

GROWING TOGETHER IN A CREATIVE COMMUNITY THE POWER OF PARTICIPATION IN AN ARTS PROJECT WITH YOUNG MIGRANTS

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Supporting young people with minority backgrounds may both strengthen their own health and society as a whole. The aim of the study is to explore how participation in a multicultural creative project affects the lives and health of young participants. Kaleidoscope is a multicultural art project where young people with different cultural backgrounds share their songs and dances, creating a combined performance with professional musicians. Does participating on this creative arena make a difference in young lives, and if so, how? A mixed-methods analysis of both quantitative and qualitative survey data (N = 102) shows that participation is important to most participants, providing opportunities to express themselves creatively and participate in a friendly community. The project is described as particularly important in hard times, as recently arrived in Norway, or while dealing with sadness or illness. Professionals can learn about what matters to these young people by collaborating and co-creating with them over time. Participation and creativity are not variables in an equation, but ways of being together that catalyze salutogenesis through meaningful experiences and mutual growth. Creative participation is therefore suggested for professionals as much as for the young people described here. The analysis points to the potential of participatory and cultural health promotion, particularly for groups in risk of marginalization.

Keywords: Participation, Creativity, Co-create, Young migrants, Salutogenesis

1. Introduction

Young people with migration experiences often face challenges related to exclusion or being in minority. However, complex cultural experiences can also nurture important life skills, such as multicultural competence, creativity and flexibility (Fangen, Johansson, & Hammarén, 2011; Salole, 2018).

Participatory, creative projects can potentially contribute to the wellbeing and empowerment of children and young people with culturally complex backgrounds (cf. Kilroy, Garner, Parkinson, Kagan, & Senior, 2007; Tyrer & Fazel, 2014). The aim of this study is to explore how participation in a multicultural creative project affects the lives and health of young participants. Kaleidoscope ('Fargespill' in Norwegian) is an art project in which children and youth with different cultural backgrounds share songs and dances they know from home, working with professional musicians. The musicians cooperate with health professionals, teachers and social workers along with participants, a collaborative approach which provides a learning opportunity also for these professionals.

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Based on previous observations and interviews in a larger mixed methods study (Seip, 2020a), I hypothesized a relation between participation and how the young participants are doing in their daily lives, and that this creative arena is important to most participants. In this article, quantitative and qualitative survey responses are analyzed to explore the difference such creative and inclusive arenas can make. This points to the potential of cultural health promotion, particularly for groups in risk of marginalization. What happens when young people who are used to being outsiders take center stage?

2. Research context: Migration and community salutogenesis

More than half of the 70 million displaced people in the world today are minors (NRC, 2019). Young migrants face regular developmental challenges while establishing their lives in new societies, and grapple with issues of exclusion and belonging (Fangen et al., 2011). Researchers in the field underline the importance of being seen and heard, and gaining access to participation on formal and informal arenas in the host society (Romaní, Feixa, & Latorre, 2012). Social inclusion, emotional care and collective meaning-making are central to young migrants' coping, as Omland and Andenas (2019) found among unaccompanied refugee minors in Norway. Participation in peer relations may be an under-utilized resource in this respect, in ways that the caretaking system does not always consider or facilitate (Omland & Andenas, 2019, p. 14).

Migrating during childhood or adolescence can be a formative experience for development and identity. Migration presents challenges to meaning and coherence, and often constitutes a significant discontinuity in one's life narrative (Sveaass, 2000). Migrants may also find new opportunities and often show remarkable resilience in the process (Selimos, 2018), and young migrants are generally more adaptive than older migrants (Salole, 2018). Gaining access to participation in a new society is often challenging, however, and marginalization and minority stress are potential health risks.

This study is located within the theoretical framework of salutogenesis, which focuses on what strengthens health (Antonovsky, 1987; Eriksson & Lindström, 2006). Health is understood as a continuum, where we all live with forces that support as well as forces that challenge our wellbeing (Fig. 1). Positive factors in our lives provide resistance resources, that move us towards the health-and-thriving-side of the continuum; while other factors contribute in the opposite direction, as resistance deficits, that push us farther towards unhealth and even death. To promote health, it is essential to mobilize resistance resources, not only provide medical care after health deterioration.

Antonovsky, the theory's founding father, emphasized the person's sense of coherence as a core resistance resource – the degree to which one experiences life as comprehensible, manageable, and meaningful (Antonovsky, 1987). A strong sense of coherence correlates with good health (Eriksson & Lindström, 2006).

A range of other factors have been found to contribute to salutogenesis, including social support and participation in positive activities, ego identity, coping and creativity (Langeland, 2014). Community psychology has shown the positive health impact of experiencing a sense of community (Orford, 2008; Sarason, 1974). Other relevant resistance resources are empowerment (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010), agency (Jansen, 2013), cultural participation (Schuff, 2014), and constructive identity development (Jetten et al., 2012).

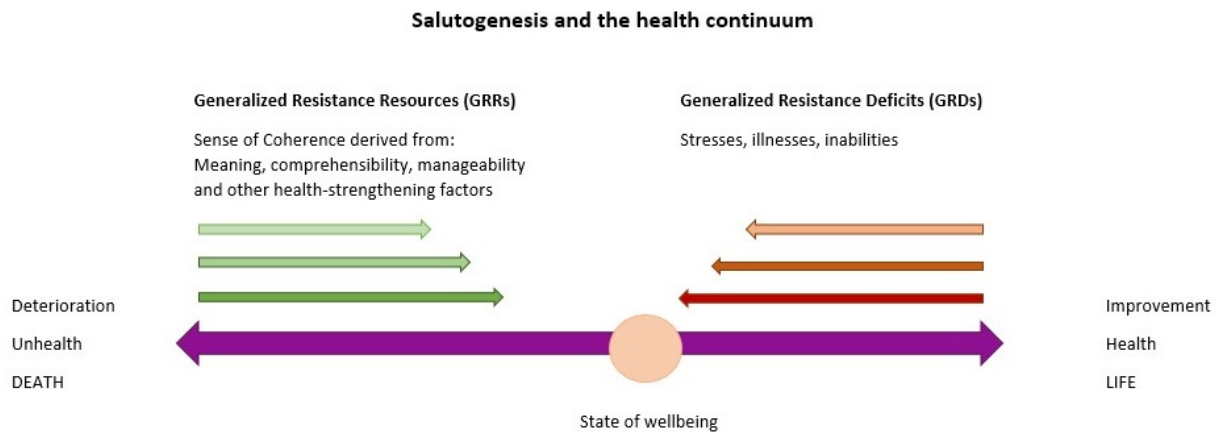


Figure 1. Salutogenesis, the health continuum. Author’s visualization based on Golembiewski (2010)

Many of these salutogenic factors are relational and community-based, and salutogenesis and community approaches can fruitfully be combined. For instance, Braun-Lewensohn & Sagy (2011) use the term sense of community coherence about how “a person who perceives his/her community as consistent, manageable and meaningful will have another resource to rely on when needed” (Braun-Lewensohn & Sagy, 2011, p. 535). In the context of the fields of community psychology and community health, we might also refer to health-strengthening mechanisms in a community as *community salutogenesis*. Applying the concept to communities would entail identifying and strengthening the relational resources that contribute to health in our communities. The literature and empirical evidence of a salutogenic approach applied in communities remains relatively scarce. However, there are several community intervention approaches relevant to salutogenesis. The combination is promising – and further research is needed, including qualitative approaches that explore the links between community and salutogenesis more explicitly (Vaandrager & Kennedy, 2017). The current article aims at contributing to this exploration.

From a salutogenic perspective, understanding migrant health calls for identifying the strengths and resources of migrants, as well as the stresses that migration entails. Migration can be understood as a drastic change of community – uprooting and loss, and often extensive efforts to join new communities in a different society and cultural context (Sveaass, 2000). Since migration can bring with it what the salutogenic model refers to as generalized resistance deficits, such as loss and a lack of coherence, it is vital to identify and strengthen potential generalized resistance resources. In this study, I look at ways to strengthen young people with migrant experiences and cross-cultural lives. I emphasize creativity and participation, salutogenic factors particularly relevant in the community under study. These resources for community salutogenesis may have untapped potential.

2.1. Creativity

Creativity is commonly defined as a phenomenon that brings about something both novel and valuable (Leung, Maddux, Galinsky, & Chiu, 2008). Creative activities are here understood as actions and interactions that lead to new products or expressions – such as the musical performances created in Kaleidoscope. Kaleidoscope includes music and dance, primarily, but also costumes, visual presentation, rhythmic games, lyrics, dramaturgical choices, scenography,

and in some locations, contemporary circus acts – in sum, the Kaleidoscope community creates colorful multimodal shows.

Csikszentmihalyi (2014) replaces the common question of “what is creativity?” with “where is creativity?” Creativity is located not only in the creative person’s head, but in the interaction with the culture and field in which that person lives. Novelty is necessarily related to what already exists in the culture. To qualify as creative innovations, novel products must be recognized by a competent community or field (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). This paradigm shift in the study of creativity, from “I” to “We” – from the lone genius or creative individual to more systemic understandings of creativity – has been noted also in social and cultural psychology (Glăveanu, 2010; Kandler et al., 2016). In other words, creating is more often than not co-creating, an intersubjective process.

This approach to creating as co-creating is relevant for the creative community of Kaleidoscope. Creativity develops through play from early childhood on, and can be reinforced later in life by practice and contextual support, for instance through participation in arts and cultural activities (Patalano, 2018). Multicultural experience can strengthen creativity, as people who experience different ways of relating to the world gain skills in perspective taking and cognitive flexibility (Leung et al., 2008). Since novel combinations are potentially available when living with multiple cultural influences, creative approaches might be particularly promising for interventions with migrants (e.g. DeMott, Jakobsen, Wentzel-Larsen, & Heir, 2017). Multimodal interaction through arts can also facilitate intercultural communication, since it provides multiple semiotic resources, decreasing the dependency on majority language skills (Schuff, 2014, 2015).

Creativity and the arts have promising links to health (Kilroy et al., 2007; Wright & Pascoe, 2015). In the British Arts for Health initiative scholars found that people’s capacity for change could increase through participation in arts projects, where they could “look at cause and consider change from a more connected, and balanced perspective” (Kilroy et al., 2007, p. 10). Creative environments where participants “experience learning, challenge, potential for experimentation, along with support, shared experience, non-competitive and non-hierarchical structures and opportunity to ‘practice being well’,” (Kilroy et al., 2007, p. 58) seemed most conducive to promoting health.

2.2. Participation

A creative environment also provides opportunities for participation. Participation can be empowering and is central in creating a sense of community, which again can enhance wellbeing and health (Laverack, 2006; Riemer, Reich, Evans, Nelson, & Prilleltensky, 2020). Social participation can be a starting point for constructive cycles of psychological adaptation, belonging and personal identity development, adding up to what Jetten, Haslam, and Alexander (2012) describe as the social cure – a path to better health and everyday functioning.

Participation, on formal as well as informal arenas, is particularly significant for young migrants as an antidote to the exclusion they often face (Romaní et al., 2012). Especially when participation leads to friendships, it can provide emotional and social support that improves overall wellbeing (Omland & Andenas, 2019). Above and beyond its psychosocial impact, participation is also an essential element of a functioning democracy and can be considered a matter of justice – even a human right. Children have the right to participate, express themselves and be heard (UN, 1989).

While there is some evidence that participation leads to improved health outcomes, the mechanisms involved are not always clear. Campbell and Jovchelovitch (2000) suggest that a social psychology that illuminates the relationship between individual and society can shed light on some of these mechanisms. More specifically, they analyze participation along three dimensions: Identity, social representations, and power. Participating in a community depends upon and in turn helps to construct a social identity, that forms a central psychological element of a group's shared awareness and ability to act together (Campbell & Jovchelovitch, 2000). Social representations, contributing to a shared view of the world, are expressed and negotiated during participation in a community. Negotiations and renegotiations depend on the power structures they happen within, and participation may often be unequally distributed and experienced within the same community, due to differences in power (Campbell & Jovchelovitch, 2000).

Another concept which may serve to connect participation to power, is empowerment (Campbell & Jovchelovitch, 2000; Odahl-Ruan, McConnell, Shattell, & Kozlowski, 2015). Empowerment can be understood as a participatory developmental process through which people gain greater control over their lives and resources – and also as liberation from oppression and marginalization (Odahl-Ruan et al., 2015, p. 4). As an example of how participation can lead to collective empowerment, Odahl-Ruan et al. (2015) describe women at an all-women festival, an alternative setting where they build relationships in feminist interaction in an emotionally and physically safe space. This forms a liberating contrast to what they find to be an often-oppressive dominant culture in their everyday lives.

There are interesting parallels to the context examined in this study, where Kaleidoscope provides its participants with an alternative setting in which they are valued differently and given other opportunities for creativity and relationships than they otherwise find offered to them as migrants. Such opportunities can empower young Kaleidoscope participants.

2.3. *Creative participation: Experiences from community arts*

Within the fields of community arts and community music, a wide range of experiences have shown how creativity and participation can be resources for wellbeing and empowerment. Participation in arts as a way of inviting potentially marginalized groups into community has taken many forms, with an early example in El Sistema from the 1970s onwards. El Sistema started in Venezuela as a way of combatting poverty patterns, offering a space for children to learn to master instruments and play together in local symphonic groups. El Sistema has also inspired musical communities in multicultural areas in Sweden, where music was used as a means of resistance, and to give voice to potentially marginalized youth (Bergman & Lindgren, 2014).

Other art forms, such as theatre, singing, dance, performance, and visual arts, have also brought young people together in empowering communities (Baker, 2013; Cuypers et al., 2011; Kalmanowitz & Lloyd, 2016; Madyaningrum & Sonn, 2011; Sonn, Grossman, & Utomo, 2013). Participants such as school children with a refugee background (Sonn et al., 2013) and young people outside of education and employment (Baker, 2013) have been given new opportunities, become more active and connected through community arts projects. The research in the field points to a range of positive outcomes from engaging in arts together, including:

- Personal development, strengthened confidence and learning (Sonn et al., 2013);
- Strengthened social relations, social skills, belonging and connection (Baker, 2013);

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- Strengthened sense of wellbeing and sense of belonging (Grossman & Sonn, 2010);
 - Giving voice to the silenced, and creating new stories (Madyaningrum & Sonn, 2011);
 - Meaning, empowerment, and space for transformation (Kilroy et al., 2007);
 - Measurable health outcomes such as reduced depression and delayed dementia (Fancourt & Finn, 2019).

Among the dominant body of literature confirming these positive processes and outcomes, there are also critical reflections and nuancing voices. Kertz-Welzel (2016) provides a critical perspective on community music, pointing to the danger of romanticizing it and portraying it as a straight-forward path to success. In an interesting discussion of how stereotypes come into play in the arts project *The Seeming*, Madyaningrum and Sonn (2011) highlight how stereotypes can be both challenged and reproduced in the interaction that takes place in the creative community. The dangers of romanticizing and reinforcing stereotypes is relevant to the case in the current study (cf. Schuff, 2016; Solomon, 2016). These discussions in themselves illustrate the complexity and reflexivity of community arts as a field, pursuing not only individual development but also more transformational social change (Maton, 2008). This range is also present in the case of *Kaleidoscope*, which includes several levels of participation, voice and agency (Seip, 2020b). The potential of community arts has rarely been discussed within a salutogenesis framework, a link I will revisit in the discussion.

3. Case: Kaleidoscope

Kaleidoscope was initiated by leaders looking for creative “gold” in children and youth with different cultural backgrounds. Professional artists invite children from many different origins to share songs and dances they know. They work together through a year, preparing a world music style performance. In the process, the project leaders emphasize that “everyone is a resource” and that “we could not have created this without you”. The project is meant to be “a warm welcome” to Norway (Hamre et al., 2011). The initiators underline that this is an art project, not a social project. This underlines how their starting point is not to help the “needy”, but that they need the creative resources that their participants bring to the project. Anecdotes from the self-presentation of the project indicate that participation may improve participants’ self-confidence (Hamre et al., 2011).

Kaleidoscope was established in Bergen in 2004 and is now found in several Norwegian and Swedish towns. There are no former studies of health benefits of *Kaleidoscope* participation. Within the field of music, the project has been analyzed critically, as a “reassuring story white Norwegians tell themselves about multicultural Norway” (Solomon, 2016, p. 188). Kvaal (2018) analyzes *Kaleidoscope* as hybrid music practices where crossing agendas meet, exploring the use of music as an intercultural tool. She emphasizes what happens backstage and in-between performances, not unlike the focus of this study. Here, however, these processes are explored in relation to health and thriving.

The *Kaleidoscope* process normally unfolds throughout a (school) year, in which the project community typically meets weekly, at first in smaller groups, while a full performance group may include around 100 young people. The leaders start out with simple trust-building activities, often in a circle, learning names and getting used to doing or singing something in front of others. Gradually, the participants are invited to share songs or dances that they know. The leaders select and refine some of these expressions for a performance at the end of the year, often combining different songs/dances/clapping games etc. into world music-style acts.

Different locations have different emphases, with ingredients such as folk music, contemporary circus, genres like rap and joik (traditional Sámi singing), and participatory developed scenography. Some Kaleidoscope groups have prepared thematic performances and collaborated with orchestras or other artists. Many participants stay on for several years, even a decade. Some veteran participants get hired as assistants or leaders.

The project is organized differently in different locations, in Bergen as an independent foundation that collaborates with local authorities, schools and art institutions, with funding from public as well as private contributors (Fargespill, 2019). In other towns, the project leadership is employed by the municipality (kommune), at the concert hall or in the school of music and performing arts (kulturskolen). These different local communities have in common that Kaleidoscope is a collaborative enterprise, adapted to local circumstances and stakeholders. The project collaborates with reception schools for refugees, local public schools, and with health and social workers in the municipality and at the hospital.

The research participants were recruited among Kaleidoscope participants. Local leaders are free to recruit participants in ways they find relevant: through reception schools and classes (where children who come to Norway first enter the school system), through music classes in local public schools in multicultural neighborhoods, through schools of music and performing arts, or as an afternoon activity for unaccompanied minors. Participants have also been recruited through teachers in adult education for immigrants, health and social workers, other musicians, teachers, or in general through snowball recruitment.

Different contexts and strategies as explained above will logically gather participants with quite different stories and situations, from unaccompanied minors to Norwegian-born children with one parent from abroad. I will present my participants among them in the methods section.

4. Methods and material

4.1 Context of study

The current article builds on a multisite survey with Kaleidoscope participants. This forms part of a larger mixed methods-study, where fieldwork and interviews preceded the survey. Both data collection and analysis combine qualitative and quantitative elements. The survey was developed based on analyses of the fieldwork and interview data (Schuff, 2016, 2018), in collaboration with a reference group of experienced Kaleidoscope participants. They were invited to contribute to the case-specific questions and discuss the relevance and wording of all items. I visited four different project locations over a period of two years (2016-2018) to gather survey data.

4.2 Overview of survey

The survey includes scales and open-ended questions, yielding both quantitative and qualitative data. There were questions about background factors (age, gender, country of birth), about Kaleidoscope participation (some numerical, some open), and validated instruments to measure salutogenesis/health/wellbeing in adolescents, specifically

- Sense of Coherence, SOC-13 (Antonovsky, 1993; Eriksson & Lindström, 2006)
- Sense of Community Scale for Adolescents (Chiessi, Cicognani, & Sonn, 2010)

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- Self-Rated Health (Breidablik, Meland, & Lydersen, 2008)

These instruments were chosen based on the prior qualitative analyses (Schuff, 2016, 2018; Seip, 2020b), to see if Kaleidoscope participation strengthens the participants' sense of coherence and community, and self-rated health. These validated measures can be theoretically and logically linked to salutogenesis, and concern dimensions that were qualitatively described by interviewees in former stages of my research. I also let participants themselves describe the impact of participation.

4.3 Participants and procedures

The sample includes 102 participants aged 13 years and over. Information about the study was integrated into the survey, and informed consent given. Parents/guardians were asked to provide consent for participants under the age of 15, in line with the project approval given by the Privacy Ombudsman for Research at Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD).

At the time of the survey, the four locations had approximately 400 participants in total, approximately 100 at each of the four sites (of all ages, 6 years and up). Among these, 102 across the four sites responded. The survey was administered digitally in Nettskjema, a survey tool from the University of Oslo. I cooperated with local Kaleidoscope leaders to organize the survey, making sure that I and/or local leaders were present when the adolescents filled in the form, to answer questions and assist with language issues when necessary. The survey was in Norwegian, the shared working language in Kaleidoscope, but customized follow-up was needed since participants are on different language levels. I took observation notes during survey sessions.

Each participant was invited to respond to the survey three times to track change over time. Due to a high turnover rate in the project groups, not many participants completed all 3 survey occasions (only 13 out of 102). I therefore analyze the time dimension differently, according to length of participation measured in number of performances they had participated in (normally one performance per year). The three survey occasions are only referred to in the qualitative analysis of open answers, in the cases where the same participant answered several times.

Among the 102 respondents, the average age was 16,7 years. There were 61 girls, 38 boys, and 3 who left the gender question blank. 76,25 % of the respondents were born outside of Norway, and more had parents born abroad (mother 81,01 % and father 79,75 %).

4.1. Analytical strategies

I combine a statistical analysis of the quantitative data with a thematic analysis of the qualitative data, before integrating the two in the discussion.

Quantitative analytical strategies. The analysis was conducted with JASP software (JASP-Team, 2018). Among the specific analytical steps were descriptive statistics (percentages, means), calculating salutogenic scores for each participant, and running Bayesian and classical frequentist analyses to check for correlations between variables and with time passed/number of performances.

Qualitative analytical strategies. I conducted a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013) of the qualitative data from the survey; using NVivo software. I gathered answers for each participant, including multiple answers from the same person in chronological order, which provided an opportunity to consider individual development over time. After familiarizing myself with the data through reading and sorting them, I coded the data in NVivo,

looking for descriptions of what Kaleidoscope participation means, and phenomena related to meaning and community. I then gathered these initial codes into four overarching themes, and reviewed the themes as patterned meaning in the data set, relevant to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 11). The resulting four themes are written up and presented in the findings below: General gratitude – Creative activities – Participation and community – Importance in hard times.

Analytical integration. After sorting and systematizing all data, I worked on the statistical analysis first, and then on the qualitative thematic analysis. I had both numerical scale scores and verbal responses from 102 participants (154 responses), and could compare different participants, and for some within qualitative responses from the same participant over time. While writing, I moved back and forth between quantitative and qualitative findings – quantitative results giving an overview, qualitative findings yielding more complexity. I will now sum up my observations made during survey administration, as context for the analysis that follows.

Survey observations. Participants were generally willing to fill out the form at Kaleidoscope rehearsals, while very few used the opportunity to respond online outside of rehearsals. They were typically together when they answered, in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. I noted that participants questioned certain terms (“global citizen”, “ethnic group”) and whether shared values were necessary for community. Some expressed frustration that there were so many questions, and some repetition (according to the common logic of survey items and psychometrics). Some participants therefore skipped questions towards the end. Mostly all filled out the open-ended answers. I noted resistance strategies towards the quantitative survey items, such as joking, leaving fields blank and ticking in between boxes.

I also observed the trusting and supportive relationships between professionals and young participants, with informal conversations, relaxed body language and laughter. This creative and collaborative arena give professionals within education and health opportunities to join their students/patients/users in other situations than where they usually meet them; where they can cheer them on and encourage their creativity, as a time-out from their everyday efforts to teach or cure them.

5. Quantitative results

The descriptive statistics show that a majority find project participation meaningful and important. They rated their agreement with the following statements on a Likert scale (1-7).

Table 1 shows that 3 out of 4 (75.5 %) considered the project important to them (somewhat/agree/strongly agree). Almost as many (72.2 %) says it helped them grow as a person. The youth were also asked how much they identify with Norway and other countries (in percent).

These results show that a greater proportion of participants identify as very or completely multicultural (58 %) than as very or completely Norwegian (33 %) or attached to another country (32.6 %). This indicates identity patterns that are more multiple/complex than singular. In terms of correlations between length of participation and salutogenic scores (sense of coherence, sense of community, self-rated health), it proved difficult to find clear linear tendencies with statistically significant correlations. Rather, there were generally high scores also on the earliest measurements, and among beginners (cf. Table 3).

Table 1. Experienced value of participation (in percent)

Statement to consider	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Kaleidoscope is important to me	53.1	12.2	10.2	10.2	4.1	4.1	6.1
I have learned something new in Kaleidoscope	54.6	9.3	7.2	8.2	7.2	3.1	10.3
Participating in Kaleidoscope has changed me	31.6	15.3	17.3	17.3	4.1	7.1	7.1
Being in Kaleidoscope has helped me grow as a person	44.3	15.5	12.4	14.4	3.1	2.1	8.2
I would like to continue in Kaleidoscope for a long time	60.6	5.1	7.1	10.1	5.1	3.0	9.1

Table 2. Identification with Norway and other countries

Statement	Not at all	A little	Fairly	Very	Completely
I feel Norwegian	25.0	25.0	17.0	9.0	24.0
I feel attached to another country	20.0	34.7	12.6	13.7	18.9
I feel multicultural	15.0	9.0	18.0	22.0	36.0

For Self-Rated Health, when asked how they would rate their own health at the time, the participants' answered with average scores throughout between good (3) and very good (4). When sorted by length of participation/number of performances, both the Sense of Community and Sense of Coherence showed some upward tendencies, but with high scores also among beginners. A clear correlation probability for higher scores with longer participation could not be documented. Thus, the clearest result from the quantitative analyses were that a high proportion of participants rate Kaleidoscope highly as a meaningful activity where they learn and grow. Also, a multicultural identity was more common than more monocultural identifications. Results for salutogenic factors are generally high, but not clearly related to length of participation. From here, we continue to the qualitative analysis of the open answers.

Table 3. Average salutogenic scores by length of participation (number of performances)

Item (range)	0-1 performances	2-4 performances	5 or more performances
Sense of Coherence (13-91)	57.61	52.96	53.69
Sense of Community (0-12)	9.39	9.25	9.78
Self-rated Health (1-4)	3.25	3.25	3.32

6. Qualitative findings

The first of the four overarching themes I sorted the open answers into was general gratitude, based on how many participants responded that they like “everything” about the project.

General gratitude

The participants generally express that they are happy to be part of Kaleidoscope, they enjoy singing and dancing and creating something special together. Among the 154 times the survey was completed, there were as many as 89 statements that were sorted into the “all good/like everything” code (including statements saying that there was “nothing” to change or be dissatisfied about).

This overall gratitude is expressed in praise for the project and its general importance in their lives: “Kaleidoscope means so much to me that I don’t have words to tell it”, one participant writes. In the words of another, “Kaleidoscope means everything”. Several participants also explain that life would not be the same without this community: “Without Kaleidoscope, I could not have lived in Norway. Kaleidoscope is really important to me.”

One participant elaborates more by stating that their favorite thing about the project is “that I have the opportunity to be myself and do what I love with good people”. This summarizes several factors often mentioned in the open answers: Self-expression and meaningful activities in a community where one feels included and important.

Some statements describe personal development experienced during participation: “Kaleidoscope has made me a better and more extrovert human being with a much brighter outlook on life.” Many also mention growing confidence: “I used to be embarrassed to talk in front of people. But after a while in Kaleidoscope, I became brave and could talk to people.” For another participant, growing empathy and confidence seem to go together in a general sense of personal growth: “Kaleidoscope has definitely helped me become a better person. Both the way I act towards others, and helping me dare to be who I am, without thinking about everybody else’s opinion.”

Another general benefit of participation is learning, in several areas: Learning about people, different cultures, languages and religions, and learning to accept and respect each other: “The most important thing I’ve learned is that it doesn’t matter what country you are born in, everyone can relate to the music and cooperate to create something amazing. At the end of the day, we’re all pretty much the same, regardless of ethnicity”.

The participants also appreciate that they improve at singing and dancing, as well as at following through with a project, and co-creating an artistic outcome. This adds up to an overall sense of growth.

Creative activities: The joys of singing and dancing

Many participants emphasize the dancing and singing as their favorite part of Kaleidoscope – dancing is mentioned 102 times, music/singing 93 times in the open answers. They enjoy expressing themselves through dance, and dancing together with others who share that joy. One participant also expresses that this is an arena different from his other settings, when he answers that his favorite part of the project is “that this is the only place I can dance.”

Another typical answer illustrates that specific appreciation of the creative activities often goes along with overall gratitude, and the importance of community: “I like everything about Kaleidoscope, I love to dance, and feel at home when I am at Kaleidoscope. I have many best friends here.”

The musical activities are often linked to positive emotions: fun, joy, freedom, and togetherness. Participants often mention the performances themselves as peak experiences – sometimes referring to specific performances, e.g., in front of the king of Norway, or on national television. Presenting a high-quality creative expression can give a sense of achievement, and doing it together adds to the joy: “Being on stage with people who make me happy” is the best there is, one participant states. Another participant explains that she feels privileged to be able to express herself in a way she likes, while making friends for life: “I love standing on stage with friends and challenging myself.”

All in all, the contents of the activities seem to be essential; it matters to most participants that what they do together, is singing and dancing. However, doing it together is also key.

Participation and community: Contributing together

As several quotes have already shown, the social dimension of the project means a lot to many. The participants speak a lot about friendship, but also liken the community to family and home: “It is a great place to be, like my second home.” And in the words of another: “We learn to encourage; we give each other love – we are simply like a big multicultural family.”

The sharing experiences also teach the young people something about themselves and how they can contribute in a community. Several say that they have learned “to be social” here, and mention developing social skills such as sharing, consideration, respect, and empathy: “I have made a lot of friends and developed socially, and I thank Kaleidoscope for that.” I particularly noticed a beautiful formulation of the most important lesson learned in the project, according to one participant: “That you don’t have to be perfect to make people happy.” This sentiment reflects the generously inclusive attitude established in the project, the warm welcome.

The opportunity to participate and contribute as equals from the beginning might be particularly important when someone has recently arrived in a new country: “In Kaleidoscope I made my first friends in Norway, here I learned the language.” The sense of participation extends beyond the project, at least for some, like the participant who describes Kaleidoscope as “a place where I have been a part of the Norwegian society”. In line with this sentiment, another participant suggests that “Kaleidoscope should be everywhere in Norway, and everyone who arrives in Norway would have a place to feel at home.” This suggests that a welcoming place is much needed among immigrants to Norway.

Particularly important in hard times?

Kaleidoscope seems to represent an antidote to exclusion for many of the young participants with mixed backgrounds: a place to belong, make friends and grow confident. Project participation will not necessarily improve everything else in participants’ life but can provide a ‘happy place’ and some breathing room – an arena where joy is possible, even when other things may be challenging. Here, life can be good despite an often-challenging backdrop. The importance of this arena right after arriving in Norway is described by several participants: “Kaleidoscope has meant a lot to me ever since I got to Norway. I have learned Norwegian here by practicing the language. I have learned a lot about dancing and music, the cultures and

experiences of others. I have made a lot of good friends, that are almost like family. All this means so much to me”.

Kaleidoscope is often described in contrast to other challenges or arenas. Some say that here, they have moved from despair to joy: “If it had not been for Kaleidoscope, I surely would have been depressed” – and from another voice: “Kaleidoscope makes me happier in life.”

This joy in spite of other challenges was also illustrated by a participant who does not have a migrant background, but who has faced long-term health challenges. The first time she responded to the survey, she wrote that “Kaleidoscope helps me through difficult times. It is what gives me joy in my everyday life.” A few months later, she continued: “After falling ill, I have become more grateful for Kaleidoscope, because I know that I always have someone I can talk to and that is cheering for me.” And in her third and last response: “Kaleidoscope has always meant a lot to me. But after I fell seriously ill a while back, it has meant everything.” This participant registered a decreasing score on Self-Rated Health over the three survey entries, while simultaneously emphasizing more and more in words how much Kaleidoscope meant.

These findings illustrate that young people facing different challenges, whether as newcomers to a society, outsiders or chronically ill, may appreciate this creative community even more than participants in less challenging situations. When life is hard, good moments shared with good people may matter even more.

6. Discussion: Integration of findings – Simultaneousness and complexity

Rather than calculating impact (a common term in quantitative approaches), I would argue that the current material sheds light on the potential effectiveness (a more common term in mixed methods studies) and meaningfulness (a qualitative term) of participating in these creative communities.

While change over time remained somewhat unclear in quantitative terms, this can also be read as signs of complexity, in processes that are not linear or streamlined. Salutogenic scores were higher early (0-1 performances) and late (5 or more performances) in participation. This may represent two tendencies: Growing importance/strengthening over time, but also specific importance at first, as recently arrived in the country. This was mirrored in responses about making one’s “first friends in Norway”, learning the language and finding a place. Emphasizing such community resources especially when needed is in line with salutogenic literature (Braun-Lewensohn & Sagy, 2011).

All in all, the results also show that a clear majority find Kaleidoscope meaningful and important. Here, the quantitative and qualitative findings support each other, with the qualitative analysis describing the importance more in depth. Participants express in their own words the importance of participation here, while life might remain challenging. Kaleidoscope participation is not a simple “pill” that automatically improves life (satisfaction) overall, and many participants have other problems that this project does not resolve. But Kaleidoscope can provide a welcome contrast to feeling like an outsider elsewhere, or struggling with language, cross-pressures or illness (for an in-depth narrative about Kaleidoscope as a ‘happy place’ in hard times, cf. Schuff, 2018).

The simultaneous presence of difficulties and meaningful fun make for a good fit with the model of salutogenesis, where forces that build and undermine health are at work at the same time. The general resistance resources most clearly present in the current data would be the dimensions of the project that the participants describe as most important and meaningful to

them; in short, being creative and being together. And perhaps best of all is the combination; being welcomed as a valued participant and friend into a community where something beautiful and ‘cool’ is co-created.

The responses about identification can also be understood as an expression of simultaneousness: The project participants may not on average feel very Norwegian, nor very attached to the countries that they or their parents came from – but many identify as multicultural. In the context of Kaleidoscope, they can be their own mix and be appreciated for just that (for more on supporting complex identity development, cf. Schuff, 2016).

The simultaneous processes and complex meaning-making happening here might explain why the quantitative responses compared over time did not point in any clear direction. When there are contradictory forces at work in someone’s life, how could an average score for wellness or coherence meaningfully describe it? It seems methodologically necessary to supplement the numbers with qualitative answers to the open questions, as well as with insights from the conversations and observations while conducting the survey (cf. Gobo, 2011). Being present during survey administration provided glimpses into the meaning-making processes involved in answering, as we discussed the meanings of different words and the participants asked questions, and language challenges were handled in cooperation – to move towards a shared understanding.

The recognition of multiple simultaneous processes is also one answer to the debate about Kaleidoscope as either token multiculturalism (Solomon, 2016) or an authentic and successful celebration of young, vibrant diversity (Pedersen & Moberg, 2017). There are at least two sides of the story; we can look at interactions and experiences on the microlevel, which have been found to be overwhelmingly positive in my material, while also reflecting upon the project's position in the larger social-political context and the paradoxes of Norwegian integration discourse. As a society, we contradict ourselves, with simultaneous constructive/destructive practices and policies, and inclusion and exclusion mechanisms at work at the same time. I consider Kaleidoscope on the constructive side: A place where participants made their first friends in Norway, and felt part of society for the first time, as the qualitative analysis above shows. But this arena is so sorely needed, and can make such a difference for many, precisely because of the lack of recognition in the larger society.

That the same project can be understood so differently, may also be a symptom of how fine the line is between recognition and stereotyping, between constructive and exotifying approaches to the moving target that is culture (Seip, 2020a; Sonn et al., 2013). There is no clear-cut solution; but being aware of some common pitfalls can help. So even though the initiators repeatedly underline that this is ‘an art project, not a social project’, awareness of its social and societal context – and the forces of exclusion vs. inclusion that its participants live with – will only strengthen it. Contextual awareness can prevent romanticizing the activity or reproducing stereotypes.

The design implies limitations to the inferences that can be made from these data. Since conducting a RCT study was not considered conducive in this study, causal inferences could not have been made from the statistical analysis even if the patterns had been clearer (cf. comparable challenges in Gabrielsen, Fernee, Aasen, & Eskedal, 2016). The quantitative results have instead been presented in light of the qualitative findings and relevant theory. Like Cabell and Valsiner (2013), I would argue that it is more appropriate to speak of (multiple, interacting, open-system) catalysts rather than (singular, separable) causes when seeking to understand complex higher-order social and psychological processes. As discussed above, these young people with culturally complex backgrounds particularly appreciate being creative and being

together, and some especially when life is difficult in other respects. Creative communities can serve as catalytic settings for meaning making and for mobilizing resistance resources. The creative processes give room for many aspects of the participants' identities and expressions. Participation and togetherness can be particularly important for young people with migrant backgrounds, at risk of being considered outsiders in society as a whole. It can also be considered a way of fulfilling their human rights.

7. Implications for practice and further research

The research design allowed for getting to know the project and its participants over time, which added to my understanding of their challenges and joys. As a more general lesson, there is always more to people than what can be measured at any one point in time. To find out if something makes a difference in their lives, we might need to spend time together, seeing what they create along the way, and listening to what they have to say. The more we suspect that people's background and perspectives differ from our own, the more time and effort we would be wise to invest.

This can serve as a reminder for professionals working with migrant youth, that a one-time impression or point of measurement should not form the basis of how to relate to them. What the participants emphasize as important to them stems from the relational, creative, and long-term aspects of the project: From being recognized, seen and heard, from singing and dancing together, and from co-creating – here, performances to be touched by and proud of. How often do the systems they live within have that kind of patience, and room for creativity? Normally, demands of efficiency and new public management in healthcare and social services would not allow for such processes over time.

Long-term interaction, preferably working on or creating something together, makes for mutual growth and can prevent pre-judgements, that minority youth usually get plenty of already (Salole, 2018). Rather than learning about specific cultures (often in generalized terms), an interactional approach encourages an attitude of contextual/cultural humility (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). Integrating such collaboration to co-create salutogenesis into the training of professionals, both within health, education, and arts, is a promising area for further development.

A common thread through several findings is the presence of simultaneous processes, and seemingly contradictory identities or phenomena: The both-and rather than either-or in these young people's lives. I find them belonging to and moving between different identities and categories; seriously negotiating while joking; playful and ambitious; feeling like outsiders, but together; pressured, but happy and free; sick, but doing well. The salutogenic framework captures this simultaneousness well in the health continuum, where multiple forces affect us at the same time.

Arguably, salutogenesis is thus a promising theoretical approach that gives room for simultaneousness and cultural complexity. However, community salutogenesis deserves more attention in research and theory development. Is life generally more meaningful and coherent when experienced as part of a community? In more operational terms, how are the constructs *sense of community* and *sense of coherence* related?

There is also a potential for linking creative participation and community arts more explicitly to salutogenesis, also including intercultural meaning-making. In communities where people have different cultural backgrounds, experiences, and frames of reference, what is considered

meaningful will sometimes be shared and sometimes diverging and contested – while creativity may flourish. Intercultural nuances of salutogenesis and sense of coherence still need to be clarified in future research (Braun-Lewensohn & Sagy, 2011), and for that, diversity settings are a conducive arena.

8. Concluding reflections

Joys and problems, resources and deficits coexist in our lives – and for some, a risk of exclusion or marginalization in society can highlight a simultaneous experience of togetherness in a smaller community like Kaleidoscope. While multicultural projects often have potential challenges and imbalanced power relations as a backdrop, the colorful performances co-created in Kaleidoscope display an excess of creative energy and the joy of co-creating. Neither the backdrop nor the frontstage performance tells the whole story. The participants express complex experiences, as analyzed here, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

The young people's creative participation does not ensure that they have steadily improving health or lives. Still, for most of them it makes a big difference, and provides specific resistance resources for salutogenesis. For some it means, in their youthfully intense words, "everything". The simultaneousness of fun and dancing with illness and transitions illustrates lived experiences of salutogenesis; with forces at work in opposite directions. At the same time: We miss the point if we only try to measure the joy, meaning and togetherness up against its effects, in an essentially instrumental approach. Alongside the challenges that life brings, that joy in itself is valuable.

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