# PARTICIPATORY ART

## As methodolgy for educational change

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### Tranformative and inclusive research

The theme of the summer workshop at the University of Malaga, *'transformative and inclusive research'* questions the current instrumental and competitive neo liberal view of education policy and addresses the need for alternative epistemologies. In this paper I will focus on the transformative and inclusive potential of participatory artistic methods and methodologies emerging from the contemporary growing fields of *artistic* and *arts-based research* (Hernández-Hernández & Fendler, 2013; Eisner & Barone, 2012; Hughes et al. 2011). As the fields of artistic and designerly research have become more accepted and included in academic research traditions, artistic and designerly methods influence and spread over to other areas of research. For this summer workshop I would like to focus my contribution to discussing *participatory methods* originating from the fields of art and design, which are now commonly in use within the contemporary fields of educational and social research (Simonsen et al 2012; Kindon et al 2010).

### Par ticipatory art as a transformative methodology for educational development work

In my PhD-thesis named **'***Relational Creativity***'** I am researching the potential of using participatory art as a transformative methodology in design for creative learning environments. In practice I have investigated the possibilities of using a participatory art project to influence university education from within. My preliminary results indicate that participatory artistic methods include the potential of transforming a learning environment to becoming a more inclusive system. I therefore suggest that participatory artistic methods can be used to investigate other ways of understanding educational processes, and for building alternative educational models and relation- ships, as proposed in the framework for this summer workshop. I certainly agree with the organizers, that we need to get together to share our knowledge about new ways of doing research. In this paper I propose as a topic of discussion, that one of the challenges for us, is to find ways to communicate and share the knowledge emerging from these new transformative and inclusive methodologies, as practitioners and researchers.

*How can we find ways to share and communicate (describe, analyse, discuss and validate) the rich variation and complexity of transformative research methods emerging in the contempo- rary fields of artistic, arts-based, educational and social sciences?*

## Study focus , objectives and framework

I work with my PhD-thesis as a artist and a researcher, reflecting upon and investigating *creativity* from a socio-relational perspective. *The overarching aim of my thesis 'Relational Creativity' is to increase the understanding of how social relations and interactions influence individuals' creativity and creative processes in learning environments, with a special focus on university students.* The practical purpose and expected outcome of the research is to contribute with new knowledge that support design of creative learning environments in higher education.

## Background and reserach design

The thesis is based on empirical data from a previous period of *artistic development work* which I was commissioned do for a department of Arts education in a Swedish university. During a period of four years I was employed to develop new and experimental artistic design for learning, involving my own artistic practice. The expected outcome specified by the university was for the art projects to enhance the use of contemporary, relational and conceptual art and digital media at the department. During this work period I created several participatory art projects involving experimental, alternative sociotechnical learning design, which were implemented in regular university courses and performed together with university students and teachers. *In my thesis the participatory art projects are analysed with the aim to understand more about how the university students' creative processes were influenced by the affordances for social relations and social interactions that were provided by the learning design.* Participatory art as a conceptual framework for design of creative learning environ- ments are also investigated from a broader perspective in the thesis, through reflective video-dialogues performed together with artists and researchers who have been working with similar intentions, methods and projects.

## Creativity as a conceptual research object

Creativity is a wide concept which can be researched from several different perspectives, e.g. if the *genius* aspect of creativity is in focus, creativity is studied as an individual trait, something which is quite common. In cognitive psychology studies are often conducted

of creativity as an individual trait, which is assumed to be 'testable' and 'measurable' with creativity tests, constructed in similar ways as intelligence tests (Eysneck, 1995). These studies often include both testing and comparing results with information concerning social and genetic aspects of the individual's life (Kyaga, 2015). Another common research perspective on creativity is to study creativity as a process, aiming to find out e.g. how problem solving works in practice (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). In my thesis, creativity and the creative process of the individual is examined from a somewhat different perspective than those described above, as I am looking at creativity from a sociorelational perspective, and as I view creativity as a flexible and fluent state of mind of the individual, which is influenced by social relations and interac- tions in the environment. I share this research perspective of creativity with other contemporary researchers, especially in the field of arts-based research and artistic learning e.g. (Hall, 2014; Irwin, 2012; Hernandez & Fendler, 2013)

## Participatory art projects as empirical foundation

The empirical foundation for my thesis is based on two participatory art projects performed during the period of artistic development work, mentioned earlier. In both projects *participatory art* (Bishop, 2012; Kester, 2011) *participatory design* (Simonsen & Robertson, 2012) and *relational aesthetics* (Bourriaud, 2002; Kwon, 2002) were used as conceptual frameworks for the *design for learning* (Selander & Kress, 2011). Participatory art can be described as a kind of social design which, from my experience seem to encourage participants to connect, interact and be creative together. It was introduced as a concept in the 1990's fine art scene to describe an artistic practice where artists invited ordinary people to contribute to artworks, an artist could for example invite people from the local community to participate in an art installation with their private photographs (Bishop, 2004).

## Grounded theory to organize multimodal data

During the *practical phase* of my research process between 2011 - 2013 the approach has been mainly artistic (see fig.1 above or look at the separate file 'fig_1.pdf' included as an attachment, to get an overview of the different stages of my research process). To organize the data during that period I used ideas from *constructivist grounded theory* (Charmaz, 2006; 2014). Charmaz postmodern version of grounded theory has also influenced my epistemological view of how to address the creative-logical process of reasoning during a research project, which I will come back to later in this paper. According to grounded theory the researcher's analysis and understanding of the empirical data starts at day one of the research project and it is the researcher's responsibility to record this continuous process, e.g. by writing or recording 'memos'. As I work with artistic methods, my data is multimodal and consist of e.g. photographs, video films, drawings, sound files, graphic art and handwritten notebooks etc. The choice of grounded theory as methodology has influenced my view of data collection and analysis and this has also resulted in a methodological development project where I have designed a digital process archive to supports continuous comparative analysis of complex artistic multimodal data, but due to lack of time and space this project which will not be further discussed here.

## Self - reflective analysis of my own art projects

The participatory art projects in the thesis, *SoundImages* and *The virtual art studio* were implemented in on-going university courses and performed together with university students and teachers. Some aspects of these two projects could be described as *educational design research* (McKenney & Reeves, 2012) as the projects involved implementing an alternative design for learning. Other aspects of these projects could be described as *action research* (McNiff & Whitehead, 2001) as the projects were researching practice with the immediate aim to improve it, so to say *in practice*. Both projects involved experimental, alternative social and digital learning design which affected the sociotechnical structure of the learning environments. During the analysis of the design phase of the projects, the situated position of researching my own artistic process was taken into consideration by using self-reflective methods inspired by the concept of the *reflective practitioner* by Donald Schön (1983; 1987) and by reflective methods used in design research (Rittel, 1988) and educational design research (McKenney & Reeves, 2012).

**Preliminary results**

The first participatory art project *SoundImages* (Morén, 2013) indicated that design for participation, interaction and co-creation affected the creative processes of the university students by contributing to an increased self-reflection and metacognitive awareness of their own creative processes. In the *SoundImages* project this was verbalized when the students explained imagining and anticipating reactions and interpreta- tions that other participants would have to the images that the students were creating. For example many of the students talked about how they thought that the preschool children involved in the project would interpret their images. The students expressed that they were keen on creating images that would be correctly represented in the eyes of the preschool children.

The second participatory art project, *the Virtual Studio* (illustrated with fig. 2, below) was a digital networking environment especially designed for art students in a distance course. All students shared the same timeline and were instructed to follow and comment on each others art projects. The students involved in project said that they understood more about their own creative processes by visually and conceptually being able to take part in each others' creative processes. These results further indicate that participatory art, used as a conceptual framework for the sociotechnical design of learning environments, can transform the learning environment to become more inclusive as a system. Additionally, my preliminary results indicate that by supporting participation, networking and visual sharing of art, the learning environment will provide opportunities for students to increase their understanding of their own creative processes.
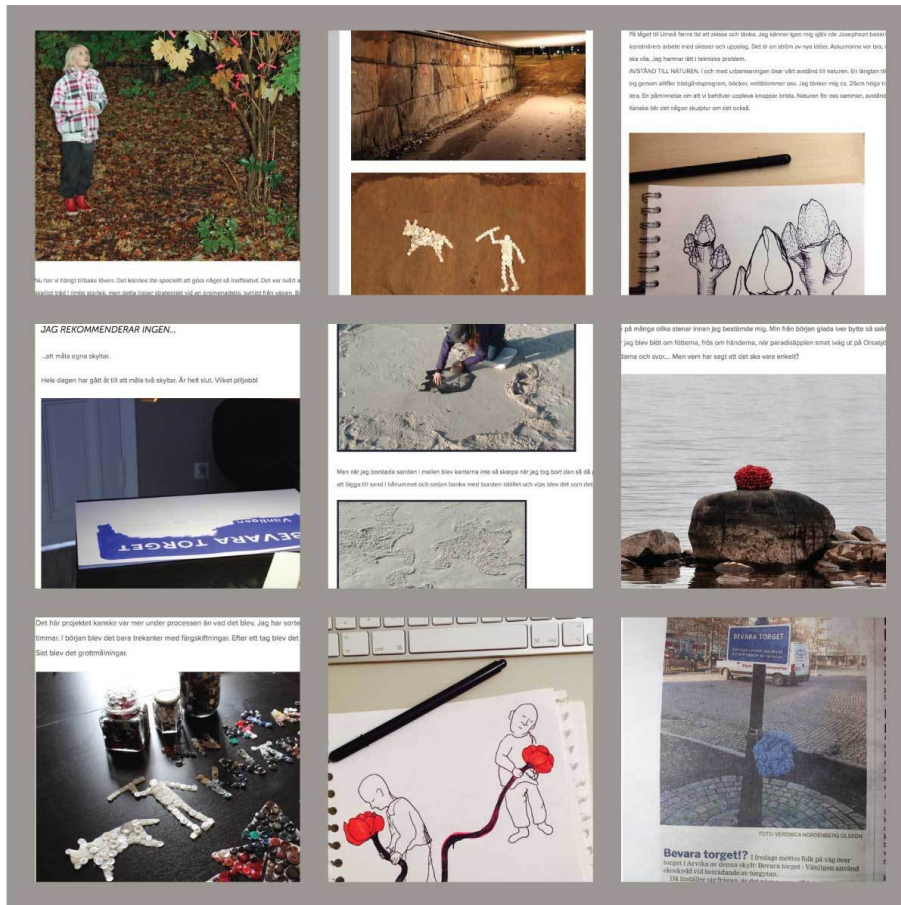
*Fig. 2. This image shows examples of how students shared their on-going creative processes in the digital environment of the 'The Virtual Art Studio'*

From these preliminary results of my own research I could propose the potential of participatory art as a methodology for change, and suggest that participatory art used as a conceptual framework for learning design has the possibility to transform the learning environment to become a more inclusive a system. However - and this is the main issue of my paper - to be able share these practice based experiences of the transformative potential of participatory art as a methodology for change, as *scientific knowledge* I am searching for ways to reflect upon, analyse, and communicate the design and implementation process behind participatory art as a transformative methodolo- gy to, make a useful tool for other researchers and practitioners.


## Methodologic al issues

As I have already indicated in the introduction of this paper, my approach to research is situated in artistic and design traditions where the common approach is problem-solving-oriented.

## A problem - solving - oriented reserach approach

This means that I start working with solving the problem *in practice* aiming to learn about the problem by reflecting *in practice* while simultaneously working with the primary aim to change and *improve practice*. From my experience, coming up with and testing solutions to problems in practice, comes first in art and design, and by reflecting on the creative-logical process both in practice, and afterwards practical knowledge can be captured, transformed and shared. Here, concepts come from *the reflective practitioner* (Schön 1983; 1987) as already mentioned. The image represented earlier in the paper (Fig 1 or attached file 'fig_1.pdf') illustrates a timeline of the different stages of this practical-theoretical artistic research- and development work process. By theorizing the practical experiences from working with participatory art as educational development work I hope to find ways to construct and share some methodological concepts, like e.g. *relational creativity* that could be useful for other practitioners and researchers in designing creative learning environments.


## Communication problems despite a long tradition

My problem-solving-oriented approach to research is in no way unusual or novel, on the contrary it is based on a long tradition of *research- and development work* or *applied research*, and is quite similar to how Robert Flanagan, the psychologist who invented the *critical incidents* method describes his approach to research in the 1950's (Wertz, 2011). Yet, I have experienced difficulties in communicating my artistic research methodology and problem-solving-oriented research design so that it is fully understood by, and therefor possible to validate for my colleagues within the broader field of educational research. I have been thinking that perhaps, my problem partly is *situated* in the fact that I live and work as an arts-based researcher in a small country in an even smaller town far up North near the Arctic circle, but geographical location is not the only issue. In Sweden, where I live and work artistic research methods have been developed primarily within the field of fine arts and industrial design, whereas in other Scandinavian countries, especially Finland artistic research methods are more commonly used in e.g. educational research (Hannula et al, 2005; Ahlbäck, 2011). Regardless of possible explanations, the consequences for me as an artist working with artistic methods for organisa- tional development in higher education are the same. I need find ways to describe, analyse, discuss and validate my arts- based research and methodology so that it can be understood by a broader audience. For this reason, I have tried to locate some critical incidents when communication goes wrong, and in this paper I will give one example of such an issue, that I need to address.

## The value of meta - reflective design analysis

An example of a communication problem that I have identified while trying to share my artistic approach to research and to methodology with my colleagues in educational science is that it is hard for me to explain the value of self reflection when it comes research design. Art and design projects are iterative, and thus often have a very short preparatory phase during the initial phase of the research process. One possible explanation for this could be that *artists and designers are primarily trained to try to solve problems rather then to research them*. A consequence of this is that the time between the first and second phase of the research process, between identifying and specifying the problem and coming up with a potential solution becomes very short, compared to many other academic research processes e.g. in educational science. On the other hand, the actual time that it takes to design and test and re- design and test again in the iterative process phase of an artistic or designerly research project may even out the differences in time eventually. However, I have noticed that it *is hard to communicate the value of analysing this iterative design process* which often initiates art and design projects and artistic and arts-based research. Further, it is even harder to justify the importance of doing a meta-reflective analysis of your own artistic or designerly process. The value of self-reflecting and analysing *your own design process* seems to be very hard to understand, and even provocative for some of my colleagues, coming from other research traditions than art and design. Communication is what I struggle with right now how to describe, analyse, discuss and validate my arts-based approach to research.

## How can we find ways to share alternative methodologies of transformation and inclusion?

As I see it, it's crucial to carefully describe our design processes and to analyse the reasoning behind our design decisions and intentions, as an analysis may reveal intuitive and intrinsic knowledge that we need to make explicit. Here I use Horst Rittel (1987) theories of *the reasoning of designers*, where the design process is regarded as a very fast internalized intuitive process of creative-logical reasoning that takes place implicitly in the designers mind. Consequently, our self-reflective analysis of the design process becomes a way of making this internalized chain of decisions explicit and therefore also possible to share with others, as knowledge.
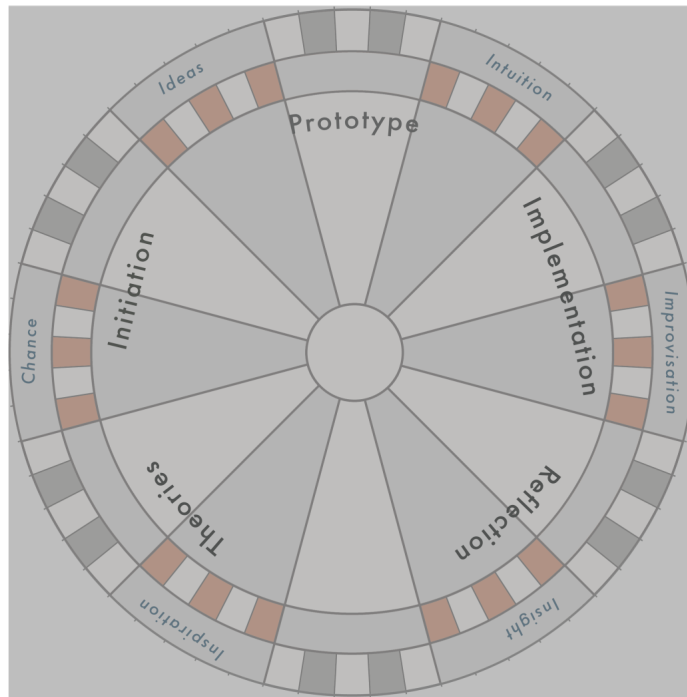
*Fig 3. This image illustrates the artistic and designerly process as a wheel of fortune, where projects can be initiated and started from anywhere, which could cause confusion in contrast to a more strict academic research tradition.*

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