

How do the Arts Inspire Personal and Social Change?

Piloting the FAM-Strategy

© Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers

Bournemouth University - Centre for Seldom Heard Voices

The term 'FAM' is an abbreviation for 'familiarisation' and 'defamiliarisation' techniques, previously known across the arts and in arts-based pedagogies (e.g. Boal's 'theatre of the oppressed' / Brecht's 'Verfremdungseffekt' / Berger's 'ways of seeing'). These techniques are also known in academic disciplines such as philosophy and anthropology to foster creative, critical, lateral, and imaginative thinking that challenges normalised, cultural perceptions and ways of being by 'making the strange familiar, and the familiar strange'. The transformative potential of defamiliarisation techniques is also used in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) for first, recognising and then, changing previously taken-for-granted thinking and behaviour, including through arts-based interventions, deepening imaginative, transformative, reflective, and cognitive learning; encouraging creative and critical thinking; and triggering new ways of sensory exploration and understanding, as a precursor for self-determined individual and social change.

The FAM-Strategy brings various interdisciplinary approaches and understandings together into one consolidated guidance for designing, tracing, and evaluating the effects of arts-based interventions on triggering the intended changes. The technique holds the potential of bridging societal divisions and combating prejudice across gender, age, race, class, ability, culture, and more.



Arts awaken 'the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us' – Coleridge, 1840

'Familiarisation' techniques, by 'making the strange familiar', facilitate engagement and understanding across established social and symbolic boundaries of exclusion and difference in society (e.g. across age, social class, or gender division as culturally-situated and defined).

'Defamiliarisation' techniques, by making the familiar strange, encourage critical recognition of taken-for-granted, normalised ways of thinking, of situations and of identities as a first step towards participants becoming agents for change.

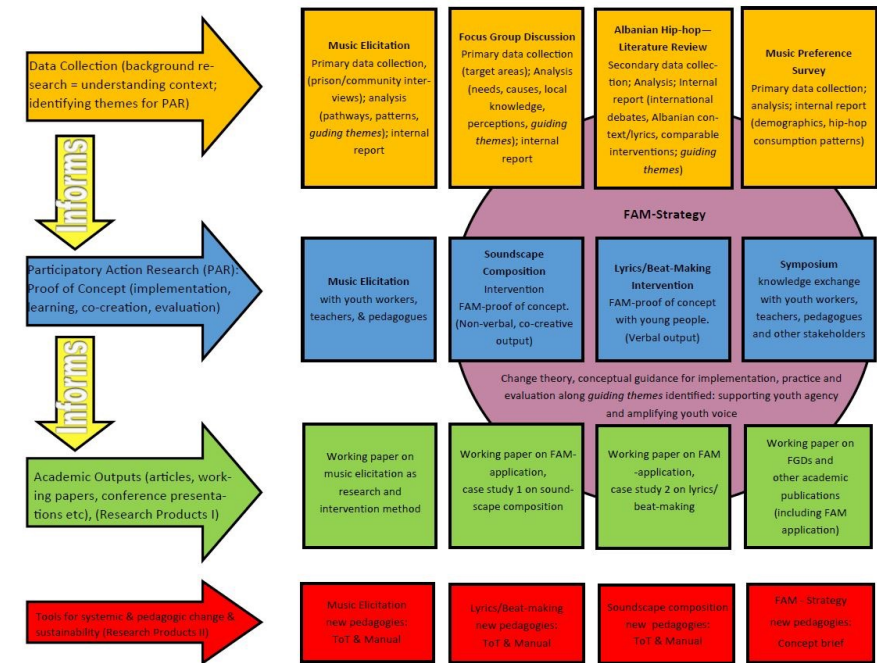
- 1 Capacity-building
- 2 Conflict transformation
- 3 Innovative mental health support
- 4 Educational: pedagogic applications
- 5 Prevention: imagining different futures away from crime
- 6 Peace building: critical engagement with sensitive histories
- 7 Relationship-building: improving relations with intended beneficiaries
- 8 Fostering societal cohesion and integration: tackling root causes of vulnerabilities
- 9 Supporting marginalised groups: facilitating critical voice, supporting youth agency contributing to democratisation

The development of the imagination and the way we transmit and express an opinion is an advantage. It is also a new way of communicating – Female, 16 yrs Shkoder, soundscapes post-pulse

...good for ourselves, and we can also pass this message to the community – Female, 16 yrs Shkoder, soundscapes post-pulse

Proof of concept: 2 case studies

<h4>Creating Soundscapes</h4> <p>Honing active listening and non-verbal 'acousmatic storytelling' skills in strengthening resilience against exploitation risks. (Panos Amelidis, BU)</p>	<h4>Lyrics and Beats Making</h4> <p>A music-based platform for young people to express their lived experiences and learn social, practical and critical thinking skills. (Mark Berry, BU)</p>
---	---



The 'FAM-Strategy' was originally developed as a change theory in response to the question of how the arts precisely work and could be documented – through participatory action research (PAR) towards delivering the envisaged change of individual and/or social transformations.