

USING COOPERATION FORUMS IN DEVELOPING A CULTURE AND GENDER SENSITIVE INTEGRATION PATH

A Product Thesis in Collaboration with Qutomo Project

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis describes the process of doing a product thesis in collaboration with Qutomo project of Nicehearts of Vantaa ry. Through the process of facilitating multi-stakeholder dialogue between different sectors of the society in a total of eight cooperation forums, Qutomo project has created a model for a Culture and Gender Sensitive Integration Path that recognizes the value of cultural diversity, gender and age.

The cooperation forum is an innovative dialogue platform where the different sectors of the society (government officials, NGO's, service users, educational institutions and third country nationals) come together to discuss issues concerning the integration of immigrants. Special emphasis is given to listening to the voices of third country nationals. Through analysing the data collected in the cooperation forums, the Culture and Gender Sensitive Integration Path Model was conceptualized.

The model is embodied in a guidebook targeted at integration service providers. The guidebook provides them with tools and ideas on how to foster dialogue in their work and develop their services to be more culture and gender sensitive, thus more effective. On October 29th 2014 the guidebook was published in the premises of Women's Resource Centre Pihlaja of Nicehearts of Vantaa, Tikkurila. The guidebook has already received positive attention in the field of integration. For instance, On October 31st 2014 The Centre of Expertise in Integration, under The Ministry of Employment and the Economy, featured Qutomo's model on their online service kotouttaminen.fi. As the guidebook gets wider publicity, the model can be distributed and utilized in communities across Finland, even internationally.

The role of the thesis writer in the project began as an intern in autumn 2013 and continued with writing the chapter "Qutomo Cooperation Forum" in the guidebook as a product thesis. This thesis describes the process of organizing the cooperation forums, conceptualizing the model and writing a guidebook on it in collaboration with the Qutomo team. Also, the impact and relevance of the model and guidebook in the current context is motivated.

Key words: Integration, Culture sensitivity, Gender sensitivity, Dialogue platform, Cooperation, Qutomo Project

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1 INTRODUCTION

Over the last decades, migration to Finland has increased and the residents are more diverse than ever in terms of culture, language and background. Qutomo project of Nicehearts of Vantaa ry has created an integration model that is beneficial in the development of more effective, individual integration of immigrants that recognizes the value of culture, gender and age.

The project has developed a model for a Culture and Gender Sensitive Integration Path through the process of organizing eight cooperation forums during 2012-2014 with total 264 participants. The cooperation forum is an innovative dialogue platform where the different sectors of the society come together to discuss issues concerning the integration of immigrants. The target groups forming the cooperation network are representatives of third country nationals (excluding refugees), government officials of the City of Vantaa, NGO's, educational institutions and experts in the field of immigration.

The Culture and Gender Sensitive Integration Path was published. It was published on October 29th 2014 in the premises of Women's Resource Centre Pihlaja. My involvement in the project started with a placement in autumn 2013. I continued in Qutomo in my project placement in spring 2014, during which the process of writing the guidebook started. I wrote the chapter on The Cooperation Forum in the guidebook as my product thesis.

In this paper I present a brief historical background on integration of immigrants in Finland, the current context of Finland, Vantaa, Nicehearts of Vantaa ry and Qutomo project. Then I describe the Culture and Gender Sensitive Integration Path, the process of organizing the cooperation forums, conceptualizing the model and writing the guidebook. Finally, I motivate and discuss the relevance of the model and guidebook in the current context, as well as my professional development.

2 THE INTEGRATION OF IMMIGRANTS IN FINLAND

2.1 A Review on the History of the Integration of Immigrants in Finland

Immigration is a relatively new phenomenon in Finland. Historically Finland used to be a country of emigration. In the 1800's Finland took part in the migration wave from Europe to North America, and in the beginning of the 1900's and after the Second World War Finns moved especially to Sweden in order to find work (Saukkonen 2013, 26.) In turn, immigration to Finland has largely been returnees and their descendants.

Research on the history of migration to Finland before the 1990's has been limited. In spite of the remote location of Finland, its residents have been interacting with other Europeans for example through the church, studies and trade. However, the number of migrants received has been low in comparison to most European countries. Until the mid-80's Finland had a strong sense of an ethnic-cultural homogeneity as a nation, and the conceptions of socioeconomic and cultural unity were not challenged in the political discourse (Saukkonen 2013.)

Compared to the rest of Western Europe Finland is experiencing immigration 20 years later. The first big wave of immigration to Finland in the 90's brought challenges to reconstruct the national identity. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union the Eastern socialist states were freed from the travel restrictions and people began to move from there to Finland. Finland also received refugees from Vietnam, Somalia, Iraq and the area of former Yugoslavia (Saukkonen 2013.)

The first Foreigner Law (Ulkomaalaislaki) in Finland in 1983 improved the vulnerable legal status of foreigners, but several essential rights were limited to Finnish citizens. The law on receiving refugees and the actions to promote the integration of immigrants (493/1999) was put into action in May 1999. In the law integration was defined as "individual progress of an immigrant in order to

participate in working life and the society while conserving his/her own culture and language". The law was heavily influenced by the integration laws of the Netherlands, Sweden and Norway.

The government policy has a history of viewing integration essentially from the perspective of employment. In the beginning the right to the integration services was significantly more limited. The integration plan is an individual plan that contains the actions that the person needs in order to learn the language, study, work and generally to settle in Finland. For a long time the integration plan and integration services were available essentially for unemployed jobseekers and immigrants living on income support. This was a reflection of other European integration policies that viewed integration policies specifically as a tool for promoting socio-economic equality (Saukkonen 2013, 87.)

A common characteristic of European integration politics is that the actions to promote integration of immigrants were implemented with a delay, as well as the lack of public political discussion on it until the 90's. This was due to the belief that the residence of the immigrants was temporary, and that eventually they would return back to their countries of origin, leaving no significant influence behind (Puuronen 2011.)

The integration policy of Finland developed into something close to European multiculturalism. The European Commission defines multiculturalism as the acceptance of immigrants and minority groups as distinct communities whose languages and social behaviours and infrastructures distinguish them from the majority (Meinhof & Triandafyllidou, 2006, 8.) Multiculturalism in Europe has not been entirely successful. Xuereb (2009) describes the challenges of contemporary European multiculturalism:

Liberal multiculturalism seeks to establish a balance between difference and equality and freedom and culture, while dealing with issues of citizenship and cultural policy. Nevertheless, it is still far from providing any clear guidelines that target ethnic and cultural integration in a satisfactory way. (Xuereb, 2009, 35)

2.2 Integration of Immigrants in Finland Today

In recent years, immigration to Finland from abroad has notably increased and become more varied. The percentage of foreign citizens in the population of Finland in 2012 was 3,6% (Migri, 2012). According to estimations, the number of foreign inhabitants in Finland will rise to half a million by 2030. According to the latest annual review of the Finnish Immigration Service, the biggest immigrant groups in Finland according to country of birth are the countries of the former Soviet Union, Estonia, Sweden and Russia, followed by Somalia, Iraq, China and Thailand. The most notable language groups are Russian, Estonian and Somali as well as English and Arabic, which are spoken widely around the world (Saukkonen, 2013, Martikainen, Saukkonen & Säävälä 2013).

The Government Resolution on the Government Integration Programme for 2012-2015 states as its general objective: “to support participation by immigrants in all sectors of the society while reinforcing the foundation for good ethnic relations and smooth interaction between various population groups (The Ministry of Employment and the Economy 2012).

The Non-discrimination Act (21/2004) guides the officials in their actions concerning the minorities, obliging them to promote the equality of the residents in all their actions. Additionally, the law forbids discrimination on any basis in working life and education, as well as ethnic discrimination in the provision of services (Saukkonen 2013.)

The main guidelines of immigration in Finland are based on the Alien Act (301/2004) and the Act on the Reception of Persons Seeking International Protection (746/2011). People coming outside of EU are required to have a residence permit, which can be granted for example on the basis of family ties, Finnish ancestry, humanitarian reasons, studies or work (Saukkonen 2013.)

The Act on Integration of Immigrants (1386/2010) regulates integration, in other words the actions the officials should do to promote the integration of migrants. The act defines integration as “the interactive development of the immigrant and

the society that aims to give the immigrant the skills and information she/he needs in the society and working life while supporting her/his possibilities to maintain their own language and culture” (Saukkonen 2013, 124.)

The idea of the act is to make the integration measures and services accessible for all immigrants who need them. According to the act every immigrant is entitled to a preliminary assessment in the social office or the employment office. The integration plan will be drafted during the preliminary assessment. The integration plan includes education and other support the person needs in order to get employed and participate in the Finnish society (Alitolppa-Niitamo & Säävälä, 2013.)

In theory, the Finnish legislation can be perceived as one of the most multicultural ones in Europe. The Act on Integration of Immigrants lays a strong emphasis on the dynamic changes of the whole society, the so-called two-way integration, and on paper the immigrants’ rights and the integration services seem comprehensive. However, the difference between the legislation and reality can be striking. The Finnish integration policy serves as an example of this. In principle, the integration of immigrants is a comprehensive, dynamic process where the new members of the society participate in the Finnish society as equals with the native residents, at the same time being able to maintain their own culture. In practice the actions to promote integration target almost exclusively the personal development of the immigrant in adjusting to the society. In result, the success or failure of integration is measured essentially by things such as employment, Finnish or Swedish skills and independency of social security, overlooking the role of two-way integration, the society in adapting to the new diversity (Saukkonen 2013.)

The unemployment rate of immigrants is three times that of the majority population, which has been mentioned as one of the biggest failures of Finnish integration politics by the Minister of Labour Lauri Ihalainen, who answered for integration affairs in the Board of Directors of Jyrki Katainen. Also, immigrant youth face five times the risk of social exclusion compared to young people in the majority population (Saukkonen 2013.) Thus, there is a need to rethink

integration, as the traditional group-oriented multicultural politics and old conceptions of controlling immigration are no longer relevant. This creates a need to develop public services, while the importance of specific integration measures is increasing (Raunio, Säävälä, Hammar-Suutari & Pitkänen 2011, cited in Pitkänen 2011.)

The division of responsibilities between the government and the municipality as recipients of immigrants in Finland influences the success of two-way integration. Several aspects, such as the acquirements of the municipality to receive immigrants (economic situation, possibilities to organize services) and the dominant climate of opinions and attitudes, affect how the living environment develops for both the newcomers and the native residents (Raunio, Hammar-Suutari & Säävälä 2011, cited in Pitkänen 2011.)

The Finnish Parliament, Board of Directors and the ministries formulate the general guidelines, on the work concerning integration is based on. In practice, the local level political decisions regarding integration of immigrants and cross-cultural interaction are even more important than nation-wide programmes that often reach the local level with a long delay, if ever. Municipalities across Europe see the decision-making and alignments in the government level as too slow and rigid in regard of the acute needs of immigration (Raunio, Hammar-Suutari & Säävälä 2011, cited in Pitkänen 2011.) Increasing cooperation between the public sector and the third sector has been a growing trend for the recent years. As the economic situation of municipalities is becoming more and more difficult, the municipalities are setting up their cooperation with the third sector in a new way. The bigger role of the third sector shows also in the field of integration (Lautiola, 2013.)

3 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

3.1 City of Vantaa and Integration

Out of the 208 100 residents of Vantaa over 13 percent speak another language than Finnish, Swedish or Sami as their mother tongue. The total of languages spoken in Vantaa is 107. Additionally, there are hundreds of Finnish children and youth living in Vantaa with their roots abroad. According to estimations the percentage of people with an immigrant background will raise over 20 percent by year 2025 (Multicultural Programme of Vantaa City for the years 2014-2017, 2014.)

The immigrant population in Vantaa, as well as in the whole capital area, has risen faster than expected, creating challenges and new requirements for the integration services. The Multicultural Programme of Vantaa city 2014-2017 is an updated version of the previous was done for 2009-2012. The programme was made in cooperation with different fields of work in the city, experts from the third sector, the residents and other partners – including Qutomo project and Nicehearts of Vantaa.

The general objective of the programme is that groups representing different cultural and language backgrounds would have an equal status with the native Finns. In regard of the integration services, the aim is to develop more flexible, diverse and light-weight integration work with more effectively coordinated cooperation. The objectives of the programme are divided in three pillars titled Work, Skills and Future, A City for Everyone and Networks and partnerships as a resource. The pillars consist of specified goals, the concrete actions being implemented or planned and the stakeholders responsible for each goal.

During the previous council term 2009-2012, Vantaa outlined the operational equality and non-discrimination work priorities as gender mainstreaming and the use of gender impact assessment. The international origins of gender impact assessment date back to UN World Conference in Women in 1995. From then

on, a number of countries and governments have sought to extend gender equality to all aspects of public administration (Qutomo Project's Annual Review 2012.)

3.2 Nicehearts of Vantaa ry

Formed in 2001, Nicehearts of Vantaa ry (NGO) is a multicultural women and girls' productive association supported by women's resource centre Pihlaja, which was opened in October 2009. The association has approximately 75 members. Women's resource center is located in the city of Vantaa, in a central location near the Tikkurila train station.

The activities of Nicehearts aim to create long-term networks and promote a place of encounter between girls and women of different cultures and ages on a daily basis. Furthermore, Nicehearts aims to promote the self-reliance, welfare, equality and integration of girls and women as well as improving their possibilities to participate and influence locally. Their projects target different groups with specific goals.

One part of the work of Nicehearts is research and development. The research and development strategy is presently centred on the integration of migrants, specifically on developing practices that will support migrants in finding their place in the Finnish society (Nicehearts 2014.)

In the women's resource center Pihlaja, culture and gender sensitive working model is being developed as a tool that can be used by integration service providers (government officials, NGO's and others). The development of integration services is substantially dependent on the ability of the stakeholders to foster effective dialogue and interactions between them. The organization serves as an expert and as a representative of women and girls from different backgrounds as well as provides grass roots level information to support local development. (Qutomo 2014)

In October 2013, Nicehearts received a recognition from Miina Sillanpää Foundation for their "active and creditable work in promoting the integration and equality of immigrants as well as in increasing general open-mindedness by

organizing activities for women and girls and by supporting their employment and entrepreneurship” (Nicehearts website, 2013.)

3.3 The Qutomo Project

Qutomo is one of the projects of Vantaan Nicehearts ry. The project began in 1.6.2012 and will continue until 31.5.2015, and is funded by the European Union integration fund and is regulated by the Ministry of Interior, Solid Fund unit. The aim of Qutomo was to support the development of cross cultural competency in immigrant service providers, by creating an innovative Culture and Gender Sensitive Integration Path that recognizes the value of cultural diversity, gender and age. The target groups forming the cooperation network are representatives of third country nationals (excluding refugees), government officials of the City of Vantaa, NGO's, educational institutions and experts in the field of immigration.

Qutomo is a context-based project implemented in the framework of participatory action research, aiming to produce knowledge and action directly useful to a group of people through research and empower people at a deeper level through the process of constructing and using their own knowledge (Reason, 1998). The point of departure is to combine theoretical and practical knowledge through facilitating a multi-stakeholder dialogue.

Qutomo project organized eight cooperation forums during 2012-2014 as an innovative method for bringing together all sectors of the society to discuss issues concerning integration of immigrants in Finland. The cooperation forum provides a dialogue platform for the different stakeholders: service providers of the city and of NGO's, service users, educational institutions. There is special emphasis on getting the voice of third country nationals heard. The emphasis is on the importance of face-to-face dialogue among, between and within the stakeholders (The Qutomo Project annual review 2012-2013.)

Qutomo's wide network reaches different actors, from the capital to other parts of Finland, include several multicultural associations, educational institutions, churches and officials. Qutomo's study trip to Copenhagen, Denmark, widened the network to another Nordic country.

As most of the integration services are provided by cities, it was particularly important for Qutomo project to have the city's commitment to the project's development goals. The City of Vantaa has been an active cooperation partner with Nicehearts and the Qutomo project. Officials from the city have participated in the cooperation forums, as members of the steering group.

In the first phase of the project within years 2012-2013 the project organized four co-operation forums. The total number of participants during that time was 143. The titles of the forums in the first phase were Forum 1: "Integration and its different meanings", Forum 2: "Culture and gender sensitivity", Forum 3: "The Finnish Labor Market" and Forum 4: "Finnish language and education". During the second phase, 2013-2014 the project organized another four cooperation forums, starting with Forum 5 with the title "Encounters: Us, Them and the Others", and continued with Forum 6: "Cooperation: Getting involved!" and Forum 7: "Towards quality integration training".

Finally, as the end product of the project, Qutomo published the guidebook on the Culture and Gender Sensitive Integration Pat. The guidebook was published on On October 29th 2014 in the premises of Women's Resource Centre Pihlaja of Nicehearts of Vantaa, Tikkurila.

3.4 Ethical Considerations in the Cooperation Forums

Each participant in Qutomo cooperation forums is asked for permission to record and use the dialogue conversations for research purposes in the Agreement Form that is given out at the registration table.

When quotes from the transcriptions of the recordings are used, for example in the guidebook, the anonymity of the debaters is ensured by referring to them

solely as “forum participants”. Their position, nationality or name are not mentioned. This principle is applied throughout the project and also in this thesis.

Furthermore, the cooperation partners of the Qutomo project are mentioned by name only in the cases when the permission for it has been given by them.

4 DEVELOPING THE GUIDEBOOK FOR A CULTURE AND GENDER SENSITIVE INTEGRATION PATH

4.1 The Culture and Gender Sensitive Integration Path

In this chapter I present Qutomo's conception of culture and gender sensitivity and briefly introduce the elements of the model, the detailed description of which is provided in the guidebook.

An encounter is the first step towards a culture and gender sensitive integration path. Encounters and dialogue with different people make up our networks. These networks can be transformed into cooperation initiatives. An open, innovative and broader perspective on encountering differences will greatly influence the promotion of integration. Events that foster encounters between the different sectors will also enable (the) Finns and (the) migrants to interact and will help them building a wider network (Qutomo 2014.)

In order to create effective integration paths that answer to the real needs of the immigrants, the integration service providers need to *encounter* each client as an individual with a different background, situation, needs and goals. Likewise, the principle of encountering people as individuals can improve daily life interaction in the society. The attitudes and approaches are shaped in the communities and arenas of interaction between native Finns and those migrated from other countries. It is crucial to have arenas for encounters in order to enable the learning processes where people can learn to live together. That is where *mutual accommodation* can take place. Mutual accommodation is a chain of events where the society regenerates along with the new value systems and behaviours brought by the new residents (Vasta 2007, Raunio & al. 2011).

The stakeholder's ability to *dialogue* and interaction between themselves and their clients is crucial to the success of integration. According to Isaacs, dialogue is not a method; it is an attitude (Isaacs 2001). The development of one's interaction skills and general knowledge on the effects that the processes of migrating and integrating have on individuals is more important than having a lot of information of as many cultures' characteristics as possible. Dialogue is more

than conversation; it is the ability to think together. In dialogue, the individual does not view their own opinion as definitive, but a step towards the end result. In dialogue, issues are viewed simultaneously from different perspectives, even though the perspectives were opposite and conflicting (Isaacs 2001.)

Networks are crucial to both the integration service providers and the service users. There is a need to develop networks because it is only through bringing people and connecting them together that we can gain support and new perspectives. Also, it is good to remember that newcomers in Finland do not necessarily have any kind of network in their new environment. Networking has an important role in an immigrant's integration process, as psycho-social peer support and exchange of information. By doing *cooperation* the resources, contacts, knowledge and skills of all the different stakeholders can be shared and utilized more effectively, saving time and resources and making the system more clear.

Culture sensitivity means learning how to recognize the characteristics of other cultures and having a culturally responsive attitude towards those characteristics. It is an ability to reflect on your own culture and how culture affects ones behaviours and attitudes. In practice, this means that one is ready to encounter others with respect to the influence of their ethnic background, culture, social status, religious beliefs and language (THL n.d..)

Gender sensitivity is taking into account the gender perspective in all levels of the society, including all services and activities provided (Gender mainstreaming vocabulary 2006). It is the ability to recognize the differences between genders as well as its influence in the contexts, needs, modes of communication and listening skills among others. It is connected to recognizing and giving value to the effects of gender in attitudes and behaviours. Gender sensitivity is also regarded as a precondition in attaining gender equality (Anttonen 2007.) It also contains an approach that values and embraces the diversity of gender and sexual orientation, instead of promoting heteronormative values (Punnonen 2006).

4.2 Organizing of the Cooperation Forums

A successful platform generates an open and respectful exchange of views and, when done well, helps participants to find common ground for cooperation. It is a place to negotiate on conflicting interests and for finding common solutions. Follow-up activities then pick up where the dialogue platform leaves off, which can have the effect of strengthening social and associational networks in the community and a shared sense of identity in a diverse society (EU Commission 2013.)

Qutomo project's cooperation forum is an innovative method for collaboration where representatives from different sectors of the society can be in an open dialogue and implement their common goals. It is an open space for the exchange of experiences, creation of new ideas as well as increasing awareness on integration. In the cooperation forums the different sectors are gathered together to exchange their ideas on how to develop integration services.

The project adapted participatory action research methods in gathering and evaluating the data collected in the forums (Reason, 1998). All the dialogue conversations in the cooperation forums were recorded and transcribed in order to be used as research data for the development of the Culture and Gender Sensitive Integration Path.

In the cooperation forums, a variety of participative and creative methods were utilized to make sure all participants have equal possibilities to participate in the dialogue. Different points of departure (language skills, education, background, sector etc.) were taken into account and special emphasis was given to phrasing the day's theme in a way that was open to challenging different perspectives. In the same way, culture and gender sensitivity is taken into consideration in the language used.

An audiovisual opening was found to be an effective way to provoke the participants to think about the day's theme (i.e. a video consisting of interviews, background information etc). Small group discussions provide the space for more intimate discussions on the topic and give a chance to participate for

those who do not dare to speak in a big group. Depending on the topic, the size of the group and the method varied. World Café method, dialogue cards, role play, drama and games are some examples of the methods used during the forums. The ideas gathered from the small group discussions were then summarized through an interactive panel discussion with the representatives from each group. Open discussion allows exchanging ideas and debating, for example after a presentation or at the end of the cooperation forum. When all the participants are in the same space, the different sectors can ask questions, give answers and together come up with solutions.

The cooperation forums were made possible to participate in for both Finnish and English speakers. Different methods were used to facilitate face-to-face dialogue between people with no common language. For example, during the workshops where the participants were divided into smaller groups, they were given the chance to choose between a Finnish-speaking group and an English-speaking group. At the same time, it was ensured that there were representatives from the different sectors in both groups. The presentation materials, invitations and programmes were translated from Finnish to English and vice versa and handed out in advance. Still, the language barrier was the biggest challenge of the cooperation forums, and the biggest point of criticism. In the cases when the participant had inadequate or no skills in neither Finnish or English, their possibility to participate was limited.

The underlying theme throughout the cooperation forums is integration. In the first forum the discussion was more general. Along the way the more specific themes and topics were chosen on the basis of what has been brought up by the participants in preceding discussions, thus making the process of organizing the total of seven forums a continuous learning experience, resulting in the final product, the guidebook on the Culture and Gender Sensitive Integration Path.

The cooperation forums were planned through a series of planning meetings with the Qutomo team, interns and the staff of Nicehearts. In the planning meetings the main theme, thematic background, forum title and workshop titles are discussed and chosen by the team. Cooperation partners, experts,

panellists, workshop leaders and guests are invited on the basis of the topic of the forum: who has special knowledge, expertise or experience on the subject and who would benefit most from the content of the forum. (Qutomo guidebook)

My involvement in Qutomo project started in 2013. I took part in the 4th cooperation forum of the project as a participant, representing Hakunila International Organization, another local multicultural organization as an intern. I was invited by my classmates doing a practical placement in the project. The theme of the cooperation forum was “Finnish language and education”.

During my 10 weeks placement of the Community, Empowerment and Participation study module (CEP) I continued as an intern in the next cooperation forums: cooperation forum 5 with the theme “Encounters – us, them and the others” and cooperation forum number 6, themed “Cooperation: Getting Involved!”. During the placement I also participated on Qutomo’s study trip to Copenhagen, Denmark, with the aim to find out what the work in the field of integration and women, as well as in multicultural organisations is like in another Nordic city. During the three-day study trip we visited organizations providing integration services, getting to know about their work, exchanging ideas and widening networks.

In spring 2014 during the Management for Change and Innovation study module (MCI) I did my project placement in Qutomo project, during which I took a more responsible role. My project was the process of being the responsible person of organizing the seventh cooperation forum, titled “Towards quality integration training”. My tasks included briefing the new interns on how the process of organizing the forum goes on about, division of tasks and overall, ensuring that the process was progressing. The programme and the summary of the ideas come up in the 7th forum can be seen in Appendices 2 and 3.

In the last, 8th cooperation forum, “Towards a Culture and Gender Sensitive Integration Path” Qutomo presented the model of culture and gender sensitive integration path, inviting the participants and cooperation partners to comment

on the relevance of the model: does it answer to the real needs and if there is something to be added or changed.

3 Model Conceptualization

The need for the culture and gender sensitive integration path surfaced in two previous projects of Nicehearts, RAY-funded (The Slot Machine Association) Kultsi project and ELY Centre-funded Nice project. Based on the experiences and results of both projects, it was revealed that a significant number of migrant women have not received help or had a difficult time integrating to the Finnish society (Qutomo guidebook 2014.)

The model was developed through Qutomo project's cooperation forums, and it is based on the ideas, experiences and information shared by the representatives of the different sectors: third country nationals (excluding refugees), government, NGO's and educational institutions. Analyzing and concluding the data gathered during the cooperation forums, the Qutomo team conceptualized the model consisting of four elements. The elements are Encounters, Dialogue, Networks and Cooperation.

The idea of me participating in the process of writing the guidebook as my thesis came up during my first placement. Combining the project placement and thesis process enabled me to familiarize myself more deeply with the concepts of the cooperation forum and the model for the culture and gender sensitive integration path, and to continue to take part in the process. I had to separate my roles as a thesis writer and an intern by writing down the time used in placement responsibilities separately in a working hours log.

The idea to divide the model into four elements came from project coordinator Margarita Sakilayan-Latvala. She presented a draft of the four elements to me and the other thesis writer Tiina Kimari, as well as the three interns from Ethnic Relations degree in Helsinki University. The Qutomo team started to discuss the elements, their meanings and content. Weekly meetings took place in the

premises of Nicehearts and a shared file on Qutomo's online drive was used for sharing and putting our comments together. Through team work the model was developed further. The work was continued by me, Tiina Kimari and Margarita Sakilayan-Latvala in the process of writing the guidebook.

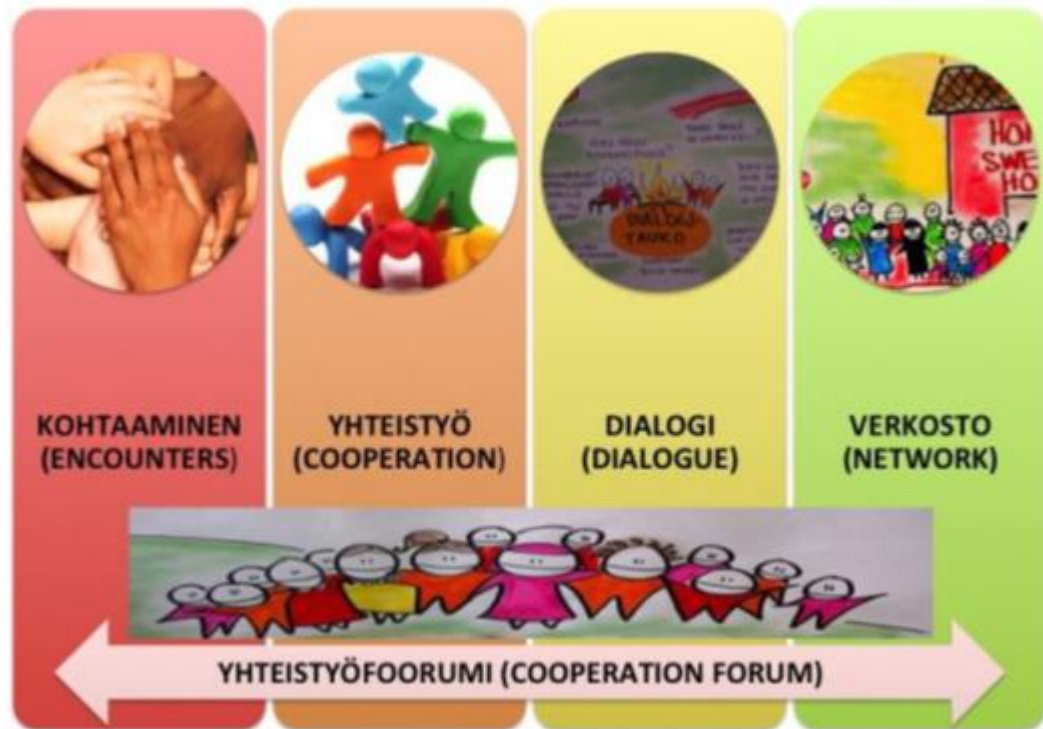


FIGURE 1: An early version of the model put together by Margarita Sakilayan-Latvala

The elements describe the issues most often brought up in the cooperation forums as well as in other projects of Nicehearts. In other words, the biggest problems of integration seem to revolve around issues in or the lack of encounters, dialogue, networking and cooperation – both within the service providers as well as between them and their clients. The elements are overlapping, and do not take place in a given order.

The model highlights the significance of these four elements in integration in both the point of view of the service provider as well as the user. All of them can be increased and developed through the use of a cooperation forum.

4.4 Guidebook Writing

The goal of Qutomo's guidebook on the Culture and Gender Sensitive Integration Path is to broaden our understanding and awareness as well to reflect on how a culture and gender sensitive model can be taken into account in implementing integration services. The guidebook is targeted to integration service providers, as well as anyone concerned about the issue, and aims to wake the reader to think and reflect on how the model for the culture and gender sensitive integration path can be used as a benefit in one's own job.

The guidebook was a joined effort by the whole Qutomo team which consists of project coordinator Margarita Sakilayan-Latvala and other thesis writer Tiina Kimari, with the help of interns from the Ethnic Relations degree in Helsinki University. The process of writing the guidebook started in spring 2014. Finnish and English versions of the guidebook were published on October 29th 2014 in the premises of Women's Resource Centre Pihlaja.

The division of work between me and Tiina Kimari was discussed during several meetings between me, Tiina and our thesis supervisor, project coordinator Margarita Sakilayan-Latvala. The two students doing separate theses in the same project at the same time, a clear division of responsibility had to be made. Even the chance of doing a collaborative thesis as a pair was brought up. In the end, me writing the chapter on the cooperation forums (pages 7-11 in the guidebook) and Tiina writing the chapter on the model (pages 12-19 in the guidebook) made sense. One of the students having Finnish as her study language and the other one having English, the thesis writing would have been complicated. Also, I have participated in every cooperation forum since the fourth cooperation forum, first as a participant and later as intern, thus making me very familiar with the concept and practice of a cooperation forum. On the

other hand, Tiina was new in the project and able to view and evaluate the concepts in a more objective and fresh way.

Brainstorming in meetings and via the shared file on Qutomo's online drive continued. Subjects of discussions included the content, phrasing, structure, layout and order of the chapters. For the layout and structure, several choices were considered to make the guidebook more attractive than a typical guidebook. The text evolved by repeatedly letting the other members of the Qutomo team review each writer's text, and then modifying it with the suggested improvements. In spite of the division of work, the entire guidebook is a piece of work by the whole team. Segments of one's writing were moved from one chapter to another in order to make the guidebook consistent. Parts that the team found challenging to phrase were written collaboratively.

Special emphasis and focus was put on applying the culture and gender sensitive approach in all aspects of the guidebook: using language that is understandable to everyone, being unbiased, going beyond stereotypical assumptions and not underestimating the reader's ability to think independently. The guidebook does not contain a step-by-step guide to being culture and gender sensitive. Instead it intends to provoke thoughts in the reader and give ideas and tools on how to improve culture and gender sensitivity in one's own context, in one's own way.

Splitting the content between the two main chapters, the "Qutomo Cooperation Forum" chapter and the "Culture and Gender Sensitive Integration Path Model" chapter was an important point in the process. The chapter on the model was decided to be an elaboration on how the model can be used by integration service provider and officials to apply and improve their culture and gender sensitivity in their client work. The decision was made to use the direct quotes from the cooperation forum participants only in the chapter on the model, to avoid repetition and to distinguish the chapters from each other. The chapter includes direct citations, ideas, experiences, thoughts and comments of the participants on integration services and on integrating into Finnish society in

general, in regard of each element. “Speech bubbles” are used to highlight those quotes.

The part I am responsible for in the guidebook is the chapter on the Cooperation forums (pages 7-11 in the guidebook). The chapter is designed to describe the elements of the model in the context of a cooperation forum: how the cooperation forum can be used to improve and promote the elements in the reader’s own context. Also, the chapter describes how Qutomo found those elements through organizing the forums.

The chapter describes the framework of a cooperation forum through practical examples. Firstly, the concept, main elements and principles of a cooperation forum are presented. The main elements listed are:

- the different sectors of the society are represented: government officials (public sector), NGO’s (third sector), educational institutions (academic), third country nationals (residents) and companies (private sector)
- the emphasis is on giving voice and listening to the ideas and experiences of the third country nationals
- culture and gender sensitivity in the context of integration of migrants is taken into account
- participants are equal partners in dialogue
- participative methods are utilized and mutual learning processes are facilitated
- participants work towards a common goal (Qutomo 2014)

Secondly, the chapter goes through the elements of the model in the context of the cooperation forum. The subtitles are:

- How can a cooperation forum promote ENCOUNTERS?
- How does a cooperation forum facilitate DIALOGUE?

- How can a cooperation forum give space for building NETWORKS?
- How can a cooperation forum initiate COOPERATION? (Qutomo 2014)

Having participated in the Qutomo project for a considerable time, I could comprehend the meaning behind the elements of the model and their important role in the cooperation forums. Still, it took time to comprehend what the actual composition of the chapter should be. The product took its form through the effective team work of the Qutomo team, who provided each other with their comments in all stages of the process.

In addition to the two main chapters, the guide includes a foreword, an introduction, conclusions and definitions of the key concepts. The guidebook is illustrated by Graafinen suunnittelutoimisto Graaf Oy and includes photos from the cooperation forums.

5 EVALUATION OF THE PROCESS

Qutomo project was launched to challenge the conceptions of integration and to bring a new culture and gender sensitive approach to it, seeking ways to bring it to practice on a concrete level. In this chapter I discuss the impacts of the project. Firstly, I argue on why the Culture and Gender Sensitive Integration Path Model of Qutomo is relevant in the current context of Finland. I move on to evaluate the relevance and benefits of Qutomo's model and guidebook. Additionally, the impact the cooperation forums have already had on the local level is discussed. Finally, I discuss my professional development.

5.1 The Relevance of the Model in the Current Context

As the 80's Finland with a sense of a cultural cohesion has transformed into an increasingly diverse society, resistance has been aroused in some parts of the society. The new wave of nationalism throughout Europe in the 2010's has been interpreted as a reaction to the internationalization that has been going on for decades. In Finland too, the discourse used when talking about immigration issues has become considerably tougher, particularly after the rise of the political party of Perussuomalaiset (The Finns) in the municipality elections of 2008. The distinction between being "immigration critical" and "racist" has been a subject of lively debate. Among the constructive criticism of the immigration policy, openly prejudiced and stigmatizing claims are heard in the politics and the public discussion (Puuronen 2011.)

A prominent characteristic of the debate is the lack of participation in it from people with an immigrant background. As the immigration critical, nationalist and racist voices are prominent in the society, the people with immigration backgrounds as well as those with open attitudes towards migration can feel discouraged or even scared to take part in the discussion. On 10.3.2013 Helsingin Sanomat reported on their inquiry on the threats that researchers of migration, multiculturalism and racism receive. The inquiry was answered by 16

researchers from universities and the government. 14 of them reported to have received hate mail, harassment on the phone and the internet, even death threats as a result of the publicity of their research on multiculturalism. Eight of the respondents reported to have censored themselves in fear of threats to them and their family. This can be viewed as a considerable danger to the freedom of speech in Finland. Overall, the nature of discussion described above hinders the immigration discourse from developing into more inclusive and sensitive (Helsingin Sanomat 2013.)

Thus, it is crucial to have arenas where alternative views can be discussed and mutual understanding can be increased. Qutomo project's response to this discussion has been to empower the third country nationals and make their perspectives heard in the public. Moreover, Qutomo's Cooperation Forum and the elements of the Culture and Gender Sensitive Integration Path invite everybody to engage in dialogue and broaden their views on integration. In Qutomo's conception integration is a concern of the whole society; not only the immigrants are integrating in Finland, but the society is integrating to the newcomers.

The new diversity creates a demand for the society to reconstruct its understanding of itself and the identities of the nation, in order to be keep up with the rapid changes and increase of diversity. Clinging to the old conceptions of being Finnish, that were relevant a long time ago, is harmful to an increasingly large amount of residents that do not fit in the old picture and are therefore left out, placing them at risk of alienation and marginalization.

Besides the increasingly diverse range of countries of origin among the immigrant population in Finland, several other aspects add to the diversity: different reasons of migrating (studies, work, family reasons, need of protection, remigration), differences in juridical status (EU citizens, temporary and permanent residence permits, returnees), human capital of the migrants (education, skills, wealth, employment potential), place of residence as well as the attitudes of the residents and officials towards the migrants (Raunio, Säävälä, Hammar-Suutari & Pitkänen 2011, 33).

The current integration system is not equipped in recognizing specific needs in developing a more effective integration path for migrants, thus, the usual tendency is to make assumptions about clients that may or may not be helpful in the integration process. The system of teaching Finnish to immigrants serves as an example of this: people with totally different points of departure and different goals are often put on the same course that only serves the needs of some of the participants. Problems of this nature repeatedly came up in the Qutomo cooperation forums. Many aspects are not considered or even noticed by the system when decisions are made concerning the immigrant's life and integration path (Qutomo 2014.)

The Culture and Gender Sensitive Integration Path aims to recognize and value all the aspects affecting the immigrant's integration. In the new environment the migrant has to build her or his identity again and find her or his place on many different levels. The wellbeing of a migrant is largely dependent on how she or he manages to find a balance between the two cultures, the old and the new – or more than two cultures. Psychologically, the process is highly complex and always unique. Overall, the common experience of all migrants is stress (Väestöliitto 2013.) Qutomo emphasizes the social aspects of integration – networks, sense of belonging, confidence to participate etc. – the importance of which is often overshadowed by the more tangible indicators of integration, such as employment or level of Finnish or Swedish skills (Saukkonen 2013).

5.2 The Impact of the Guidebook

Qutomo's guidebook contributes to the competency for cooperation between the different sectors by providing tools to foster encounters, dialogue, networking and cooperation; the elements that can make their work not only into culture and gender sensitive but also more effective. The concepts and tools are transferable to different contexts. Through the guidebook, the knowledge can be widely distributed throughout Finland and also internationally. To put it simply, the benefits of the cooperation forums described in sub-chapter 5.3 can be made accessible for use anywhere, were development of encounters, dialogue,

networking and cooperation is needed. The model can benefit communities across professional fields, work places, parishes, NGO's, in voluntary work, on one's personal life.

There already exist guidebooks targeted at integration service providers, or at professionals of specific fields on how to deal with cultural diversity within the staff and/or the clients such as Puhumalla Paras – Ratkaisuja arjen etnisiin konflikteihin (The Ministry of Interior 2008), Monikulttuurisuus työn arjessa (The Institute of Occupational Health 2007), Ammatillisen maahanmuuttotyön kulttuuri: Erilaisuus sosiaali- ja terveydenhuollon jäsenyksissä (Järvinen 2004) and Olemme muuttaneet – ja kotoudumme (The Family Federation 2013). Often, these guidebooks have a conflict-oriented perspective on multiculturalism and integration. They address the issues largely from the perspective of the native population, while Qutomo's guidebook incorporates the voices of all the sectors of the society. The model is not a result of researchers examining or interviewing immigrants, but a result of dialogue conversations between the sectors. The guidebook aims at being understandable for readers with different points-of-departure. Moreover, the emphasis is on being concrete: the guidebook provides ideas and examples on how to bring the model in practice on any level of the society.

Qutomo's guidebook has already received attention among the field of integration. The Centre of Expertise in Integration, under The Ministry of Employment and the Economy, runs an online service kotouttaminen.fi. The website has collected information in relation to integration for integration service providers: the integration services, laws, methods, courses, seminars etc. On October 31st 2014 Qutomo's guidebook on the Culture and Gender Sensitive Integration Path was featured on the website with a description and a link to the guidebook in Finnish and English.

On October 8th Qutomo project received a diploma, "An Innovative Network", from Laurea University of Applied Sciences. The diploma was given for "bringing together stakeholders from the different sectors that work with third country nationals. The network promotes understanding on integration through encoun-

ters and dialogue [...] The network has great potential to change the world” (Inno Kylä 2014.)

Moreover, the guidebook has a significant role as a displayer of the voices of third country nationals, whose participation in the development of the services of the society is crucial in order to create an inclusive, equal society. The sharing of the stories and experiences of third country nationals serves the society in several ways. The guidebook raises awareness of integration issues, based on individual immigrants’ experiences and the expertise of immigrants associations, thus empowering the third country nationals by strengthening their voice in the public discussion, widening their range of action and creates possibilities for partnerships between organizations. Likewise, their empowerment can raise the profile of immigrants and make integration issues visible for the public. When immigrants gain more resources and competence, they are able to raise awareness in a significant way, which in turn helps the general public to comprehend the increasingly diverse society. To conclude, awareness-raising and empowerment are separate, but mutually reinforcing functions that both can be used as tools for combating discrimination and marginalization (Väestöliitto 2013.)

5.3 Impact of the Cooperation Forums

Cooperation between the different sectors is necessary in integration services, among which the goals and issues are mainly the same and the resources are both limited and shared (Qutomo guidebook 2014, 17). As the responsibilities are shared and contacts and knowledge are exchanged and utilized, the integration services will naturally be more effective.

The cooperation forums have succeeded in providing a possibility for dialogue between the different sectors of the society in the pursuit of strengthening and developing further the networking and cooperation within and between the stakeholders working in the field of integration. Through the cooperation forums,

a plenty of knowledge has been created to be shared and utilized in the different levels of the society.

The total number of participants in the cooperation forums was 264. Overall, the forums were attended by a large variety of sectors. In particular, third country nationals, NGO's and educational institutions have been highly represented. In the figure below, the percentage of the representatives of each sector of the society is illustrated (Qutomo 2014.)

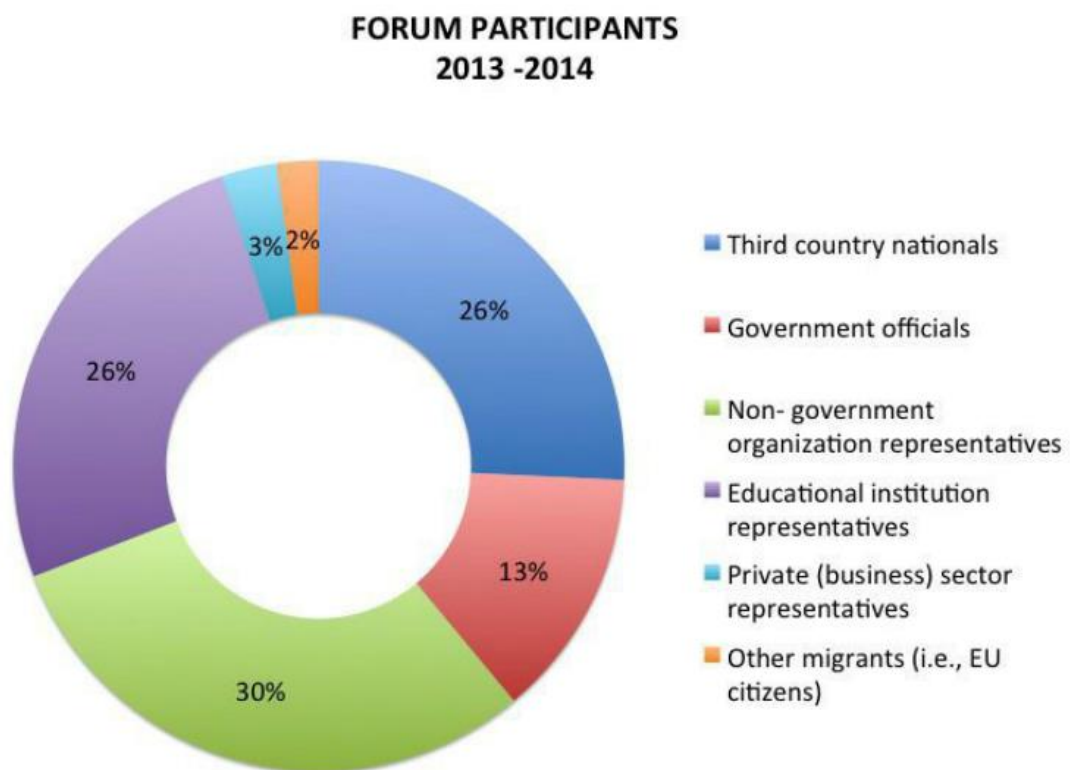


FIGURE 2: The different sectors of the society represented in the Qutomo Cooperation Forums (from Qutomo's Annual Review 2013-2014)

Through the cooperation forums the public sector, such as ELY Centre (Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment) and the City of Vantaa have been given the chance access to the grass root level information and experiences; hearing the opinions of third country nationals on the integration services.

According to Hannele Lautiola from the City of Vantaa, an active participant in many Qutomo cooperation forums, Qutomo cooperation forums have brought to light the voices from immigrant groups that are usually hard to reach for the officials. For example, immigrant housewives, people moved to Finland because of their partner's work and international university students have shared their experiences and opinions. In the future, the hearings of those groups are planned to be linked to the work of Advisory Board of Immigration Issues. The Multicultural Programme of Vantaa City mentions the cooperation forums of Qutomo project as an example of how the residents' voice should be heard in the decision-making (Lautiola 2013.)

The cooperation with the city has already resulted in a joined event, The Immigrant Forum in 2013. Vantaa City was assisted by Nicehearts of Vantaa and the Qutomo project in organizing the event that aimed to enhance the participation of Vantaa residents with immigrant backgrounds in the decision making. The programme consisted of presentations from the city officials and a workshop in which people discussed how to improve the services of the city (Vantaa City 2013.)

Furthermore, the cooperation forums have enabled the creation of new projects and forms of cooperation. According to the feedback of the forum participants, new and different forms of cooperation have been started after the forums. The participants view as the most important results of the forum the sharing of information as well as the possibility to implement cooperation and organize mutual events with the contacts made in the forums.

The participants are able to sustain the networks they have built in the forums, as after each forum they are sent the contact list of the participants and a summary of the ideas come up in the forum. The summary of the ideas from the 7th Qutomo Cooperation Forum is attached as Appendix 2. This way the participants have the chance to keep in contact with each other and possibly implement cooperation. Social media is utilized to continue the discussions: by writing about the topics as well as about the activities of the cooperation partners on the Qutomo blog and Facebook (Qutomo 2014.)

Listening to the voices of third country nationals, particularly women, was a special emphasis of the project. As Salla Tuori (2012) says, the opinions of immigrant women are often not heard nor taken as valid information (Tuori 2012). In the development of integration services into more culture and gender sensitive services, that take into account the individual's needs, the contribution of third country nationals is crucial. The Qutomo cooperation forums have invited the third country nationals to participate in the process of developing the services that concern them as experts based on their knowledge and information. Their participation has, in addition to giving them the empowering experience of being heard, has given plenty of valuable grass-root information and opinions to be utilized in the development of integration services. Service users not only bring expertise but can help professionals define the roles and support needed to be accountable and responsive to change and improvement (Hafford-Letchfield, 2006). The equal, open space of the dialogue platform provided in the cooperation forums has given the integration service providers and service users a possibility to encounter each other on a deeper level and engage in dialogue.

At the end of each cooperation forum, each participant was asked to fill in an evaluation form. Their feedback was valuable for the project in order to incorporate the participants' ideas to the further development of the concept of the cooperation forum. Some highlights from the feedback summary is presented in Qutomo's Annual Review for 2013-2014. Almost all participants claimed they were empowered by the forums – they gained new ideas, greater understanding, contacts and skill. 97 percent of the participants claimed that they will utilize the newly acquired skills and tools in the future (Qutomo 2014.)

Representatives of third country nationals that had participated in the cooperation forum evaluated the forum in Third Country Nationals Consultation Meeting in March 2014. In the quote below, where a participant describes how the forums have benefitted her, the significance of all elements of the Culture and Gender Sensitive Integration Path (encounters, dialogue, networks and cooperation) can be seen between the lines:

It's a good chance to bring all together, all these different sectors, and everyone can know, together at the same time, what is going on there, how the one lives, and what the other does for the person in front. And it's a good opportunity because when I was here, I was alone and I didn't know what is going around me. Who are these people around me, for example NGO's, what exactly are they doing? And what chances you have for studying here. But when I came here and I met all these people I got the idea, in general: what is the role of each part, of each sector that is coming and presenting, advising, talking, taking ideas from us... So, it's a good chance to know what is going (Forum Participant, Third Country Nationals Consultation Meeting 2014.)

5.4 Professional Development

Since the first time I participated in a Qutomo Cooperation Forum, I believed that the project had an innovative approach to developing Finland towards an inclusive, equal society that is able not only to deal with its increasing diversity but also to embrace, value and utilize it as a resource. I felt their approach was up-to-date and innovative in its emphasis of participatory action methods and the dialogue platform as a learning environment of the integration system.

The two placements in Qutomo project provided me with an illuminating insight and practical experience on project work that I could not have learnt from lectures or literature. Several times I experienced the whole process of organizing events. I learned the unpredictable and busy nature of project work: each process of organizing a cooperation forum is a unique learning process. The same methods and tools could not be repeatedly applied, but forum by forum, the concept was developed through trial and error, and a plenty of self-criticism and reflection.

From the first cooperation forum I participated in to the finalization of my thesis, this has been a continuous learning process, each phase adding up to the next. I have gained a great number of new contacts and deepened my understanding on the phenomena of migration and integration considerably.

The process of conceptualizing the Culture and Gender Sensitive Integration Path and writing the guidebook was an educative experience. The team work and the brainstorming in the Qutomo team were inspirational and taught me a great deal about cooperation as well as my own interaction and collaboration skills.

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APPENDIX 1: TITLES OF THE QUTOMO COOPERATION FORUMS

Phase 1: 2012-2013

1. Integration and Its Different Meanings
2. Culture and Gender Sensitivity
3. Immigrants in the Finnish Labour Market
4. Finnish Language and Education

Phase 2: 2013-2014

5. Encounters: Us, Them and The Others
6. Cooperation: Getting Involved!
7. Towards Quality Integration Training
8. Towards a Culture and Gender Sensitive Integration Path

APPENDIX 2: PROGRAMME OF THE 7TH QUTOMO COOPERATION FORUM

INVITATION: QUTOMO PROJECT'S COOPERATION FORUM


7 – TOWARDS QUALITY INTEGRATION TRAINING

Date: 14.3.2014 at 8:30 – 15:00

Place: Women's Resource Center Pihlaja, Unikkotie 2 C, 2nd floor

Discussions in the previous cooperation forums have raised the issue of the effectiveness and impact of the current integration training programs for unemployed immigrants. How can we improve them? Do you have some ideas for development? We believe that we can make a change together. Come to make an impact and take action!

PROGRAMME:

8.30-9.00	Coffee and registration
9.00-9.10	Qutomo: Culture and Gender-sensitive integration path
9.10-9.20	Experiences on integration training
9.20-10.00	Labor market integration training: The present context and future prospects <i>Laura Ruuskanen, special planning officer, Uusimaa ELY-center</i>
10.00-10.15	Break
10.15-12.00	WORKSHOP - A new perspective on integration training: How would the ideal integration training look like? <i>Pilar Valdivia and Hervé Tionang, HELMO project, Afaes ry</i>
	
	HELMO is a multicultural education project aiming to increase multicultural dialogue and cultural understanding via a range of activities in the Helsinki metropolitan area. The project aims to foster the involvement of third country nationals in Finland and to promote two-way integration. Within the HELMO project, multicultural workshops are organized for different target groups.
12:00-13:00	Lunch
13.00-14.00	Workshop continuation: Putting our ideas into action!
14.00-15-00	Panel discussion and summing it up
15.00-	Networking

WELCOME!

APPENDIX 3: SUMMARY OF THE IDEAS FROM THE 7TH QUTOMO COOPERATION FORUM

1. TRANSPARENCY

The process of getting into the integration training courses should be made transparent, ensuring that all those who are involved (immigrants, government officials, NGO's) are well informed of the said process (how long the waiting line is, number of clients, the value of the courses, different paths and options that can be considered while waiting). One idea that came up during the discussions is to organize events where the above-mentioned stakeholders can ask questions concerning the process in an open dialogue.

2. DEALING WITH THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE OLD AND THE NEW PROGRAMS

Given that the current integration training programs have already been improved over the years – this has also created another target group, a group of people who went through the training programs during the past years who unfortunately are still struggling with the same problems as the newcomers. They still have not been integrated through employment, language skills or are still in need of networks. How can we take into account their context in the current context? For example, there can be “refresher courses” for Finnish language through virtual environments. Or can non-governmental organizations be important cooperation partners for the said target groups?

3. COOPERATION AND NETWORKS AS A CRITERIA FOR INTEGRATION TRAINING PROVIDERS

It should be an important criterion for integration training providers that they have the capability to link their students to real-life context. This should not be limited to work-life i.e. employers, but most importantly also include organizations or other educational institutions. This will only strengthen the cooperation between the different sectors and also will open more possibilities for the service users to be more active members of the society.

4. NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS AS ACTIVE COOPERATION PARTNERS

Non-government organizations should be more active in ensuring that the government officials as well as other sectors that are directly in contact with the clients are well-informed of the services, events, projects that they offer. This way, the cooperation will be more concrete; NGOs can work hand-in-hand with

for instance, the employment office or social workers. An example case can be that while there is a long waiting line for the Finnish language courses, the clients can be directed to NGOs offering complementary services instead of waiting at home. An idea that came up was to organize an annual meet-up with various integration service providers to give them a chance to exchange good practices, introduce their service and do networking. Another example can be involving the NGOs in the evaluation and monitoring of the integration training programs. Organizations can provide a neutral or impartial ground for collecting feedback.

5. INTEGRATION TRAINING PROGRAMS SHOULD BE MORE FLEXIBLE AND INTERACTIVE

Different learning methods were suggested, with a focus on the courses becoming more interactive not only between the students or between students and teachers but more importantly, to involve other volunteer groups i.e., from the read together network, NGO networks or even elderly homes. This way, students will also gain access to networks that are outside of the integration courses, which in turn might be instrumental in the success of their integration process.

Flexibility of the integration training courses was also highlighted. Among the ideas discussed were: the possibility of different time schedules (morning, afternoon, late afternoon courses), virtual learning environments, apprenticeship training focused on language learning for highly educated migrants, or tandem language learning (finding language partners: A Finnish-speaking person will be partnered with an English speaking person and they learn together).