



Art as a Tool of Empowerment

A Case Study of Communal Art Projects with Migrants

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ABSTRACT

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A Case Study of Communal Art Projects with Migrants

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This thesis research reflected on community-based art projects and their potential in positively integrating migrant communities into the Finnish society. Empowerment was defined as the key element of positive integration. As a background work, findings were drawn from different community-based art projects from outside Finland. Autoethnography and case studies were used as the main methodologies in the thesis research. The autoethnographic work focused on two community-based art projects, *Monessa Mielessä* and *KOTIO*, in which the thesis author was one of the artistic instructors. Through these projects the author reflected on how the participants, and himself, experienced empowerment.

Also discussed in this thesis report is *Pando*, the final artwork for the author's thesis exhibition. *Pando* was inspired by community-based art projects, where none of the works were originally made with the intention of showing them in an exhibition. Bringing them together in the gallery space posed new questions: What happens to a social media campaign video in a gallery setup? What is the role of the artist? Who is the empowerer, and who will be empowered? *Pando* was a video mapping installation that was exhibited in spring 2018 in Gallery Himmelblau at the *HOT FUTURES Degree Show* of the Fine Art study path of Tampere University of Applied Sciences.

The main findings of the thesis were as follows: Art as a tool can create and facilitate a safe environment for a positive dialogue and possibilities for empowerment. Furthermore, empowerment should not be seen as a one-way process with a top-down approach, but rather a more complex interpersonal phenomenon that challenges hierarchies. The same applies to positive integration, where empowerment and sense of community are crucial in turning a passive integration process into true inclusion.

Keywords: empowerment, community-based art, migrant, case study, autoethnography

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1 INTRODUCTION

As autoethnography is my research method to write this research paper, obviously I will start with a story. My own story.

In 2014 I was living in Kajaani in Eastern Finland. Because I was unemployed, I was participating in the Finnish language course offered by the employment office (*TE-toimisto*). Most of the participants in that course were doing the course as a part of their integration schooling (*kotoutumiskoulutus*). However, technically speaking, I was not doing integration schooling. By that time, I had already been living in Finland for over three years and I had both employment and educational history in Finland. So, it turned out I was too qualified to be offered integration schooling by the employment office.

In the Finnish language course there were students from all over the world. Quite soon I noticed that my classmates had very different backgrounds and levels of education. There were people who had never gone to school, as well as people who had been to universities and higher studies or such. Basically, it was a wild mix of students from all over the world, with different cultural and life experiences. I was quite excited thinking this must be a very dynamic group and this course is going to be fun. Hopefully, I would get to learn not only Finnish but also things about many different cultures and people. But unfortunately, when the reality hit, I was not only confused but also disappointed.

The language course was obviously focusing on learning Finnish language. The method of learning the language was Finnish to Finnish. There was not really any common factor or method on how to communicate with each other. Obviously, everybody did not speak Finnish as it was a beginners' course.

I was wondering, alongside the Finnish language, why are we not using our body or visual cues or some different methods to communicate more effectively? When there was a misunderstanding or the teacher was trying to explain some Finnish grammar to the students, they explained everything in Finnish. Which was understandable given the fact that it was a Finnish language course. But the problem

was, it was the language that we did not understand. No matter how “slowly and loudly” the teachers would explain to us, it would not be a great help.

I noticed a lot of frustration in the class, from the teachers as well as from the students. The learning method was rigid and based on “how not to make mistakes”. There were a lot of grammatical rules from the beginning that we had to learn. It was mostly about how to speak “grammatically polished” Finnish. The teachers were supportive and helpful. They were following the course plan. But no matter how supportive the teachers were, I felt that it did not help as much as it should have.

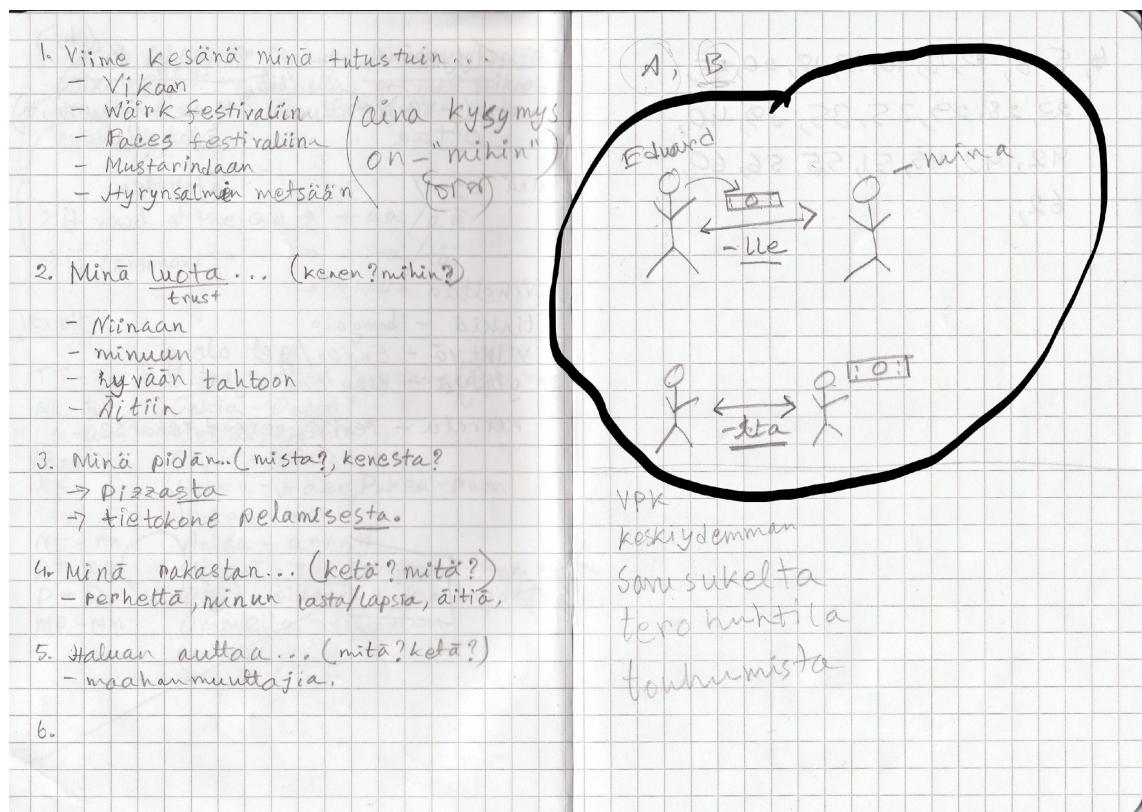
On a separate yet connected story, I am dyslexic. It means that I have challenges reading and writing. In other words, I have difficulties dealing with text in general. However, I myself am quite good with visuals. My holistic way of learning is through visual and auditory cues. Mostly, when I am dealing with visual context, I feel like home. I can learn the best when I visualize things. This realization triggered me to conduct an experiment in my Finnish language class with my own classmates.

In the Finnish language class, I noticed that my classmates who did not speak neither good Finnish nor English (English being the most common international language) were struggling a lot in the class to understand the lectures. Teachers were struggling to communicate with those students. I started to go to those classmates who were struggling with the language in the class. I started explaining to them the same things that the teacher just explained in Finnish that they did not understand. I started to draw. I drew simple stick figures and used very simple Finnish words that they knew, to give them a context to explain for example a certain grammar rule (PICTURE 1). When I asked them whether they understood my explanation or not, they replied mostly, “yes, I understood (*kyllä, minä ymmärsin*)”.

I kept doing it and I realized I started to help my classmates as well as I was helping myself by drawing and contextualizing a scenario and explaining it in Finnish. Suddenly I was having a lot of fun learning a new language despite the rigid and boring learning process in the class. With this realization, I immediately

started to look online for articles about how art can help the process of learning a second language. I came across many interesting research articles. That led to me making a draft of an idea for a project. I ended up presenting this idea for a pre-task in Tampere University of Applied Sciences (TAMK) entrance exam back in 2014 (Appendix 1).

I am writing this very thesis based on the projects that were initiated by that idea in 2014, to achieve the very same degree that I applied for in TAMK in 2014.



PICTURE 1. A scanned page documentation from Khalid Imran's notebook from the Finnish language course (2014).

The entrance exam pre-task was to create an idea for a project that could be developed throughout my studies in the department of Media and Arts in TAMK. During the upcoming years, I would be working on realizing that idea into projects throughout my whole studies in TAMK.

In the next chapters I am going to present the methodology of autoethnography, which is the method of this thesis, and theory of empowerment and how empowering can be achieved through community-based art practices. I am going to

showcase a project done in London in 2018 and 2019 called *The Voice of Domestic Workers*. After that, in chapters 5 and 6 I present my own projects *Monessa Mielessä* and *KOTIO*. Lastly, I discuss my final exhibition artwork *Pando* that was exhibited in the *HOT FUTURES Degree Show* of the Fine Art study path of Tampere University of Applied Sciences, during spring 2018 in Gallery Himmelblau.

2 METHODOLOGY

Case study is one of the research strategies alongside experimental research and survey research (Hirsjärvi et al. 2013, 134). Case study is not a research method but rather a way of research or a research strategy (Laine et al. 2007).

Case studies are used especially in the social sciences, including arts. In order to take large, representative data and examine it better statistically, the case studies delve into a few cases in depth and examine them from different angles. The aim is not to find generalizations and key features or cause-and-effect relationships, but to describe phenomena and make new observations (Colorado State University 1993).

2.1 Autoethnography

Autoethnography is a research trend that combines personal experiences (*auto*), which are analyzed (*graphy*) to create an understanding of cultural experience (*ethno*) (Ellis, Adams and Bochner 2011).

According to Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011), in autoethnographic research, the author of the thesis collects information in working life about the context in which the research interest is directed using various methods. Scientific practice involves the analysis of accumulated diary experiences, which in turn requires knowledge of existing theoretical knowledge and relevant previous research data, and the mirroring of one's own experiences against this.

The autoethnographer faces challenges on the playing field of science and has to justify their choices and so on, because traditionally one of the key requirements of science is objectivity. According to philosopher Niiniluoto (1984, 25), scientific information must be scientifically authentic, it cannot be based on the researcher's original intuition and instinct, for example, of radiation emitted by radio stars, but it is publicly verifiable. But might not the diary just contain this kind of information: intuitive and instinctive? According to Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011), a traditional researcher supporting the tradition of science could also ask:

Who is interested in my input for this subject? Why would anyone be interested only in my story, especially in a so-called research project? When it comes to autoethnographic research, my story alone, according to Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011), is not enough, but theoretical and methodological tools and research data are needed.

Autoethnography has also been criticized for its narrowness, personality, and biographical knowledge; the relationship between storytelling and knowledge. Generally, the first-person point of view is considered biased and that there is no “I” in academic writing. According to Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011), this critique can be answered as follows: Isn't it always the first-person who speaks in research?

3 WHAT IS EMPOWERMENT?

The idea of empowerment is connected with the concept of power, meaning that empowerment is closely connected to power of changing: gaining it, expanding it, diminishing it, and losing it (Page and Czuba 1999). Empowerment seems to include the perspective of multiple social problems existing because of social and material resources' unequal distribution and access.

Many have argued that power is not something fixed with an individual, but instead is constituted within relations between people within broader historical, social, cultural, economic, and political contexts (Foucault 1980; Serrano-García 1984). Power could be also understood as a social relationship; it can be found in the relations between people, and these relations are mediated through peoples' positions within hierarchical social systems (Fisher, Sonn and Evans 2007). Thus, power can actually strengthen while being shared with others (Kreisburg 1992).

Freire (1973) has presented three steps for empowerment: conscientising, inspiring and liberating. Based on Freire, the disadvantaged or the oppressed can become empowered via learning about social inequality (i.e. conscientising), encouraging others by making them feel confident about achieving social equality, and finally liberating them. Parparts', Rais' and Staudts' (2003) argument is that empowerment must be understood as the inclusion of both individual conscientisation (power within) and the ability to work collectively that could lead to politicised power with others, which also provides the power to generate change.

3.1 Empowering through community-based art practices

Community-based arts and cultural practices, also known as CBAC practices, refer to artistic practices that correlate with specific contexts and are designed to influence societal change. These practices use creativity as a methodological educational tool and seek to build facilitation for interaction. (Carrasco et al. 2016, 230–231.)

One example of such practice is *Pa'tothom*, an organization that creates theatrical plays that deal with conflicts. The plays aim at liberation and well-being through community participation. For example, topics such as prejudices against immigrants or gender-based violence have been dealt with in their performances. (Carrasco et al. 2016, 231.) Another example of a CBAC practise is *Teleduca*, an organization that seeks to raise information among young people about health, drug use, and romantic relationships through participatory documentary productions. The productions of the young people participating are presented annually at a short film festival. (Carrasco et al. 2016, 231.)

CBAC practices can play a prominent role in personal psychological empowerment processes. Firstly, psychological empowerment can be achieved as participants make new social relationships and take on new kinds of tasks and roles, creating new perspectives on things. The opportunity for participants to move into such situations allows for three possibilities: (1) new social status, (2) changes in the way they view themselves and others, and (3) changes in the way they experience social relationships. (Carrasco et al. 2016, 237.)

Secondly, the results of psychological empowerment can be accomplished through CBAC practices by using art as an expressive form of communication and as a kind of language. By opening up to new ways of expressing identity, representing reality, and communicating concerns and aspirations, it creates new and versatile ways to experience life. (Carrasco et al. 2016, 237.)

Lastly, the empowerment occurs when the participants experience a feeling of being capable of things and gain confidence in themselves (Carrasco et al. 2016, 237). These three interrelated processes help build critical content for a person's life and social relationships. By creating an arts platform for identity communication, CBAC practices help empower individuals, foster critical thinking, and develop talent and confidence. (Carrasco et al. 2016, 239.)

Factors that empower the group include social support and cooperation between participants and artists (Carrasco et al. 2016, 239). These processes challenge traditional decision-making, increase critical collective consciousness, and strengthen affective and reproductive social relationships (Carrasco et al 2016,

239). CBAC participants are given the opportunity to express the themes and concerns they wish to address and to analyse how these issues affect the group. Group identity begins to be nurtured as the group resolves what limits individuals in relation to the chosen theme. (Carrasco et al. 2016, 239.)

Positive experiences of community empowerment are achieved through the production of collective knowledge. Critical awareness increases as the learning community strengthens, as the community becomes more empowered. New and shared cultural capital is linked to the community's existing economic, social, and cultural capital. (Carrasco et al. 2016, 239–240.)

In the next chapter I will showcase a project done with CBAC methods to empower migrant groups working in London.

4 CASE STUDY: “THE VOICE OF DOMESTIC WORKERS”

In 2018–2019, a participatory video project *The Voice of Domestic Workers* took place in London with Zhe Jiang, Tassia Kobylinska and 12 women participants who were from the Philippines and working in London. The aim of this project was to use participatory video as a tool of empowerment and resistance for migrant domestic workers in London. The hope was that participatory art could play a role in supporting the voice of marginalised communities. The project's aim was not to use art as an end product, but as a tool for social construct process to help achieve social change.

Participants had previously worked collectively in workshops that included photography projects, creative writing projects, performance workshops and creating artworks. With this project they were filming their own movie with their mobile phones, because it was a familiar and accessible tool for the participants, and they could film throughout the day and show what they wished with it. Videos included interviews, which the women conducted with each other. The respect and trust grew among them and the facilitators during the project.

Throughout the project the women who participated found similarities in their experiences, solidarity and empowering collective call for actions in the political field too, with critical awareness of precariousness and exploitation. They could also share common issues and seek collective solutions. The creative process of filmmaking was also a way to express individual traumas safely. The experience for the participants was empowering, and the end result was a testimonial co-produced film *Our Journey* that was exhibited in many places, for example in Stephen Lawrence Gallery.

The aim of making the situation of this marginalized workforce known and articulating their own interests for the wider audience seemed to reach its goal. The visitors of the exhibitions consisting of media representatives, trade unionists, NGO staff, community activists, politicians and a public audience reported that the exhibition was moving and changed their view of thinking about the subject.

The exhibition also got media attention, so this communal art project was now open for the larger societal discussion. (Jiang & Kobylinska, 2020.)

In the next chapters I will go through community-based art projects *Monessa Miellessä* and *KOTIO*, where we used similar methods and approaches to empowering immigrants, with the difference of mainly aiming to help with language learning through community-based art.

5 CASE STUDY: MONESSA MIELESSÄ

The project got started in the city of Kajaani in 2013 in Finland. Although Kajaani is a relatively small city, there lives a fairly large migrant community, because one of the biggest refugee reception centres of Finland is situated in Kajaani.

My dear friends and colleagues Niina Piirainen and Kimmo Penttilä were drama instructors and we wanted to do something together to find a way to bring some positivity and playfulness to the integration process of the migrant community through art.

The project we started in Kajaani was called *Monessa Mielessä* (in Many Minds, in Many Ways) – Community Art with Unemployed Immigrants (PICTURE 2).



PICTURE 2. A documentation from *Monessa Mielessä* community art project (2014).

Monessa Mielessä was an applied art project that studied self-expression through diverse media of arts. The core idea of the project was: “Language has a huge significance to one's personality. What happens to self-expression, when only a foreign language is available? Tones of speech, emphases of the words existing

in one's native language seem impossible to achieve in a new language. A new language is often taught by repeating the grammar rules and concentrating on the mistakes.”

This project aimed to forget “doing right or wrong” and focused purely on self-expression instead, using various creative methods. The contents of the project were not determined beforehand, but the priorities and goals raised from the group; thus, the group itself produced the content of their art.

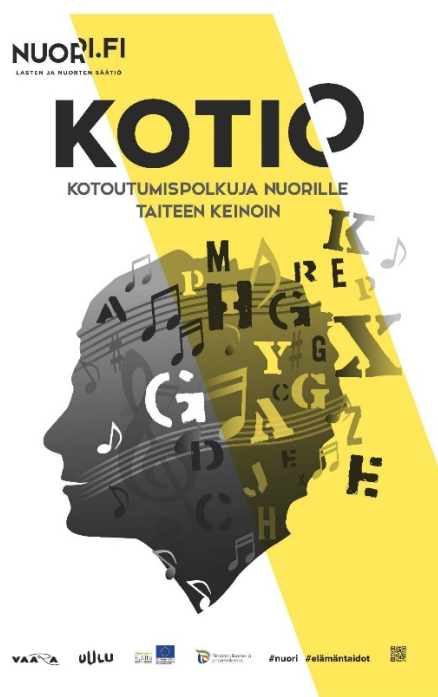
This process had led to a new phase in 2015: Integrating art for learning Finnish. Participants did various language exercises through artistic methods. Thus, the participants were able to contextualize the new language on their own experiences. Learning became more holistic and cultural differences were better accepted. Participants made their own art works and got to learn the language and cultural norms at the same time. This process created a dialogue with their integration process in the long run. This project had been funded by *Myrsky-hanke* from *Suomen Lasten Ja Nuorten Säätiö (The Finnish Children and Youth Foundation)* since 2013.

After conducting three pilots during 2014–2016, it was clear to me that, in order to positively tackle some of the integration issues in Finland, the instructors/teachers/actors must be a mix of native Finns and people with migrant backgrounds. The philosophy here is “nothing about us without us”.

I pitched an idea to Riikka Åsterlund, the Project leader of *Myrsky-hanke* at the time, that we must try to make a longer project, where one of the key features of the project would be that the instructors must be an equal mix of Finns and migrant instructors.

After brainstorming for about six months and going through a funding process from the European Union, *KOTIO* was born (PICTURE 3).

6 CASE STUDY: KOTIO



PICTURE 3. A digital poster of the *KOTIO* project, the Finnish Children and Youth Foundation, (2017).

Young immigrants can face many challenges in finding their own place in the new living environment. Insufficient language skills, unfamiliarity with the educational opportunities or the rules of working life, lack of networks and encountering prejudices can make it difficult to find one's own path.

The aim of the *KOTIO* project was to warmly welcome young immigrants to their homes in Hämeenlinna and Forssa. *KOTIO* sought to provide young people support in strengthening their life skills and self-esteem, as well as opportunities to learn new things in a participatory, fun, and memorable way. Participatory workshops were created, in which the young participants deepened their knowledge of Finnish society and culture, strengthened their language skills and improved their work-related skills and abilities. In addition, they reflected on the importance of their own roots and cultural identities in the workshops. Activities aimed to build bridges between immigrants and young Finnish people by organizing shared art experiences.

During the *KOTIO* project, 265 young adults of various nationalities, for example from Afghanistan, Iraq, Bangladesh, Turkey, Syria, Somalia, Ethiopia, Kenya,

and Peru participated in the workshops utilizing music, visual arts and theatre as an artistic tool. The workshops were conducted by the artists of two different co-ops named *Kulttuuriosuuskunta Uulu* and *Vaara-kollektiivi* (Appendix 3). The workshops encouraged young people to express themselves and reflect on their own goals, and addressed themes related to perceptions, norms and stereotypes in different cultures. As a result of the workshops, the young people planned and carried out the raptures in collaboration with young people from local art schools, music colleges and art centres.

The young people participating in the workshops were reached through, among others, our partners *Faktia Oy*, *Hämeen Setlementti ry*, *Spring House Oy*, *SPR Lammi* reception centre and *Vanajavesi College*, *Tavastia Vocational College* and *Kiipula Vocational College*.

The project was financed by the European Social Fund, the *Finnish Children and Youth Foundation* and City of Hämeenlinna, and it was implemented during 2017–2019.

6.1 Ways of conducting the workshops

Four artists acted as instructors: Khalid Imran (visual artist, media artist), Miia Säppi (drama instructor), Petra Käppi (ethnomusicologist) and Jan Kurimi (musician and painter). Each instructor team consisted of two instructors, among which one instructor was with an immigrant background and the other was a native Finn. The instructor teams were divided into two groups. My teammate was Miia Säppi. We used drama methods (acting and interaction exercises) and visual art (drawing, painting, photography, moving image) as artistic tools (Appendix 2). The other team was Petra Käppi and Jan Kurimi with music as their artistic tool.

We met with the students from partner schools for 10 weeks per student group for each instructor team. The actual workshop took place in the first nine weeks. The students studied Finnish language through music, drama and visual art. The 10th week was for organizing joint art escapades.

The joint art escapades made it possible to facilitate a rather relaxed and fun environment where the immigrant student community and local Finns could mingle and share moments and experiences. At the same time the immigrant students had the opportunity to showcase their creative talents. For many of our students, those escapades were the very first time where they had the opportunity to present their talents and skills in front of an audience.

7 FEEDBACK

Art and artistic processes can bring hope to people. Having an artistic approach within the integration education brings the groups and communities together more positively and effectively. I can say this based on the feedback of the migrant students who participated in the *KOTIO* project. Here are a few examples:

I was able to ask questions and listen to students. Because in the rest of the lessons [lessons outside of *KOTIO* project] there is no time for all the students to speak. At the same time, I remembered words I had forgotten because I did not use them in my daily life, and in the end, I wished the duration of the course was longer than that. (Ahmed, participant in *KOTIO* project, *Vanajavesi College* and *Tavastia Vocational College*, 2018 and 2019.)

Ahmed became so empowered from knowing the community, knowing his classmates and the classmates from another school, that he became a leading character and the contact person for his class when we produced a flash mob in Hämeenlinna as a part of the art escapades of the *KOTIO* project (PICTURE 4).



PICTURE 4. A documentation of a flash mob performance in Hämeenlinna, 2019. A screenshot by Khalid Imran.

For the first time in one and a half years in Finland, I feel hope.
(Mustafa, participant in *KOTIO* project, *Hämeen Setlementti*, 2017.)

Most of the other participants in the class immediately agreed with Mustafa. This comment was given after participating in a workshop for only two weeks. If two weeks can bring hope, one can only imagine what kind of positive impact could happen when two weeks turns into two years or more.

One of the participants was Zinash. Zinash joined the *KOTIO* workshop from the third week onwards out of the nine weeks' workshop. At the beginning Zinash didn't speak much Finnish. She had difficulty forming sentences and she was also shy of making mistakes. At the end of the whole course, Zinash explained to us (the instructors) for about ten minutes, all in Finnish how much she did not like this artistic course. She wanted to learn Finnish and she thought we would teach Finnish in a more traditional way. Zinash was used to the traditional form of class and learning method. She did not like this new artistic method. After her feedback, I asked Zinash if she noticed that she had explained all her feelings and feedback in Finnish to us, and that she couldn't speak Finnish well enough to explain herself when she started the course. Zinash looked at me with surprised eyes and smiled at me with awe. I noticed her smiling with satisfaction and she could not even believe herself. This reaction and feedback of Zinash shows how the artistic ways of learning can have empowering effects.

Sidar was a participant as a Finnish language student at *Kiipula Vocational College* in spring 2018. She had always been interested in performing. During our workshop, we decided together with the students to make video art as a part of the art installation for their exhibition, which would eventually become a part of the art escapade at the end of the whole workshop. Sidar said she was extremely happy and felt empowered, because for the first time in her life, she got the chance to perform for a video (PICTURE 7). The video installation was shown for one month in the Hämeenlinna central library. Sidar got to show her work to all her friends and family.

Jihan was another student in the same group with Sidar. Jihan also participated in the same video work mentioned above. Jihan was also really interested and

fascinated by the idea of performing for their own art video. But something bothered her. She thought she couldn't be in front of the camera and show her face on the video. Her culture of origin didn't allow this. We agreed with Jihan that she can still be part of the video as long as we don't show her face (PICTURE 9). After we were finished with the video, Jihan said smiling, that she felt confident and felt like a superstar and she never had this kind of opportunity before.

Amino was a student in *Tavastia Vocational College* in 2018. She liked dancing, singing and playing football. But her culture of origin didn't let her do either of those activities. She was married. She told us that she was not allowed by her husband to do the things she liked, such as playing football. During *KOTIO* project Amino got to dance and play during the drama exercises. She also got to sing during the music exercises. She got to do the things she enjoyed while learning Finnish language at the same time. Amino ended up being the lead singer for the video work we made with the groups of *Tavastia Vocational College*. Amino was usually sitting at the back of the class and fairly quiet, but the process of her becoming the lead singer made her stand in front of her whole class making her more confident. She started to be more involved in the workshops and she was clearly more motivated towards the activities.

8 THE POTENTIAL OF USING ARTS IN FINNISH INTEGRATION EDUCATION

The main goal of the integration process for immigrants in Finland is to make the immigrants positively cope with the Finnish society, learn Finnishness, and be ready for the Finnish labour market as quickly as possible. The integration process starts with Finnish language learning. In regular integration training for immigrants, the lessons are mostly based on sitting in the classroom and having lectures. The participants of the courses are people from around the world, with different life skills, different cultural backgrounds, different mother tongues, all mixed in the same lesson and forced to follow the same study curriculum.

The method of teaching Finnish language is “Finnish to Finnish”. Obviously, there is a big lack of common factors of communication. The diversity of cultures is rarely used as a tool of studying in the classroom. The lessons are mostly based on “how not to make mistakes”. People from different nationalities and different educational and professional backgrounds are all required to take the same lessons. The existing practice and quality of the integration process also somewhat differs between different cities and municipalities.

The combination of the aspects mentioned above makes the learning process sometimes long, rigid, and even boring. Thus, heavy frustration is experienced both among the immigrant students and among the teachers. This kind of learning process doesn't bring the group together. Besides, in the case of asylum seekers, who have had a rough past in most cases, going through such a long and frustrating process is simply not an effective way for them to positively integrate to neither the Finnish labour market nor to the Finnish society.

Including art in the study process allows the students to make “good mistakes” and learn from those. As it is at the core of creating art to allow oneself to be creative, and it is not a severe problem if “mistakes” happen, students are not afraid of pushing themselves out of their comfort zone. Thus, a safe environment is created in the classroom and students can speak more freely. Students are

more likely to set free from the pressure of learning and a stressless learning process is born.

9 PANDO - THE FINAL EXHIBITION INSTALLATION



PICTURE 5. Khalid Imran: *Pando*, 2018, video mapping installation, an installation view at gallery Himmelblau's puuvillasali (2018).

As my final exhibition artwork, I created a video mapping installation titled *Pando* (PICTURE 5). *Pando* is Latin for "I spread". The video duration was 34 minutes. It was a collage of video works made for multiple community art projects I had been working on during my Fine Art studies in TAMK. The video artworks that were used in *Pando* were made separately, but they all fall under the same umbrella of "art as a tool of empowerment". *Pando* was exhibited at the *HOT FUTURES Degree Show* of the Fine Art study path of Tampere University of Applied Sciences, during spring 2018 in Gallery Himmelblau.

9.1 Background of the artwork

With community art as my medium, I have been studying the phenomenon of social alienation and how to battle it with art and creativity. This was also my focus point during my art education in TAMK. As my final artwork, I wanted to create an art piece that would combine selected community art projects which I

worked with while I was studying. This is how *Pando* was born. *Pando* showed my own artistic journey throughout my studies in TAMK. It also depicts how I was empowered by those community-based artworks I was working on in order to empower the oppressed.

The people seen on the canvas have all played important roles in planning and creating the video works. In a way this is also their art, their stories, which I have brought to life with them. The different groups I have been working with include refugees, immigrants, families, and youth with fewer opportunities.

None of these works were originally made with the intention of showing them in an exhibition. They were end products of workshops, i.e. from the *KOTIO* project, as well as social media campaign materials to tackle hate speech. Bringing them together in the gallery space poses new questions: What happens to a social media campaign video in a gallery setup? What is the role of the artist here? Who is the empowerer, and who will be empowered?

9.2 The artwork and medium choices

I wanted to use moving image in *Pando* because it is a versatile tool for artistic expression. For me, moving image in *Pando* also symbolized those people's lives who appeared in the video, the people who had been in a constant move (PICTURE 6).



PICTURE 6. Khalid Imran, *Pando*, 2018, video installation (2018).

The videos were projected and mapped across four painting canvases of different sizes (PICTURE 8). I decided to use the video mapping technique to metaphorize the different stories coming from around the world.

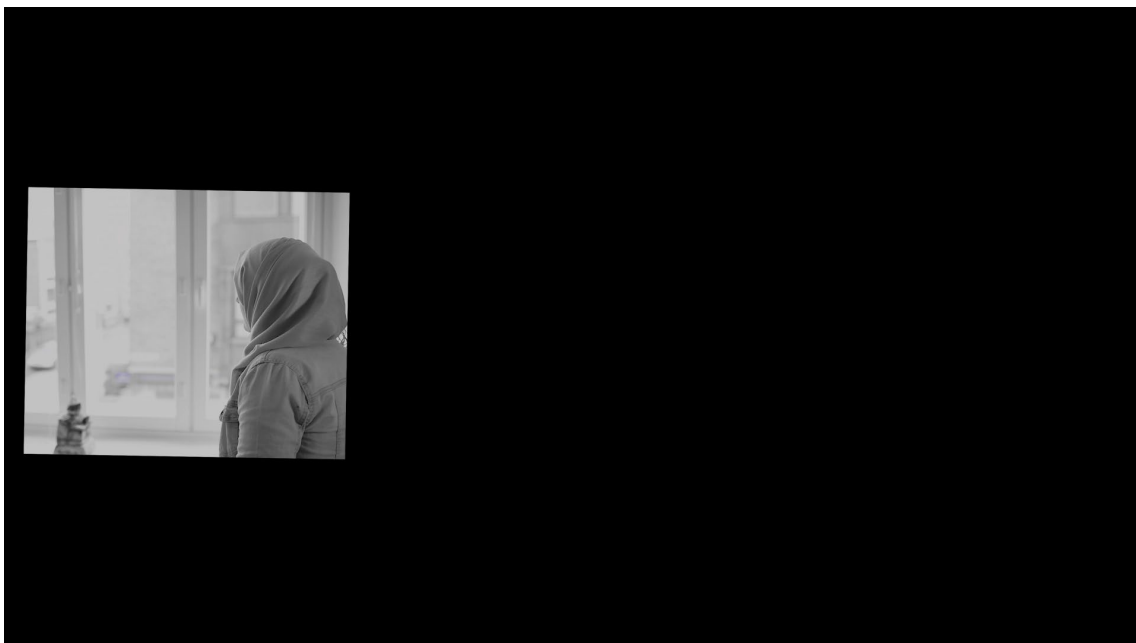
The context of each video dealt with personal as well as communal stories of the people seen in the video collage. They were sort of moving portrait paintings of the characters in the video.



PICTURE 7. A photo documentation of *Pando* in the exhibition space in gallery Himmelblau. Photography by Khalid Imran, 2018.



PICTURE 8. Khalid Imran, *Pando*, 2018, video installation. Detail of the video. Screenshot by Khalid Imran.



PICTURE 9. Khalid Imran, *Pando*, 2018, video installation. Detail of the video. Screenshot by Khalid Imran.

10 CONCLUSIONS

There are many concrete examples around the world of community-based art projects and their empowering effects on the participants. My projects that I discussed in this thesis showed similar positive results based on the feedback.

Integration should be a two-way process. In the case of Finland, the migrant community needs to learn how to live in the Finnish cultural environment. At the same time the native Finns need to learn how to live in the fast-growing multicultural Finland. When both the native Finn and migrant communities merge with positivity, integration turns into inclusion.

While working with these community art projects, I have seen the empowering effects on the participants first-hand. My role as an artist was to empower the participants. But each time I had seen a participant being empowered, I myself was empowered too. This experience helped me to navigate myself towards my own goals and interests. Turns out, the empowerer became empowered by empowering. Art facilitated this process.

Art can create and facilitate a safe environment to have a positive dialogue. I think art should not only be shown in galleries, or just collected, art should be used. It should be inclusive and engaging. If art practices and artistic approach is taken more into consideration for the integration training for migrants, Finland can have a positive effect on including its fast-growing migrant communities into Finnish society. Art is a tool of empowerment.

Khalid Imran's video installation Pando was charmingly presented as painting canvases of different sizes acted as screens on their traditional easels. The installation's rich content created with community art methods opens the world of people from different cultures in a valuable and respectful way. (Aamulehti 2018.) (Translation by the author of this thesis.) (Appendix 4.)

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12 LIST OF PICTURES

Picture 1: A documentation from Khalid Imran's notebook (2014).

Picture 2: A documentation from *Monessa Mielessä* community art project (2014).

Picture 3: A digital poster of the *KOTIO* project. The *Finnish Children and Youth Foundation*, 2017.

Picture 4: A documentation of a performance in Hämeenlinna, 2019. A screenshot by Khalid Imran, 2021.

Picture 5: *Pando*, an installation view at gallery Himmelblau (2018).

Picture 6: *Pando*, 2018, video installation (2018).

Picture 7: A photo documentation of *Pando* (2018).

Picture 8: Detail of the video installation *Pando*. Screenshot by Khalid Imran, 2021.

Picture 9: Detail of the video installation *Pando*. Screenshot by Khalid Imran, 2021.

13 APPENDICES

Appendix 1.

A pre-task of Khalid Imran to Tampere University of Applied Sciences, 2014. A screenshot by Khalid Imran, 2021.

S.M. Khalid Imran
Pre-task 2

Nalien (Native alien)

Few facts:

- Integration for immigrants is bureaucratic. Finnish language lessons that are offered by the Employment and Economic Development office during this process also follow the same path.
- The lessons being provided as a part of the integration should be more pedagogic not bureaucratic.
- There should be more diversity and creativity introduced in the integration trainings to make it more efficient.
- People with different academic skills are all mixed in the same lesson and forced to follow the same method of studies.
- Social alienation is a burning issue. Not only the young natives but also the aliens (immigrants) are facing the very same challenge.

Idea of the project:

Develop a visual method of teaching Finnish language for immigrants.

(It is a two-way method: The teachers should provide more visual (e.g. using images, drawings) grammatical lessons and the students shall be asked to produce images individually and/or in groups that contextualize the lessons that they are being taught.)

Integrating art in language studies:

- Studies showed students creating images enhance language learning in three different ways:
 - They are more involved, confident, and productive.
 - Positive change in the classroom environment that is more self conscious and conducive to language learning. Students are more able to perform cognitively demanding tasks, and the quality of their written and spoken language improves.
 - Motivation also increases when they share artwork with classmates.
- Art more actively engages students in their own learning processes on a personal, intellectual and physical level.
- When students cooperate with each other to create visual images and tell their stories, the class develops a sense of group unity, and individual and cultural differences are accepted.
- Student-created images can introduce new subject matter because they are more real, vivid, and meaningful to the students lives. Thus the writing is contextualized and personal.
- Second language education goes beyond language itself to the study of culture and society. So the integration of art experiences has an important role to play here. Art helps students to link the language they are learning to its culture.
- Through the creation of images students have the opportunity to use skills that maybe stronger for them than more traditional academic skills. It provides the students more balanced, holistic and cognitive educational experience.

End words:

Integration can be a long and demanding process. When the courses or trainings offered by the authority become difficult to understand for the lack of having a common language, it can easily turn boring and frustrating both for the participants and for the instructors.

- Finland is now in a unique position to learn from the mistakes of other countries and can change the course of history by making positive integration of immigrants.

Art can change this scenario.

Appendix 2.

Example of an exercise from a workshop. A segment from the teaching material in Finnish from *KOTIO*'s homepage,

<https://www.nuori.fi/static/f5819890827fa4e18d75f402ee110dea/Harjoitteita-kielenoppimiseen%20teatteri-ja-kuvataide-1.pdf>. Retrieved on 29.10.21. A screenshot by Khalid Imran, 2021.

Kuvallinen ilmaisu



Piirtäminen silmät kiinni

Jokaiselle annetaan paperi ja mieleisen värinen kynä. Taustalle laitetaan rauhallista, mutta iloista musiikkia. Osallistujat sulkevat silmät (Huom. kaikki eivät välttämättä halua. Silloin voi katsoa esimerkiksi ikkunasta ulos, kunhan ei paperia.) Ajatellaan, että kynä tanssii paperilla musiikin tahdissa noin 2 - 3 minuuttia. Avataan silmät ja keskustellaan lopputuloksista. Voi tehdä toisen kerran uudella paperilla ja musiikilla. Tarkoitus on tutustua piirtämiseen ja myös tehdä "abstraktia" taidetta.



Kuvien purkamisessa voi käyttää myös adjektiiveja sisältäviä sanalappuja tai -palikoita.



Appendix 3.

Home Page of *Kulttuuriosuuskunta Uulu*, <https://uulu.fi/>

Home Page of *Vaara-kollektiivi*, <https://www.vaarakollektiivi.fi/>

Appendix 4.

An extracted segment of the critique about *HOT FUTURES Degree Show* published on Aamulehti website in 2018. Retrieved by Khalid Imran on 11.02.2019

11/2/2019

Valmistuvat uudet kuvataiteilijat näyttävät monipuolisuutensa tamperelaisissa gallerioissa | Aamulehti

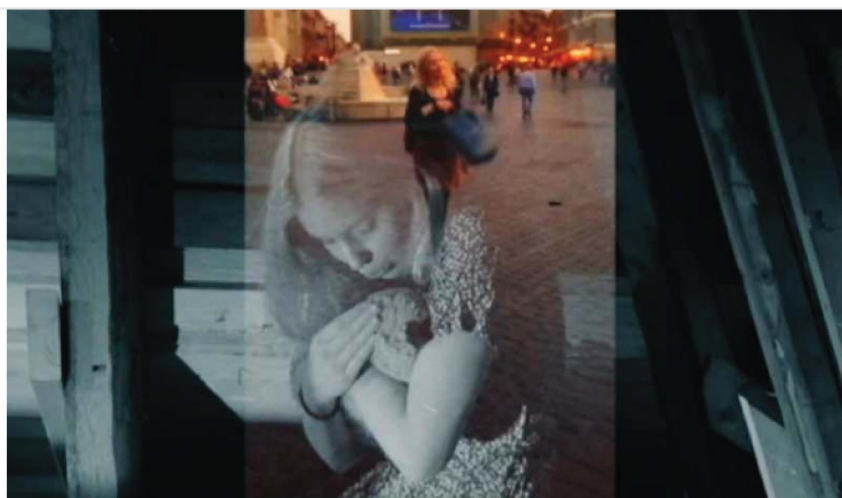
Tilaa

Etusivu

Asiakaspalvelu

Kirjaudu

Valikko


[← Etusivu](#)
[Seuraava >](#)


Veera Nelimarkan Dance Makabre on monikerroksinen teos kuolemanpelosta.

Khalid Imranin videoinstallaatio *Pando* on pantu esille hurmaavasti, kun screeneinä toimivat erikokoiset maalauskanavat perinteisissä telineissään. Installaation runsas, yhteisötaidemenetelmin syntynyt sisältö avaa erilaisista kulttuureista tulevien ihmisten maailmaa arvokkaalla ja arvostavalla tavalla.

12:sta Tamkin taiteilijasta maalauksia näemme vain kolmelta, Nelimarkalta, **Anniina Puirakselta** ja **Konsta Koivistolta**. Etenkin Koivisto pysäyttää, hänellä on varma ja energinen ote.

Kolmessa galleriassa

Saskia, Rajatila ja Mältinranta ovat nyt Kankaanpään taidekoulusta valmistuvien näyttämöinä.

Saskiassa koin koskettaviksi **Karita Heikkisen** puupiirroksiset, jotka

TIETOSUOJA

Lisätiedot almamedia.fi/tietosuoja



Käytämme evästeitä!

Käytämme Alma Median sivustoilla evästeitä. Jatkamalla sivuston selaamista hyväksyt evästeiden käytön.



Sallitko sijaintitiedon käytön?

Alma Media voi tarjota sijaintisi perustuen kohdennettua sisältöä, mainontaa ja säätietoja. Sijaintitiedot voidaan yhdistää palveluiden käytöstä kerättyihin tietoihin.

[Älä salli sijaintia](#) [Salli sijainti](#)



Luet

- 1 Koti tiloi
"Vel
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- 2 Bus:
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- 5 Törl
kuv: