



Understanding the effects of community arts projects: A case study of Be Part! of Elegia delle cose perdute

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CONCEPT AND MANAGER:

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Aims & Context

| **Understanding the effects of**

Be Part! of Elegia delle cose perdute project (23. 1. 2023–13. 2. 2023)

How does the project: enhance the visibility of marginalized groups, promote a sense of belonging, and reinforce civil society?

| **Immigration to Iceland is on the rise for the past 20 years**

17,487 migrants arrived to Iceland in 2022

(Statistics Iceland 2023a).

— 4,516 of those are forced migrants seeking international protection

— Leading countries of origin: Ukraine (2,343) and Venezuela (1,209) (Directorate of Immigration, 2023)

Total population of Iceland as of January 1st, 2023: 387,758

(Statistics Iceland 2023b)



Methodology

| **Qualitative case study design**

| **2 phase-research:**

1st phase – exploratory stage: 4 semi-structured expert interviews with employees of the Red Cross, the municipality of Reykjanesbær, and the Hamarinn Youth Centre in Hafnarfjarð

2nd phase – (off-site and on-site research):

- Monitoring meetings and rehearsals via video recordings
- Short questionnaire distributed to refugees and asylum seekers participating in the project (Community members)
- 4 focus group discussions (FG)
- Participant observations and field notes

| **Analysis: open coding and hermeneutic analysis**



Composition of the focus groups

FOCUS GROUP	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	GENDER	IMMIGRATION STATUS	ROLE IN THE PROJECT
FG 1	12	Iraq (4), Syria (3), Nigeria (1), Venezuela (4)	FEMALE (8), MALE (4)	Asylum granted (8), Asylum seeking (4)	COMMUNITY MEMBERS (12)
FG 2	17	Iceland (3), France (3), Italy (6), Czech Republic (3), Venezuela (1), Spain (1)	FEMALE (9), MALE (8)	Asylum granted (17)	PERFORMERS (17)
FG 3	11	Ukraine (4), Venezuela (1), Iraq (1), Palestina (3), Syria (1)	FEMALE (6), MALE (5)	12 Asylum granted (6), Asylum seeking (3), Unknown (2)	COMMUNITY MEMBERS (11)
FG 4	14	Czech Republic (1), Iceland (3), Italy (2), Ukraine (2), Venezuela (3), Iraq (2), Spain (1)	FEMALE (9), MALE (5)	Asylum granted (5), Asylum seeking (2)	PERFORMERS (7), COMMUNITY MEMBERS (6), LOCAL (1)



Findings

01

Fostering new relationships, bonding, and compassion

02

Overcoming cultural barriers through movement

03

Improving confidence and mental health

Continuation of the project or organizing similar activities is highly welcomed by the project's target group

Enabled locals to re-evaluate how they perceive themselves and Icelanders in general: cold and distanced vs. caring and kind



01 Fostering new relationships, bonding, and compassion

Bonding and making connections were the most recurring topics during FGs after expressions of joy and happiness from participating in the project

| Creating family-like connections

We have different cultures. But when we are all here, we do not have, everybody does... are seemed to be brought into same house, it all seems like one. There was no tribalism, or “this is my culture, this is not my culture”, we just go together.

AMELIA, COMMUNITY MEMBER

| Strong interpersonal bonds which disregard cultural differences



**Shared child-like experience helped strengthen the connection
between participants**

And it's funny to me, because sometimes the men and women seem even more playful than the kids. You know, because kids are allowed to be playful, and the [adults], they-, they are refugees in a different country, they, they're allowed, or allowed themselves to be playful. So, we all create spaces where they can be playful. So, it's uh, generous of them to let themselves be that way, but it's also necessary [chuckles], I think, even. And like, that's what brings us together, this like, really child-like openness and playfulness to even be silly.

ANNA, PERFORMER



**Dancing exercises bolstered interpersonal connections
and bonds: manipulation, trust and balancing exercises**

And there is also, perhaps the issue of trust. Because at first, lots of people I saw they were like looking like “Ah, you’re from another country” and everyone was a little bit shy. But you see this progression of how people act. Like in the last rehearsal when we had these exercises dealt with the trust, when you have just to fall down and you have to tru-, to trust another person, because you can just fall down and, and hurt yourself. But that was really cool also, to see that people started connecting, not only with people from their countries, but from people from other countries. And that was like “Wow”, so, people just lost those, like, mind “Oh, I can’t come to this person or that person”. And that was like erasing those borders.

CLAIRE, COMMUNITY MEMBER



| **Community members felt less isolated**

| **Project promoted compassion and admiration among non-Community member participants and their desire to continue providing support to Community members**

I'd say I'm in awe because of the special feeling of getting to know someone without knowing so much about them. Uh, but physically. Getting to know someone physically. Uh, and also in awe because of them being in such an uncomfortable situation in life, uh. Yeah, just the stress of their life is so huge, we, that we don't even understand it, but still, they're able to be creative and free. I'm in awe of that.

MIA, PERFORMER



02 Overcoming cultural barriers through movement

Verbal vs. physical communication – movement transcends cultural differences

I think even that, that yes, there is different cultures, but because we are working with movement and stuff like that, I, I don't see this difference in the cultural stuff that much, because we are all doing the same in a very cultural-less principles, let's say. Like, you, you have a very specific task to do, which, movement-wise, and it's respectful, it's not about, like, you don't touch too much. It's always like in this space that I think everybody becomes in, in a sa-, in the same terms. So, I don't see this cultural difference that much, when we are working. Maybe after, yes. When, when we are chatting and everyone is talking about their own experience, countries, whatever. But in the working space. I, I don't see this difference. Or I don't feel it.

BEATRICE, PERFORMER



For me this project is really great for adaptation of people in a foreign land. Because we all here are foreigners. We are not at home. Lots of people do not speak any English or Icelandic and they feel isolated. So, this is a great example how through our bodies, without communicating with our tongue, we can communicate with other people. How we can open, how we can make friends and so on. Uh, this is really great example of how you help, you can help people in other countries feel more like at home. And to not feel like, the hostile environment. Because you can feel safe, and this is like, I think the most important thing for all of us here.

CLAIRE, COMMUNITY MEMBER

Reducing cultural barriers through movement as a path to social integration

Expert interviews also predicted positive impact on social integration as one of potential outcomes of the project

Dance reveals the common denominator – being human above all else

- Being treated as a human and as an equal means being treated with respect
- Community arts projects can reduce inequalities (Catalano & Morales 2022)



03 Improving confidence and mental health

Learning how to open up to others and express themselves freely, without insecurities or shyness

Gaining confidence strengthens a sense of security

For me, I think I, I became more confident in myself, because when you come into a new country, you feel like a little bit lost. For me. Because you don't know some rules, you don't know something, so you feel like a little bit un-, not confident, actually. And this project helped me to feel it and to feel like uh, s-, if something happened, I will receive help if I ask.

PAULINE, COMMUNITY MEMBER



| **Gaining a sense of purpose – not feeling
“just like a piece of furniture”**

| **Relaxing, releasing energy**

| **Escape from daily realities of the Community members’
precarious conditions, sense of loneliness and trauma**

For me, that was release. Psychological and physical. Because I have great problems with my spine and muscles, because of stress. And it really helped me, like to [inhales and exhales] and feel a little bit of joy. Because, when your life is very uncertain, and you are like a hedgehog, like, you’re gather yourself together to find another job, to make new projects, you need to survive. And when you are in this mode of survival, you forget to get satisfaction and joy from life. And that was like this drop of joy, uh, that, that is returning me to life. Because now I have more forces, even physical, I’m more productive. Because, when I’m happy, I can do much more than when I’m upset.

CLAIRE, COMMUNITY MEMBER



Conclusion

Community arts project can have positive impact on forced migrants

Be Part project enabled:

- creating strong interpersonal bonds
- overcoming cultural and language barriers through movement
- gaining confidence and psychological release

Project confirms previous findings regarding the potential of dance to evoke empathy (Catalano & Morales 2022) and confirms that community art project can be used for building primary relationships and social networks essential for social integration of migrants (Bosswick & Heckmann 2006) and it bolsters the argument that leisure activities engaging both migrants and mainstream society can build ties between the two groups (Fong & Berry 2017)

Providing opportunities for forced migrants to express themselves creatively can be a good starting point for addressing their social needs and a tool for social integration



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