

1. The role of culture in constructing active rural communities
2. Cultural activities constructing young people's participation

# The role of culture in constructing active rural communities

## **My doctoral thesis (2012): Village action and the production of an active village**

- The research question:
  - What is an active village?
  - How are active villages produced?
- The data of the study
  - national village action programmes
  - the Village of the Year competition
  - observation and interview in active villages

# The role of culture in constructing active rural communities

- *Villages are social spaces, based on community action and the commitment and the activeness of local people*
- *Culture has an important role in constructing the sense of local community and the local identities*

# The role of culture in constructing active rural communities

- Cultural heritage builds shared past and roots
- Village history books
- Cultural landscape
- Local traditions

# The role of culture in constructing active rural communities

- Culture as a part of local development projects – building the villages future
- Restoration of old village halls and other old buildings through EU-Leader funding
- Attracting tourists and visitors

# The role of culture in constructing active rural communities

- Culture building the sense of community
- Local identity and the sense of belonging
- Cultural events
- Having fun!

# The role of culture in constructing active rural communities

## Conclusions:

- The role of local communities is emphasized by neoliberal development. The responsibility of local welfare has been removed from public sector to civil society, individuals and local communities
  - Rural policy and community development project funding
- Culture constructs local communities, social capital, trust etc. – builds peoples motivation and resources to take more responsibility of local welfare and living conditions.

# Cultural activities constructing young people's participation

- The research project: cultural participation projects and acts targeted on young people that have been implemented in Central Finland since 2010's.
- The task of the research is to deepen the understanding of cultural participation in the case of young people.

# Cultural activities constructing young people's participation

Research questions:

- What is the role of culture and what kind of cultural activities have been included in the projects?
- How do people in the projects understand the concept of (cultural) participation? Does it mean being an active user of cultural activities, or do the projects also have objectives to increase young people's participation in a broader sense, for example, by giving participants opportunities to get involved in planning and decision making processes?
- How is culture related to other dimensions of participation, economic, political and social? Is it, for example, an instrument of preventing social exclusion and promoting active citizenship?

# Cultural activities constructing young people's participation

- Participation can be defined simply as taking a part in some activity.
  - Cultural participation = taking a part in cultural activities.
- The definitions of cultural participation vary from access to cultural activities to broader cultural rights of the citizens.
  - Participation means different things in different contexts, it can mean cultural experiences, cultural education, creative capabilities, cultural heritage, language, values, artistic expression, consuming arts, symbolic manifestation, identity etc.

# Participation

	Broad definition	Narrow definition
Cultural dimension	Creation of symbolic manifestations Decision-making on cultural matters	Access to cultural activities
Economic dimension	Participation in consumer society and in labor market	Financial access
Political dimension	New media technology and social networks Collective action Political consumerism	Conventional modes of political participation
Social dimension	All forms of social participation	Formal social participation

# Cultural activities constructing young people's participation

- The province of Central Finland
- 275 992 inhabitants
- consists of one bigger city, Jyväskylä (138 922 inhabitants), 22 smaller municipalities and large rural areas.
- 19 projects or actions in the area which have an objective to increase young people's participation and involve cultural and leisure activities.
- a great variation in size and budgets on the projects.

# Cultural activities constructing young people's participation

- 11 of the projects/acts (19 in total) are implemented in the provincial center, Jyväskylä city, and 8 in smaller municipalities.
- In 11 of the projects/acts an association is the main implementer, and in 5 a municipality. Only two of the projects are implemented by art institutions
- 6 of the projects are rural development projects, funded by European Union Leader initiative and 2 of them are multicultural projects targeted on immigrants.
- The preliminary results: Different objectives of cultural participation projects/acts:
  - 6 projects with economic objectives
  - 10 projects with political
  - 12 with social objectives.
  - 4 with artistic objectives.

# Cultural activities constructing young people's participation

**The economic objectives of cultural participation (6): The acts made to increase young people's' labor market capabilities – working life and self-employment skills**

- In two rural development projects there is an objective to teach young people entrepreneurial skills by organizing independently events and leisure activities.
- One multicultural project concentrates integrating immigrants to Finnish culture and society, and learning working life skills is one part of the process.
- In the game workshop project there is an objective to increase the participant's resources to find work in the game industry.
- Media and handcraft workshops are organized by the city of Jyväskylä to improve young people's working life skills in creative industry.
- Jelmu association/Ballroom Lutakko educates voluntary people to learn how to run a music club, to act as waiters, ushers and ticket vendors. Young people get a chance to become a member of artistic organization and at the same time they get work life experience and learn working life skills.

<http://www.jelmu.net/jelmu>

# Cultural activities constructing young people's participation

The political objectives of cultural participation (10) : the acts made to get young people express their opinions , influence the content of cultural activities and to promote active citizenship.

- In four of the projects there is an interest to let young people to influence what kind of cultural activities and art forms they would like to experience and also produce by themselves.
- Kivijärvi council is a youth council which concentrates on planning and organizing different leisure activities for local young people.
- In the city of Jyväskylä, there are several festivals and happenings where young people's' voluntary involvement have significant effect also on the content of the events which means that they have opportunity to get their voices heard.  
<http://wp.nuortenkeskisuomi.fi/nuoret/>
- The video project uses video making as an art tool to bring the opinions of young people out in public.
- In five projects there is also an objective to educate active citizens. They are rural community development projects that try to activate young people to get interested in developing their community, and increase their sense of responsibility of their home place and environment.  
<http://nakymattomat.turkuamk.fi/>

# Cultural activities constructing young people's participation

**The social objectives of cultural participation (12): promotion of wellbeing, prevention of loneliness, exclusion and social problems of individuals, but also increasing of equality in more general level.**

- Two of the projects are targeted on young people with immigrant background and aiming to integrate them to Finnish culture and society.
- Do not suppose - project seeks answers to the prevention of hate speech and the promotion of equality through youth work and art. For example in drama workshops they reflect diversity, equality, cultural differences and similarities and participants get more courage to express themselves.  
<http://www.jyvaskyla.fi/nuoriso/uutinen/1/0/92776>
- Gender sensitive youth work is an example, how cultural and leisure activities can increase equality, in this case the objective is to promote gender equality.
- Cultural participation projects try often to reach those young people who do not usually engage in cultural activities and arts, which is the case for example in game , theatre, music and cartoon workshops.  
<http://nakymattomat.turkuamk.fi/>
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# Cultural activities constructing young people's participation

**The artistic objectives of cultural participation (4): aims to produce new artistic content, enhance artistic interest, increase cultural capital and enrich cultural events and offerings.**

- Culture and art is not considered only as an instrument to promote young people's competence and resources, but the objective is to promote and develop the culture itself.
- For example organizing events and festivals have artistic goals and festivals attract large audiences.
- Artistic dimension can also mean educating young people to try out different cultural activities, for example visit museums or classical music concerts.
- <https://www.taidetestaajat.fi/#/!intro>

# Cultural activities constructing young people's participation

## Conclusions

- Culture is at the same time artistic, economic, political and social capital. It is used as an instrument to promote young people's wellbeing and to prevent social problems.
- Culture is seen as a resource which helps young people to get into working life.
- Culture is an instrument to get young people express their opinions
- Culture is an instrument to educate active citizenship.
- Young people are invited to participate in the definition and production of cultural content.
- Promotion of equality is an important task of cultural participation.
- Culture is also an instrument for multicultural work and prevention of exclusion.
- The fact that there are artistic objectives only in four projects (19 in total) emphasizes the instrumental role of culture.
- Most of the projects are implemented in the third sector, by non-governmental organizations. The role of the public sector and art institutions is much smaller.
  - ➡ To increase the understanding of young peoples' cultural participation, the concept of culture and participation should be used in the broad sense to be able to capture the variation of different forms of action.