

## **Love Talks and Neighbourhood: Promoting encounters, tolerance and social inclusion by means of art in daily life and the living environment in Finnish Lapland**

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### **Abstract**

This article will introduce the *Love Talks and Neighbourhood* (later *Love Talks*) project, part of the AMASS, Acting on the Margin: Arts as Social Sculpture project. *Love Talks* was realised in Finnish Lapland in 2020, as part of an effort by local artists and art education students to explore how arts initiatives can build tolerant, community-focused neighbourhoods, while reflecting on how such activities can be scaled up to larger initiatives. The artists and art educators involved in the project took on the roles of teachers, developers, enablers, curators, facilitators, producers and creators of a new dialogic operational culture. The project asked whether socially engaged art can provide new tools for social interaction and increased collaboration. Can it lead to a new dialogue, critical discussions and new forums for participation? This paper highlights the importance of paying attention to how activities are organised and realised in the diverse and often challenging environments characteristic of socially engaged art and community-based art education. It explores how to promote encounters, tolerance and well-being through the use of art, and the role of culture and art in promoting social inclusion, capacity building, networking and participation in daily life and living environments.

**Key words:** Socially engaged art, participation, practising tolerance, marginalisation, art-based action research

### **Prologue**

*It all started when two Iraqi asylum seekers who had settled in Rovaniemi, Finnish Lapland were granted asylum. The moment was so important for them that they wanted to give a gift in return, to share something beautiful about their own culture. They came up with the idea to build a scale model of one of the most famous buildings in*

*ancient Babylon, the Ishtar Gate. The gate, known for its brilliant colours, was a show of love from King Nebuchadnezzar to his wife and was named after Ishtar, the goddess of love.*

## **1. Introduction**

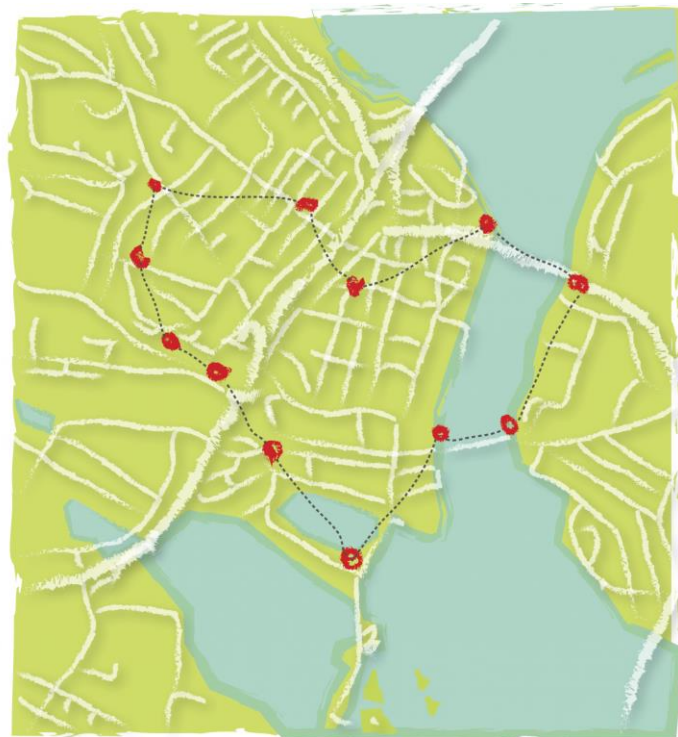
An impressive art work graces the banks of the Kemi river in Rovaniemi. This work was created and installed by Iraqis Al-Fateh Ali Mousa and Saba Majid, immigrants to Finland, in 2020. The work was a gesture of their appreciation to the community of Rovaniemi for giving them a new home as refugees. The story of their art work is revealed in the prologue of this article. The essence of their gesture became the inspiration of a city-wide project that was implemented in 2020 across Rovaniemi.



*Figure 1. Al-Fateh Ali Mousa and Saba Majid in front of the gate (4 meters high, 5,5 meters long, 1,5 meters wide) at the opening ceremony. Photography: Mirja Hiltunen, 2020.*

In this article we will introduce the *Love Talks and Neighbourhood* (later *Love Talks*) project, part of the AMASS, *Acting on the Margin: Arts as Social Sculpture*

project (AMASS). *Love Talks* was realised in Finnish Lapland in 2020, as part of an effort by local artists and art education students to develop arts initiatives that can build tolerant, community-focused neighbourhoods, and to reflect on how such activities can be scaled up to larger initiatives. The project arose out of a desire to promote interactions between people – neighbours, strangers on the street, family members – that are open-minded and free of preconceived notions.



*Figure 2. The artistic activities that constituted the Love Talks project were laid out in the shape of a love heart across the neighbourhoods of Rovaniemi as illustrated in the city map. Graphic design by Heidi Luokkanen, 2020.*

The project approached the city as a common home for all its inhabitants. Pieta Koskenniemi, a local director, live art maker and art educator, began curating and planning the Ishtar Gate in 2019. Later, Pieta and her team invited additional collaborators – other artists as well as faculty and students from the University of Lapland Faculty of Art and Design – to join the AMASS project. The organizing group eventually grew to consist of two curators, two researchers, eight artists from different fields and four art education students.

Socially engaged art is defined for the purposes of this paper as an artistic practice that requires a meaningful interaction with communities and that has broader social, educational or political intentions at its core (Desai, 2020; Kester, 2004). These kind of art practices include collaborative and community-based processes, and often public and dialogic practices, that rely on social intercourse and exchange (Gablik, 1995; Kwon, 2002; Lacy, 1995; Olsen, 2019). When speaking about socially engaged art we refer also to relational art or relational aesthetics (Kester, 2004).

The city of Rovaniemi is home to different immigrant groups, experiencing various degrees of marginalisation. While many are refugees or displaced individuals and families who have been provided with new opportunities to permanently settle and live in Rovaniemi, many migrant workers, foreign students and knowledge workers also migrate to the city on an annual basis. The latter group migrate to the city for work and study purposes spanning from one to many years. To a varying extent, these individuals, families and even smaller communities may experience discrimination due to difficulties in learning the Finnish language, while many would also not be able to speak Swedish or English as alternative languages. Additionally, a lack of participation in local activities such as cultural events, and the harsh climate during the long and dark arctic winter, which forces people indoors further impacts the integration of immigrants within local communities. Like other socially engaged art projects in Northern Finland, we aimed to seek alternative solutions to societal problems by encouraging communication between different parties in a diversifying society and levelling access to cultural activities regardless of background for both locals, immigrants and other minority groups (Hiltunen, Mikkonen & Laitinen, 2020; Jokela, Hiltunen, & Härkönen, 2015).

The authors of this article are deeply aware that social issues are connected to power relations and politics in society, however, we still believe it is worthwhile to explore the potential impact of an art event, its meanings to wider society and how it might have the power to affect social issues such as the fostering cross-cultural understanding and integration of displaced peoples. As associates of the AMASS project, we share the project's conception of art's role in society, as stated on the project's home page (AMASS, 2020):

The arts can move people, educate societies and question widely accepted narratives. The arts can also shed new light on the past, hold

up a mirror to contemporary life and launch new perspectives for the future. AMASS, an arts-based action research project, aims to create concrete opportunities for people to come together and accompany artists as agents in creative projects and interpretations.

In the *Love Talks* project, artists and art educators play the roles not only of artists or teachers but of developers, enablers, curators, facilitators, producers and creators of a new dialogic operational culture.

The research questions motivating this artistic experiment are based on the artists' various roles in the event. Our main research interests concerning such roles were how arts initiatives can build tolerant, community-focused neighbourhoods; what kinds of stories the artists connected to the activities and the unfolding of the processes; and how such activities can be scaled to larger initiatives. Key methodologies selected were open-ended artistic experiments, group discussions and interviews.

## **2. Role of artists: Interaction and connections with one another**

The artist and art educator teams involved in the project implemented arts-based strategies to develop community and social development and to expand roles for artists in a small but multicultural Northern city. We explored ways to expand the powerful impact of the arts to benefit more people and communities by inviting artists to take part in all stages of the study, from planning to evaluation, and by offering open space for citizens to take part in the art workshops and public art events. The most important social impact of the art was promoting interaction and connections between people, opening up discussions about meanings and how they relate to intercultural connections.

As in all types of relational art practices, the conceptual or physical realization of a piece relies on human reaction: on the implicit or explicit exchange of information between the piece of art and the people who witness or take part in it (Kester, 2004; Lacy, 1995; Lippard, 1997). Socially engaged art relies on the participatory or the relational context, which depends on the capacity to build a relationship between collaborators and audiences (Olsen, 2019). Earlier studies have pointed out that successful socially engaged art depends on a combination of artists' and art educators' professional skills in their mediums, pedagogical capabilities and knowledge of participatory art methods

(Hiltunen et al., 2020; Hiltunen, 2010). The venue or public environment for the art also plays an important role in terms of actualising participation.

Our aim was to attract participants from the general public, including immigrants, elderly people, young adults and people from different cultural backgrounds. Members of the Rovaniemi public who participated in art-making events can be viewed as active participants as they contribute specific meanings and agency to the project through their expressions, for example in the mural workshop. Similarly, many of the artists also found themselves in active roles from the perspective of community participation, which is typical for conversational art in general. The role of art as a space of mutual knowledge creation and negotiation is vital in promoting socially engaged art. The question of shaping belonging, self-esteem and genuine understanding of one another highlights the importance of the encounter and the subsequent negotiation of meaning.

Initially, the team planned to include “blind dates” in the project activities, in which unknown members of Rovaniemi neighbourhoods would be invited to garden, home and front yard parties. However, these plans had to be changed due to the impact of COVID-19 in the summer of 2020. Instead, unique community arts meetings hosted in public spaces around Rovaniemi – amid the ongoing emergency situation of the pandemic – were incorporated into the project in late summer.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic began in winter 2020, the project invited special groups to join the exploration of the themes Neighbourhood and *Love Talks*. These preliminary workshops considered the fields of art, culture, health and social care. The operational environment encompassed art workshops carried out in Lapin Muistiyhdistys Ry [Memory association of Lapland], a daytime activity centre for the elderly. Art education students organized four art workshops; the participants were 12 elderly women.

Rovaniemi Youth Service was also invited to join and explore the everyday environment at the city centre with their young customers. All the art works from these preliminary workshops were later exhibited in the workshops space at the Revontuli shopping mall as part of the main activity week in September 2020.



*Figure 3. The open workshops space at the Revontuli shopping mall invites the public to join. Photography: Mirja Hiltunen, 2020.*

Socially engaged art derives much of its meaning from interactions and encounters with the public. *Love Talks* events were open to community participants, fellow artists and the wider public during the activity week (occurring during Rovaniemi-viikko, or Rovaniemi Week, 6.-12.9.2020). The workshops were set up in public locations to ensure access for audiences; community interaction with the exhibited works and ongoing workshops occurred at the centrally located Revontuli shopping mall. The number of active participants in the five open workshops was approximately 90-100. The number of passers-by with whom one of the facilitators had deeper discussions related to the theme was approximately 70-80, of whom many were migrants. The musical performances of the Finnish sledge songs and their Roma musical versions were well attended as all the concerts were fully booked.



*Figure 4. A sticker-making workshop led by artist Juha Mytkänimi introduced the world of sticker culture; participants made handmade stickers on the themes of love and acceptance. Photography: Mirja Hiltunen, 2020.*





*Figure 5. A mural painting workshop led by artists Leena Pukki and Juha Mytkäniemi included indoors designing and outdoors painting days. Photography: Mirja Hiltunen, 2020.*

Musical and performing arts activities were organized at the same venue, including performances of Finnish sled songs and their Roman musical versions and a street dancing workshop titled One Love Jamboree.



*Figure 6. Musical and performing arts initiatives included Finnish sledge songs by Minna Siitonen and their Roman musical versions by Hilja Grönfors. Photography: Mirja Hiltunen, 2020.*

### **3. Research methods**

Collaborative working methods that are based on sharing experiential knowledge and learning involve situations that require understanding the experiences of others and seeking solutions together. Art-based action research develops participatory and dialogical processes and prioritises participants' agency and involvement (Jokela et al., 2015). It is a research strategy that combines artistic practices with development research in formal and informal education, regional development and community empowerment. Stakeholders and community members are often active members in the research processes. Art-based action research is especially rooted in process-oriented dialogical and place-specific forms of art, such as environmental and community art and pedagogical settings and practices of community-based art education (Jokela et al., 2019; Jokela et al., 2015).

The research data used consists of visual documentation of the process and artworks created, which illustrate experiences and symbolize value transformations, as well as participatory observation and interviews. As found in other arts-based research, the literature shows that the arts can enable non-verbal knowledge transferral (Brown, 2001; Leavy, 2017; Stevens & McKechnie, 2005). Images and art can offer a practical medium, through which facilitators and artist-educators can empower participants by facilitating expressions of complex ideas about their 'art worlds' (Becker, 1990). The consideration of multiple views and concepts, and its articulation fosters the participants' understanding of their role within a complex multicultural society.

In *Love Talks*, the key data collection methods included participant and external observation, focus group discussions and note taking. Workshops enabled the implementation of focused activities and processes according to how the artists envisaged the production of smaller events. The workshops were organised by lead artists. The artist-researcher and project lead rotated amongst the workshops over the period of the event (31.7-20.9.2020) to observe the artist-participants and audience members from the wider public. Group discussions were arranged before, during and after the event with the artist-participants. Data were collected using digitally recorded interviews, photos and video, as well as research diaries and notes. Analytical approaches used for evaluation purposes were photo and video analysis. Content and visual analysis were used for data analysis.

The evaluation in this article is specifically focused on the participating artists. We engaged the artists in focus group discussions after the event. The evaluations and assessments of results were collected through semi-structured interviews with the artists. At the end of the group discussions, we asked the artists about their experiences and what they found evocative. Interview questions for the semi-structured interviews included themes such as the stories that were conveyed through the art activities and their relation to neighbourhoods. In addition, the questions focussed on how artists used their art to understand and process ideas about inclusion, tolerance and engagement. The enquiry further included themes such as barriers that artists tried to bridge within their communities, how the experiments enabled them to generate new outcomes and how their roles impacted on their interventions. The artists were also asked about whether they recognised any novel aspects to the experiments and how the intervention *Love Talks* could be scaled up

nationally. The interviews ended by questioning the artists on their roles in policy making in their local communities.

The limitations of the evaluation were that the researchers followed a qualitative approach by using interview data, hence the findings were based on the meanings and understandings that the participant-artists formulated through reflections on the events. Quantitative approaches to evidence-based assessment are preferred in evidence-based policy, which is predominantly based on quantitative data and the perception that 'data' needs to be 'factual' (Toulmin, 2001, cf. Belfiore & Bennett, 2010, p. 134) to be relevant in policy making contexts. This approach to assessment has been critiqued in the field of the arts, as it is based on "socially and culturally constructed notions", hence some researchers propose assessments that use qualitative data and approaches used in the social sciences (Belfiore & Bennett, 2010, p. 126; Galloway & Dunlop, 2007).

#### **4. Findings: "Different ways of encountering, even in passing by, in short encounters, you can touch on really big questions."**

The stories that the artists used as inspiration for their projects were connected to their personal identities and their roles and careers as artists or arts promoters and curators. This event was used to express themselves and share their work for the benefit of their communities and careers. All artists saw strong connections between the audiences and how they worked to engage with people. Neighbourhoods and connectedness to people and other cultures were strong themes that emerged from the interviews, as were stories of seeking acceptance as people and artists. For example, one artist said in an interview:

My project speaks about love - this thing in Lapland is a very big problem. Here the people don't like contact with one another. I once told people here to just open (their) minds. Just a smile for another person (because) another person (is) the same as you. My father always told me: "Love can build a bridge to light". I think the art thing is very important in the life. (participant, 2020)

The question of how tolerance can be promoted through arts was considered by many. While about three out of five artists felt that the project succeeded in creating or at least raising questions about tolerance, there were also strong opinions that the project failed to create awareness and that tolerance was not

improved after the project. One reason behind some such opinions was the impact of the pandemic.

All artists felt that questions of tolerance and inclusion are important and that the purpose of art is to ameliorate gaps and disconnections that cause these societal challenges (exclusion, intolerance, disengagement). Some artists commented on disengagement between cultural groups in Rovaniemi and said that the challenges are too great to overcome, which causes great suffering to marginalised groups in the city. For example, from one interview:

If we create an atmosphere and an environment, and such a very permissive mood, I feel that the same space can be shared at the same time by teenagers and primary school children and the elderly, and immigrants alike. It is some concrete simple doing that can open up opportunities for dialogue and truly surprising events. It (doing) is that creates that encounter, discussion and dialogue. (participant, 2020)

Most barriers were identified to be those between people and cultures and the barriers artists face in securing meaningful work, income and the support needed to practise full time as artists. Lack of resources such as funding and time were identified as barriers to artistic production and sustainability. As stated by one interviewee:

More possibilities to make participatory art which means of course that the artist should have a salary to do it. And specifically, sufficient funding to compensate for the time of the artist who needs to be with people, engage with people on a deep level and lead them through an artistic process. (participant, 2020)

Most interviewees did not relate to a majority culture but rather with marginalisation, mainly due to the cultural group they belonged to or due to their role as artist (as artists they felt marginalised and some, as non-artists, felt marginalised within artist groups).

Many artists reported that their activities were not novel, but that they were meaningful. One artist commented that the total project had little novelty as it did not surpass boundaries between neighbourhoods as it set out to do. This was greatly due to the pandemic, which limited the coordination of the project. Due to the pandemic, plans changed along the process, affecting the structure

of the actions (and leading to the open access art space). The semi-structured interviews, a qualitative method selected for the assessment of the project, presented valuable insights into the experiences of the participating artists. Their narratives reveal, for example, how flexibility was embraced and how arts projects such as *Love Talks* was perceived as opportunities for encountering one another as neighbours, how important the role of serendipity is in meeting one another and the role of location and bringing the arts to the people.

I consider this (project) successful and for me rewarding – it being somehow flexible and going into many directions. The fact that things has changed and been on the move [referring to the COVID pandemic] may have enabled even more occasions to encounter [one another] if they had been determined closely half a year ago. (participant, 2020)

It happened somehow forced [to respond quickly to changes during the COVID pandemic]. So, what we did was already scaling, like progressing from a traditional thinking about workshops we instead took the event to a place [the Revontuli shopping centre in Rovaniemi] where people already go so that we can reach a much larger bunch of people. (participant, 2020)

Well, I learned or actually noted again that when you get people predisposed to the idea and they start to process: “OK, I see this kind of possibility here and now”, then people are really open and become easily inspired. (participant, 2020)

All artists felt that the project was very suitable in terms of scalability – that it could be rolled out from a city centre in Rovaniemi across all of Finland and in many neighbourhoods, but that limitations to funding would be the main barrier. As one artist said:

Activities in the art world are often based on project funding, relatively short projects like ours, with short-term funding. If we really want to create dialogue or connections between people, [such projects] should last longer. (participant, 2020)

If we want to scale what we did, let’s write up understandable directions how we did it [and] bring out the whole story. Then just proposing that the whole country of Finland is doing the same, for

instance every September being the September of Love. (participant, 2020)

While some artists reported in the interviews that they were able to convey the meanings they intended, some artists reported that they were not able to deliver their meanings and messages as anticipated, and that the connections and meanings they hoped to be able to make across cultural and language boundaries failed. For example:

When I started building Ishtar Gate I'm thinking maybe everything after that will change. But, I see nothing [has] changed. [It is] still [the] same. I need [for] the Suomi people [to] know who I am and from where [I] come and I need them [to] know me. (participant, 2020)

It would have been nice to have more things intersecting, putting different cultures and groups in the same space and seeing what happens, but OK even like this – this is a good beginning. This seems to be topical now, there is this kind of motion, like I'm all the time hearing and reading about people missing these kind of things (encounters) over borders. (participant, 2020)

Artists felt that the question of influencing policy through arts was very important but that it was mostly not thought of or considered by artists. Much potential for collaboration between the fields of arts and public policy making was acknowledged. Artists said they do not sufficiently pay attention to policy and they do not participate in such processes, as they are not asked to or involved by policy makers. They all were interested to become actors in such processes. As one artist said:

There are a lot of messages from communities wanting to have brief representations or concepts of art workshops. There are groups that are open to [this kind of] artistic work and those kinds of groups, but there are not many artists connecting them. The world of business and the fields of art and culture are not fronting each other. (participant, 2020)

## **5. Research outcomes, ethical considerations and project-specific challenges**

General feedback from people just passing by with whom the artist had conversations was very positive in general. The love-themed murals around

the city centre and the Ishtar Gate are still enriching the public art scene in Rovaniemi and have since received positive feedback from locals



*Figure 7. Love murals in the city centre of Rovaniemi. Photography: Mirja Hiltunen, 2020.*

The project received a significant amount of attention on social media during the activity week; online, people expressed a desire to see somebody organize a second Love Talk in the future. The collaboration with the Lapin Muisti yhdistys Ry [Memory Association of Lapland], a daytime activity centre for the elderly, has continued; two art education students are organizing more art workshops with elderly people in the spring of 2021.



The research was guided by relational accountability, which promotes respectful representation, reciprocity and the rights of the participants. The ethical principles and guidelines of the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (TENK) were considered throughout the course of the research. Ethical issues were taken into consideration at every phase of the project: planning the workshops, interacting with community members, data gathering, consideration of the right to stay anonymous or act under one's own name, the positions of the researchers and publication of the results. The ethical approaches of socially engaged art, community art and community-based art education involving marginalised participants have been discussed by various researchers (e.g. Kester, 2004).

There were some project-specific challenges that prevented collecting consent forms from the wider public, but all the main collaborators and artists were informed that they were taking part in a scientific study conducted at the University of Lapland. In this article we are focusing on the artists' points of views. They knew that participation in the study was voluntary and that there would be no negative consequences for them if they chose not to participate in the study or to withdraw from it. All the artists were willing to participate in the focus group discussions and interviews and to participate through artistic expression and making, sharing and exhibiting art, whether physical or digital. Both the participants and the researchers were provided copies of the consent forms.

Some project-specific challenges also arose due to how the activities, and participation in them by the organizers, artists, receiver participants and wider public, were impacted by the COVID pandemic. Initially, activities were planned to include sites in neighbourhoods and at peoples' houses and in their front gardens. As a result of the pandemic, some events had to be moved to larger public spaces. Originally, the *Love Talks* events were spread across Rovaniemi neighbourhoods so that, when plotted on a map, the locations formed a large heart shape. The locations of the events alone thus formed a strong symbol of love and connection, conveying meanings related to care and creating connections across neighbourhoods in a small Finnish city.

Meanings related to intercultural connections were strongly present in one of the artistic works, created by Iraqis Al-Fateh Ali Mousa and Saba Majid, immigrants to Finland. As asylum seekers, they chose to build a scale model of the Ishtar Gate, in a show of love for their new home country, Finland.



*Figure 8. A scale model of the Ishtar Gate standing on its site in the Rovaniemi public park, along the Kemi river. Photography: Mirja Hiltunen, 2020.*

Meanings embedded in local actions and the workshops for the elderly and youth were also strongly represented in the symbolism of other artworks, for example in the use of pastels, floral colours and love hearts in the sticker workshops and in people interconnecting in the mural-making activity. Meanings that derived from the musical and sledge song activities were also symbolised, including intergenerational and intercultural crossings and meetings between the inhabitants of the city and between Roma and Finnish peoples. The meanings of the activities were sender-driven due to the artists involved, who took agency in engaging with their community. The artists were from different cultural backgrounds and had varied personal histories and identities, but all wanted to and worked to engage with people from the city. One of the artists reflected on the process and found it very educative for herself as well:

[In the workshops] there emerges different kind of prejudices, also among the supervisors/facilitators – I discovered my own prejudices and therefore I was observing how I react to the participating people, if

I am acting differently with this person because of him being a man with an immigrant background, or someone being transgender; these kinds of thoughts you have to face. And then I look at the photos like “well, I have been photographing more of these ones than those ones [laughing]”. I find this very educative and this should be discussed more. (participant, 2020)

Members of the Rovaniemi public who participated in art-making events due to their active participation also ended up embedding specific meanings and agency into their expressions, for example in the mural workshop. Many of the artists were, however, also in receiving roles from the perspective of community participation.

I’m quite self-critical and I challenge myself in my art. How can I [as a facilitator] somehow quiet down that critical voice and give people more space? But still, it’s also important, when people are taking part in this kind of activity, especially if it’s a public art work, it should be one that you can stand up for, that is good enough. (participant, 2020)

The *Love Talks* project results are relevant to cultural policy in the Finnish Lapland region as it relates to the integration of immigrants and minority groups in mainstream culture. The role of art was seen as an active contributor to society, while the project’s potential was recognized also by the funding bodies, the Finnish Cultural Foundation’s regional Lappish fund and the City of Rovaniemi’s cultural services which supported the event. The research data and analysis forthcoming from the focus group discussions and the interviews that were conducted post-event with the artists for assessment purposes, provided data about the scalability and potential impact of artistic projects to mainstream cultural events for social, health, educational and environmental policy making. The documentary video of *Love Talks* has been selected to be screened at the virtual annual conference of the Nordic Council of Ministers hosted by the Finnish Ministry of Culture and Education in June, 2021.

## **6. Recommendations for refinement of future projects**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the project activities had to be limited and changed, which impacted the arrangements for and the scope of the event. The reach of the project was severely affected, but locally-inspired and bottom-up events like this, which follow the narratives of local (and marginalised) people and groups, sharing their stories, knowledge, skills and dreams, can be scaled

up to the national level. The various goals and objectives of the different parties involved should be turned into strengths that can serve as a basis for a new approach. As one participant suggested:

More resources, more time, more stuff. More individuals for the production team to better prepare things before the actual happening. I think these kinds of public arts spaces are extremely easy to realise in other municipalities or countries. It is a workable concept. (participant, 2020)

In the evaluation of *Love Talks*, the artists discussed topics such as how to encourage people to experience the opportunities that can be offered by art to create spaces for encounters such as stepping into artistic workshops. The artists reported that most of the passers-by in the mall had not experienced this kind of activity before. What was found to be successful were the succinct and sincere explanations by the facilitator of what was being done and why. The confidence of the artists in the significance of the project was also important to conveying its meaning. The open access workshops aimed at providing opportunities to participation for all groups, including immigrant communities, that are not usually included in the public art contexts of Rovaniemi.

The *Love Talks* and Neighbourhood project began with a dream of increasing awareness of what kind of ambience we want to have in our shared home, the city. There was also a hope of making this home better represent its varied population visually. Artists involved in the project shared a belief that art alone cannot change reality, but that it can be a significant factor in making alternative perspectives on everyday life visible and begin wider discussions of them in society.

As Augusto Boal (2000), the founder of Theatre of the Oppressed, has explained, insights in the moment are valuable, but to have a political dimension and significance, the artistic acts should be repeated hundreds of times.

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