

Creating Soundscapes (Soundscape Composition) with young people in Albania: FAM/PAR case study

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Reconnecting Albanian Youth and Society (RAYS)
Enabling positive life choices for youth.



Bournemouth University - Centre for Seldom Heard Voices & Experimental Media Research Centre (EMERGE)

Creating Soundscapes (alternatively called, Soundscape Composition) workshops, have been a central part of RAYS' experimental and innovative array of participatory action research (PAR), implemented by the academic team of Bournemouth University. Following several technical Training-of-Trainers and knowledge-exchange workshops with Albanian youth-work practitioners in 2021 and 2022, in September 2022 a pilot Creating Soundscape with young people considered at-risk of criminal exploitation was conducted in Shkoder, Albania.

Soundscape Composition workshops explore the potential of sound through honing 'active listening' and non-verbal, 'acousmatic storytelling' skills. In application of the FAM-Strategy (see separate poster), activities aim to strengthening creative, critical, reflective and empathetic, sensory and cognitive skills as basis – here - for building resilience against criminal exploitation risks and imagining futures away from such risks. Creating Soundscapes encourages an exploration of participants' social and natural environments through sound as basis for audio-based storytelling. Such explorations may cross social spaces and symbolic boundaries which demarcate societal divisions along an offering of tasks (FAM-Strategy) based on 'guiding themes' previously identified to underpin exploitation risks (see FGD-poster). The workshops furthermore impart transferrable, digital and audio technological skills.

How can we document and evaluate the ways in which an arts-based interventions inspire Personal and Social Change? (FAM-Strategy)

Responses collected revealed that the workshop contributed to gaining a sense of confidence not only in learning a new set of transferrable, technical skills and trying out an innovative, albeit unusual, arts-based approach to exploring the world, but also in expressing critical thought. Satisfaction levels were high, and participants reported of new perspectives and an expanded imaginary relating to their future.

Engagement
Sensory ↔ Critical

"Maybe I will become a sound engineer."
(14 16 yrs, female participant)

"The imagination does not know any limits even though in the beginning it seemed impossible for me to work with something so new, in the end I still managed to get satisfying results."
(14 16 yrs, female participant)

"Our story is about gender boundaries. First we have a manly environment, with cigarettes, drinks, billiard and a lot of people, in contrast to a female environment"
(14 16 yrs, female participant)

"First we recorded sounds of the car, then conversations with friends, later as if we were listening to music....."
(14 16 yrs, male participant)

"The noticeable lack of libraries in our town, especially in comparison to bars."
(14 16 yrs, female participant)



How do the Arts (here: Creating Soundscapes) Inspire Personal and Social Change?

The imagination ... its primary role is to signal what could be. What could be is a linguistic stand in for a set of political, social and cultural demands, strategic aims, revolutionary longings.
(Lola Olufemi 2021 Experiments in Imagining Otherwise)

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is an established research strategy for applied, practice-based social research addressing real-world problems in an inclusive, co-creative manner which recognizes and credits participants' voice, knowledge, and creativity – thereby providing the space and opportunity for participants to become their own agents and drivers of individual and social change. If project duration had permitted, the next step would include to amplify the voice of those whose stories and perspectives are 'too easily ignored'.

This proof-of-concept case study of the FAM-Strategy (relating to 'familiarization – defamiliarisation' techniques in the arts; see FAM-poster) evidenced the suitability of Creating Soundscapes to generate more attentive, equitable, and inclusive forms of engaging young people at risk in ways that may heighten their chances of experiencing their future as active, imaginative, critical, and self-motivated citizens.