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Inspiration and Ideas for Digital Cultural Youth Work

**Experiences from Estonia,
Finland and the Netherlands
through the Diggiloo project**

Jenni Hernelahti & Susanna Pitkänen (eds.)

HUMAK UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

DIGGILOO

Digital Cultural Production from Youth to Youth

Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



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FINNISH INSTITUTE
IN ESTONIA

Gemeente  Amstelveen

P60

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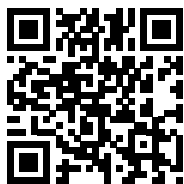
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Introduction



Diggiloo partners in Finnish Institute at the Estonia, Tartu, September 2022.
Photo: Heidi Iivari, FINST.

What is Diggiloo?

Susanna Pitkänen

This publication offers ideas and inspiration for many kinds of productions, all involving young people who have found different ways to express themselves individually and in groups with the support of dedicated youth workers and art instructors. Well done!

Creativity and ideas start to flow once the right combination of partners has been found and our motivation and enthusiasm have been awakened. We discovered just how challenging it can be in youth work to bring good partners together and to identify common interests, a common working language, the right age group and mutual goals. Coming up with content and getting help in technical know-how is the easier part.

The activities of the Diggiloo project can be grouped as follows:

- Engaging with youth groups to create digital productions.
- Sharing experiences among youth workers on how best to support and facilitate digital cultural youth work. Sharing pedagogy, ideas and technical know-how.
- Networking to create a joint international cultural project to engage youth and to work digitally.

Aim for a surprise: the power of networking

As Hannele Valkeeniemi, director of the Finnish Institute in Estonia (FINST), summarized the lesson learned: “If you gather an unexpected combination of people with different backgrounds to join in a common task, you will get unexpected results.” So, the efficient way to create something new is to engage in all kinds of networks with all kinds of people and then toss around ideas. Local youth work networks in both participating cities, Tartu and Amstelveen, have gained new partners and ideas have been developed by unexpected combinations of interested parties. Who would have thought that a mix of people from twin towns Tartu and Tampere, FINST, graffiti artists and musicians together with the Tartu Youth Work Center, could create a mural with extensions to on-line content and experiments with augmented reality? The rest is history – and you can read about it in this collection and watch a making-of video.

Thanks to Digiloo projects, the Amstelveen City Social Youth Work has gained new partners and connections locally. This has led to the formulation of a new approach and policy to local youth work. They reached out to youth work foundation Future Face and received help in using digital media to reach more young people and attract them to cultural events. Talented young people created web-pages, videos, and podcasts and used social media to get the message through to more youngsters in Amstelveen. As a result, Speakerz events at the cultural venue P60 have been packed with young people and youth workers have been on hand for them.

Humak, as a Finnish educational institute which trains youth workers, has mobilized students as part of Diggiloo project to reach out to local youth groups. Student trainees in the Diggiloo project got an inside glimpse of an Erasmus+ project and familiarized themselves with both cultural and digital youth work. Some have even contributed articles to this collection. We are a lucky nation to have a well-organized cultural youth work network run jointly by Centre of Expertise for Municipality Youth Work Kanuuna and our partner Young Culture. We are eager to share this idea with other countries – it works! In a sparsely populated country with long distances, networking is a way to find your “tribe” and prosper. Most of the articles and examples have been gathered from this network.

Digital revolution in cultural youth work

In the following pages, we aim to present cultural productions which utilize some form of digital technology in a new or unexpected way.

Diggiloo started during the Covid-19 pandemic, and we saw how youth work quickly adopted every new possibility of digital youth work. The aftermath of this era will show which of these digital working methods are here to stay and which will fade away. It is only natural that now it is once more possible to meet



The Friendship mural in Tartu. Heidi Iivari with young musicians Jõrg, Mirjam Eles-sawi and Liisa Tulvik. Photo: Liina Ergam (FINST).

face-to-face, put on performances, laugh and rehearse together, this is the preferred method amongst youth. Friendships and networks are mostly built through real-time communication together. But at the same time, an extraordinary toolkit has been created to plan, rehearse, make, publish, stream and get feedback online digitally. Many events and performances now reach much wider audiences via hybrid presence. Some ideas can only be achieved with “new” technologies, such as artificial intelligence. Some participants can only be reached – and certain forms of accessibility can only be achieved – online. On the one hand, there are productions such as the Discord-based theatre by IRTI youth theatre group, produced exclusively via online rehearsals and performed to and with an online audience. On the other hand, you have the Finnish National Theatre engaging youth both as actors and as audiences in a GÄNG street performance, incorporating the digital aspect through the use of pre-recorded sounds and narratives which the audience experiences via headphones.

What lessons have we learned? The only limit to what we can do is our imagination!

To conclude with the wise words of Ninni Parviainen: “Cultural youth work is no more and no less than the intellectual and spiritual capital that we pass on to our children.”

This publication would not have been possible without the inspired editorial work of Jenni Hernelahti, Humak and Heidi Iivari, FINST. Our graphic designer was Emilia Reponen, Humak who has done miracles again. We extend our special Thank You! to Jennifer Bergman, Humak who has made the articles readable by correcting our English. We are also grateful to Ninni Parviainen and Johanna Hurme for all the help they gave along the road and for paving the way for co-operation. Thank you all!



Author **Susanna Pitkänen** is Diggiloo project manager and senior lecturer at Humak.



Cultural and Digital Youth Work

Suvi Tuominen & Jenni Hernelahti

This publication showcases a collection of projects and practices in the field of cultural youth work, with a focus on programmes that draw on the potential of digitalisation in one way or another. Our world today is digital and digital technologies are becoming an increasingly significant part of everything we do. The majority of young people experience online spaces as part of their natural environment, not disconnected from the rest of their lives.

Cultural and digital youth work are not easy to define, and we might wonder are strict definitions even necessary? The difficulty in defining the field speaks to both the diversity of youth work practice and its multisectoral nature. Definitions have, nonetheless, been attempted in the interests of fostering shared understanding.

Cultural youth work

In defining *cultural youth work*, we encounter our first stumbling block with the word “culture”. Culture in its narrowest sense refers to the arts. At its broadest, *culture* refers to almost all human activity and interaction with others. When we talk about cultural youth work, we usually mean activities for young people that involve art in some way. Cultural

activities have, of course, long been organised with and for young people all around the world. The term *cultural youth work*, however, is relatively new. The concept of cultural youth work began to take shape in Finland in the 1990s. The first use of the term in an official context was its inclusion in the Finnish Youth Act of 2006.

With support from the Ministry of Education and Culture, [NuoriKulttuuri](#) has developed a definition of youth work that is used quite widely in Finland. This definition is intended to facilitate discussion rather than offering an exhaustive account of all the possible dimensions of the field. According to the definition, cultural youth work is an activity that incorporates art or culture to support young people's growth, independence and participation in society. It is also typical of cultural youth work that professionals from different sectors work together on shared goals. It is important to recognise the inter-sectoral and multi-sectoral nature of the work.

The strategic development of digital youth work: a brief history

Digital youth work has been around for several decades but increased markedly in the 2010s as various digital devices, particularly smartphones, became more widespread. With the development and diversification of various forms of digital youth work, the need to reflect on the objectives and strategic development of the field became apparent. It is important to note that digital youth work and online youth work are not synonymous; online youth work is one form of digital youth work.

One of the first sets of national guidelines for digital youthwork was drawn up in Scotland in 2014. Based on the Scottish guidelines, and with extensive co-operation from municipalities, local organisations and parishes, Finland developed its own set of national guidelines in 2016. Estonia's national Smart Youth Work strategy was produced in 2017.

Various youth work organisations have created their own local digital youth work strategies based on the national guidelines. Others have integrated digital technology into their existing youth work strategies in various ways.

A common European definition of digital youth work

In 2016, the European Union appointed an expert group to provide recommendations for digital youth work and to consider competences for digital youth work. The group comprised representatives from 21 countries. Their work drew on two established digital competence frameworks: DigComp 2.0 and MENTEP

(Mentoring Technology-Enhanced Pedagogy). Competences for digital youth work are brought together under the following areas: the digitalisation of society, information and data literacy, planning and designing digital youth work, communication, digital creativity, safety and evaluation.

The group defined digital youth work as follows: “...proactively using or addressing digital media and technology in youth work. Digital youth work is not a youth work method – digital youth work can be included in any youth work setting (open youth work, youth information and counselling, youth clubs, detached youth work, etc.). Digital youth work has the same goals as youth work in general, and using digital media and technology in youth work should always support these goals. Digital youth work can happen in face-to-face situations as well as in online environments – or in a mixture of these two. Digital media and technology can be either a tool, an activity or a content in youth work. Digital youth work is underpinned by the same ethics, values and principles as youth work.”

European Council conclusions highlight the importance of strategic development

The above definition is widely accepted across Europe. The definition and the work of the expert group provided a basis for the Council Conclusions on Smart Youth Work (2017) and the Council Conclusions on Digital Youth Work, approved by the Council of Ministers of the European Union in 2019 during the Finnish Presidency. The Council Conclusions on Digital Youth Work sought to strengthen the capacity of youth work to anticipate the future, to promote the strategic development of digital youth work and to reduce the digital divide between young people.

Both the Smart Youth Work and Digital Youth Work conclusions call on EU member states to promote and develop youth policies and strategies surrounding technological development and digitalisation more proactively. Member states should incorporate within their youth strategies clear goals and concrete actions for developing and implementing digital youth work and for assessing the impact of digital youth work on young people and youth work. Member states should also support innovative approaches and new models of co-operation for providing digital youth work and digital services. Member states are also urged to invest in the development of digital capacity among youth workers and organisations involved in youth work.

The Conclusions on Digital Youth Work follow on from the Conclusions on Smart Youth Work in actively seeking to close the digital divide between young people. All young people, regardless of their background, should have equal opportunities to improve their digital competence. The Digital Youth Work Council

conclusions identify a need to strengthen the role of youth work, particularly in supporting young people's creative competence and skills in using technology, enabling them to be critical consumers and active creators in digital environments.

Further development work is needed **and cultural youth work is the key**

The Covid-19 pandemic saw an increase in online youth work. While great strides have been made in many of the recommendations of the Digital Youth Work Council Conclusions, there is still work to be done to meet the other targets. The pandemic hastened the development of online activities and associated competences, but there is still much to be done in face-to-face digital youth work and to address the digital divide between young people. There is a great risk that this divide will only deepen as the pace of technological development increases and AI tools become more widespread. It is easy to identify with the concerns raised in the council's conclusions: will all young people be able to keep up with the technological transformation of society?

Combining cultural and digital youth work provides an exceptional resource particularly for the development of young people's creative technological skills. There is a strong tradition in cultural youth work of experimentation, and new possibilities in face-to-face digital youth work naturally arise in the context of cultural youth work. Art activities have already been successfully integrated into creative technology lessons. Similarly, various hybrid implementations and blended digital and in-person activities are already commonplace in many organisations.



Author **Suvi Tuominen** is a senior lecturer in NGO and Youth Work at Humak University of Applied Sciences. She previously worked as executive director at the Centre of Expertise for Digital Youth Work and in this capacity represented Finland as part of the EU expert group responsible for developing the definition and competences for digital youth work.



Author **Jenni Hernelahti** is a senior lecturer in NGO and Youth Work, cultural manager and community educator.

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Youth Work in Three Cities in Finland, Estonia and the Netherlands

Jenni Hernelahti

I had a great opportunity to discuss youth work with experts from Estonia and the Netherlands. Ron Mesman is a manager of youth work in Amstelveen, a small and very multicultural city (with 79 000 inhabitants of 137 nationalities) near Amsterdam in the Netherlands. Helen Siska is the manager of youth work in Tartu, Estonia, a city of 97 000 inhabitants. I also reflected on my own experiences as a municipal youth worker in Raisio, a small city of 25 000 inhabitants close to Turku in Finland.

To begin with, we all recognised that none of us could speak on behalf of our whole nation. The municipal youth work systems in Finland are, perhaps, slightly more homogeneous, but when we talk about cultural youth work, local differences are huge and a variety of different organisations and individuals are involved. Siska and Mesman both emphasised that they could only speak for their own cities. “If you look at youth work in the Netherlands, you see one big patchwork of organisations being occupied with youth work. And every city has its own goals. If you go to Amsterdam, the youth work is totally different, and it’s only five kilometers away from Amstelveen”.



Helen Siska introduces the activities of the Youth Council at Tartu Tarkusepäev 2022, an event celebrating the first day of the school year in Estonia. Photo: Andre Iva.

Who is young? In Estonia, a young person is someone aged between 7 and 26, while Dutch youth policy generally defines *youth* as the age group 0 to 25 years. According to the Youth Act in Finland, a young person is someone under 29 years of age. The Act also defines youth work as “the efforts to support the growth, independence and social inclusion of young people in society.”

While Amstelveen youth workers are in schools and on the streets, youth work in Raisio and Tartu is carried out within the framework of youth centres

Discussing youth work, we discovered many similarities between youth work in Estonia and in Finland, however youth work approaches in the Netherlands and in Amstelveen are quite different. In Finland and Estonia, youth centres are the cornerstone of municipal youth work, although other kinds of youth work also exist. In the Netherlands, the focus is on schools. There are eight youth workers in Amstelveen, and they all work in schools. There has been a lot of discussion about school safety in the Netherlands, and one way to promote it has been to have youth workers present in schools.

“Once a month, we have a very big party in our cultural centre P60 for youngsters from 12 to 15 years. 700–800 youngsters attend this this evening and

youth workers are there to talk with the youth. So, the youth workers focus is being present at schools, meeting youth at big parties organized for youngsters and being visible on the streets.” Mesman adds. He says that in order to organize the big events, volunteers are also needed, but for safety reasons, these volunteers are mostly about the same age as the target group. Sexual harassment is currently a big issue in the Netherlands. We were all in agreement that municipal youth work is a job for professionals, but in NGOs the contribution made by volunteers is remarkable.

The tools used in youth work are determined by youth workers’ expertise and interests

When we discussed digital, international and cultural youth work, we identified the same phenomenon in all three countries. There are some specific local needs, but the tools used in youth work depend a lot on the interests and skills of the youth workers. International projects and trips abroad with young people are less common in Amstelveen than in Tartu. There is not so much need for additional internationality, because the city itself is very multicultural. In Raisio, there is very active co-operation with sister cities, but any other international projects depend on workers’ own capabilities and personal interests.

We also discussed digitalization and how the Covid-19 pandemic has permanently changed the world and the methods used in youth work. Mesman is concerned about the dark side of the virtual world but acknowledges that when all



Local band “Popprijs” performs in P60. Photo: Paul Gabel



Jenni Hernelahti at the stage before a youngsters theater play starts in Raisio library.
Photo: Jussi Hernelahti

the information is on the Internet, seeking help or discovering activities is also much easier. There are two sides to this issue.

Siska mentioned that in youth work we need all kinds of connections, both face-to-face and online. Online work cannot replace face-to-face interaction. I added that, before Covid, there were some skilled and enthusiastic youth workers who focused on online work, but most youth workers were engaged in traditional face-to-face work. Nowadays the roles are not as clear-cut, and everyone is involved in digital youth work in one way or another.

Cultural youth work:

tapping into the power of art and culture

It's good to know what we are talking about when we use the term "cultural youth work". The definition is fuzzy, and individuals in different national contexts understand the term differently.

"In Tartu we are trying to combine culture work with open youth work. But it's not the same in all cities in Estonia", notes Siska. The situation is similar in Amstelveen and Raisio. Art is a tool that is incorporated into municipal youth work, but, as just one tool, does it gain enough recognition?

I also asked Johanna Hurme. Hurme works for Young Culture, a Finnish organisation that supports local cultural youth work, organising youth art events. The organisation's own definition of cultural youth work is "youth work done with the power of art and culture". Hurme feels that the main problem is that cultural youth work is not well-recognized. This creative and innovative form of youth work has developed a lot in Finland over the last five years and there are many different individuals and organisations engaged in cultural youth work. In addition to municipal youth work, there are NGOs, free groups, volunteers and professionals. The approach is also versatile with strong networks.

But then again, the same is true for the whole field of youth work. "The youth worker is a teacher, parent, social worker etc." says Siska and laughs. The strengths of youth work are in its flexibility and its ability to transform.



Author **Jenni Hernelahti** is a senior lecturer in NGO and Youth Work, cultural manager and community educator.



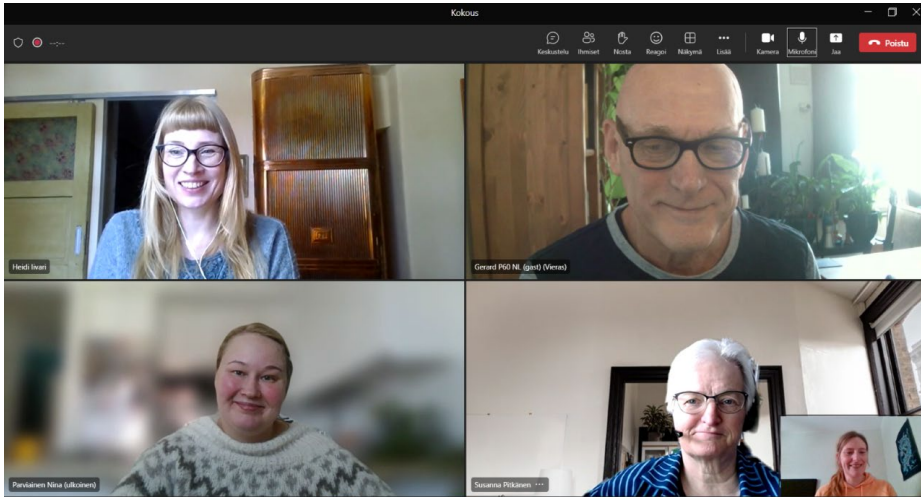
Estonian Song Festival in Tallinn, 2023. Photo: Kaupo Kalda.

The Cultural Traditions in Estonia, Finland and the Netherlands

Heidi Iivari

The idea of this article is to compare the cultural traditions of Estonia, Finland and the Netherlands and to explore young people's interest in them, in the past and today. What similarities and differences are there? Does the size of the nation play a role? What about location: rural vs urban?

The article is based on an online conversation held in the spring of 2023 with the participation of **Ninni Parviainen**, planner at Competence Centre for Municipal Youth Work Kanuuna, from Lahti Finland, **Jenni Hernelahti**, lecturer at Humak, **Susanna Pitkänen**, senior lecturer at Humak and Diggiloo project manager, **Gerard Lohuis**, Director of venue P60 of Amstelveen, the Netherlands, and myself, **Heidi Iivari**, the writer of this article and Programme Manager of DIGGILOO at the Finnish Institute in Estonia. **Riin Luks**, Programme Director of Community Education and Hobby Activity and **Jorma Sarv**, Programme Director for Culture Management, both from Viljandi Cultural Academy, a college of the University of Tartu, contributed via e-mail.



Screen shot of the participants of the conversation “Cultural Traditions in Estonia, Finland and the Netherlands”, spring 2023.

National identity versus multi-culturalism

When I moved to Tartu in 2006, I was surprised how enthusiastically Estonians take part in nationwide events and ceremonies. The Estonian Song Festival is the biggest nationally, a tradition unifying Estonians since 1869. This choral festival also played an essential role in Estonia regaining independence after the Soviet era, with the power of “The Singing Revolution” – the documentary film of the same name is also worth watching. The Song Festival is held in Tallinn every five years alongside the Estonian Dance Festival. This year saw 31,415 young performers and 90,000 spectators out of a total population of less than 1.4 million.

Since not every hobby group is invited to perform at the festivals, a remarkable part of the free time of young Estonians is given over to choir and dancing rehearsals. “About 50,000 very devoted and motivated young Estonians are dealing monthly with the same tradition based on the same idea”, underlines Sarv. UNESCO, he adds, has declared the Song and Dance Festival tradition a masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity.

When it comes to Finland’s cultural traditions, the first thing that comes to Parviainen’s mind is Finland’s national epos The Kalevala (1835), compiled by Elias Lönnrot. It is based on the oral epic of Karelia, a province in eastern Finland, part of which nowadays belongs to Russia. The Kalevala was rediscovered at the end of the 19th century by Finnish painters, composers and writers, as well as scientists and key figures within the national romantic movement. The Kalevala was seen as evidence of the “pure” or “original” Finnish heritage. Parviainen, who has long experience of teaching performing arts to young peo-



Finland's national epos The Kalevala is still inspiring Finnish contemporary theatre. The play *Väinämöinen* (written and directed by Juha Hurme) in 2023 in TTT-Theatre (Tampere, Finland). Photo: Kari Sunnari.

ple and directing theatre, points out that The Kalevala is still influencing Finnish culture. "You can still see it nowadays in many interpretations especially in the theatre field."

Since my own field is Finnish literature, I am happily surprised at how popular The Kalevala remains as a source of inspiration in the entertainment industry and, consequently, its continuing appeal amongst teenagers and young adults. Featuring in games, music, films and literature, The Kalevala also influenced J.R.R. Tolkien's legendarium. Like "Nordic Noir" in the cinema, "Finnish Weird" is an internationally recognised subgenre of Finnish speculative fiction, combining Finnish mythology with Finns' relationship with nature and environmental issues.

Finland, unlike Estonia, retained its independence after the Second World War, but the war has had a significant influence on Finnish society and culture, as Pitkänen points out. The war united the nation more than any other historical event in Finland. For small, sparsely populated and variable new states like Estonia and Finland, language, literature, theatre and music have been and continue to be important tools for maintaining and strengthening national identity.



King's Day Celebration in Amsterdam. Photo: City of Amsterdam.

But what about in the Netherlands?

“Totally different”, says Lohuis. “The Netherlands has been a very multi-ethnic country since the 17th century, when the first refugees came to the Netherlands. And we have the history of being a coloniser for 400 years. Nowadays there are 18 million people living in a very small area. So, the people are very packed, but with very different backgrounds and cultures.” Lohuis mentions the annual King's Day on 27th April as an example of a vital cultural tradition. “It is a big carnival and there are flea markets throughout the whole country, and young people take part in it too by selling their things and wearing orange clothes and flags”. A similar but much newer tradition is the 1st of May in Finland and Estonia, which is celebrated less and less as a Labour Day – especially in Estonia, where soviet traditions carry negative associations – but as the students' spring fest. Another nationally unifying tradition in Estonia and Finland is Midsummer.

Though there are few immigrants in Estonia and Finland compared to the Netherlands, it is worth of adding that the indigenous people such as Samis in Finland and Setos in Estonia are part of the countries' cultural traditions and their impact on the national identity is remarkable not only historically but also today as Parviainen, Pitkänen and Sarv point out.

Rich patrons of the arts versus governmental support

Estonia, Finland and the Netherlands are all situated next to the sea, but unlike in Finland and in Estonia, the waterway has played a key role in the Netherlands becoming a rich and liberal country. Water is also a very important element in Dutch leisure and cultural activities. Lohuis mentions a five-day ice-skating event in which people can skate through eight cities, a tradition which is increasingly under threat due to climate change.

“Since half of the country is under or next to the water, the ships and therefore trade and earning money have always had a very big footprint in the Dutch history and traditions”, explains Lohuis. But practical business-oriented thinking has also ensured the Netherlands is a forerunner when it comes to the western values. “The country is very liberal because of the trade, the democracy started to develop very early as well as people’s rights, the equality and freedom of religion and opinion.”

According to Lohuis, this tradition still influences how culture is financed in the Netherlands. “Before the Second World War, culture was funded only by the private money, and you can see this also nowadays: you can’t have more than 50 % public support for your projects. Financial independence is very important in the Netherlands”, says Lohuis.

Again, this is not the case in Estonia and Finland. “Youth culture in Estonia is financed by the local government’s budget according to the priorities of the Youth Sector Development Plan for 2021-2035.” says Riin Luks. “Activities pursuing wider national impact are financed from the state budget, like Estonian and Ukrainian youngsters’ cultural camps. Some youth associations also get regular annual grants from the state budget.”

The power of local activism

The financing and organising of cultural youth work is more centralised in Estonia and Finland and is supported at the governmental level. In the Netherlands, in contrast, local authorities have greater independence. NGOs, nevertheless, play an important role in all three countries. As Parviainen reminds us, local NGOs and other grassroots organisations do essential work today, but they were also the initiators and forerunners of professional youth work and cultural institutions such as theatre in 19th century Finland. Finland has a remarkable tradition of over 500 local amateur theatre groups which unite whole villages and all age groups and between them organise over 450 summer performances. Intergenerational music and dance ensembles are also popular in local communities.

Luks notes that, in Estonia, some tasks of practical implementation, like hobby education and youth work umbrella organisations, are delegated to youth work NGOs. Lohuis points out that youth cultural venue P60 in Amstelveen, for instance, would not exist without ten years of grassroots work and access, and the initiative of young people themselves. Both governmental support and strategy and grassroots level activism are needed for effective youth work, adds Pitkänen.

The role of the grassroots movement has been and is still especially important in the countryside, where NGOs are enabling youth hobbies and clubs. Estonia and

Finland can still be proud of their very wide network of libraries, but that is no longer the case in the Netherlands. “Because of the financial crisis in 2007, lots of small and local libraries disappeared, especially in the villages and therefore many cultural activities in the countryside”, says Lohuis.

Challenges and empowering

There are differences in the accessibility of cultural activities in urban and rural environments. “It is more and more difficult to offer high quality free time activities to the smaller amount of people living in the countryside”, says Sarv in the case of Estonia. Luks adds that one of the challenges in Estonia, is the lack of professional youth workers.

Pitkänen takes up the issue of the accessibility of culture in small cities and in the countryside. The solution has been to establish arts education institutes and children’s cultural centres throughout the country and to allocate resources and support. Local cultural youth work offered by volunteers and youth workers is extremely important.

Lohuis points out that although the cultural policy is based on the idea of equality, and culture and education are considered to belong to everyone in the Netherlands, low-income citizens tend not to take part in cultural activities. “This is the case especially in ethnic communities like the Turkish or Moroccan communities, they are more focused on surviving, earning money, so even if they have access to the cultural activities, they just don’t have time for it or they don’t even know about those possibilities”.

Parviainen, who has lot of experience of youth theatres such as Timotei Teatteri and Legioonateatteri in Tampere, says that performing arts – and community theatre, in particular – is an effective way to bring together young people with different backgrounds, facing a range of social problems. “Theatre is a good tool to help you take life into your own hands.”

Hernelahti agrees with Parviainen but observes that empowering people through performing arts is quite a new phenomenon and therefore not yet entirely organised: “Many organisations and professionals of social theatre focused on children and youngsters have emerged in the last ten years in Finland.”

“Theatre is indeed a good tool for diversity and inclusion in the Netherlands, too”, agrees Lohuis. He has encountered this in his own organisation, P60, where young offenders can undertake community service instead of going to prison. “The system works very well, and the youngsters often start to make theatre, and play or record music. Sometimes they want to continue working as a volunteer in P60 after serving time”, he adds.

There are many theatre and circus schools for children and young people in Estonia, but youth circus is not popular in the Netherlands, according to Lo-huis. Similarly, Estonia and Finland have seen a revival of interest in traditional handicraft such as knitting with national patterns and folklore music and dance, unlike in the Netherlands. Estonian and Finnish youngsters also see board games and escape rooms as a nice way to gather and meet other young people – again, unlike in the Netherlands. When talking about global trends, gaming is popular in all three countries. Though we can see threats in it, such as gaming addiction, it can be also empowering, especially, if the gamer can play an active role in creating the virtual reality.

Same aims and values

In conclusion, we can say that despite differing cultural traditions and historical backgrounds in Estonia, Finland and the Netherlands, we share the same aims and values, which impact cultural youth work. All three countries are based on the European democracy; equality and the inclusion of minorities – immigrants or indigenous peoples – are part not only of our cultural traditions but also of our contemporary culture. One of the most important aims is to encourage and enable young peoples' interests and their access to cultural activities and hobbies regardless of their background. While there are countless trends, subcultures and interests, which vary to country to country and change quickly, young Finns and Estonians seem to have a stronger connection with cultural traditions than their Dutch peers.



Author **Heidi Iivari** is DIGGILOO project manager at the Finnish Institute in Estonia.

Digital Communities

Promoting Creativity

and Connecting

Youth



Discord as a Platform for Creativity

Suvi Tuominen & Jenni Hernelahti

Imagine an interactive online theatre performance: the actors and audience are both online, and the audience experiences the performance by following a mix of real-time chat and short pre-recorded video clips.

Could this be the way of the future for art and theatre-making? Finnish theatre instructor Lauri Haltsonen worked with young people during the pandemic to create an online theatre performance. He sees a lot of potential in this approach: “The members of our working group felt that they got much more out of it than they would have gotten from a regular play. It also enabled participants to take part in the project from different locations.”

Discord is a communication and instant messaging platform. Originally designed for gamers, the platform lends itself to a range of applications, with theatre performances just one example. In this article, we describe some interesting initiatives from the DIGISTI project all experimenting with the use of Discord as a platform.

The use of Discord in youth work skyrocketed during the pandemic

In Discord, you can set up text or voice channels on different topics, restrict access to the channels for certain users and assign users different levels of moderation rights. Voice channels can also be used to share screen and video, as in Teams or Zoom. Discord also allows you to chat with other users via private messages.

Discord has been used widely and in a variety of ways in youth work for quite a long time. During the pandemic, its use exploded in youth work in Finland. Over the last couple of years, Discord has provided a platform for open youth work, where youth workers are present at specific times, and activities – such as cooking nights, gaming, various competitions and cinema nights – are planned and implemented on young people’s terms.

Big crises often create new ways of doing things. Covid-19 lockdowns prompted online theatre project *Kuka löytäisi minut* [Who Would Find Me] staged by Lauri Haltsonen and Imatra’s IRTI Theatre. EU-funded project DIGISTI – Taking over digital skills at upper secondary level aimed to address the impact of the pandemic on young students’ well-being and employment, providing various kinds of support to seven vocational colleges in the capital area. The project, funded as part of the European Union’s response to the Covid-19 pandemic, was carried out by three universities of applied sciences (Humak, Laurea and Haaga-Helia) in cooperation with The Deaconess Foundation Helsinki and Wenhe Ltd. Some of DIGISTI’s activities for young people took place in Discord.



“Who Would Find Me” poster by Lauri Halsonen.

Arts and role-playing in Discord

As part of the DIGISTI project, Humak University of Applied Sciences organised extra-curricular activities (mainly online) for vocational college students and worked with students and staff to develop college youth work. The programme aimed to create shared experiences and alleviate the loneliness many suffered during the pandemic.

One DIGISTI programme, organised in cooperation with Hyria Vocational College and Hyvinkää Youth Services, provided activities for young people in the town of Hyvinkää. Hyria had noticed that many students suffering from loneliness had an interest in art. At the same time, a group of young adults with a passion for art started to meet at the Hyvinkää youth centre. The DIGISTI project brought the organisations together.

Face-to-face meetings were held weekly at the youth centre, but the project added an online dimension to the programme: every other week, participants were offered the chance to participate via Discord in a hybrid format. Hybrid sessions usually involved between two and five young people at the youth centre on a shared computer with up to three young people joining remotely on their own devices.

A project youth worker was on hand in Discord along with a series of visiting artists from different fields including comics, animation, digital drawing and visual design. Sessions usually began with the guest instructor guiding participants through the secrets of art-making via Discord voice channel and the platform's screen share feature. Participants then worked independently, before finally uploading their work to Discord for the instructor to share and discuss.

The young people reported making new friends and gaining new inspiration for their own art. Participants welcomed the online opportunity, as it was not always possible for them to get to the youth centre. Online delivery also made it possible to draw on instructors from around the country.

The DIGISTI project also established an online role-playing club. Participants used a Discord voice channel to communicate during games, which were held on the Roll20 platform. Gaming sessions were arranged once a week and, in between, the group kept in touch on various Discord channels. Separate text channels were created for topics such as character development, game session information and general discussion.

Players in role-playing games often do not compete with each other. Instead, they engage in collaborative storytelling, overcoming challenges by working together. This makes role playing ideal for youth work and community-building activities. Although players did not know each other beforehand, they very quickly became friends and kept in touch outside of the gaming sessions as

well. The programme ended with an in-person meet-up, at the initiative of the young people themselves.

Online theatre reached new audiences and made us think about communication in new ways

Created in collaboration with a cast of amateur actors aged 17–23, *Kuka löytäisi minut* [Who Would Find Me] tells the story of a young woman who disappears, leaving behind mysterious messages in Discord. Haltsonen chose slightly more experienced actors, to ensure the cast were able to commit to the project despite the exceptional circumstances of the pandemic year. The play was created using devised theatre and work on the project began with the joint creation of the storyline.

The play was easy to stage in Discord. The various text channels included real-time chat performed by the actors, as well as YouTube videos and links to other Discord channels. The audience were able to follow the chats at their own pace and jump from one Discord channel to another, although they could not themselves contribute.

The play was mainly advertised through social media. For Haltsonen, game enthusiasts aged 20–40 represented a surprising new target group. The costs of the project were very low, because Discord server and Google services were free of charge and there was no need for a physical rehearsal space. “The play was performed in Finnish, but if the language had been English there would’ve been international possibilities, as Discord is a global platform” Haltsonen reflects.

It was a unique experience for everyone involved. “Normally, words make up about 80 % of communication, and since the communication was almost entirely text, we had to think about how to express everything when there was no nonverbal communication. There was also no sound, so tone and emotions had to be expressed in text and emojis. Building characters via the medium of text alone was a challenge and offered audiences a completely new kind of theatre experience” Haltsonen adds.

Our creativity is the limit

Almost everything we do face-to-face, we can also accomplish in the online environment. We can feel part of a community, make new friends, be passionate and creative. Online environments also enable things that are not possible

in the physical environment and these possibilities widen our perspectives and horizons in many ways that we may not have even imagined yet.

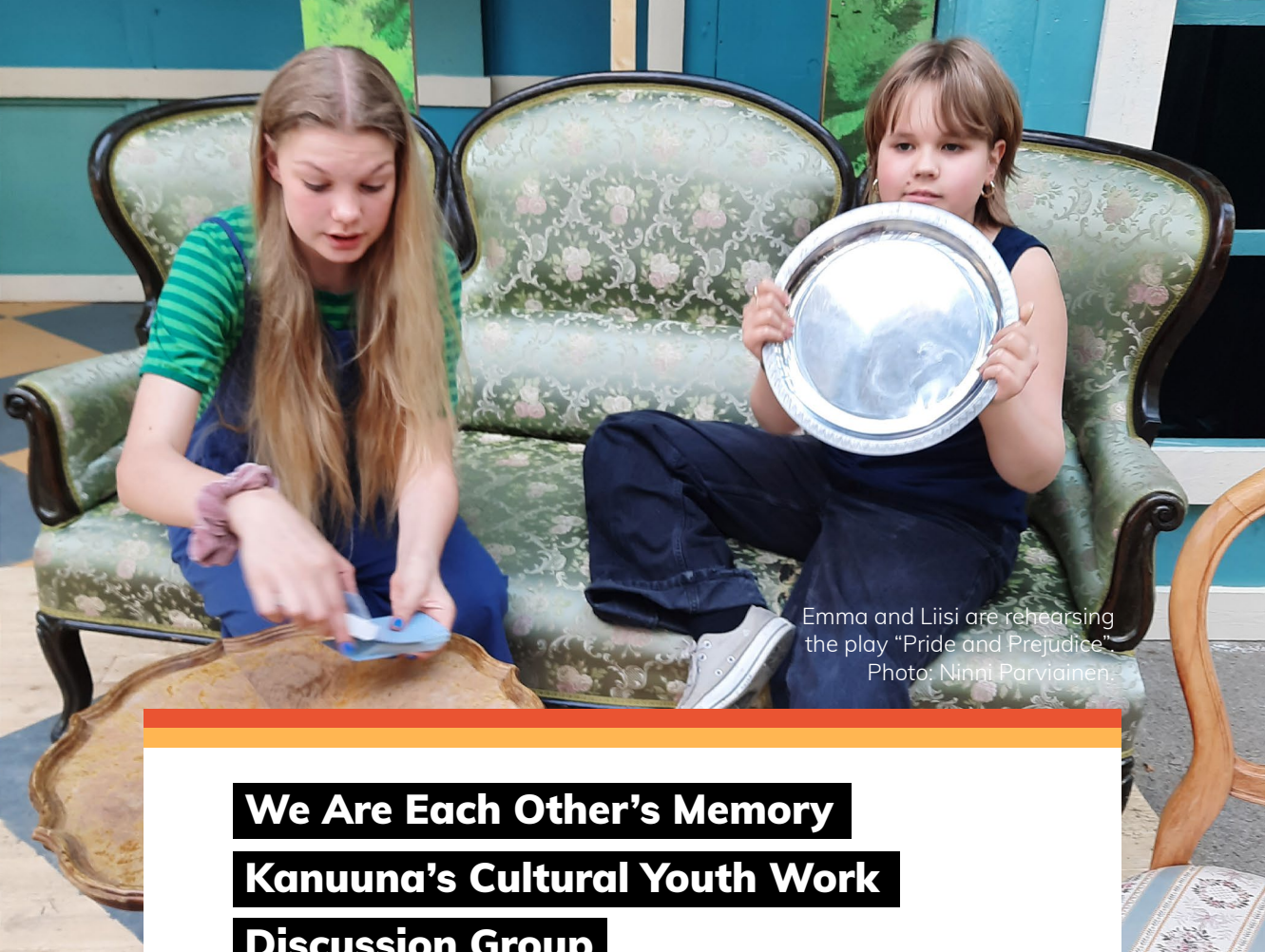
When physical limitations are removed, international projects become easy. Creating an online theatre performance together with groups of young people from different countries? Writing, painting, making music together with others across physical barriers and geographical boundaries? Hosting artists and experts from around the world via your online youth centre? With the right technology, tools and mindset, everything is possible!



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Emma and Liisi are rehearsing the play "Pride and Prejudice".
Photo: Ninni Parviainen.

We Are Each Other's Memory

Kanuuna's Cultural Youth Work

Discussion Group

Ninni Parviainen

Cultural youth work has been defined in a variety of ways. Sometimes the term is used to refer to high-quality programming for children and young people led by an expert in a particular field of art. The term can also refer to making culture accessible to young people, by contributing effort or funds. Cultural youth work also involves taking young people to concerts, to theatres, out into nature, to the beach, to the streets – anywhere they can build cultural capital, exchange ideas, learn, question, and engage with others.

Regional and local practices and development projects in cultural youth work are a pre-requisite for the development of the national body, write Schalin and Pyykkönen (2022:12) in their Finnish Youth Research Society article *Nuorten kulttuuria tukemassa* [Supporting the culture of young people]. National policies are valuable in themselves, but for young people it is more useful to see regional and local practitioners, because they can promote cultural youth work in a concrete way in the everyday lives of young people. This key idea is also apparent in the cultural youth work

discussion group at the Municipal Youth Work Centre of Expertise Kanuuna. As planners, we explore what is happening in municipal youth work and share professional practices and ideas.

When I began, two years ago, as a planner with the Municipal Youth Work Centre of Expertise Kanuuna, my first responsibility was to join the cultural youth work special interest discussion group in Discord. I remember being extremely nervous – I was new to online discussion groups – but I quickly realised that I'd found my people. While cultural professionals are not, in my experience, a homogeneous group, I've found as a profession they tend to be warm and approachable. I remember that already then, as later, the conversation was by turns enthusiastic and nuanced. Over the years, the definition of cultural youth work has always been a topic of keen debate, never a source of conflict.

In spring 2021, the discussion group was led by Satu Olkkonen, postdoctoral researcher at the University of the Arts Helsinki. Her discussion style was productive and warm. When responsibility passed to me that autumn, I was determined to maintain the same calm and conversational approach. The first session in autumn 2021 was disappointing; not a single participant showed up. In Teams were Johanna Hurme from youth organisation Nuori Kulttuuri and guest Anu Utter who I had invited along to talk about using drama techniques in youth work. We did end up staying and chatting for the whole hour and a half. I feel in that session we laid the foundation for a collaboration between Kanuuna and Nuori Kulttuuri that led to our joint tenure organising the cultural youth work discussion group the following year.

In autumn 2021 and spring 2022, the discussion group met every two weeks and Nuori Kulttuuri planner Johanna Hurme and I attended each other's events at every opportunity. During the year, we covered a variety of topics, from pop-up culture centres to creative movement for children. Invited guests included municipal officials, dancers, youth work practitioners, student activity co-ordinators, artists, bloggers, and programme directors. We invited guest speakers that participants wished to see, and often even a whisper of interest in a particular direction had me seize the idea. Participation grew steadily and my initial fears that no-one would come subsided. The discussion group began to establish its place. Over the two years we had wonderful moments: laughter and tears. The highlights were the moments in which we shared our experiences and were able to pass on approaches and ideas to each other and even develop new practices and collaborations. Sometimes the sessions became peer support, a space that allowed us to open up about the various challenging situations we encountered in cultural youth work.

In my experience, across many municipalities, youth workers do not always realise that they are doing is cultural youth work. They may feel – wrongly – that cultural youth work happens elsewhere and is somehow fancier and different, even though cultural youth work is what they are doing every day in their

own work. This realisation came to me – as many wonderful insights do – the hard way. We can never separate our individual identity from our professional identity. We are the sum of what we have experienced, learned, and achieved. Youth workers may have previous occupations, pastimes, interests, and passions which they pass on to the young people they work with, whether or not they understand this as cultural youth work. And then there are youth workers who have been involved in dance their whole life and lead dance classes in a youth centre or artists who inspire children and young people with incredible crafts and handicraft. There are also countless youth workers who understand the value of cultural education and create opportunities for young people to engage with culture, by arranging band camps, locating training facilities, or taking them to the movies, the theatre, or an art exhibition.

As noted above, we are the product of our lives. We are what we engage with, what we build and what we remember. My beloved drama work always emphasises the individual's wholeness and their ability to work with the resources they have. Drama is understood as a tool of theatre arts, a medium, above all, for asking questions rather than supplying ready-made answers (Ventola & Renlund, 2005). This is how I see the overarching idea of the cultural youth work discussion group, and this is also the reason it grew so popular in 2022–2023. We facilitators had a genuine interest in asking the questions and listening to the responses. It didn't really matter that the sessions were online, the atmosphere remained mostly conversational, a space to engage. I feel that the round of introductions helped here: each of the participants had the chance to introduce themselves and share their news. We also had a Padlet where participants could introduce themselves and network.

Spring 2023 has been an interesting time from a cultural politics perspective. Political upheaval has been felt intensely in the cultural sector as well. A top Finnish politician of the moment, reflecting on the meaning of culture more broadly, has defended proposed national budget cuts with the justification that culture is a luxury which Finland cannot currently afford. In response, we could think: without culture, who would we be? Who would be keeping a record for future generations of who we are, what we feel, what we dream of and what we long for? Culture is our collective memory. We Finns remember where we were when Käärijä almost beat Swedish performer Loreen at Eurovision 2023. Käärijä is just an ordinary guy from Vantaa, yet behind him were countless arts professionals, polishing the diamond until it shone but not flawlessly. What a masterpiece it was: the product of countless hours devoted by backing singers, dancers, make-up artists, costume- and set-designers, each of whom were once inspired by someone to do something creative – perhaps by someone involved in cultural youth work who may not even be aware of the impact they have had.

As I write this article, I'm already working elsewhere. I've been at the art museum for a month now, surrounded by the works of artists of the Finnish golden age. Last thing yesterday, I stood in front of a Helene Schjerfbeck painting and smiled a wry smile. If someone had told her that culture was merely a luxury, would she have been dissuaded from becoming an artist? Perhaps not, but can we afford to take that risk? Cultural youth work is no more and no less than the intellectual and spiritual capital that we pass on to our children.



Author **Ninni Parviainen** is a Head of Library, Culture and Museum Services at City of Orimattila, former planner at Youth Work Centre of Expertise Kanuuna and head of theatre school Teatterikoulu Timotei.



Creating Cultural Opportunities for Young People

Carita Rukakoski

As part of the Diggiloo project, I interviewed Aleksi Valta, Executive Director of the Association of Finnish Children’s Cultural Centres and Auni Tuovinen, art educator and engagement officer at Hämeenlinna-based Culture Centre ARX. Valta and Tuovinen shared their perspectives on the current state of cultural activities for children and young people and its future potential. We also talked about community art and reflected on the challenges and opportunities for combining art and digital technology.

The Association of Finnish Children’s Cultural Centres is a national umbrella organisation for children and youth centres. Through the association, we get an overview of what members are doing in the child and youth culture sector. “We carry out plenty of projects with our members. The largest of these has been Art Testers. Digitality has been a huge part of this project – the biggest youth art project in Finnish history – which involves taking all Finnish 8th graders to engage with art. During the pandemic, the programme produced a great deal of digital content for

the 8th graders”, notes executive director Alekski Valta. The association has also created a webpage – harrastakotona.fi – with tips and ideas to inspire children and young people to make art at home as well.

“We want to promote children’s right to culture, recreation and the arts.”

Alekski Valta

The work of the Children’s Cultural Centre is based on article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. “We want to promote children’s right to culture, recreation and the arts,” observes Valta. “Our network of cultural centres differs from basic education in the arts, formal after-school arts programmes that follow the national curriculum and are aimed at a select few. Our work targets those with fewer opportunities. Working towards cultural education plans is really important for the association and for our network.

Embracing a range of art forms and open to all, Culture Centre ARX is member of the Association of Finnish Children’s Cultural Centres. Auni Tuovinen, from ARX, says her participants include young people as well as children of all ages along with their families. The centre’s programming is diverse. Tuovinen reels off a list of the events they organise: exhibitions, training for school and early childhood education groups, open art mornings for families, integration family clubs and Come and Craft! afternoon art clubs for school-aged children. Events



The HÄX Demo Tour gave young people a chance to try their hand at creating digital content. Image: ARX homepage.

include ARXantai, a Saturday event for families with children, art festival Hip-palot and Valoilmiö light art event, as well as youth Street Art Festival Räikee, which is produced under a separate brand, HÄX. “The core value that informs our work – and the thing that we are constantly working to improve – is the quality of children’s culture and increasing participation” says Tuovinen.

“The most recent HÄX projects have included the Demo Tour, in co-operation with Get Active Near You, a project that is part of the Finnish model for leisure activities. The Demo Tour visited secondary schools across Hämeenlinna, organising workshops for the students. These workshops gave students an opportunity to experience a range of youth culture fields: spraying virtual graffiti using VR glasses, trying out various electronic music techniques using tablets and other devices” recounts Tuovinen enthusiastically.

The work at ARX is not limited to a specific art form. Offerings range from visual art to handiwork and crafting, light art to media arts and education and youth culture sub-genres such as graffiti art, rap and hip-hop. This broad programming provides as many children and young people as possible with a jumping off point where they can begin to explore hobbies they find interesting.

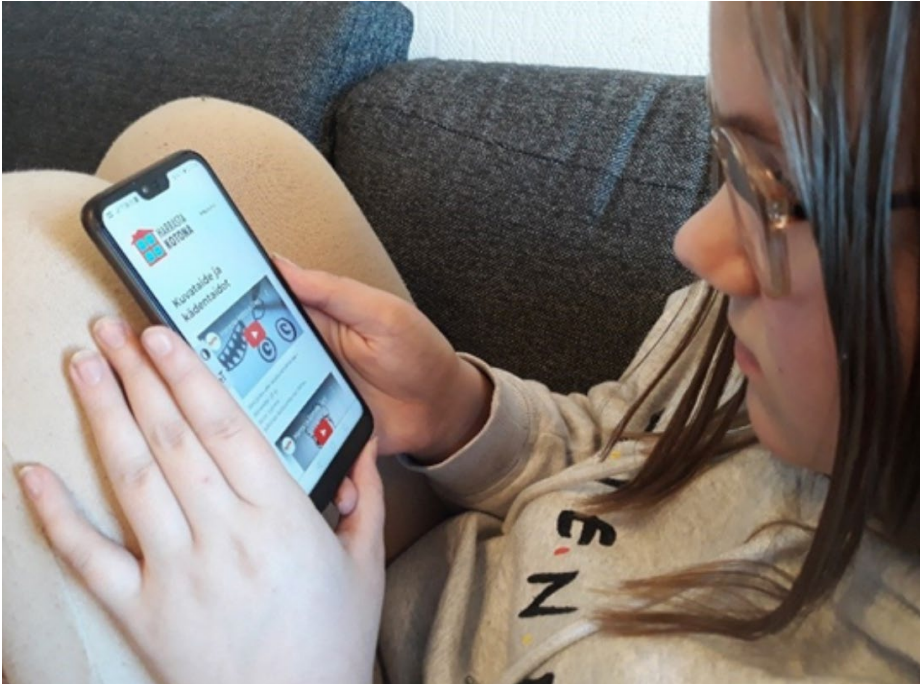
“Community art is a community- or participatory artistic production in which community members can get involved in the various stages of the art process.”

Auni Tuovinen

Sometimes a path into the world of culture opens up by chance. So it happened for Tuovinen, it seems. Her own cultural journey began in childhood through music and acting. After high school, she discovered an interest in handicraft and trained as a seamstress. During a placement at a workshop for the unemployed, Tuovinen saw the appeal of working as a facilitator. Keen on the idea, she applied to a UAS bachelor’s programme in Culture and Arts and studied to become an art coordinator and ended up working in children’s culture. She went on to further develop her professional skills by studying art education at university.

Valta also found his way into the children’s culture sector almost by accident. He had worked for years in various sports organizations, but when a suitable opportunity arose, he made the leap into what was to him the somewhat unfamiliar world of children’s culture. He has enjoyed himself.

Children and young people can be a challenging demographic to engage in culture and art activities, which may not immediately resonate for them. When I asked Tuovinen and Valta how they reach out to children and young people, they both had the same answer: outreach youth work and cultural outreach, going out and offering young people these services in environments that are familiar to them. “Places such as skate parks, youth events and schools”, offers Tuovinen.



The harrastakotona.fi website offers children and young people the opportunity to make art. Image: harrastakotona.fi,

The week after our interview, Valta took part in a children's culture forum with the theme of inclusion and best practices. There's work being done to genuinely reach out to young people and to involve them. "Young people need time and we need to keep organizing programmes even ones where no one is likely to show up at first" explains Tuovinen. "A significant challenge with the recreation model in Finland is the limited success with have with secondary-aged children. They are a challenging group to work with and it takes skill" Valta notes.

"Digital transmission of performing arts doesn't necessarily work for children and young people, or other audiences really. Why would you want to watch a virtual theatre performance that may not be necessarily have been filmed well, the sound quality might be poor, when at the same time, on a screen, you could be watching a world class film that's been made for that very purpose?"

Aleksi Valta

What do Tuovinen and Valta think about the current state of children's and youth culture? What needs work? For both, the answer comes down to the same issues: funding and resources. Or rather, the lack of them. "The whole business is too project-focused, it's emphasised in our work. Our umbrella organisation relies entirely on grants for its funding. The work and the funding of sports organisations is more long-term. This project bureaucracy is exhausting and the constant need to secure funds takes the focus away from important youth

work”, says Valta. “The challenge and the problem is that when there aren’t a lot of staff, all the effort is put into management” Valta continues.

For Tuovinen, it’s a positive that the children’s and cultural centres have the necessary skills and approaches to engage young people. ”We could make wider use of this across various sectors of society, when we need an insight into the thoughts and aspirations of children and young people”.

“Some types of performing arts – such as musical performances – work slightly better, but even these have the issue that, in the programme they are meant to be an interactive event. We had great success with verbal arts workshops, with school children participating via chat.”

Aleksi Valta

Read more about Aleksi Valta’s experiences of youth work during the Covid-19 pandemic here: <https://www.kulturradet.no/documents/10157/a7464045-2cb6-4988-9948-ffd834508a5d>



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Photo: City of Helsinki / Jussi Hellsten.

I don't know how, but let's find out:

Digital Youth Work in Helsinki

Mikko Röman, Aino Palmroos & Susanna Pitkänen

Helsinki is, in many ways, the forerunner of digital cultural youth work in Finland. This is mostly due to the fact that Helsinki is home to almost 200 000 young people, over 300 professional youth workers, over 50 youth centres – nearly one for every neighbourhood – as well as a variety of NGOs offering cultural activities for youth. Helsinki has also decided to invest in digital youth work, with advanced digital equipment, trained employees and a commitment to establishing both special digital cultural Hubs and decentralized competence among youth workers.

Let's have a look!

The Diggiloo project was lucky to have the City of Helsinki Youth Services join us as an associated partner, taking an active role in the co-operation. Our other partner, Verke, also nests inside the same organization, so there was a good representation. Verke co-ordinates the National Centre of Expertise for Digital Youth Work in Finland.

The City of Helsinki offers a wide range of activities for young people aged 13-29. All the activities are free and open for all. Before we introduce some concrete examples, let's have a look at the trends, ambitions and aims of digital cultural youth work.

Mikko Röman is Coordinator of Digital Youth Work within the City of Helsinki. We have gathered information for this article by interviewing him along with Aino Palmroos who studies youth work at Humak. Mikko also gave a presentation for the Diggiloo steering group and has shared his thoughts throughout the project.

In his presentation, Mikko noted that: "One thing seems to be almost certain - the youngsters we work with and ourselves continue being surrounded by technology now and in the future - so let's tackle it".

Digital youth work has been already defined at the EU level as: "Proactively using or addressing digital media and technology in youth work. Digital youth work is not a youth work method - digital youth work can be included in any youth work setting (open youth work, youth information and counselling, youth clubs, detached youth work, etc.). Digital youth work has the same goals as youth work in general, and using digital media and technology in youth work should always support these goals. Digital youth work can happen in face-to-face situations as well as in online environments - or in a mixture of these two. Digital media and technology can be either a tool, an activity or a content in youth work. Digital youth work is underpinned by the same ethics, values and principles as youth work." The target, says Mikko, is to implement this in our youth work.

He speculates on the techniques that may be available in 2030, when our current youth are adults: it is possible that robots will do most of our physical work, artificial intelligence (AI) may be our co-worker at the office and flying drones will fly in lunch when we're hungry. Actually, none of this is science fiction; it is already possible.

Mikko reasons that since research has shown that the idea of the "digital native" is a myth, we need to help all young people learn to use technology and refine their media literacy - they are not born with these skills.

While outlining the digital youth work plan as part of his work as coordinator, Mikko has made use of the conclusions of the EU level Council of Digital Youth Work. It is important to try to implement research to develop new approaches, he observes.

The first conclusion on digital skills is: "Digital literacy and other 21st-century skills play a crucial role in young people's independence, social inclusion, employability and daily lives." It is with this thought, reflects Mikko, that we



Photo: Mikko Rönman.

encourage young people to get involved in participatory budgeting, for example. There are two avenues of influence. City-wide ideas are gathered largely online: improvements are suggested and voted on to determine which receive funding. There is a separate budget reserved specifically for young people's own activity needs and this process is facilitated largely face-to-face in youth centres and schools via digital devices.

The second conclusion has a social equality theme when it states: "The digital divide needs to be bridged. All young people should have equal opportunities to enhance their digital competences, regardless of their background". Gaming consoles are available in all Helsinki youth centres and seven of these centres also provide special equipment for computer gaming. Libraries also serve the whole community: there are, for example, 36 decent 3D printers available for use in the city's public libraries, so you don't necessarily need to buy your own equipment.

This conclusion addresses equality for all in the use of digital technologies regardless of gender, nationality, language and so on. This is implemented in many ways such as Gaymers' nights, an open gaming event organised by the City of Helsinki for sexual and gender minority youth.

We move on to discuss the centralized digital cultural Hubs and decentralized competences that the city supports. The spectrum of offerings for young people Mikko describes is wide. Participants of the media activities can take portraits in a photo studio, for example, or shoot short films and music videos, create

video effects in a green screen studio, and edit videos with professional programs. They can also broadcast a radio show, record podcasts and take part in multi-camera streaming.

In the Voice of the Young Editorial Board, young people produce newspaper articles, TV stories and blog posts for Finland's largest media organisations and stimulate social discussion in social media.

The Helsinki Unity Music network boasts 10 professional music studio facilities in 8 different locations with guidance available.

Luuppi Media

Luuppi Youth Centre, situated in Kontula, offers media activities for school groups and young people. At Luuppi, you can make your own media art in a studio. The place offers the possibility to create your own videos or photography and a green screen studio where you can stream or take photos. Luuppi also organizes street art and graffiti workshops free-of-charge. Young people can also borrow equipment such as cameras and recording and video equipment.

Kipinä Youth Activity House

Situated in Itäkeskus, Kipinä is a youth centre boasting various radio and music studios. Here the Helsinki Unity Music studio network operates out of three studios named Mummola, Kellari and Puukkopaja. Signaalimedia is also situated here, and it offers a place for young people to create their own podcast or produce their own radio show. Signaalimedia provides the space and the equipment. Young people can also loan equipment and run their own radio channel. Signaalimedia publishes their finished work for example in Spotify or Instagram. One of their projects has been careers podcast Ammattipodcast. In these episodes two teenagers invite people from different professions to talk about their jobs. Guests have included a flight attendant, police officer, nurse, architect, stylist, actor, rapper, midwife and subway driver. The guests describe their average day, talk about how they got into that line of work and try to give a real insight into the profession. The podcast seeks to provide people - especially young people - with an accurate picture of what it's like to work in various professions.

Narri Youth Theatre

Situated in Sörnäinen, Narri specialises in theatre activities for young people aged 9–29 years. The activities that Narri offers include theatre groups, camps, courses, workshops, events and performances. Each group lasts a whole school year, and the cost of participation is minimal. The programme seeks to promote young people's wellbeing using the methods of theatre pedagogy. It can be very meaningful for a young person to participate and experience the power of group work. Other youth centres also run youth theatre groups and producing plays is a popular hobby.

Tiivistämö Event Hub

Tiivistämö is situated in Suvilahti. The City of Helsinki Youth Events Unit moved to its current address in 2019 along with Gloria Cultural Arena. Gloria offered a range of subculture events. Tiivistämö is an urban space that offers facilities for various kinds of events, from small shows to big raves or competitions. Tiivistämö also offers internships for young people, helps them organize various events or find work in different event roles. Tiivistämö interns get to use professional standard event equipment, such as mixing desks, lighting technology, multi-camera recording and visualization technology. During the worst of the Covid-19 pandemic, Tiivistämö adapted their shows for streaming. The unit stayed open throughout the pandemic, and by streaming everything was able to continue as an event space with a different concept.

Herttoniemi – Herts

Herts, in Herttoniemi, is a new venue for young people, offering a variety of activities. Herts offers a small studio space, that can be rented, as well as a space designed especially for dance and theatre activities, a group mode for hosting meetings and a space designed for gaming and watching movies.

Decentralized general competence among youth workers means that every practitioner is expected to know the basics of both digital and cultural youth work to be able to support and guide youth groups. Staff are encouraged and trained to get involved in projects, to build their own competences and even specialize in a particular media or art form. The aim is that youth work empowers young people to be active and creative in our digital society, capable of making informed and reasoned decisions, and of taking responsibility for and being in control of their own digital identity.

Youth work also has a role to play in helping young people navigate online risks related to conduct, content, contact and commercialism, including issues such as hate speech, cyberbullying, disinformation and propaganda.

Lastly, we asked Mikko what he considers to be most important in implementing digital youth work. Mikko responds that a curious mind, a positive attitude and the courage to experiment and learn from failure would be enough to start with.

He offers this example: “If youth wants to build a website and the youth worker doesn’t know how, then the youth worker can always say: I don’t know how, but let’s find out.”




Mikko Röman is Coordinator of Digital Youth Work within the City of Helsinki.



Aino Palmroos studies youth work at Humak



Susanna Pitkänen teaches youth work as senior lecturer at Humak



The New Heritage Festival
Flower Bouquet Workshop. Photo: Eeva Vitsut

Tartu 2024 Extended – the Young People Behind Tartu’s European Capital of Culture Celebrations

Angela Ader

Tartu, together with Southern Estonia, is the European Capital of Culture in 2024. This is an immense opportunity and a great challenge for Tartu and Southern Estonia. We knew from the beginning it would mean producing hundreds of events for different audiences. Keen to involve plenty of young creators and organisers in the Tartu 2024 program, we created the Tartu 2024 Extended initiative. Tartu 2024 Extended will focus on engaging young people (14 to 19 year-olds) through culture and art and will incorporate digital elements. So far, as of autumn 2023, 50 young people have participated in this developmental process, creating events for over 4000 people. A particular focus will be on strengthening transversal cooperation between the fields of culture and youth work, enabling us to talk about difficult topics in creative ways.

What is Tartu 2024 Extended?

Youth participation in cultural events and in social activities is low in general. Tartu 2024 Extended aims to foster collaboration between organisations supporting young creatives, active citizens and artists involved in the European Capitals of Culture and to provide young people with new learning opportunities to become more entrepreneurial and creative and better-equipped with cultural participation skills. In this way, we can raise awareness of the cultural field as a potential career choice for youth. Through informal learning, we combine best practices in youth work with cultural activities. This contributes to the development of creativity, team-work and problem-solving in participating countries and youth programmes.

Youth work initiatives tend to be very local, village- or city-based. During Tartu 2024 Extended we want to raise awareness of the internationality of youth work. There is a definite lack of methodology when it comes to working internationally and bringing together different cultural activities. All our cities are home to youth from multicultural backgrounds – not least Ukrainian refugees – who are also keen to be part of organising youth events.

Through this project we want to strengthen international collaboration between culture and youth programmes in the European Capital of Culture framework in order to increase the inclusion of young people, to identify new innovative methodologies and practices, and to have a positive long-term impact on the participation of young people in the creative processes and organisation of cultural events in Europe. By publishing guidelines and by maintaining a long-term European Capital of Culture (ECOC) capacity building network, we seek to highlight the internationality of youth work and facilitate transversal cooperation between the culture and youth fields.

With this project we hope to overcome physical distance and bring our youth into the European dimension, working together in international teams. Data shows that there has been a demographic decline in youth in the regions and the lack of “youth voice” or youth leaders in cultural management decision-making is a significant problem in our cities. We believe that through cultural events and participation we can give young people the opportunity to take the initiative. The European Capital of Culture (ECOC) designation provides a boost both for the city that holds the title and for the whole region.

Tartu 2024 Extended Methodology

The aim of European Capital of Culture Tartu 2024 is to develop the cultural community and, in particular, to invite young people to get involved and to host cultural events. The goal of Tartu 2024 Extended is to increase the cultural management skills of 14- to 19-year-olds in southern Estonia through learn-

ing, doing and sharing. Our programme encourages young people to take responsibility for their surroundings and cities. It challenges them to start developing the – cultural, social and ecological – environment of their city, to create the kinds of places they can see themselves living in the future, and thus begin shaping their own future.

Through professional development workshops and seminars, as well as active involvement in multicultural teams and international cultural youth events, young people from our 19 partner municipalities will learn about self-efficacy and will begin to understand the importance of their role in active citizenship in Europe. They will be given the tools and skills to help them shape their environment through culture and are encouraged to share these skills with their peers. We encourage young people to take the initiative to shape their own cities, build intercultural dialogue and share different approaches to ensure that young people understand that their participation is both welcome and vital for a healthy society.

Tartu 2024 Extended is a developmental programme which consists of seven in-person sessions.

Sessions focus on the following:

- 1. Idea**
- 2. Team**
- 3. Programming**
- 4. Communication and Marketing**
- 5. Technical execution – producing**
- 6. Engaging audience and volunteers**
- 7. Wrap-up and analysis**

In the Tartu 2024 Extended programme, participants explore how to develop projects, how to put together a team and how to plan and implement an event. Festivals organised by our young participants took place in June 2022 and June 2023 and a third will be held in June 2024. Since programme participants live in different places, most planning is done via digital platforms, necessitating the use of digital project management platforms such as Google Drive, Telegram or Discord.

Every event has to be marketed and promoted via the web, and we hold seminars dedicated to exploring how to make your event more engaging online. Each team creates their own brand, their own Facebook event, Instagram post and website, and this involves using digital tools. Our main platform for design is Figma.

Together with cultural management skills we encourage the young participants to think about ways to engage people via the web. This could mean making art on the digital platform, making art accessible via the website and reflecting on digital platforms. Another important element is event production, which requires special technical skills. We have agreed that young people are responsible for producing all the events.

The first Tartu 2024 programme took place in April 2022–June 2022. The second round was held October 2022–June 2023 and the third will be October 2023–April 2024. With 3 rounds and around 75 young participants, we will deliver 3 big events and over 20 smaller events for young people in southern Estonia.

In 2024, the participants will organise Tartu Youth Party, a unique initiative in Tartu bringing together children and young people to enjoy their free time together. The participants will also organise Youth Festival in the summer and International Youth Day on the 12th of August. Young people will be responsible for the whole production, including lighting, sound and technical construction

Some examples of events produced by young people:

Uuspärimusfestival - New Heritage Festival

The New Heritage Festival brought together technology and local traditions. The team of three behind the event wanted to do something that would resonate with visitors and make their eyes shine. Right from the beginning, it was clear that they wanted to organise an event in the countryside, outside of Tartu, and focus on South Estonia more broadly.

The event offered the chance to try your hand at both modern and traditional workshops, from robotics to floristry. There were performances by music and dance artists, and an open discussion group at the National Archives on the topic: “How to connect with your roots?” The evening ended with a performance by headline act Oopus, who also gave a talk about creating music today using different technologies.



The New Heritage Festival, Robotics Workshop. Photo: Eeva Vitsut.

Tartu 2024 Risti-Rästi Festival

In June 2023, 24 young people organised the Risti-Rästi (Criss-Cross) Festival in Tartu and Southern Estonia. The programme brought together roleplay games, design, a charity ball, a concert programme, a dance battle, an underground rave party and discussions about startups and investing. These activities were all the work of young people, from brainstorming through to production. The organisers located venues, found speakers / performers, secured technical equipment, designed the posters, ran social media campaigns and gave interviews to the media.

Experiences and future plans

Past participants all feel they have become much braver about sharing their ideas and more active in starting initiatives in their own towns. 74 % of past participants said that Tartu 2024 Extended gives young people opportunities to make their ideas a reality. Many said they would like to continue being cultural managers, with more than 70 % intending to continue organising events. The first year showed that many participants went on to organise activities within their own school or for Extended Fest or New Heritage Festival the next year. We also see that one strength of the Extended programme is the community it creates. Participants developed a strong connection with their team-members, with other programme participants and with Tartu 2024 in general. This ini-

tiative offers young people an opportunity to experience event-management in a safe environment and gives them the courage to continue with cultural management activities.

This project will enhance the quality, visibility and recognition of local/regional youth work, both through knowledge transfer within the European Capital of Culture network and through the transfer of knowledge, skills, contacts and cooperation opportunities to local youth work partners. The project also clicks together with the horizontal priority for common values, civic engagement and participation, giving young people an opportunity to raise topics which are important locally and globally in Europe. The main value is that the young people themselves produce these projects in multicultural teams. This will be the first youth initiative to be implemented between different European Capital of Culture partners following environmentally friendly cultural management principles. It is our hope that the group leaders will continue to organise these activities after the European Capital of Culture year together with the city of Tartu.

We cannot train cultural managers within 6 months, because it is life-long learning experience, but we can encourage young people to think about culture and inspire them to organise cultural events in their own cities. This youth movement will be a legacy of Tartu 2024.

For further information in Estonian: <https://tartu2024.ee/extended>



Author **Angela Ader** is Tartu 2024 education Project Coordinator and Tartu 2024 Extended programme leader.

BLOG by 16-year-old Stella Seim, February 2023

Tartu 2024 Extended's fifth meeting

- from communication to glitter

On February 18, the fifth meeting of the Tartu 2024 youth program Extended took place. This time the main theme of the day was marketing. Merili Ginter, Kerli Peetsalu, Laura Grigorjan and Kaidi-Lisa Kivisalu came to speak and hold workshops at the mission. Stella Seim shared her thoughts about the day.



Tartu Youth Party 2023 in Alexela Loomekeskus, Tartu. Photo: Helene Toomeks.

The day started with a great introduction, where we received tips for organizing a sustainable event from Impact Day's main organizer, Merili Ginter. Merili told us how she got into organizing events and shared her experiences. It was very nice to meet her. Her positive attitude and joy provided a warm atmosphere for the whole day.

In the social media workshop, we took a closer look at what goes into making Instagram and Facebook posts. We took away interesting ideas on how to create eye-catching and memorable content. We found out, for example, that if you put several pictures on Instagram in one post, you will appear twice in people's feed.

In the design workshop, we could review the visual language of our event with our teams. We chose colors for the event and created a poster. We got interesting tips on how to market the event well and stand out to people.

In the communication workshop, we summarized the content of our event and made sense of it so that we would be the bosses of our own event and know the exact goal. We learned about news values and how to use them to promote an event and make it attractive. The media takes into account the fame, topicality, influence, freshness, unusualness and conflict of the participants. At home, we were tasked with writing a press release for our event.

At the end of the day, we all ate together in the Tartu University cafeteria. The evening ended with the Tartu Youth Party organized by our wonderful Extended program girls. At the party, you could sing karaoke, have your face painted with glitter, enjoy bubble tea and listen to rapper sãm. There was a lot of activity, there was never a moment of boredom, and the event was a great success. Many thanks to the organizers!

The whole day was filled with a lot of useful knowledge and ideas that we can use in our future life and projects and that will help our events reach many people.

Case Studies:

Gaming as a Source

of Wellbeing



Making Games as a Hobby and Means of Self-expression

Jaakko Kemppainen

Games have brought us joy for millennia and even digital games have fifty odd years of history behind them. Digital gaming first exploded in the 1980s, as game consoles and cheap home computers began to appear in our homes and everyday lives. The first generations to grow up with digital games are now middle-aged and they haven't necessarily given up gaming.

According to the University of Tampere's Player Barometer, around 65% of Finns play digital games at least once a month. When other forms of gaming are included, 89% of the population are active players. Almost all young people play digital games at least sometimes. Only 3.4% of those aged 10 to 19 and 7.1% of those aged 20 to 29 never play digital games. Gaming is a phenomenon that extends throughout the nation and our society, particularly amongst younger people. Games are one of the most popular forms of art and culture.

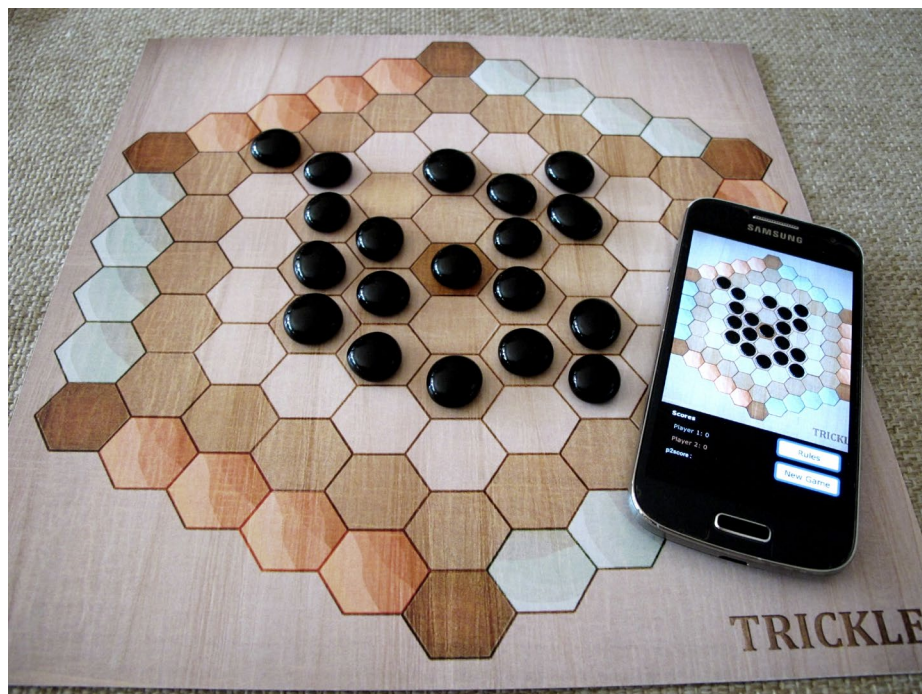
As well as playing games, here in Finland we also make a lot of games. The commercial production of digital games currently employs round 4,000 individuals in a few hundred firms. The sector has a domestic turnover in the region of 3 billion euros. These figures attract significant

media coverage, which in turn feeds interest in the topic. People are interested in game development. It can also be a hobby.

On games and making them

In the modern world, games encompass a wide array of different products and pursuits. This article focuses on digital games such as those played on computers, game consoles and mobile devices. As anyone who has ever played Monopoly or poker knows, of course, digital games represent just a fraction of the games that are out there. Beyond traditional boardgames and card games, there are also other physical – or ‘analogue’ – tabletop games, including tabletop miniature games. Assembling and painting the figures and terrain for these games is itself a rather popular pastime.

Leaning towards the verbal arts, tabletop role-playing games are in a class of their own. This is collaborative storytelling in which players work together to tell the story of their own player character, with a gamemaster ensuring that play follows the natural law and story arcs of the game world. In live action role-play games (or LARPs), players, dressed and kitted out as their characters, are fully immersed in the world created by the game arrangers. LARPs are



Trickle, the boardgame I created as a hobby project, alongside the mobile version. Four separate versions of the game exist, the largest being a 5-metre-wide installation. Photo: Jaakko Kempainen.

related to improv theatre in their “embodiedness” but, unlike improv, they are not performed for an audience. All participants are part of the game.

Yard games, sports, playable art installations, choose-your-own-adventure books...whole books could be devoted to the different ways of playing. Games are further categorised into different genres. Broadly speaking, games can be classified as either action games, requiring coordination and quick decision-making or *strategy games* which are slower and incorporate longer cause-effect relationships. Typical action genres include shooter games, racing games and platform games (also known as “jump n’ run” games). Strategic genres include role-playing games, world conquest strategy games and puzzle-solving games that require calm reasoning. These genres can all be further classified in to ever smaller and more specific subgenres.

In a 2012 article, I identified around 50 different genres in use in different sources. Of these, the majority described the function of the game, with labels such as *racing game* or *shooter game*. Other labels were associated with the theme of the game. *Horror* and sports are examples of thematic genres. At the time, I identified a total of 13 overarching genres. Now, 10 years on, the range of genres is broader than ever and there are likely hundreds of genres in play.

There are various roles involved in creating a game. Typically, a game needs a designer – someone who can draw together the ideas into a coherent whole that corresponds with the motivation and skill development of players. Story development and world-building also fall under the remit of the game designer, alongside many other tasks. Both digital and physical games involve visual design. The work of a graphic designer is extremely broad, from visualising user interfaces to animating 3D characters. Digital games also tend to incorporate sound design and music, with these falling to a composer or sound engineer. The logic and functionality of the game world is, naturally, accomplished through programming. There are countless highly specialised areas in game coding, including systems programming, multi-player server coding and game logic. Beyond the central game development roles, the team will usually also include a producer who ensures the production remains within budget and on schedule and that team members have all the resources they need.

The various game development roles are rarely shared out evenly within the team. At times, a single person might do everything, but usually various people are needed for each of the different tasks. Large game development projects might involve hundreds of people, with some concentrating on specific areas in great detail and others operating as higher-level architects, head designers and team leaders.

Easy and fun?

“Making a game is easy. Making a *good* game is hard. Making a successful game is impossible” – there’s a kernel of truth in this quote by game researcher Annakaisa Kultima. Creating a simple digital game takes a matter of hours. Making a game capable of impressing more than yourself, your friends and relatives, however, requires skill, motivation and opportunity. Even this doesn’t guarantee success; success requires perseverance, capital and a good dose of luck.

In recreational game development, there’s no need to aim for success or a career in game design. Alongside commercial entertainment products, games can be art – a medium for the maker to express something about their lives, to draw attention to social issues and explore the human condition. Games can also be just a bit of fun you come up with to amuse your friends. In the past, we made home videos and played punk music. Nowadays, young people are increasingly expressing themselves through the medium of games.

Games possess the same expressive and communicative power as other forms of art. Gaming influences how we see the world and how we process information and experiences in the same way as other hobbies such as scouts or ice-hockey (also a game) or taking care of horses. Game-making has joined the ranks of other pastimes such as playing in a band, taking art classes, writing poetry and amateur dramatics, and thousands of Finns already practise it. People mostly design games solo or with friends, but more a formal, organised approach to the hobby is already gaining a foothold.

Let’s jam

One of the easiest and most enjoyable ways to get into game design is to participate in a game jam. These events are typically held over a weekend. Participants are assigned a theme on Friday evening and have until Sunday evening to create a game based around that theme. Participants can participate individually or with a group of friends. It can also be highly rewarding to assemble a team of strangers to work closely with over the weekend. Game jams are not about identifying solutions to a particular problem, nor do they offer mentoring or the opportunity to spar with others. Rather, participants figure out answers to the challenges they set themselves. Food and drink, however, are often on offer, typically sponsored by a local game firm.

In addition to weekend game jams in specific locations, jams can also be organised remotely online or at a slower pace. Ludum Dare is one example. This internet jam has been going for years and has been held over 50 times. Makers participate from their own workstations over the space of a weekend. In slow jams, makers might be given a month or two to develop their ideas with the groups



Samsara, a card game created in the Finnish Game Jam 2012. The cards were illustrated by Annemarie Grönroos and Noora Korppi. The author designed the rules and did the research for the lore. Photo: Jaakko Kempainen.

working together, say, one day a week. In between sessions, participants may continue to think about and develop the game. There are similarities between this kind of event and a game development club, but both the time limit and the goal of creating a playable game lend structure and direction to the activity. The idea of developing the game in your own time and with your resources also distinguishes slow jams from game dev clubs.

Jams in Finland are rarely competitive. In contrast with many other countries, jams here emphasise free expression and experimentation. In a game jam, it doesn't matter if the game doesn't really work or if the graphics are a bit rough. The most important thing is trying something, experimenting and having fun. Jams also attract game industry professionals and serious hobbyists, so first-timers may well have the chance to observe veteran developers at work.

The biggest event of the year, the Finnish Game Jam (FGJ), is held in late January, early February each year. Around a thousand game makers assemble in 10 different locations around the country. The Finnish Game Jam is part of the Global Game Jam, an international event organised the same weekend and with the same themes and tasks as FGJ. Smaller game jams are organised in different firms and educational institutions in connection with the online game event Assembly. More information on game jams can be found on the Finnish Game Jam website (<https://www.finnishgamejam.com>).

Game dev clubs

Clubs also offer a forum for game development in numerous cities around Finland. In some municipalities, programmes are arranged by schools as an extra-curricular activity. Game development activities may also be organised by a municipality's youth services. There is nothing stopping parishes, adult education centres or art schools from providing sessions in game art design. The main thing is to ensure that there is a knowledgeable session leader, appropriate devices, time and a workspace.

A capable session leader – a student or game industry professional – will be able to guide participants through the various stages of the game development process. They should be able to analyse games and ideas and offer ideas for improvement. An experienced game designer will be able to assess how big and complicated a given project will likely turn out to be and whether it is even worth attempting. Participants who have only ever played massive games may not necessarily have a good sense of what is “enough” when it comes to game design. Trying to recreate League of Legends, Rocket League or even Among Us on your first attempt is more than likely futile. Your first game should be a project you can complete quickly or, at very least, a project you can complete.

If participants are interested, it pays to begin with board games. Here you can quickly see the results of your handiwork and can trial the game mechanics and the rules in rapid cycles. The easiest way to start is to take an existing game and begin modifying the rules one-by-one. This approach transformed Finnish boardgame *Afrikan Tähti* [The Star of Africa] into a pirate adventure played on randomly generated navigation charts. Boardgames are not a separate endeavour from digital games. Many digital game creators also dabble in boardgame design, and, conversely, when designing digital games, will first create boardgame-style paper prototypes that enable them to test out specific elements of the actual game more quickly and with fewer resources than programming for real.

In both digital games and boardgames it is important to dive straight in and try out a rough draft of the graphics, sounds, code and rules to test whether the makers' ideas are even feasible. There is nothing more disheartening than getting excellent 3D models publication-ready, only to find out that the mechanics of the game need to be changed and your models scrapped. An experienced session leader can assist participants in allocating their resources and help them avoid major frustrations.

Camps

Game development camps are somewhere between a club and a jam. Participants come together in a single location for a weekend or even longer and create games under the guidance of an organiser. Camps adopt the time limit and team format of the game jam and the experienced leader and thematic freedom of game development clubs. In a camp, participants stay onsite. Organisers may be responsible for providing food or the whole group may cook together.

Leading a game development club and organising a game development camp both require an understanding of how games work. It's not just about using software or being able to program. You also need to be familiar with graphics tools and audio technologies and the game engine that's being used. Game design is a profession in its own right, encompassing everything from devising rules and writing stories to understanding player psychology and game balance. Balancing a game – making it fairer – might involve nerfing, when you decrease the power of an item, character or skill within the game, or conversely, buffing, when these elements are strengthened.

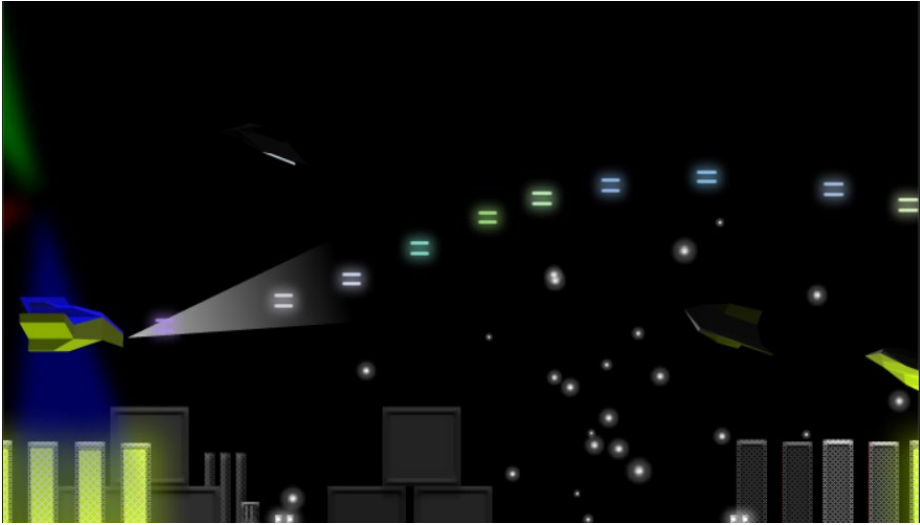
Commercial games today are a far cry from classics such as Monopoly and The Star of Africa. In today's market, Monopoly would not make it through to release; the game is not well balanced, and the winner is clear long before the game ends. For many contemporary game publishers, the roll-to-move mechanism used in The Star of Africa would mean an automatic rejection. Both these games are fun – especially for children and beginners – and relatively easy to copy, but they are not particularly good games by modern standards.

When planning game development events, it pays to try and bring experienced game designers on board to help plan and direct the activities and offer feedback. The advice, comments and stories of an experienced professional can offer participants an interesting look behind the scenes of the game world and may even encourage them to study or pursue a career in the industry.

Self-directed work

The majority of games are still made by hobbyists in their own time, through a process of trial and error and watching online video tutorials. Finland has traditionally had a very strong hobby culture and several notable success stories have grown out of hobby projects in the field. As previously noted, those who have always played big games often have quite unrealistic expectations of the skills necessary and the work involved. A mentor is helpful here, someone who can help break down the process into manageable steps.

Industry professionals can be invited to visit clubs, libraries and youth centres to talk about making games and point young people towards further resources.



Enlightenment. This 2004 shooter game took about a month to code, alongside my work and studies. The game won an international game development competition, the name of which is lost from the pages of history. Photo: Jaakko Kempainen.

There are few, if any, up-to-date written resources for beginners in Finnish, nor do people tend to read much these days. Online videos can be helpful, especially if you fancy trying your hand at block coding in Minecraft or Roblox. Designed for children, the Scratch programming environment is an accessible program for building two-dimensional games. Scratch teaches the basics of programming and comes with a wealth of instructional resources, both text and video. As your skills improve, you will generally require better tools and the Unity game engine fits the bill. Employed by professionals, Unity can be used to create proper commercial games. While the engine does require some understanding of game logic, 3D mathematics and game development, it offers hobbyists an easier entry point than traditional hard coding.

Ideally, hobbyists would be able to find each other and work together, each in a role that suits their interests. Beyond coding and design, game development encompasses many other audiovisual tasks. Character and environment design might suit an illustrator and may complement studies in clothing design or architecture. A closet composer could find a platform for their work through a hobby project composing game music. Keen writers can explore how they might combine their stories with the work of the illustrator using a tool such as Twine.

One form that creative gaming may take is roleplaying. Traditional tabletop roleplaying games see a small group of players gathered for hours around a large table, adventuring in a world modelled by the game master. Roleplaying is collaborative storytelling in which the game master describes the world and the situations the characters face. The players, for their part, describe what they would do in the situation to ensure the whole group succeeds in their quest. The

outcome of battles and challenging situations is generally determined by the roll of a die and with the help of the rulebook.

Each participant in a roleplaying game can apply their creativity to solving problems and telling the story from the perspective of their own character. The greatest responsibility falls to the game master who must both keep the game world consistent and maintain the pace of the action. The game master can themselves devise the game world and adventures, even the whole game system, but most games make use of RPG books. As the Covid-19 pandemic has shown, tabletop roleplaying games can also be played remotely. Remote games work well over Teams, Zoom or Discord. There are also countless programmes you can use to ensure that maps, character sheets and dice rolls are assigned fairly. A good beginner-friendly roleplaying game system is Heikki Marjomaa's *Yhteiset Tarinat* [Shared Stories]. The game has been successfully played remotely by first-time players in their 50s and 60s and would no doubt also work for younger players as an introduction the world of roleplaying games.

Finally and for starters...

For the generations who have grown up with digital gaming, games are as natural a mode of self-expression as, say, home videos or punk music may have been to previous generations. Success need not be the objective in making games. Your goal might be to have fun or address issues that are important to you or to network with your peers. There is a lot of interest in creating games, but parents and teachers familiar with more traditional forms of art may not necessarily know how to facilitate the hobby nor be able offer practical advice.

Ideally, individuals working with young people and within the cultural sector would have sufficient training in the secrets of game development to guide interested hobbyists towards appropriate tools and resources. Game industry professionals should also be encouraged to get involved in supporting and facilitating youth activities. This would not only help young people but would also benefit the sector as a whole: providing greater understanding of future generations, incorporating new creativity and ensuring the growth and quality of the workforce.



Author **Jaakko Kemppainen**, at the time of writing, works as Regional Artist for Games as Art at the Arts Promotion Centre Finland. He has earned his keep making, researching and supporting games for over 20 years. As a game designer, programmer and producer, he has been involved in the production of around 30 published games. His works on game design include *Pelisuunnittelijan peruskirja* [Basic Book for Game Designers] (2019) and *100 peli-idea* [100 Game Ideas] (2022).



Karla Virtanen and Inkeri Murole enjoying a mobile game. The game offered new insights about a figure the girls admire – writer and social activist Minna Canth (1844–1897). Photo by Elina Saarela.

Digital Learning Games in the Museum

Sanna Reinikainen

Kuopio city museum network is utilising digital learning environments for public engagement. Gamification platform Sep-po.io has been chosen for use across our museums. The platform has been easy to adopt, as students are already familiar with the game from the school environment and the game is tried and tested.

Kuopio City Museums' public engagement

Kuopio city museums offer a diverse range of culture, art and nature information centres around Eastern Finland. The Kuopio Museum host exhibitions on both natural and cultural history. Kuopio Art Museum features local visual arts and the Old Kuopio Museum is dedicated to the history of the city. The museums also host temporary exhibitions. The J.V. Snellman Home Museum features the Kuopio years of philosopher and statesman Johan Vilhelm Snellman (1806–1881).

Many games support the themes of both the permanent and temporary exhibits. Some of the most popular have been *Jännäri Kuopio* [Kuopio thriller], a game played around the city of Kuopio exploring the witchcraft trials, and *Kuopio 1918*, a game based on the Finnish Civil War. Through these games, it is possible to approach challenging topics such as death and war.

In 2021, Kuopio Museum and Kuopio Main Library came together to form *Kantti*, a cultural quarter bringing together knowledge and stories and incorporating jointly planned facilities, content and events.

Collaborations with educational institutions and programme packages for special groups are a key and established form of audience development. We collaborate extensively with local organizations on events. Each museum has a regional development mission in the North Savo and Eastern Finland areas. We work with educational institutions, special groups and organizations throughout the region.

The wellbeing angle

Kuopio city museums form part of the city's wellbeing services, alongside sports and fitness services, libraries, adult education centres and arts services (theatre and music). The wellbeing services' public engagement projects are designed to support the wellbeing of customers, and the services are customised to ensure their accessibility for different customer groups. Learning games are part of the marketing of Kuopio City's wellbeing services and other services. A game offers natural way to link services and introduce customers to new places, even on the move.

The benefits of gamification in public engagement

Gamified public engagement is carried out with many different target groups. The games provide welcome information about the history, nature and built environment of the local area to students, daycare groups, tourists and residents of the city and the surrounding areas, new and old alike. The games can be played anywhere. They are designed for museum exhibitions, libraries, other wellbeing services, cities and the whole region. Some of the games can be played on the ground with a map. Others you can access from the comfort of your own sofa. They can provide a pathway between various services and support the services in engaging with customers.

For students and other learners, mobile games are particularly useful in supporting phenomenon-based and life-long learning. A mobile game is an entity, at its best breaking down the traditional barriers between school subjects, combining resources into a meaningful whole.

Gamified learning environments provide the opportunity to learn about history and phenomena in a broad way and to experience life through stories, photographs, audio and video recordings. They can also help individuals explore services and service packages and help them connect with services.

Joint games have been produced by Kuopio City's wellbeing services - including museums, libraries, adult education centres, sports and fitness, general cultural affairs and the city's marketing and communications division. There have also been collaborations with youth services, educational institutions, organisations, North Savo wellbeing services county health and social welfare, the Family House network, which supports families with children, youth centres, community centres and parishes.

Instructions for seppo.io games can be found here: <https://kuopionmuseot.fi/verkkosisaltoja/> (in Finnish)

Have fun exploring Kuopio and its surrounds!



Author **Sanna Reinikainen** is a museum educator at Kuopio City Museum Centre.



Cover of the "Forth...Back?"
game booklet.
Illustration by Anna-Linnea
Usvalinna.

Creating an Interactive Game with Young People for a Local Museum

Anna-Linnea Usvalinna

For the second internship of my Community Educator studies, I jumped into a very particular project: a collaboration between Kuopio Museum and Young Culture Festival 2023 (Nuori Kulttuuri Festival <https://nuorikulttuuri.fi/festival/>). The festival took place on May 25-27th 2023, turning Kuopio city centre into an active and welcoming cultural environment for teenagers. The original idea of my internship was that I'd be displaying and promoting the museum's digital content during the festival. I was given freedom to interpret this goal as I wanted and was also encouraged to create my own content for the festival.

I was charged with promoting the museum's digital content - mostly Seppo.io games - to the target audience of this youth festival. Seppo.io is an educational game platform used by teachers, and so children have played these games primarily at school. It seemed a rather challenging task, then, to make these kinds of games interesting for 13-18-year-olds and to encourage them play these in their free time. I decided that the best way to find out what appealed to teenagers in these games was

– of course – to play the games with actual teenagers. I also really wanted to create a new game with them to set an example of what might appeal to this target group. I also figured that this would provide Kuopio Museum with useful data for their future games and content.

First, I created a loose plan for the game: some plot ideas, game mechanics, how many teenagers I was looking to work with on the project and how much time the process would take. The next step was to build my team.

Alongside my studies, I work part-time as a youth leader in local community centres, so I asked around at work to see if some of our teenagers would be interested in joining this kind of project. Two 14-year-olds, Salla Kirjavainen and Ada Kokko, were really excited by the idea and together we became a game planning team.

When the planning team got together for the first time, we chose a few of the museum's Seppo.io games to play. We then discussed the game platform and mechanics and brainstormed ideas for how we could develop these so that playing these games at the museum wouldn't feel too much like playing educational games at school. The teenagers' assessment was clear: the games should not be too information heavy, and they could be fun. This input established the essential criteria for our own game.

The museum's existing digital games could either be played around the city centre or remotely from a single location, so we wanted our game to be played inside the museum as players explored its permanent exhibitions. We also wanted our game to utilize the information included in the exhibitions instead of offering additional information as the existing games did.

It felt important for the game to have a story, bringing a new fictional layer to the museum experience, while still using facts as a tool to navigate the game. The planning team unanimously felt that time travel was a fitting theme for a story that would lead players through exhibitions presenting eras from prehistoric times to the recent past. The idea behind incorporating fictional storytelling was to ensure that the game would be fun and approachable while still educating players about the museum's exhibitions.

The game developed around the essential ideas we had but also took on a life of its own during the creative process. Our initial goal had been to create a mystery game, but it started to resemble a fictional tour around the museum's exhibits. Sure, there were tasks for the players, but their main objective was to be observant of their surroundings and find answers to the game's questions. We named the game "Edes...Takaisin?" which translates loosely as "Forth... Back?" but is also a play on words in Finnish: "(Will we) even (get) back?". We found it funny considering our game's premise was that the player has stepped into a wormhole and time traveled back in the past and the whole



The creators of Forth... Back game? [Edes...takaisin?]. Salla Kirjavainen, Aada Kokko and the author. Photo: Susanna Pitkänen.

point of playing and completing tasks along the way is to find your way back to the present day.

We managed to complete the game around a week before the Young Culture Festival. The festival had been our original deadline, so we had some time to play the first version ourselves and make any last-minute changes. The first version of the game was a printed booklet where the player could fill out the answers to the game's questions. During the festival we handed out these game booklets and pencils to museum visitors and encouraged them to try a different approach for their museum visit.

Right before the festival, I started working on the digital Seppo.io version of the game with museum learning producer Nina Alvejärvi and we continued after the festival as well. Salla, Ada and I had created some extra questions and tasks for the digital game that were not suitable for the printed booklet, but we were still keen to include in the game. The tasks were incorporated in the digital version. We tried our best to re-create the original game as closely as possible while embracing the possibilities offered by the digital platform. The final version of our Seppo.io is starting to come together and I am keen to see how this digital game will be received by audiences.

I quickly realised, when I started my internship, that the museum's digital and other extra content was rather hidden and not widely publicised. One of my internship goals was to bring this content to public awareness. I designed posters promoting the existing Seppo.io games and posters were also produced for "Edes...Takaisin?". These posters were displayed in the museum lobby at the beginning of the Young Culture Festival, and I believe they may still be there. I have seen a digital poster I created displayed on the museum's screens, promoting their digital content. These – I hope – will help visitors discover the digital content.

Looking back, the project obviously had solid foundations we were able to build on successfully. The independent work and planning I carried out before starting the actual game development with Salla and Ada was very important. As I was given a free hand by the museum, I had to put faith in my own ideas. For me this approach feels rather natural; I am used to carrying responsibility for creative projects in my own artistic practice as well. For those who are less familiar with this field of work, I would recommend starting with a good plan. The process may not always follow the plan, but it's essential to have a solid plan in the background you can refer back to if you're feeling lost. Create a clear structure and let your imagination fly around it!

Something I learned in this project was the importance of my role as team leader. Even though the two teenagers I was working with were active and showed great initiative, they still clearly expected me to guide them more than I was originally prepared for. My response was to start making clearer plans for them before each meeting, going through the plans at the beginning of each meeting and giving them some individual tasks. I feel this worked well and also had a positive effect on our teamwork. This feels like something that depends on the group you work with so my best advice would be to observe the needs of your group and develop their teamwork accordingly.



Author **Anna-Linnea Usvalinna** is a Finnish visual artist and second year community educator student at Humak's Kuopio campus.



One way we reached out to young people was playing the game Among Us with them on streams by content creator Myst1s. Photo: Raija Törrönen

Wellbeing and Participation Through Community Gaming

Nina-Elise Koivumäki

The *Game Over? – Continue!* project aimed to promote youth wellbeing and improve young people's outlook on the future through facilitated gaming sessions. The year-long project was carried out in the Kuopio area with support from the European Social Fund. The project was a collaboration between Savonia, Humak and the University of Eastern Finland, in close co-operation with local association Savon Diginatiivit.

Our goal was to bring together game enthusiasts and young people at risk of social exclusion in a group programme to explore the various dimensions of gaming together. At the same time, we sought to help young people identify their own strengths and to interest them in education and careers options. Our work was differentiated to meet the individual needs of the young people: for some this was recreational, for others it was a pathway towards employment in the game industry. In some cases, the programme was closer to rehabilitation, with young people suffering from social anxiety able to join in and engage with others in a safe environment.

A dive into the world of young gamers

When the program launched in October 2022, we were active in reaching out to young people through broad marketing and outreach. We went onto local gaming communities on Discord to talk about our programme and got in touch with young people via Twitch, broadcast by Kuopio streamer Myst1s. Several members of the project team also joined the CS:GO livestream and others chatted with young people about games and invited them to join the sessions.

In addition to streaming, general marketing and an opening event held In January, we also recruited participants through workshops in Kuopio and the TUVVA programme, a training programme for individuals preparing to take upper secondary studies.

Learning and doing things together with gaming

We administered a Webropol survey during the recruitment phase to elicit information on participants' interests and favourite games. Based on the survey responses we divided the young people into groups with the thought of matching those with more or less the same interests, so we would be able to address different themes with the different groups. The majority of respondents felt there was a need for community gaming events and relaxed opportunities to hang out with other gamers.

We made an effort to provide the different groups with activities that would feed their interest. Some groups practised streaming, others had the chance to try out coding and some visited game industry firms. There was also time set



Involved in the project was Patric, 19, who has a special interest in graphic design for games and online content. Photo: Klaudia Käkelä-Nuutinen

aside for gaming together and for thinking about issues in team gaming and practising communication in games. The sessions were facilitated by members of the project team with experience in both digital gaming and in working with young people. We also arranged for guest experts to visit our group sessions.

We kept the groups small, at around 4-5 participants. These smaller groups made easier both for participants to get to know each other and for the facilitator to get to know the participants. After the final session, each of the participants will receive a certificate recognising the strengths and skills they have demonstrated throughout the programme as well as a digital badge outlining the content of the sessions. The young people will be able to use these credentials later, such as when applying for jobs.

New findings on the well-being and social connectedness of young gamers

As part of our project, the young participants are able to take part in a well-being study jointly conducted by the Department of Technical Physics and the Department of Social Sciences at the University of Eastern Finland. The study combines physiological measurements with a survey evaluating psychosocial skills and interviews that focus on participants' social relationships.

We have observed that even just taking measurements – in which the young person has instant data on their sleep quality, for instance – can prompt participants to think about taking care of themselves.

In cases where survey responses raised concerns about a young person's emotional state, a researcher from the team was able to contact the participant, offer them a listening ear and, where necessary, guide them towards further help. In interviews with young people, charting their social relationships, there were interesting discussions of their online and offline relationships and the link between gaming and these relationships.

Community gaming events for and by young people

Running throughout the programme was a commitment to developing the events in partnership with young people; these events would be based on the wishes of the participants and their own input would be visible. Each of the participants would have the opportunity to take part in organising an event in line with their strengths, interests and resources. There are a lot of different tasks involved in organising gaming events, so there is something for every-

one. At the beginning of the project, we organised low-threshold events where the main focus was hanging out together and playing. Towards the end of the project, we plan to organise larger LAN parties bringing together young gamers from around Kuopio for a two-day event, offering young people the opportunity to learn new skills, meet like-minded people and advance the local gaming culture on their own terms.

Tips from the Game Over? – Continue!

Team for successful gaming programme

- **It's all in the attitude!** You don't need to be an expert gamer to facilitate gaming. Interest and enthusiasm are enough.
- **Draw on the skills and knowledge of young people!** Give the young people a chance to facilitate group activities themselves and to brainstorm a programme for the meet-ups, strengthening their agency and engagement.
- **Ask a friend!** Draw on the support of local associations, companies and educational institutions that deal with gaming and tech. This will broaden your programming and provide young people with learning and networking opportunities.
- **Make time!** If you want to reach out to marginalised young people, be prepared that it takes time to identify and recruit them. Be patient and approachable.
- **Grow!** At the heart of game-based learning is a genuine interest in the everyday lives of young gamers and shared dialogue about the significance of gaming in their lives. Help your participants strike a balance between gaming, self-care, work and their studies



Author **Nina-Elise Koivumäki** is a specialist at Humak University of Applied Sciences.

Case Studies:

Expressing Yourself

through Visual Arts

TAIDE FOLIO

Taide\Folio: a Free Portfolio and Discussion Platform for Young People

Anni Ruppenen & Suvi Haapaniemi

Taide\Folio nuoritaidefolio.fi is a free Finnish portfolio and discussion platform for youth visual arts. On the *Näyteikkuna* [showcase] page, 13 to 28-year-olds can create an artist profile and display their work. The *Ilmoitustaulu* [noticeboard] is a space where anyone can create a user account and join the conversation on artmaking. The website is maintained by Young Visual Art, an organisation delivering cultural youth work throughout Finland with an emphasis on visual art.

Taide\Folio was developed in 2020–2021 in co-operation with young artists. Planning took place in live workshops and via Instagram surveys. Development and website maintenance have been accomplished with support from the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture. The project was funded by a development grant from the ministry and is maintained by national youth organisation annual general grants. Website technical design and maintenance have been outsourced. The Taide\Folio platform was launched in May 2021 at a Nuori Taide (Young Visual Art) event. These national events for young art makers are held biennially in different cities around Finland. The website's user and visitor numbers have steadily increased over the period 2021–2023 and we are continu-

ously developing the website's usability in line with the feedback we receive. In the first two years, 210 artists profiles have been created in the *Näyteikkuna* [Showcase] and over 1,030 artworks added. Each profile includes a clickable *Contact the maker* button and this function has been used 60 times to leave feedback and offers of work.

Low barriers to entry

Taide\Folio brings together hobbyists of what is often a solo pastime – art making – and enables young people to meet fellow makers. It is possible to create a user profile and engage with the site from outside Finland, although the work of Taide\Folio centres on Finland.

The visual culture produced by young people depicts the age we live in. We have something to learn from the stories and art of each of these young people. Taide\Folio provides an alternative to social media channels where – amongst the millions of users – it can be challenging to get your art out there and to find audiences. The goal is to create a community where we can learn about others and the world as we engage with art. From spring 2023 onwards, there will be activities such as live-meetups, visits and training sessions.

The website aims to reduce the pressure around showing others your work by creating an environment where everyone is welcome to tell their own story and to share their art in their own way. No prior experience in exhibiting art is required and the website is free to use. Our aim is for the website to remain free to use in the future as well.

“The visual culture produced by young people depicts the age we live in. We can learn something from the stories and art of each of these young people.”
Anni Ruppenen

A simple tool for instructors

Teachers, instructors, curators, artists and other art and youth sector professionals are encouraged to incorporate Taide\Folio in their practice, and our website offers downloadable tips (in Finnish, as of spring 2023). In 2022–2023, there are free educational programmes for young art hobbyists and for those working in youth visual culture. You can order the training package *Ota Taide\Folio haltuun* [Get to Know Taide/Folio] nuoritaide@art-centre.fi at nuoritaide@art-centre.fi. The training package is offered in Finnish and English.

Taide\Folio has won praise from youth sector professionals who have expressed an interest in similar websites for other fields of art. The website can help young people and those working with youth visual culture develop important skills – both skills in visual culture and professional skills, such as being able to write about your art and being able to market and promote art projects.

The website adheres to Youth Visual Art principles around providing a safe space and a discrimination-free zone. The safe space arises from a common set of principles that users are made aware of and asked to abide by. Young people are given the space and freedom to define and discuss art in a way that suits them

With the basic Taide\Folio website established, from 2023 extra funding will be sought to further develop the site. One goal is to have the website translated into other languages, such as Swedish and Northern Sámi. With extra funding, could organise international study trips and exhibition projects. This would give young people from different countries an opportunity to make, produce and explore visual culture together.

A checklist for designing youth websites:

- Get young people involved in the planning. Map out their wants and needs via workshops and surveys.
- Promote the website regularly to different target groups. Engage with people and let them know how the site can benefit them.
- The launch doesn't mean the website is done. Find out about user experiences and invite feedback on the usefulness of website content. Update your site to ensure it meets the needs of users.
- Be proud of what you have accomplished! Your enthusiasm will inspire new visitors to check out the site.



Author **Anni Ruppenen** is a cultural youth work producer and a website manager for Taide\Folio.

Suvi Haapaniemi



Summer was not endless unlike our love
2022
150 x 130 cm
öljy kankaalle

**TAIDE
FOLIO**

Nuori Taide shares Taide\Folio artist profiles via Instagram with the hashtag #nuori-taide. Pictured: oil painting by Suvi Haapaniemi, Summer Was not endless unlike our love

The Taide\Folio user experience: a professional and convenient platform for young art makers

I'm 19-year-old art-maker Suvi Haapaniemi. I came to know about Taide\Folio before its official launch in early 2021, when my art career was just beginning. I had previously published photos of my work on social media, for example, but I needed a platform where I could focus on showcasing my art in a more professional way. I was looking for a website where I could share my art and introduce myself as an artist, somewhere where my lack of formal education would be no barrier. I wasn't quite ready to create a whole website – my catalogue was small and I lacked the necessary practical skills – so the newly-launched Taide\Folio was ideal.

Creating a profile on the Taide\Folio *Näyteikkuna* page is easy and convenient, but there are also plenty of options for customising the profile. There's the option to write a short artist bio and you can add a selection of keywords describing the techniques you use and the themes you deal with in your work. I like to use these keywords because they make your profile easily discoverable. They also make it easy for me to find other art makers who are interested in the same techniques and themes.

The most important feature for me is that you can include the details of your artwork along with the images. My artworks appear in my profile in a portfolio format, just as they would on my own website. What makes Taide\Folio special is that the platform is meant for young art makers. It's important that artists like me who are just starting out have an opportunity to practice writing about their art, sharing their work and networking with other young artmakers. Taide\Folio suits young artists like me who are trying to showcase their art in the most professional way possible but it also suits those who want to share their art without any greater professional ambitions. You can set up a profile without publishing photos of your art and it is possible to create an account even if you don't have a single completed piece. The platform can equally just provide a space to talk more generally about your own artistic identity and your aims and aspirations as an artist.

A really useful and practical feature of the Taide\Folio platform and of maintaining your own artist profile, is that it offers others the opportunity to get in touch. Thanks to the site, buyers and journalists interested in art have discovered photos of my work and contacted me. Journalists have also been able to make use of the descriptions I have written, quoting these texts in their articles or researching my work in advance.

[Suvi Haapaniemi's Taide\Folio profile](#) (in Finnish)



Author **Suvi Haapaniemi** is Lahti-based artist.



Digital Technology for Everyone: a Youth AI Art Exhibition

Maiju Räsänen

In 2022, a number of image generators became available to the general public. These applications enabled us to produce images of significantly higher quality than ever before with the help of various artificial intelligence techniques. By drawing a few horizontal lines across a computer screen, we were able to create a realistic landscape image; by feeding an AI system with a verbal prompt, we could create an artwork in the style of Van Gogh. In the media, there was particular interest in the copyright implications of AI art (cf. Räsänen 2022 and Virranniemi 2022) and speculation over whether the rights to the work belong with the individuals who come up with the prompt, the coders or the creators of the – perhaps thousands of – original images the AI system used to generate the image. The *Tuu mukaan [Join in]* project, developed by the Central Finland branch of Inclusion Finland KVTL Keski-Suomen Kehitysvammaisten Tuki, was particularly interested in the potential of AI-generated art to support self-expression and digital inclusion among young people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The project set out to trial AI art creation in group programming for young people with additional support needs.

The AI art project grew out of the young people's desire to organise their own art exhibition. The young participants were not too concerned about art techniques, as long as they would get to hold their own exhibition along with a proper opening night to celebrate, something the participants were already familiar with from earlier in the project. Creating AI images, however, was a completely new experience for the whole group. The young people were interested in AI-generated art but also a bit wary. Some were quite at home using technology and could navigate various digital communication channels with ease, while others struggled to use the equipment independently. In co-operation with the City of Jyväskylä digital youth work services, we settled on a trial in which the young people would have the opportunity to create art using AI system GauGAN 2, at cultural youth work centre Veturitalit. The young people were introduced to the program and equipment, and were also offered Augmented and Alternative Communication (AAC) interpreting and personal support and guidance as needed so that everyone would succeed in prompting AI and creating art.

There were some wonderful surprises, but we also encountered challenges during the process. Most of the participants found creating AI art surprisingly simple. The images were quick to generate and modify and it was easy to experiment with variations on the same subject. Creating the images using traditional methods would have been far more labour-intensive. Using the AI application enabled a whole new way of producing representational images for young people

ordinarily only capable of abstract visual expression. The weird and funny details and errors in the images also provided a great deal of entertainment. The young people discovered that it is extremely difficult to get AI to deliver your vision accurately and the process always involves serendipity and surprises.



*“It was nice to do the AI thing, and I got a good artwork”
(participant)*

*“It was nice to make AI art and it was exciting to see the kind of artwork it turned out to be”
(participant)*

SUURTAPAHTUMAT

taidenäyttely 1.12.2022–4.1.2023

Tuu mukaan -nuorten ryhmän A.I.-taidetta
Kansalaistoiminnan keskus Mataran KäytäväGalleriassa



“It was nice to do art and the best bit was drawing on the computer” (participant)

The young people’s collection of artworks ultimately became an art exhibition they named Suurtaapahtumat (the Big Event). The exhibition was on display in Käytävä Galleria at the Civic Activity Centre Matara in December 2022 and January 2023. The opening, held as part of disability rights week celebrations, was spectacular, with live music and a buffet of treats.

Digital inclusion for young people **with additional support needs**

Using AI to create images is a relatively new approach and its full potential hasn’t yet been exploited in either youth work or in programming for those with intellectual disabilities. The young people’s exhibition received a great deal of attention and feedback, largely because these individuals with intellectual disabilities were among the first to experiment with AI as a group, to create a new culture around it and to share their output in the form of an exhibition. It was also meaningful for the young people themselves and this was evident in the pride with which they displayed their artworks and described their experiences with AI to guests at the opening.



This was something of a role-reversal. New technologies and digital culture generally reach those with intellectual disabilities more slowly than the general population, if at all. Accessibility requirements set out in the UN convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (The UN Association of Finland), the rights of persons with disabilities written into Finnish law (Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, FINLEX 27/2016) and the Act on the Provision of Digital Services (FINLEX 306/2019) all steer society and the services system towards greater equality. In practice, these requirements – equality of opportunity and full inclusion and participation in a digitalising society – are insufficiently met, particularly for individuals with severe disabilities.

Digital inclusion, in short, is when an individual is able to utilize digital tools in a way that is meaningful and relevant and facilitates their daily life (Hänninen et al. 2021) For young people with intellectual disabilities, digital tools have the power to foster participation but also to limit young people's agency where there is a lack of access to these technologies. Ensuring digital inclusion is a matter of equity; the use of mainstream technology has been shown to enable young people with disabilities to engage in activities without reference to their "otherness" (Kivistö 2019, 44). Digital participation has also been associated with an improvement in the life chances of young people with disabilities, particularly those living outside the capital area, where opportunities to engage with different communities may otherwise be extremely limited (Eriksson 2019, 4). If, however, barriers are not removed and appropriate support not put in place, our increasingly digital society will leave some young people behind. Supporting the digital inclusion and agency of young people with intellectual disabilities goes beyond assistive technology or technological solutions. It is important we empower young people with disabilities through their skills and abilities and through the support of those around them (Kivistö, M. 2019, 44–45).

Digital participation as a means to cultural inclusion

Kaarakainen (2022) notes that digital inequality and digital exclusion prevent individuals engaging in the normal relationships, activities and programmes that are accessible for most people. Those at risk of digital exclusion include young people with cognitive impairments, such as language and learning difficulties (Kaarakainen 2002). Young people with intellectual disabilities are particularly affected. It is also worth noting that – despite the different everyday challenges they face, and additional support needs they may have – these young people's needs and aspirations for a meaningful life and leisure time do not differ significantly from those of other young people of the same age (cf. Eriksson 2019, 23). What they want and need when it comes to digital participation is also similar. Those working with young people must provide opportunities to engage in a range of digital activities as well as offering support and guidance to those who need it most.

Supporting the digital inclusion of young people can be seen in the context of mechanisms for promoting inclusion more broadly (cf. THL 2022). When our default is barrier-free access to (digital) environments with genuine opportunities for everyone to participate – through economically- and socially-accessible leisure activities and peer interaction –, this also supports the digital inclusion of disadvantaged youth. The key is to offer young people the right level of support, to offer support that reflects their needs, and to offer this support in such a way that they retain their autonomy. It is also important to acknowledge that young people with severe disabilities may require ongoing support and guidance to enable them to use digital platforms and autonomy may only be possible with the assistance of others. Even when an individual is reliant on the assistance of others to participate, the experience of participation is still personally meaningful.

“It was nice to come up with a name for my own artworks and it was nice when they were on display at the exhibition” (participant)

“The best part was that the show became something unique” (participant)

While digitality has no intrinsic value, it is one pathway to participation and to feeling included. Kaarakainen (2022) notes that the broadest positive impacts are found in digital interventions that centre individuals’ personal lives and social interactions. Meaning comes from interaction with others and from taking the things that are already important to people and delivering them digitally. This was also one of the foundations of the Tuu mukaan youth AI art project. The young people’s ambition was to hold their own art exhibition, and this was accomplished with the use of digital tools that provided them with the opportunity to express themselves in a whole new way. The art exhibition was, nevertheless, a real, physical event where people could engage with others in person. These young people may have learned something about artificial intelligence and got the hang of using digital tools, but above all, they had an opportunity to feel part of the digital culture of our time. They were credited as artistic creators, who – if they fancied – were more than capable of putting on a Big Event!

Tips for co-ordinating similar projects:

- Check out the various AI image generators in advance (e.g. StableDiffusion, Dall-E, MidJourney, nVidia Canvas etc.) The group can also experiment with these and chose one themselves, if there’s enough time.
- Be aware that some image generators require an email address to sign in. It’s good to let participants know this in advance so that everyone comes prepared with all the information they need to sign in and you can get straight to work.

- Consider the support needs of your participants and ensure there is appropriate guidance available. Participants can also benefit from planning and sketching out their designs on paper before getting started on the computer.
- The images produced by image generators tend to be rather low resolution. Small images are fine when printed, but larger ones can look blurry. There are dedicated AI applications - image upscalers - you can use to increase the size of the images.
- Sharing art is part of the process. Traditional exhibitions, online exhibitions and group discussions can all promote interaction around the work.



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Gris-Markus Reinesberg is supervising the 3D course.
Photo: Heidi Iivari

Making A Bridge Come Alive With Augmented Reality

Heidi Iivari

In April 2023, the Finnish Institute in Estonia organised a 3D workshop in Tartu entitled “Street art + augmented reality = your reality?!” for young people aged up to 19. The 3D modelling began in Tartu with a work of street art titled “Friendship”, which was painted by young people from Tartu and Tampere on the supporting structures of Sõpruse Bridge (located at Turu 22, Tartu). The 500 square metres of graffiti were designed and painted by professional graffiti artists from Estonia and Finland. Young local volunteers were also involved, attending painting workshops and documenting the process. The street artwork “Friendship” was opened on the 10th of September 2022, celebrating the 30th anniversary of the friendship between the cities of Tartu and Tampere and the 25th anniversary of Tampere Maja, a cultural centre located in Tartu.

See the video of making the “Friendship” mural:
[Friendship mural ENG final.](#)



Allan Valm is showing the possibilities of Reality Maker at the Mobi Lab's Tartu office. Photo: Heidi Iivari.

Putting together the physical and the virtual bridge

Right from the beginning, the plan was to add some virtual content to the physical bridge. The first step was to share the music and poetry of young locals via a DIGGILOO QR code sticker on the information board next to the bridge. The content was produced by the Finnish Institute in Estonia in cooperation with young musician and producer Liisa Tulvik, a co-owner of Gruuviabrik, a recording studio that helps young musicians get their music published. The virtual bridge SoundCloud playlist introduces the young talents and their music and poetry: <https://soundcloud.com/gruuvivabrik/sets/project-diggiloo> The playlist can also be supplemented in the future with new creative works by young artists. The physical information board is also a place where everyone is welcome to share via QR code their own positive interpretation of the theme of "Friendship" through the medium of music, art or poetry.

Adding augmented reality

The 3D modelling and augmented reality workshop was implemented in cooperation with technology company Mobi Lab and Tartu Art School. The first session was held in the Mobi Lab Tartu office, where director Allan Valm in-

roduced us to augmented reality and Reality Maker, an application they have developed to bring augmented reality animations into the physical world.

The next four workshop meetings were supervised by a young 3D artist Gris-Markus Reinesberg, who had recently graduated from the Tartu Art School. Inspired by the graffiti art of the bridge, the participants started creating their own digital content in the 3D studio of Tartu Art School.

“We created two different works – a flower and a seated child – based on the graffiti on the two pillars supporting the bridge. While creating the pieces, I taught the students the basics of using Blender as a designing tool and gave them tips on how to make the work easier”, says Reinesberg.

“We created the 3D works together and set them up to Reality Maker’s sandbox provided by Mobi Lab”.

What did 17-year-old Art – our most active participant – think about the workshop?

“Thanks for the great opportunity to take part in such a great course. It was the best!



Art is happy with the results of the 3D course. Photo: Gris-Markus Reinesberg.

As I had no previous experience in the 3D reality, everything was new and interesting for me. I learned about 3D modelling and augmented reality. Every second was exciting, and I was surprised that 3D modelling is so much fun.”

Thanks to the workshop, Art says, he discovered a totally new world to be captivated by, and who knows, maybe a path to a profession of his dreams.

“I think everything was just great and the course was very well organised. The instructor was also very nice, inspiring and supportive. Taking part in the workshop made me think I could tie my life to this field and study 3D at the Tartu Art School”, Art enthuses.

Make the bridge come alive by yourself!

But back to the bridge. What is different now? Nothing, if you have a look at the pillars with the graffiti. But if you are ready to experience another reality, follow these instructions:

Download the Reality Maker application to your mobile device from the App Store, Google Play or on the website: <http://realitymaker.eu>

Login: viewer2@lab.mobi, password: demo

Explore!

And instructions for spreading friendship over the world to the ones who are far from us but one in heart!

This editor mode allows users to place and experience 3D models in their desired space:

1. Download the Reality Maker application to your mobile device from the App Store, Google Play or on the website: <http://realitymaker.eu>
2. Login: editor2@lab.mobi, password: demo
3. Click on the “Tap here to add” button and select the DIGGILOO model from the list.
4. Place the model in your desired place.
5. Click on the anchor button and follow the instructions.
6. Once successfully anchored the model is now ready to be explored by you and others!

For more information about the workshop in Estonian: <https://finst.ee/uudised/tasuta-koolitus-noortele-tanavakunst-liitreaalsus-sinu-reaalsuus/>

See also the video of using Reality Maker: [Making a Bridge Come Alive with Augmented Reality. Workshop in Tartu, April 2023.](#)



The author **Heidi Iivari** is DIGGILOO project manager at the Finnish Institute in Estonia.



Tartu Friendship mural in process.
Photo: SirkusRakkausPumPum.

“Bringing people together is a super skill of the future and digitality is an essential part of this”

Heidi Iivari

In Autumn 2022, sister cities Tampere and Tartu celebrated 30 years of friendship with a programme of events that included a Friendship Mural. The mural brought together youth street art and digital content comprising youth music and poetry.

Behind the design of the 500m² mural on Tartu’s Sõpruse Bridge and directing the participatory painting process was street art project manager and producer Piritta Suominen from street art association SirkusRakkausPumPum (SRPP) (CircusLovePumPum).

I interviewed Suominen, in person, in her hometown of Tampere in spring 2023.



Piritta Suominen and her dog Masi. Photo: SirkusRakkausPumPum .

Piritta Suominen, how did you find your way into the cultural sector?

I've always had an active imagination and when I'm playing or doing something I'm unstoppable, so even as an adult, playing with children comes really naturally. There have always been a lot of kids in my life and I've enjoyed organising activities for them. My role as an adult has been to create the scaffolding for their play. I have huge range of skills that are not really related to cultural sector work, but they've led me to situations and jobs where I've ended up doing cultural work

What is SirkusRakkausPumPum and how did it come about?

SirkusRakkausPumPum originated in 2011, inspired by the idea of a 5 year old. It was then that my five-year old decided she wanted her own circus that would travel everywhere and paint the world in rainbow colours, and ask How are you going? and What would you like to play? Everybody would be welcome to join in, from babies to grandfathers, wheelchair users and those without kids of their own. I thought it was a wonderful idea. My child came up with the name (CircusLoveBoomBoom) and put on the first puppet show and said now we're going on tour. I said let's do it and organised us an eight-show tour. We went to the grandparents', visited parks, aged care homes and daycares. It was a per-

formance that invited the audience to join in and to contribute voices/noises, puppets and props. The performance also combined role-play and dress-ups.

The following summer, we suddenly had a hundred volunteers doing children's events. At first, these were families we knew already and together we staged pirate adventures and other workshops – puppet shows, children's music and theatre activities.

I scripted the workshops based an idea from my hugely prolific child. We even coined a new term: adventure theatre. Last year, the association shifted from organised play to primarily street art. At SirkusRakkausPumPum, our aim – in short – is to offer children and young people meaningful, legal and safe street art activities and, at the same time, discourage vandalism.

So what you're doing is community art?

Exactly. For a few years we operated as an unregistered association because at that time it didn't really feel like we fitted in to any particular sector, and the stuff we were doing didn't attract funding. It was only later that our approach started to become more common; we moved away from the performer-audience model and invited people of really diverse backgrounds and ages to participate. There was a real need for activities that all parents and their kids would feel comfortable joining in. You need to create something silly that people can throw themselves into, and I feel like we succeeded creating that kind of atmosphere. We had already completed various community art projects, including with the Wheelchair Dancers of Pirkanmaa, when young – childfree – graffiti artists also began to take an interest in what we were doing.

How do you fund your activities?

Our work is funded through various project grants, commissions and wage subsidies. For the latter, rather than just gig workers, we choose individuals who are keen to develop themselves and to further our educational concept and who are able to commit to the various schedules and projects. Street art education is offered with the same enthusiasm and quality everywhere and for all groups.

A large part of our work funded through commissions. Municipalities, cities, art museums, schools, daycares and construction firms contract expert services, street art consulting on choosing the walls, designing the work and designing courses on how to paint.

Among the commissions we have undertaken are MM-kisakatu (World Championship Competition Street) and Tampere City's Kesäkatu (Summer Street) project which also included participatory workshops.



Piritta Suominen organises and supervises street art happenings to the young people of different age. Photo: SirkusRakkausPumPum.

How did you learn to do graffiti and to teach it?

Just by doing it myself. I don't have a background in street art or any strict artistic vision or goals. My strength lies, above all, in coming up with the concepts and in the ability to structure the work into appropriate units. I'm a above all a creator and an educator, inspired by people and talent and colours and atmospheres.

How does digitality appear in your work?

During the Covid-19 pandemic, we create a virtual street art map (2020) for Tampere Art Museum (here, in Finnish), showing street artworks, street art parks and legal graffiti spots in the Tampere area. We keep the map updated and anyone can use it, even teachers utilise it in their art education work. There are currently about 150 points of interest on the map and [as of spring 2023] it has been viewed almost 191,000 times. The map has also attracted various social media posts. Beyond the Tampere region, we have also organized participatory street art training elsewhere in Finland, including Oulu and Ostrobothnia. In planning and organising the events, you always have to enlist local social media channels. Bringing people together is a super skill of the future, and digitality is

an essential part of this. Young people use Instagram especially, so that's where we keep them updated using their own language and their own images. We have also received a lot of positive feedback via social media. People also readily offer to get the message out there on social media. In addition to Instagram, we share photos and videos on Facebook, YouTube, via image library and on our homepage.

What else can we do to reach out to young people and get them involved?

In addition to social media, we can engage young people through schools and youth centres. It is easier to engage with young people in smaller communities compared to big cities where there is so much more on offer. It's a kind of outreach youth work: I talk to the kids and listen to what it is they want. Young people are best at communicating the message to other young people.

Young people need to be involved on an equal footing – as equal participants. In Lempäälä, for example, our first meeting was held at a youth centre and then the young people themselves were given the opportunity to decide the venue for the next meeting. Of course, as organisers, we have an idea of what is possible, but it's futile as an adult to try and guess what young people will find genuinely engaging. Young people have a good sense of what activities are needed and where. If the adults take over – steering the activities in the direction they feel is clever – the whole thing can become counterproductive.

My approach is also quite spontaneous. Even when we're already out in the street, painting, I'll go up to young passers-by and invite them to join in.

SRPP has been running for over 10 years now and has received many children- and youth culture awards. What highlights spring to mind?

We've had so many wonderful experiences...one is the summer of 2022, when we were invited, along with street artist Eetu-Elmeri Heino, to join the international scout jamboree in Evo Forest, between Hämeenlinna and Lahti. The planning was all done remotely and we only had one day on site with Eetu-Elmeri to lay the groundwork for the artwork. I briefed camp organisers, who had never facilitated a street art activity before. We put up 200 metres of fabric between the trees and Eetu-Elmeri painted fifty graffiti outlines. Over the week, 7500 young people contributed to our Peace Valley artwork. The number of spraycans we used ran into the hundreds! Combining activism and art, our Peace Valley activity station was deemed the best of the jamboree's various "program valleys".

Alongside SRPP, there were others involved in creating the Tartu Friendship Mural: the City of Tartu, the City of Tampere, Tampere House, the Finnish Institute in Estonia, Operation Pirkanmaa as well as professional artists and volunteer painters. What was the process like?

Among the Finnish contingent, we had professional artist and practical organiser Omar Truco Kallonen, Eetu-Elmeri, Merituuli, Jesse and Niko – (side note: street artists often go by just their first name or by a pseudonym) – all street artists from Pirkanmaa. Some of the artists already knew each other, having worked together previously. Omar designed the mural with Tartu street artist Seppo. I provided the “grand vision”, so to speak, and arrived in Tartu with Omar a few days ahead of the other artists.

I know how much youngsters love to paint! Since street artists often work quite quickly, we needed a really large surface so that any young volunteers who wanted to join in were able to participate. It took a fair bit of explaining to get the Finnish commissioning organisations to comprehend just how much space the project would require. Fortunately Tartu had plenty of space – 500m², thank you City of Tartu!

In Tartu, the adult street artists worked on their own art pieces and, on workshop days, local youth had the chance to colour the large graffiti designs. The graffiti aimed at young people offered a clear outline but still gave participants the chance to choose the colours that appealed. Nor did it matter if they strayed outside the lines. The work of the professional artists and workshop participants came together beautifully. Participants were given opportunity get involved without worrying about making mistakes and the artists were on hand for any touch ups.

As always, I quickly picked up the most essential vocabulary and expressions in Estonian to coax passers-by to come spray paint with us and to show them how. It was a terrific and really inspiring project; I personally learned a great deal about working with new people, especially as most of the planning had to be accomplished remotely. The school groups who participated – young people and their teachers – were wonderful. Above all, we were so warmly welcomed in Tartu. I was also really glad that no-one thought, you know, Tartu has its own street artists, no-one saw us as a threat. Instead we received really lovely feedback: no one has ever attempted this kind of project here before and that sort of thing. I’m always inviting passers-by to come join in the action regardless of their background, and it was really nice to see that this concept of mine that works in Finland also applies elsewhere in the world.

Alongside the Friendship Mural is a information board with a QR code that takes you to music and poetry by local youth. People can also add their own link to the Friendship content. In spring 2023, the Finnish Institute in Estonia

organised sessions for local youth in which they created augmented reality content based on two of the bridge's artworks. How do you feel about this integration of physical and digital content?

It's extremely important to include digital content and the kids think it's cool, too - children and young people inhabit a digital world. We could also incorporate a soundscape or perhaps interviews alongside the Friendship Mural, and put together various events that draw people back to the site. It's important that the end result continues to genuinely engage people – not just once for the audience at the opening. I always advise organisations commissioning graffiti that, right from the outset in street art projects, we should be thinking about multichannel continuity. Demolition art and street art is also a brilliant way to promote sustainable development and green transition, and with digitalisation we can get so much more out of it.

What kinds of projects would you like to be involved in going forward?

My concept of participatory street art that brings together people of different backgrounds - I would absolutely love to keep going bringing the concept outside of Finland. Tartu was the first time we attempted this kind of street art project abroad. It would be great if I could help disseminate even more information about all the EU projects to young people and those working with young people in the community. At SRPP, working in the third sector, we have a great deal of freedom. Teachers, for example, are constrained by particular rules around the way they are able to speak to young people, but we're free to communicate with young people in a language they understand.

See further information about SirkusRakkausPumPum:
<https://www.facebook.com/sirkusrakkauspumpumry/>
<https://www.instagram.com/sirkusrakkauspumpum/?hl=fi>



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Act now!

Creating impact through art

A handbook of reactive eco-crisis art

practice offers tips and tools

for art activism

Elina Katara

Act now!

Our guide to reactive eco-crisis art practice is freely available to all and can be download from the websites of the Association of Finnish Children's Cultural Centres and Young Visual Art (Nuori Taide). The guide is available in Finnish and English

The guide seeks to offer ways to channel the frustration and anxiety brought about by the eco-crisis and to harness the desire to do something that makes a difference, using art activism. Users of the handbook are prompted to engage with the phenomena surrounding eco-crisis actively, creatively, and critically.

The guide leads us towards art practice through questions and reflection. It can be used in a wide range of contexts with diverse groups, indoors, outside and in online environments. The guide lends itself to short courses and intensive courses as well as longer programmes. The objective is to create art that is responsive and impactful – artworks that change how we think about eco-crisis and how we respond, both creators themselves and audiences who encounter the artworks.

Through small actions we can make a big impact

What's important in art is innovation and ideas. Preparation is less important than planning, insight and effective teamwork. Social media channels provide a wonderful opportunity to publish your artwork and achieve visibility and impact.

Our guide to reactive eco-crisis art practice does not teach art techniques, offer ready-made workshop plans, or provide the latest statistics on the local and global effects of this era of eco-crisis. Rather, it encourages the reader to draw on the knowledge, skills, understanding, and experiences of participants to create a strong, powerful work of art for their own world.

The key thing is working with your own skills and knowledge. Projects are encouraged to involve local artists and eco-crisis specialists so we can work together and bring about change for a better tomorrow.

A workshop during International Week at Humak

The Guidebook for Reactive Eco-crisis Art Practice was put into practice in a training programme organised by Humak University of Applied Sciences during International Week at a Finnish camp centre surrounded by nature. There, a group of 30 Finnish, Belgian and German students was divided into three groups. Each group planned and produced a work of eco-crisis art in a workshop organised by Young Visual Art. The works were photographed and filmed and published on the Young Visual Art Instagram account. The three-hour workshop also included a brief introduction to the guide and the methods it offers.

The workshop began with the knowledge and skills participants brought with them and was conducted with respect for nature, working with the environment on its own terms. Our art supplies were the things we found in the surrounding forest or items participants had with them.

The reactive eco-crisis artworks can be found on the Young Visual Art (Nuori Taide) Instagram account and via the hashtag #ReactiveEcoCrisisArt. Share your own eco-crisis art with the same hashtag.

The YLTA: Youth Learning through Art project 2021-2022

Youth Learning Through Art was an international two-year project in Finland, Slovenia and Poland. The project was coordinated by the Association of Finnish Children's Cultural Centres. The Finnish Nature Association and the Art Centre for Children and Young People were also involved. Each of the participating countries held two art workshops for young people. Training sessions were organized for art educators and youth leaders.

The project saw professionals from the youth and arts sector join young people in co-creating methods and tools that could be applied in youth work to help address issues and questions important to young people. The theme of the Finnish sessions was environmental art.

The Art Centre for Children and Young People organised pilot workshops for young people at the Finnish Nature Association, contributed to the international YLTA training and produced a handbook for environmental art and art activism. Artist and researcher Sonja Salomäen was invited by the Art Centre for Children and Young People to participate in the project and the youth pilot workshops and the handbook are based on her development work.

Publication:

<https://lastenkulttuuri.fi/menetelmaopas/opas-reaktiiviseen-ekokriisi-tai-detyoskentelyyn/>

<https://lastenkulttuuri.fi/menetelmaopas/guide-book-for-reactive-eco-crisis-art-practise/>



The author **Elina Katara**.

Case Studies:

Youth Inclusion

through Music,

Podcasts and

Theatre

Noorteaken Podcast supervisor Helene Tammeoks and the podcast host Grete. Photo: Tartu Youth Work Center.



Tartu Youth Work Center

Podcast Noorteaken

Margit Kink

Tartu Noorteaken (Youth Window) launched its own weekly broadcast on a local radio channel in 2019. The host of each episode is a young person active in the local community. Each week they discuss a topic important to young people with guests ranging from youth workers to other young people. When lockdown came in March 2020, no new broadcasts could be recorded at the local radio station. This gave rise to the idea of creating a podcast at the Youth Work Center that would provide young people with experience both making and participating in a podcast dedicated to their interests. Covid19 restrictions at the time meant it was possible to record the podcast at the centre.

At that time it was possible to apply for support from an Estonian project foundation Varaait. As it was the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, the programme aligned with one of the aims of the project round – conducting remote youth work. In addition to providing experience, the project aimed to communicate youth information more effectively and to give young people a voice. A little over 2 000 euros was received from the foundation, which were used to buy three microphones, microphone stands, a camera, a sound recorder and the necessary cables.



Noorteaken Podcast in Action with the host Keiri and her guests. Photo: Tartu Youth Work Center.

At the time of writing, 33 podcast episodes have been recorded, along with various specials, including an episode on sign language. The young hosts are dynamic and bold, and the show covers a range of issues currently facing young people. The first host, Grete, then 16, says the experience gave her confidence, lots of contacts, and an opportunity to practice engaging with different people, including some who were not easy to reach out to. She also learned how to be polite, yet honest at the same time and learned how to cope with stressful situations. Today, 3 years on, Grete has hosted several youth podcasts, lead many initiatives and has given talks at and lead several big conferences.

The most popular topics among the YouTube audiences have been motivation, self-development, time management, and a discussion “is voluntary work for anyone?” Similarly, one of the most popular specials was an episode featuring youth worker Jaan-Raul who communicates in sign language. The podcast has had guests from different fields, including development coaches, influencers, writers, young people active in different spheres, and students of different disciplines.



Noorteaken Podcast host Kerttu with her guests. Photo: Tartu Youth Work Center.

The first 19 episodes were produced with an accompanying video, until we recognised that this labour-intensive process was more effort than it was worth. Synchronizing video and sound is challenging, and people prefer to listen to podcasts on the go and tend not to watch the video. We record our podcasts in the Garage band environment and process them in the same environment, iMovie or in DaVinci. The podcast airs via the Anchor.fm platform and listeners can tune into the Noorteaken Podcast in five different environments: YouTube, Spotify, Amazon Music, Apple podcasts and Castbox. The first two are the most popular channels among our young listeners.

A contest was recently held with the aim of further developing the podcast. Young people ran for different tasks such as compiling a script, anchoring a broadcast, and montage. That contest saw many new team members join us at the Noorteaken podcast. When we asked Kerttu, 15, why she got involved, she said that her major motivation was to become a better performer and communicator, and to gain experience hosting a broadcast. Kerttu had just hosted her first podcast and her immediate reaction was: “It went better than I expected,

and I want to do this again.” Kerttu’s emotion demonstrates very clearly why the podcast is important for young people. It builds their self-assurance and offers an experience of achievement which will help them later life.

Tartu Youth Work Center development manager, Helene, is largely responsible for directing the Noorteaken Podcast. When asked how Tartu Noorteaken was doing, she answered: “I feel that this has breathed new life into Noorteaken – we now have several new anchors, all of them very different. Their choice of themes, drawn from their own interests, is really varied. This is a good opportunity to practise public performance and how to prepare and conduct interviews, while improving confidence and self-assurance for the future. The Noorteaken is also created by young people for young people. The themes have been chosen by young people and this ensures they are topical and engaging.”

See also:

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/@tartunoorsootookeskus3158>

Tartu Youth Work Center’s website:

<https://tntk.tartu.ee/en/tartu-noorsootoo-keskus/podcast-noorteaken>



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How Can We Create a Successful Podcast?

Eevi Savolainen

Signaalimedia's Experiences

Working with Young People

Signaalimedia is culture studio for young people aged 13 to 25 run by the City of Helsinki Youth Services. Signaalimedia offers young people a chance to try their hand at producing radio shows and podcasts either independently or in collaboration with other young people. Podcast topics are usually inspired by the young people's own interests and there are two staff members on hand to help where necessary: media producer Eevi Savolainen and youth leader Viet Tan Vuong.

Kipinä Youth Activity House, in Helsinki's Itakeskus is home to a podcast studio young people can use – with guidance or independently – to realize their podcasting dreams. Signaalimedia's radio production relocated to Kipinä in January 2020. Podcasting got off to a flying start when Covid-19 restrictions meant that direct radio broadcasts had to be adapted and the technical thresholds for production lowered. We acquired several RODEcaster Pro podcast production studio systems and headsets with integrated microphones that young people could borrow and use to produce content from home.

Creating a podcast starts with an idea and a need

A podcast is a talk program published via various online services. Audiences are able to listen to episodes anywhere and on any smart device. Podcast topics and genres range from true crime to current affairs and conversations covering everyday issues such as the kinds of careers that are out there and what they involve. Podcasts can be created alone or with a group. There are no restrictions on how long an episode needs to be or how frequently the podcast is released, so the series can be adapted to suit each creator's vision. Whenever a young person interested in podcasting turns up at Kipinä or gets in touch via our Instagram, the project always begins with a blank canvas, and it is the young person's own ideas, ambitions and opportunities that shape the development of the podcast. All of our productions, at Signaalimedia, have originated with young people and the young people themselves have been involved in the production.

The podcast is a versatile and effective communication tool when used properly. Podcasts provide a forum to discuss very general issues, but also personal and intimate topics. Our podcasts have dealt with challenging subjects such as mental health, family relationships and sexuality. Anyone can try their hand at podcasting, and you never know where a single "crazy" random idea might lead. There's no simple recipe for creating a podcast. Inspiration may strike while you're lying in bed, out for a run or brushing your teeth. All you need to get started is a creator and a topic that young people are interested in.

There are many motivations for creating a podcast: wanting to explore a particular topic from your own perspective and share this with other young people, wanting to learn more about an issue, to get to know the interviewees better and to entertain your listeners. Podcasts work best when listeners can relate to the topics, the host and the guests. Podcasts we usually listen to alone. They can alleviate loneliness, so the way you talk and the way you show up for your listeners can have a whole new impact on them; the topic can be completely secondary. To persuade your listeners to click on your podcast, however, and to keep coming back, your themes and topics need to resonate with what is going on in their lives.

Signaalimedia has so far produced four seasons of careers podcast Ammattipodcast. The idea for the series originated during the Covid-19 pandemic, when career-themed Living Library events were unable to run. The podcast has been a departure from our regular operations as the production determines our schedule year-round. In contrast, the podcasts produced by our young people tend to last several months to a year at most. The production of the careers podcast is led by staff members, but young people are involved, proposing and selecting the professions to profile each series and two young people were employed over the summer to develop and conduct interviews for the series. Young people engage with issues through their own lives, and are often keen to share their experiences, so that other young people realise they are not the only ones going through these things and there's no need to feel alone.

Play around with ideas and test them out

There are so many podcasts being released all the time that no-one could possibly listen to them all or even find out about all of them. The more opportunities you have to listen to podcasts, try out your opening lines and segues, experiment with topics and play around with ideas, the better and stronger your final production will be. In youth work, however, it's good to remember that sometimes a short project all wrapped up is better than a much longer work-in-progress. It's worthwhile reaching for the stars, but it is also important to recognise what can actually be achieved with the time, technology and team available. There's no point continuing to test indefinitely; at some point you have to trust your own vision and set out to achieve it. If you realise that an idea is not working, it's worth changing tack immediately. It's important to listen to the episodes yourself, but also to have others listen and ask for their feedback. This will help you develop a good sense of what works and what doesn't.

Establish your start and end point

In their initial excitement, young people are often keen to produce dozens of episodes and several series, and many imagine themselves working on the same production for years. Right from the beginning, however, it is important to set yourself two firm limits: a start and an end point. The start is important for your audiences. It helps generate interest in the show and will ideally inspire them to become regular listeners. Defining the end point is important for creators, because it makes it easy to recognise when work on the episodes and on the podcast is finished. If you do not set an endpoint for the podcast right from the start, there is a significant risk it will fall through, due to lack of interest and motivation on the part of the creators. When you start planning a podcast, it is good to think about when the first and final episodes will be released as well as how frequently the episodes will be released. This helps ensure the creators are committed to working actively on the episodes.

Podcasts can be made and released episode by episode. Alternatively, all the episodes in a series can be scripted, recorded, and edited first and then released according to the schedule you have chosen. It is also possible to produce just a single episode. A fixed release schedule provides a rhythm to the work of podcast production. Listeners too will become accustomed to the schedule and know to expect new episodes. In addition to your start and endpoint it is also important to establish a fair and explicit allocation of work within the podcasting team so that no-one finds the work too overwhelming.

It is good to keep in mind who you are creating the podcast is for and why. When your motive is clear and you know why you want to finish the job, it is easier to push through on tough days. Note down your goal and come back to it when necessary. It is also worth sharing your goals with the other members of your

team, so everyone is clear about why producing and publishing this podcast is important to them. If the motivations of the team members are very different, there is a risk that the least motivated may abandon the project mid-series, leaving the more motivated to carry on alone.

Relax and jump into the recording session

Even if you don't happen to own recording equipment worth hundreds or thousands or have the opportunity hire a professional studio, you can absolutely begin podcasting. The smart device in your pocket or your palm is a decent enough audio recorder, at least to begin with. Recording should take place in a quiet room or somewhere you can control the background noise and ambient sounds. The best room in the house is a walk-in wardrobe or bedroom. These places tend to have more textiles, which soften reverberation, which is when sounds echo off the hard surfaces of the room. You should definitely not attempt to record in a coffee shop, even though it may be a tempting option where podcast guests are concerned. In a coffee shop, there are so many elements that impact the final results, such as background music, noise, and other voices that get picked up by the microphone. These can't really be controlled for nor can they be easily removed or reduced during editing.

You should concentrate more on your speaking technique than recording technology: speak calmly and clearly. Above all, be yourself and speak the way you would to a friend. Reading off a script, using overly formal language or being excessively polite can easily sound unnatural or pretentious. When the topic is clear, it is easy to follow. Nervousness is natural and a sign that you care about what you're doing. Nervousness manifests in physical symptoms, such as sweaty palms, increased heart rate and shortness of breath. When you pay attention to these things and consciously calm yourself down, your output will sound better and more natural. Never be afraid of doing another take, even when you have guests.

Happy podcasting!



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Links in Finnish:

Ammattipodcast - Making of (2022): <https://youtu.be/HYX2PSsvnXE>

Professional podcast Making of (2022): <https://youtu.be/GmWr5AWEQfw>

Signaalimediassa tuotettuja podcasteja:

Miten podcast tuli helsinkiläiseen nuorisotyöhön?: <https://open.spotify.com/episode/6J58SOW49COAJ5RsfDJbPa?si=193cbc0915e24cad>

Podcastien hyödyntäminen nuorisotyössä: <https://open.spotify.com/episode/orqh31RQ0oXCnM1UYKrMcs?si=aa765b0481704739>

Itä kuuluu mitä kuuluu: <https://open.spotify.com/show/7n5oA0uL-6jHRAT5ESFEhqV?si=b84b047139a5430a>

Suomen menestynein luuseri: <https://open.spotify.com/show/50SZYDx-w8ymPrGoNOd54iz?si=1292bb45d1144798>

Yks juttu vielä: <https://open.spotify.com/show/6ROnzuKIKSrtlt3dPeWoe-J?si=85233fcc32914a2a>



P60 VENUE AMSTELVEEN NL

– The Stage is Yours!

Gerard Lohuis

Cultural centre [P60](#) is deeply rooted in the local community of Amstelveen, a satellite town of Amsterdam. Known for its youth focus, the centre has a café-bar serving homemade burgers, a concert hall, workshop spaces and band rehearsal rooms. Talent development support and coaching is a priority focus for the centre. The centre also promotes visual art, in particular digital art, which is sometimes displayed on the building façade. Work by emerging artists is showcased in the café. A feature of the centre is its small full-time team of nine, augmented by more than a hundred local and four international volunteers, providing young people with training, travel, work experience and creative opportunities.

The original impetus for P60 was that little to no provision existed in the city for young people, who had to travel into the centre of Amsterdam to find suitable activities. This led activists to lobby for facilities and in 2001 a designated, purpose-built music venue, P60, was opened in the newly designed city centre of Amstelveen. The venue takes its name from the city square where the centre is located, Plein 1960. P60 is run, to a great extent, both by and for young people, with music taking centre stage. The venue's 200 activities draw around 45 000 people per year. The average annual budget is 1.5 million.

Younger age groups are considered “expensive” to programme for: they do not purchase drinks, so bar income from events is low, and additional security staff are required to ensure their safety, meaning costs are higher. Without subsidies, these age groups tend to be neglected. P60 is able to provide events and activities aimed at young people because its public subsidy directly supports loss-making activity. P60 is not required to programme events with appeal across all ages, ethnicities and social groups, however, delivering a specific number of events per year for the 12–18 age range is a condition of its funding. In the liberal Netherlands, bars are allowed to operate in youth venues to raise revenue provided alcohol is not sold to people under the age of 18.

Volunteers

P60 relies on volunteers, and they are the backbone of the organisation. Our youngest volunteer is 16 and the oldest 58. The P60 café is also used weekly by seniors over the age of 60 for informal social meetings and cultural activities. The organisation chart is a wheel that illustrates how all employees, volunteers and stakeholders are equally important in keeping the wheel moving forwards. Most volunteers work in the food and beverage department. The programme and production, technical and marketing departments have fewer volunteers. Volunteers always work alongside a paid staff member and rented security officers ensure the freedom and safety of everyone at P60. New volunteers are recruited by existing volunteers and with slogans like “Why not stand on the other side of the bar?”



Twisted Sisters in P60, photo: Frans van Arkel

Volunteers must sign a volunteer contract, where they promise to follow the house rules, to attend their shifts (or arrange cover) and to respect everyone in order to gain the respect of everyone. Volunteers receive a warning after one offence and after two offences can no longer volunteer at P60. The whole P60 community feels like family, offering a safe space for personal development where individuals gain social, educational, cultural and workplace skills.

Every year in July, the end of the season is celebrated with a legendary boat trip, complete with food and drinks. At the Christmas party, the names of volunteers who have worked for 5 years at P60 are unveiled on the pillar of fame at the café. Volunteers average 2.5 years at P60 and most go on to secure good jobs with the skills they have learned.

International connections

Located just 15 minutes from Amsterdam-Schiphol airport, Amstelveen is home to a very international population with more than 140 nationalities represented. Nearly 25% of the city's 95 000 inhabitants were born overseas. At P60, this diversity is reflected not only in our volunteer crew, but also in our programming: from Bollywood parties, to Russian spoken comedy and K-pop events.

Since 2005, the venue has been a member of Trans Europe Halles (www.teh.net), one of the oldest and most dynamic cultural networks in Europe. TEH has been at the forefront of repurposing abandoned buildings for arts, culture and activism since 1983. Based in Sweden, the network comprises 140 members in 40 different countries across Europe – from Norway to Georgia.

Within this network, P60 is active in European programs like Creative Europe, Erasmus and the European Solidarity Corps (ESC). Through ESC, volunteers from other EU or partner countries spend a year at P60 for personal development. Besides hosting international volunteers – more than fifty to date – P60 also sends Dutch young adults abroad.

Digital innovation

While P60 remains the only pop venue in Amstelveen, there are more than 25 similar (and larger) venues within a 25km radius (Amsterdam, Haarlem, Hoofddorp). This is one reason P60 aims to stand out via digital innovation.

In 2004, in collaboration with partner [Gloria](#) in Helsinki, P60 launched a virtual stage with interactive chat, webcam, web phone and NetMeeting. The initiative did not work out as intended; we were too early, given the software available at the time. With today's open-source software, P60 now have the chance to

build a new 3D stage parallel with the live stage. The challenge is to attract more (digital) visitors with a kind-of-live experience, where they can choose a personal avatar and explore and interact within the 3D stage. This is the follow up to our 2019 streaming project, in which new generation Canon cameras were placed in the concert hall, enabling us to record and edit videos for online event promotion.

During the corona pandemic, in 2020–2021, P60 was able to maintain connections with our regular visitors by staying visible with frequent live streaming events. The package is also used by famous artists for rehearsing, recording and editing their shows. With our knowledge of young people, P60 can virtually deliver customized demand on supply so that the venue is also ready for Generation Alpha (those born in 2010 and later). The virtual setting provides endless possibilities for young people to engage with artists, even international acts, in a way that is not possible with a live stage.



The author is **Gerard Lohuis**, director of P60.



Photo: Tuomo Manninen

Performance - Gäng

- exploring how and why young people roam around in the city space

Nina Arki

A joint production by the Finnish National Theatre and the Finnish Youth Research Society

A group of 11 young volunteer actors with the help of Kantti theatre professionals arranged 11 performances in Helsinki city centre in autumn 2022. The young actors played the role of city guides, helping audiences see public space through the eyes of young people and showing them how young people use the space. 40 participants at a time were guided around the central railway station and the underground tunnels beneath it. As they followed the guides, audiences wore headphones and listened to audio inserts. The production dealt with young people's experiences of urban space and the threats and fears of both young people and adults. Who should be afraid of what?



Photo: Tuomo Manninen

Art performance as part of a youth research project

The Finnish Youth Research Society gathered a group of researchers in 2020 as a result of public concern about youth forming gangs and loitering around public spaces. A leading newspaper wrote at the time: “More than a hundred potentially dangerous young people are now moving in groups in the city center of Helsinki” HS 10.1.2020. Researchers gathered information and statistics while also interviewing young people, to gain a better understanding of what was going on. The researchers ended up suggesting a series of artistic interventions to explore the phenomenon. The first performance was GÄNG, produced in co-operation with the Finnish National Theatre. It can be described as performance theatre combining physical and digital environments.

The project was mostly carried out by a hard-working group of young volunteers. The production team was also joined by Tiuku ry, The Performance Arts Centre and G SongLab, and consisted of designers, researchers, young performers and the staff of the National Theatre.

The content was created around the hierarchies and power relations that young people face in the city. The production team went through the research material and started work on the manuscript. A call for actors was also organized, through which most of the young performers were selected. The young people participated in four workshops, after which they rehearsed for a month before the actual performances. Although the concept and script were almost ready at

the beginning of the training period, content was also created with the young people during rehearsals. Special effort was made to come up with a presentation combining the stage and a digital platform. The research had shown that social media platforms constitute a second level of space for young people to hang out alongside physical spaces. The map features, in particular, of applications such as Snapchat or WhatsApp make it possible to share locations and routes and enable young people to form groups and to meet up ad-hoc. These applications make it possible to send alerts and invitations to gather in a spot. Stage director Joel Teixeira Neves describes the performance as site specific. This means that the performance could not be presented in any other place and that the content and context manifested in this specific place.

The workshops provided significant training for the young actors. There were extensive discussions and preparation ahead of the performances. In a public setting, interactions with passersby can change the atmosphere and the whole performance. The workshops included acting exercises and city tours. Staging the performance in an urban environment meant that there were many details to consider: the chaotic nature of the urban space was always present, and it was necessary to think about what other things could happen in urban spaces parallel to the performance.

Youngsters forming digital tribes **and being city nomads**

Digitality was emphasized and a variety of digital tools were used. During the performance, the actors communicated via WhatsApp, enabling them to arrive at the scene at the right time. During the performance, the 40 headphones were connected to a transmitter playing prerecorded audio from the guide's mobile phone. Audiences could hear parts of a discussion about how the city looks through the eyes of young people as well as other pre-recorded narratives, music, sounds and songs. The group stopped to watch or take part in several scenes as the tour proceeded. The performances made visible many situations young people encounter in their everyday lives in urban areas, such as being denied access to spaces or being confronted by authorities like security and police.

The script of the performance included excerpts of research findings like: "Young people hang out in the city alone or in groups in an effort to strengthen the internal cohesion of their own group and to meet groups of other young people. For many young people their free time is also digitally and geographically intertwined with certain places. Digital devices are the most significant factor that has changed the way young people hang out. Young people monitor the physical location and digital activity of their most important friends in various applications, sometimes secretly." Diggiloo participants had the opportunity



Photo: Tuomo Manninen

to listen to these audio excerpts in an interview with Joel Teixeira Neves and a presentation he gave to help us understand the content of the performance.

The guided tour started at the central railway station with the performers and the audience meeting. It was especially important to highlight how to follow safe space guidelines for those outside the show who may not be aware of them. Performers then distributed headphones to the audience with instructions on how to use them, so the tour could begin. The performances were enhanced with audio from the headsets. The final part of the guided tour was a concert night, with performances by the actors and young people from the G SongLab workshop.

The performance sought to make an impact: to draw constructive and positive attention to the youth culture of hanging out in public spaces, to bring about changes in attitudes and to tackle the root causes of distress. The young people who congregate in railway stations and elsewhere mostly need a space to gather and meet friends. Researchers were tasked with evaluating the results of the performance and surveys were given to the audience to collect feedback. The performance generated considerable attention both during rehearsals and during the performances themselves. GÄNG received national press coverage and the material was recorded and will be evaluated by the researchers.

It is very important to spark a conversation around important youth issues. Young people's concerns should be addressed so that they are able to participate in the change. It is important that we recognise, highlight and understand the issues young people face before the situation gets out of hand.

Link to the recorded presentation by Joel Teixeira Neves: GÄNG
<https://youtu.be/vZYT7r1OtRw?si=p5JoSFg5VYVqH9Fe>

Other links:

Finnish Youth Research Society: <https://www.youthresearch.fi/>

Finnish National Theatre, GÄNG:
<https://www.kansallisteatteri.fi/esitys/gang-opastettu-kaupunkikierros>

The Performance Arts Centre: <https://eskus.fi/>

G SongLab: <https://www.gsonglab.fi/index2.html>



This article was originally written based on an interview with director Joel Teixeira Neves by **Nina Arki**, a student at Humak.



The article was further complemented with material from a presentation by Neves and edited by **Susanna Pitkänen** who works as a lecturer at Humak.

