ASSESSING THE QUTOMO PROJECT PILOT GROUP

Assessing the Qutomo Project Pilot Group using the handbook: *Towards a Culture and Gender Sensitive Integration Path: Handbook for Integration Service Providers*

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis was conducted in cooperation with Nicehearts ry of Vantaa, Finland. It was done based on the data and knowledge mainly gathered from Qutomo project, which was a project of Nicehearts ry. The title of the thesis is Assessing the Qutomo Project Pilot Group. The pilot group was assessed using the handbook previously published by Qutomo project and Nicehearts ry.

This thesis paper describes the process of building the Qutomo project, its cooperation forums and the Qutomo pilot group. The pilot group and the findings of the pilot group are the main focus of the thesis. The Qutomo project has been implemented by Nicehearts ry, in Vantaa. Qutomo project organized eight cooperation forums, which brought together professionals from different sectors of society. The project created a Culture and Gender Sensitive Integration Path based on the findings, discussions and ideas from the cooperation forums. The embodiments put together in the handbook have been tested in practice in a pilot group, brought together by Nicehearts ry.

This thesis analyses the functions of the pilot group from the perspective of professionals and the researcher. In addition to this, this thesis will explain the necesseties which brought on the Qutomo project in the first place and it will give a clear, comprehensive overview of the process of the Qutomo project in its entirety.

The pilot group was organized four times by project workers of Qutomo project. The themes covered in the pilot group were inspired by the cooperation forums previously organized by Qutomo project. The main methods used while assessing the pilto group were observation, project assessment, feedback forms, and audio recording.

Key words: integration, culture sensitivity, gender sensitivity, pilot group, Vantaa, Nicehearts, Qutomo

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

Since the early 1990's, immigration has been increasing in Finland (Statistics Finland). It is important to not only focus on how to change this pre-existing society but also to focus on how to integrate our new comers so that we can all function together in forming a better place for us to live in. Despite Finland being ethnically homogenous society, the immigrants arriving here are nothing but. Not only do the origins vary ethnically, religiously and culturally, but also in terms of education, work history and wealth. It would be thus unadvisable to consider that people who are arriving from such varied backgrounds, would share a similar integration path.

Qutomo project, of Nicehearts ry, wished to focus on this fact; how to specify integration for a heterogeneous future. The project aimed to build an integration path which takes into consideration the different starting points of individuals arriving here. Qutomo project focused on developing intercultural competencies and through this, aimed to improve the integration services. It aimed to build a new integration path which would take into consideration different cultures, gender and age. The target group for the project were professionals working in integration service fields and third country nationals, excluding refugees. In order to provide a platform for discussing the necessary changes required in the field of integration, Qutomo project organized cooperation forums. These forums aimed to give an opportunity for an open dialogue between different sectors in society and to strengthen cooperation between those entities offering integration services. As a result of the cooperation forums came the new integration path which has been condensed into a handbook, published in October 2014 in the premises of Nicehearts ry.

In the process of building a completely new form of an integration path, there are always several stages. It takes the cooperation of many different entities to

discover and dig deep into the state of integration processes today in Finland. It is necessary to evaluate with a critical eye how these processes are being carried out and to discover what improvements need to be made. The stages in this particular project have been varied. First there was the organization and carrying out of the cooperation forums between different actors in society. After this, the different elements of the integration path which were discussed in the forums were put together in the Qutomo handbook. Finally, the Qutomo project organized a pilot group, in order to test out the elements provided in the handbook. This research-based thesis is specifically focused on the process and outcome of the Qutomo pilot group, the aim being to answer the question of: How do the elements of the Culture and Gender Sensitive Integration Path work in practice? However the thesis will look at all the different stages of Qutomo project which have led to the formation of the pilot group, since they cannot essentially be separated.

2 BACKGROUND

This thesis is focused on Qutomo Project's pilot group; the formation, process and outcome of that group. The pilot group cannot however be looked at without paying attention to the foundations which created it. These foundations are Nicehearts ry, Qutomo Project, its cooperation forums and handbook, respectively. In order to make the formation of the pilot group understood and to avoid confusion between the different stages of the Qutomo project, we will now go over each of the abovementioned more in depth.

2.1 Nicehearts ry

Nicehearts ry was founded in 2001 and it is a productive association aimed for girls and women. The main objective of Nicehearts ry is to promote the wellbeing of girls and women, to increase participation and to facilitate integration of immigrants and migrants. Nicehearts ry is currently functioning in the premises of Women's Resource Centre Pihlaja and it is located in Tikkurila, Vantaa. The Resource Centre itself was opened in 2009. In addition to the services and projects aimed for girls and women, Nicehearts ry is also involved in research and developmental projects. One of the projects at Nicehearts ry is the KasvuKutsu- project, which is intended for women with immigrant backgrounds and who have been unemployed for longer terms. The intention of the KasvuKutsu- project is to promote the employment of its clients by aiding them directly into the job market or assisting the women in getting, for example, vocational education in order to increase their chances of employment. The projects of Nicehearts ry include the Girl's Space (Tyttöjen Tila), which provides a safe place for girls and young women aged between 10 and 28. The Girl's Space gives its clients a safe environment where the girls can get together, craft, cook or hang-out, whilst always having reliable and trustworthy adults around.

Another project is the Kultsi project which started in 2011. The Kultsi project aimed to support women from different cultural backgrounds by creating a learning environment where dialogue and encounters are at the center. The aim of the Kultsi- project was to develop a new, culturally sensitive social support model, the WahvaNainen model. This was one of the projects which proved how necessary it was to build a new integration model. The Kultsi- project, funded by the Slot Machine Association (Raha-automaatti Yhdistys), and the Nice- project of the ELY Center (Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment) made it evident that a large group of immigrant women in Finland had not received the essential help they had needed and had not been integrated in a necessary manner (Sakilayan-Latvala, Kinnunen, Kimari & Rintala-Ahl, 4).

2.2 Qutomo Project

The Qutomo- project is one of the projects of Nicehearts ry. This project started in July 2012 and continued until the end of May 2015. Qutomo project intended to give its participants the chance to share experiences, ideas and practical tips which promote cooperation between different sectors of our society. The project was focused on building a new integration path, which takes into consideration different cultures, genders and age. It aims to build this integration path with the help of all the service providers functioning in different levels within the society. Qutomo- project aimed to increase intercultural information exchange and the exchange of skills between those offering integration services and officials, the third sector and citizens of third countries. Qutomo project was funded by the European Integration Fund and the Finnish Slot Machine Association and it was supervised by the Solid-funding's unit. (Työ- ja elinkeino ministeriö.)

The target group of the Qutomo project was first and foremost the third country nationals, not including refugees. Since most of the integration services are provided by the municipalities, it was very important to get the municipality

(Vantaa) become genuinely committed to fulfilling the projects aims and developmental focuses. The project aimed to improve the integration services by organizing cooperation forums, in which the service providers were allowed to bring forth their own ideas for development, from the basis of the discussions in the forums and their own experiences. The main method used in this project was participatory action research, in order for the participants to be able to contribute as experience-experts, critics and researchers.

The goals and targets of Qutomo project were clear from the beginning and the best way to achieve these was through cooperation forums, where the target groups could come together. During the Qutomo project, eight cooperation forums were organized. The first of these was organized in October 2012 and the last one was held in May 2014. Within the cooperation forums, it was important to have representation from different sectors of society. This included the public-, private-, third- and academic sectors and residents (third country nationals). The set-up of the cooperation forums paid mind to making sure the participants were all in an equal relation to one another. The forums aimed to make use of theoretical information and practical knowledge in increasing the dialogue between different players.

The cooperation forums provided an opportunity for an open dialogue between representatives from different sectors of the society, specifically those offering integration services and those using them. The aim of these cooperation forums was to strengthen the collaboration between the different service providers within the municipality. The participants had the chance to exchange experiences and methods of working in order to develop a culturally and gender sensitive integration method.

As a result of the process of Qutomo project, the cooperation forums and the analysis which ensued, there were four main themes which arose; dialogue, encounters, network and cooperation. It is essential to recognize the importance

of these themes and the manners in which they are intertwined. Encountering, the willingness to do so and having the chance for it, is the first step towards a culturally and gender sensitive integration path. Open encounters with those of different origins and opening dialogues with them is the only way to create networks. In an ideal world, these networks make way for cooperation.

These themes, which partly overlap and entwine, have been collected from the eight cooperation forums organized. They have been collected together and explained in detail, into the handbook, aptly named: Towards a Culture and Gender Sensitive Integration Path: Hand-book for Integration Service Providers. The themes are accompanied by questions, suggestions and examples which have all been collected from the cooperation forums. The main aim of the handbook is to increase our understanding and know-how on integration and culture/gender sensitivity. It also targets to make the reader more aware of culture and gender sensitive work methods in integration work. The reader is encouraged to read with a critical outlook and to try and see how the new integration model can be used in their own work.

In order to fully understand the adaptability and sustainability of the formed methods, it was the natural next step to test out the products of the Qutomo cooperation forums. Hence came forth the Qutomo pilot group, the main focus of this thesis. Consisting of professionals in the integration services on a municipality level, the project set forth to put their practices in a test. The pilot group followed the normative rules of any given pilot group, described by Rouse as a small scale experiment or trial, which gives the organizing actor a chance to learn how the program (in our case methods) would function on a larger scale (Rouse, 2013). Pilot groups do not normally last for a prolonged period of time, since they are for testing purposes.

3 GOALS

Immigrant women, who, upon arriving to Finland, are in different life situations, of different ages and from different backgrounds, need specified and customized support. There cannot be only one way to integrate immigrant women into Finland, since the starting points of these women are so different. Integration is not only limited to women, however, the Qutomo project, being carried out by Nicehearts ry, a specifically women-focused organization, has a responsibility to look at this from the perspective of women. Integration is known to be a two way process. It requires not only the effort of those integrating into a new society, but also a readiness from the society they are integrating into. The society, or community, into which newcomers are being integrated into has to be able to work effectively through different sectors. These sectors of the social work field, which are mainly responsible for providing integration services, need to be able to cooperate in order to meet their clients' needs.

Qutomo projects' goal has been from the start, to give a platform for these abovementioned issues of integration to be tackled. The cooperation forums organized by the project, provided an ample opportunity for different service providers and the individual to come together. The cooperation forums aimed to bring together professionals, from different fields of integration services, to come together in order to have a dialogue and to strengthen their cooperation. The focus of these dialogues had been to bring forth a way in which integration services could be made into more effective, with a strong understanding and respect for a culture and gender sensitive work method. In the cooperation forums, a special emphasis was put on thinking out loud about the ways in which women's integration, specifically, could be improved. This was done by looking at the issues of education, employment, language skills and wellbeing.

The model of the Culture and Gender Sensitive Integration Path was built from the inputs which arose from the cooperation forums. It is based on the thoughts, ideas and discussions which were held between representatives of different sectors (education, officials, and third sectors) and third country nationals, excluding refugees. The aim of the Culture and Gender Sensitive Integration Path is to awaken professionals to take note of the impact that culture and gender have on their client work. The model urges professionals to take the challenge of testing the methods provided, in their own work.

The Culture and Gender Sensitive Integration Path has been put together constructively in the form of a handbook. The handbook, written by Nicehearts ry project workers and students as a cooperation, was published in 2014. The goal of the handbook was to simply pin out and bring together in a condensed manner, the life-course of the Qutomo project and specifically the new integration path. The handbook wakes the reader to challenge their understanding and knowledge of integration. It urges professionals to take a closer look at a work method which is both culturally and gender sensitive and adapt this into their own work. The aim of the handbook is also to widen our understanding and knowledge around the themes of dialogue, encounters, cooperation and networking (Sakilayan-Latvala et al. 2014).

The Qutomo project pilot group, on which this thesis is focused, was built from professionals in different sectors of the integration services. It brought together people from different fields and combined knowledge from different corners of integration services. The pilot group intended to test out, in practice, the methods given in the handbook and the results of this pilot group will be further dissected in coming chapters.

4 LITERATURE REVIEW

Qutomo project in its entirety, the cooperation forums organized and especially the handbook which has come as a result, have been a large part of building this thesis. The Concept of a Cooperation Forum (Kinnunen, 2014) has also had a large influence on this research. It opened the theories and mindset behind the Qutomo project in more detail and gave a clear understanding of how the cooperation forums came to be. The themes which arose in the cooperation forums have been the basis of the pilot groups and will thus be very influential in terms of evaluation and analysis and have been used to refer to throughout the research.

In the Towards a Culture and Gender Sensitive Integration Path: Hand-book for Integration Service Providers (Sakilayan-Latvala et al., 2014), the process of the Qutomo project and the cooperation forums have been explained the process of the project and the results in detail. The main themes which arose in the eight cooperation forums were encountering, dialogue, network and cooperation. These themes are not limited to one another and they often overlap. They are themes which are very closely related to one another and are difficult to achieve without one another.

In order to achieve functioning dialogue, networking possibilities and cooperation between individuals, it is essential bring people together, for them to have true encounters. This is the first step to make, in order to move onto the next ones. It allows a learning process to take place, which benefits both sides. It is not uncommon to use the notion of culture as an excuse for the lack of encountering, but often the real problem is the fact that there is a lack of possibility for encountering others, in an acceptable environment. Having the possibility to encounter different individuals broadens our views and this was made possible through the cooperation forums. It gave an opportunity for the individual to come

together with the service providers and get a chance to understand the myriad of services better. A once confusing integration system, may appear sensible after having the chance to discuss the system with one who knows it well. It also gave an opportunity for the participants to see that they are not necessarily alone in their situation and a clearer vision of what opportunities there are available. (Sakilayan-Latvala et al., 2014, 8.)

5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The major themes around which the Qutomo project and the pilot group are focused on are integration and the concepts of culture and gender sensitivity.

Integration, in its simplest form, is the process through which the different individuals within a society join together to make a whole, functioning community. The individuals arriving to a new setting do not abandon their own cultures or beliefs for their new homeland. Rather, they retain some aspects of their culture and embrace some aspects of the "host" culture and beliefs. This is what is often perceived as ideal integration. It is a two way process, in which both the "originals" and the newcomers have to learn, teach and be flexible. Integration has different forms, its outcome is never complete and it affects people in various ways, both negative and positive. When people use the word integration it can be understood in many ways, due to the fact that it has different stages and forms, which can be perceived differently. The process of integration is not something that happens overnight. It is usually a long process which requires understanding both ways. For some it can be a simpler process, for others it can take decades. It is important to understand also that some people do not want to necessarily integrate, despite what the community around them wants or needs.

Before individuals reach full integration in their new homeland, they often go through other stages. These include, but are not limited to, assimilation, separation and marginalization. Not everyone goes through all of them, but these are important to understand and separate from integration itself. It is often that these four are connoted with one another, and it can cause confusion and misinformation.

When an individual arrives in a new country, it can never be predicted how they will react to their surroundings, the people, religions around them and so on. This

all depends on many things from how this individual was raised to more psychological aspects of the level pf adaptability the individual has. Though it is difficult to explain why, some individuals choose to (either consciously or subconsciously) to abandon the roots they have come from. This can include aspects of culture or religion which are visible, by i.e. changing their clothing or culinary habits drastically. It can also be seen as a change in the belief system or value system of that individual. However the latter is often a slower and less perceivable process. This process is referred to as assimilation. The individual wants to be accepted into their new surroundings to such extent that they try to become one with the majority.

The opposite of assimilation is separation. The individual holds on to their own beliefs, values and traditions in a manner in which they do not accept anything from the majority culture. The individual avoids contact with the natives and preferably only mixes with his/hers own people. This is often more common with the elderly.

Often with young people (first or second generation immigrants) there is a risk of marginalization; they abandon their own culture, but they do not accept the mainstream culture either. This leads to rejection from both sides. It can be a way to begin a new subculture, but it is usually very strenuous process for the individual, since there is a risk of losing identity.

Integration, the process of keeping "the best of both worlds", is seen as the typical and most socially acceptable outcome of immigrating to a new country. This is what the Qutomo project aimed to promote. To help the professionals' new methods of encountering their clients, in order to help them integrate into this society. The project aimed to be culture and gender sensitive, since these are aspect which may have been overlooked in previous methods of integration.

Culture sensitivity refers to the ability to recognize other cultures and respect the complexity of belief and value systems others bring with them. It is the ability to reflect one's own culture and appreciate the effects that culture has on one's own actions. Culture sensitivity is a form of behavior which is accepting of other cultures. It requires continuous analysis and observation in order to achieve an attitude which is open to other cultures. In practice, a person has the ability to encounter another individual paying mind to the effects of socio-economic status, religion, language and culture have on that individual. (Sakilayan-Latvala et al., 2014, 22).

Gender sensitivity refers to paying mind to the effects that gender differences have in different contexts. It refers to the recognition of values and attitudes which are often linked to gender roles, with in social work and integration work. (Sakilayan-Latvala et al., 2014, 22).

6 EVALUATION PROCESS

There are a few different methods which have been used while conducting this research. Although it would have been advised to use only a few data collection methods for this research, since it is not a wide research, I perceived it to be more useful to have more than one method. The methods I have used have complemented one another very well and have given the research more depth. In terms of reaching the goals of this research, it was necessary to have different research methods, in order to collect valuable and valid data. This chapter will take a closer look at the different methods which I have used while conducting my research.

6.1 Project assessment

The primary method which I have applied is of course project assessment. The "project" is the pilot group in this case. I feel it is a necessary starting point in any given project; to be able to assess the project at hand. Through the process of project assessment there have been other methods which I have also adapted in order to get a fuller understanding and better, concise results. Those methods will be also further discussed in this chapter.

It is very important that any given project (in this case the pilot group) has an outsider assessing the flow of the project. Those who are leading the process itself may not necessarily see where they are going wrong and may not notice everything which is going on at all times. The method of project assessment is therefore vital in this context. In order to be sure that the project runs smoothly and evaluation process is meticulous, it is very important to have an assessor. This thesis is therefore strongly based on the method of project assessment. It is an effective work method which helps the researcher recognize the strengths as well as weaknesses of a project. By definition, assessment is the systematic

determination of the results of an effort or intervention (Davis, 2009). In this research I will be conducting both an assessment of the pilot group as well as an evaluation, therefore I wish to make it clear, at this point, that it is important to understand that there is a difference between assessment and evaluation. Assessment is a way of answering, for example, what is working or not working within the pilot group meetings. It is a continuous process which will be taking place for as long as the research ends. In a slight contrast evaluation is a different process altogether. It is the evaluation of the results of the give project. It will focus on the quality of the results, answering the question of how well did the pilot group work instead of what had been learned from the pilot group (Davis, 2009).

6.2 Observation

The method of observation provides an ideal way of finding out about the world around us. Interviews and questionnaires tells us how the respondents perceive the world around them, but with observation we are able to see what is really happening. This is why I have chosen this method as one of my primary research methods.

Observation is more than just looking at people. The researcher has to be systematic and carefully plan what they wish to observe and in order for the information to be analyzed and interpreted, the data needs to be recorded. The method of observation provides abundant qualitative data and the researcher is able to get immediate and direct information on the functions of those individuals and groups that they are observing. This method allows the researcher to observe the targets in their natural habitat, without the restrictions of an artificial setting.

One of the good things about this method is also that it can effectively compliment other research methods and this will help in making the research abundant in evidence and data.

Although the method of observation has many upsides, it comes with some side effects as well. The data gathered relies heavily on what the researcher deems important or worthy and thus this can lead to any details being left out. The objectivity of the research may suffer. There is also a lot of information coming to the researcher, so it is also possible he/she does not notice everything. In these cases I think the size of the group can affect the meticulousness of the research.

In addition to this, it is generally agreed upon that the presence of an observer can also have effects on the functioning of a certain group. However, I dare to challenge this viewpoint. I do not think that the presence of an observer always changes the dynamics of a certain group. I believe that it depends of the pre-existing group dynamics. For example, there are researches done in a school environment (Borg & Gall, 1989, 46), where the presence of an observer clearly affected the patterns. I believe this to be due to the fact that within a classroom, there is already some familiarity between the students and teachers, everybody knows one another and the observer is clearly the one standing out. However, in an environment where nobody knows one another, or where only a few know each other, the observer does not stand out as "the odd one out" and thus the effects that an observer has within that group setting is clearly different to, for example the school environment.

It is also important to note that there are different types of observation. In this research I am using non-participative observation, in order to try to maintain the objectivity of the research. Non participative observation can also be referred to as naturalistic observation (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara, 2009, 212-214). This type of observation does not include any type of intervention or participation from the researcher. The researcher does not coax the situation or the environment in any way, but rather observes everything as they "naturally" are.

6.3 Audio recording

The method of audio recording is very useful in a research such as this one. During the pilot group meetings, there are many different discussions going on at the same time, and the researcher does not necessarily have the ability to observe all of them. This is why it is necessary to record them and the researcher is able to refer back to the discussions.

All of the meetings of the pilot group were audio recorded and it has enable me as the researcher to focus on the dynamics of the groups. This has proved to be an effective method, however it is not without faults. During the recording, not all conversations were audible due to the positioning of the recording device. This is something that needs to be take into account in future research. In order to be able to hear all conversations, it would have been better to have maybe more than one recorder.

The conversations in the recordings will be transcribed and used also as a part of the data analysis. The transcriptions will not be extremely detailed, because there are many unnecessary discussion parts which are not needed for this particular research. I will transcribe them in a way that I perceive to be the most useful for this exact research. This will be explained in more detail in the Data Analysis chapter.

6.4 Feedback forms

Although this is a qualitative research in general, we have also opted to use a method known generally to be a quantitative method, a feedback form. Generally this method is used in quantitative research due to its standardization, however it has been a good tool also in this research (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara, 2009, 194). It can be used to compromise other research methods.

feedback forms are generally good due to the fact that they are not time consuming to researcher. They can be sent to all participants and the results can be easily analyzed. Thanks to modern technology, it is easy to analyze them with the help of a computer.

The problem with feedback forms is that the researcher cannot be sure if all participants take part in the feedback form. In this research we conducted on-line feedback forms which were sent to all participants of the pilot group, however often we have had to ask the respondents many times to answer the feedback form. The researcher can never be sure how seriously the respondents have taken the feedback form, some respondents may want to answer it in detail, whilst other may do it just because they feel they are compelled to do so. This may have an effect on the results of the feedback form (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara, 2009, 195).

7 FINDINGS

In this thesis it is very important to pay mind to the entirety of the Qutomo project, as has been explained in the previous chapters. This chapter will now focus solely on the results which have been gathered during the pilot group meetings. It will be analyzed from my, the researchers, perspective. I will look at the results firstly from the perspective of the research methods used, paying attention to the possible effects that these methods may have had on the results gathered. After this, I will analyze the results in relation to the method of implementation, the pilot group. In analyzing the results, I will focus on three simple perspectives through which I will have the understanding of the results. What was useful/good about the pilot groups, what was not useful and what could be changed about the pilot groups?

The Qutomo project pilot group gathered five times, in which I was not present during the first meeting. The methods which I used in the pilot group were non-participative observation, audio recording and feedback forms.

The methods used helped us to find out that in a general framework, the participants felt that the pilot groups and the methods of implementation were either good or very good. This varied slightly between meetings; at times, the participants felt that the meetings had gone well (reflected in the feedback forms). The expectations of the participants were not cleared out before the meetings started, so it is difficult to know what they wanted to achieve from the pilot group. Despite this, the majority of the participants who replied through the feedback forms felt that the group meetings reflected their expectations either very well or well.

The most important thing that the participants felt they had gained from the pilot group meetings, was the chance to network and gain new contacts. This can be

seen in the feedback forms answers and it was a prevalent discussion topic in the pilot group meetings. This responds with the aims of the project as a whole to some extent. In order to better arm professionals with the skill sets they need to improve integration, they also need the correct contacts, especially in a land bureaucracy such as Finland.

Through the audio recordings it was evident that the conversations were at times derailed from the original questions or discussions and this was also reflected in the feedback form answers given. Some participants felt that the discussions were off-topic and that some methods to keep the conversations on-topic would have been useful.

Participants also wished for an increase in the concreteness of the discussions. Some felt that despite the discussions and conversations, there were no actions taken as such to help facilitate the things which had been discussed. This became evident mainly through the feedback forms. I believe the reason this issue came up in the feedback forms is that the participants felt they are able to express their views more openly in the feedback form since it was anonymous. Another problem which was mentioned in the feedback forms was linked to the group work assignment. Participants felt that the ways in which tasks were explained were not clear enough.

In terms of what needed to be changed or developed, it was clear that many participants wished for more open conversation and concrete actions after the discussions. Some felt that the discussions or actions which were discussed were not implemented in reality and this left a feeling of superficiality. There were wishes to increase opportunities for cooperation between professionals in a more concrete way, however the exact ways were not mentioned. These views were partly expressed the conversations in the group meetings and also in the feedback forms.

When discussing the validity of the research methods, it is good to take a quick look at how these methods may have had an effect on the results. Observation and audio recording were used during the meetings, and did not seem to have any direct effect on the results. Despite the fact that the methods used gave a general sense of what the participants felt was good or had gone well, it is unknown how these specific methods limited the participants in terms of the answers they gave. Observation and audio recording are both quite low-profile methods, in a sense that they do not cause disruption. My presence did not seem to affect the participants. They seemed relaxed and natural in their actions. The recording did not also seem to faze the participants. The participants were not at any point asked how the presence of an observer or audio recording devices would affect their participation or contribution in the discussions, so it is extremely difficult to analyze the effects that these methods had on the final results.

It is difficult to analyze the validity of a pilot group, however it is important to understand the effects that the formation and implementation of a pilot group will have on the results of a research. There are many aspects in any give group which will affect the flow of conversation, the conclusions of conversation and the full participation of those involved. Within any group, there are people who are more willing to take part in the discussions, those who prefer to remain silent and those who are in between. The length of the pilot group, dynamics within the group and the role of the group facilitators all have also strong effect on how the group functions and how the participants perceive the existence of the group.

The backgrounds of the participants in the Qutomo pilot group were all linked with integration work, either directly or indirectly. However, the level of knowledge that the participants had for one another (and to the group facilitators) were unknown to me. I believe that the level of knowledge between the participants may have had some effect on how the participants behaved within the pilot group meetings.

In terms of the conversations within the pilot group meetings, some participants expressed a need for more open conversation and braveness to discuss even difficult topics. It was a common perception amongst participants that the discussion was slightly shallow, in a sense that things were discussed, but there was no way go from there.

7.1. Conclusion

As the researcher, I would say that the participants generally felt that the pilot group meetings were perceived to be good and useful, but to an extent. I feel, in accordance with the participants' replies, that there was a good chance to network, to gain useful contacts and to discuss with professionals from a similar field. However, I do not feel that pilot group meetings gave the participants the tools for concrete actions, which they should or could implement.

I believe it would have been a good idea to ask the participants beforehand what the topics are that they would most likely want to discuss and to try to interlink these topics with the Qutomo guidelines, which were the main focus of the pilot group meetings. It felt that the meetings were slightly scattered, not only in terms of the topics beings discussed and how they can be implemented in reality, but also in terms of the changes within the participants. The participants' attendance, in reality, cannot be regulated, since it was on a voluntary basis, but I felt this had a big impact on the continuity of the pilot group. Since the aim of the pilot group was to test out the guidelines given by the Qutomo handbook, it would have been ideal to have same people attend throughout. The topics discussed were not, in my opinion, necessarily implementable. In theory, they are logical and useful, but in reality difficult to implement. As a suggestion, I feel it would have been good to allow the participants to try out a method/tool which they have never used, and tell in the next group meetings how that went. In these meetings, it felt that most

of the tools given, were advices on how to mentally receive a client rather than what to do (or what to change) in practice in terms of meeting a new client.

I feel that the Qutomo pilot group would be very useful when implemented with professionals who, for example, have not had much contact with clients in need of integration. For instance, the tools/advices given during the pilot group may not be new information for someone who has spent years working with immigrants, but for a worker who is now jumping into the field and has not had much experience with encountering immigrant clients, it could be a lifeline. So, I feel it is important to pay mind to the type of target group the guidelines are directed. In terms of the networking perspective, I feel that the pilot group worked well. There was a good mix of professionals from different parts of the social work field and it is good to increase the chances for these professionals to meet, exchange ideas and experiences.

As an outsider in the pilot group meetings, I would also like to press on the importance of concrete actions taken further than the pilot group meetings. The meetings were not frequent enough to get real, concrete actions in terms of cooperation between professionals or direct, visible methods which can be implemented. I feel it is important to have real methods which are being tested out and now I felt these were missing.

8 ETHICS

There were not many ethical issues to be covered in this research, fortunately. However, all researches have certain ethical aspects which need to be taken into consideration.

In terms of participating in the research, all of the participants were made fully aware of the aims of this research. They were informed of the purpose to which the research will be used. The participants were also informed of my presence and they were aware of the reason for my participation.

The ethical issues concerning the methodology were firstly linked to the method of observation. This was a big part of conducting the research and thus extremely necessary for me to be at the pilot group sessions as the observer. The organizers of the pilot group, Meg Sakilayan-Latvala and Marja-Liisa Rintala-Ahl, had informed the participants of my role as the observer. Use of audio recording in the sessions also raised ethical issues and the participants were told why we were recording the sessions and they had all agreed to their group conversations to be recorded. In terms of the feedback forms, they were all anonymous. The participants were made aware of this also. I believe this enabled them to be able to answer the feedback form questions more freely; not having to worry about the researchers or other participants knowing what they had answered. The interviews will also be anonymous. As the interviewer, I will know of course who the interviewees are, but this will not be evident in any way during the research or in the results.

It is good to mention at this point that a research agreement has been done with Nicehearts ry. This is an essential part of doing any research specially one which is being conducted on behalf of an organization. The research agreement will be available in the appendices.

9 RELATION TO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The starting point of the Qutomo project has been to develop intercultural competencies and to better the ways of integration in the Finnish society. What better way to develop a community such as ours, other than developing the manners in which we integrate our newcomers?

When discussing the relation that the pilot group has with community development, it is fundamental to look at the following as whole: the Qutomo project, the cooperation forums, the handbook and the pilot group. It is difficult to separate one from the other, since these are all a result of one another. Building a new integration path and a model is an important part of community development, especially in a community such as ours, where this is a necessary issue to tackle.

The reasons why integration is important needs no explanations. Without integration, our society cannot move forward, cannot make the most of the assets of the people living with us and cannot even begin to fathom the idea of a peaceful coexistence. Integration is the key to avoiding many social problems.

For instance, it has been proven by a longitudinal research conducted by the Ministry of Employment and the Economy has found a direct correlation between the education levels of those children whose parent have had integration plans made. It showed clearly that the children of those individuals (parents) who had integration plans made, were more likely to continue their education to higher levels. The research did not find direct answers as to why this happened, but the results speak for themselves.

The relation of Qutomo project, as a whole, and community development, is something that will become more visible in the future. The results, will not be visible immediately, since integration is a long process which can often take

generations to become fully visible. The project impacts the professionals working in the field of integration and it recognizes the fact that integration a two way process which cannot be complete without participation from both sides. The Qutomo project is hopefully a start to similar projects, which aim to assist the professionals in the field in order to better help their clients.

10 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The process of writing this thesis has been long, but it has been interesting. It started with a place period which took place in Nicehearts ry in the fall of 2014.

While conducting the research, I noticed it was difficult to remain in a passive state in terms of following the process. It was easy to criticize the things happening around me in the meetings for instance, but remaining passive took a lot more than expected. It was an eye opening experience, one in which I was learning to observe without meddling.

Within this research, I found it difficult to apply existing research, theories and literature. The research, although not one of a kind, had to be looked at from a singular point of view, as to not mix other researches while it was going on. This caused difficulties while writing the analysis and the thesis in general; I was able to recollect how things seemed and felt during the Qutomo pilot group, however, applying other theories onto it was almost impossible. I felt this was the most difficult part of the thesis writing as a whole and I feel this is reflected in my writing.

In terms of cooperation with the organization for whom I was doing the research for, I felt the cooperation was quite minimal, especially after the pilot group meetings finished. I was not expecting much cooperation, since most of the data had been collected and so on, but I felt I was missing a lot of information which was necessary for this thesis and despite various tries, I did not receive much of the background information I would have needed for the thesis. Of course, this can be understandable from the point of view that each organization have their own schedules and things to deal with, so I cannot expect to be a priority, however I felt I would have needed slightly more help in terms of collecting the necessary information.

Nicehearts ry and Qutomo project were my first jump into the world of associations in Finland and this experience taught me many things from the third sector of Finland. It helped me realize the importance of networking and collaboration. The benefits and possibilities which come with networking with professionals from different fields are limitless and it goes a long way, especially in the third sector. I think this is something which should be, to an extent, included in the curriculum. For students entering this field, it is necessary to know how important networking and collaborating is. So, years down the line, we don't need to be doing similar projects.

All in all, the process of conducting my thesis was very teachable and fruitful. I enjoyed working with the Qutomo team and continue doing so.

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APPENDICES

Appendices are on a separate Excel file.