

## **Villages on Move Baltic and special target groups**

Villages on move Baltic project main goals in following cooperation were: encouraging immigrants, refugees, seniors and disabled people physical activities, collecting and testing ideas for physical activities with use of culture of experimentation. Co-operation project involved immigrant students from South-Savo Vocational College, local day care center (Mikkelin Päiväkeskus), community educator students from South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences (Xamk) and Southern Savo Sports Federation (ESLi).

Physical activity of people with immigrant backgrounds is often less pronounced than the main population. In particular, the relationship between women who have come to Finland from other cultures in sport has been very different (Zacheus, Koski & Mäkinen 2011).

Various forms of exercise and the meaning of taking care for their own well-being through physical activity are mostly unknown among immigrants. Different kinds of special needs with senior and disabled people can also be risk for social exclusion.

The essence of physical education is based on two fundamental goals: education for physical activity and education through exercise. Exercising in integration work includes, for example, getting acquainted with various forms of exercise, directing into their own well-being, informing about sports opportunities and inspiring new experiments. From the point of view of health and prosperity, everyone should have some physical activity.

Educational work has been a tool for a long time, during working with immigrants. Exercise is a good opportunity for example to introduce the Finnish language and to explore Finnish culture. However, it is often difficult to make longer-term conclusions about the effectiveness of integration work (Majjala 2014).

One of the aims of the Villages on Move Baltic project (VOMB) is to consult, collect and test selected ideas with asylum seekers, immigrants, seniors and disabled people. An important goal is to get their opinions and feelings expressed and at the same time encourage people to try out new opportunities for exercise. This was proven as good method during integration process, because immigrants, refugees, seniors and disabled people were involved also in planning process (idea competition), where they were being able to express their own ideas and wishes.

### **Action in VOMB-project**

Etelä-Savo Vocational College (Esedu) offers training for graduate education, with a focus on Finnish language studies. This way we achieved to reach out to 96 immigrant students for intervention. They live in Mikkelin and in the surrounding small municipalities (Hirvensalmi, Pertunmaa,...). Esedu offered VOMB project a good opportunity to get contact with rural immigrants.

Esedu students were in five different groups, based on their ability to study and Finnish language level. With these groups, the first-year university students were encouraged to inspire, to activate, and to collect ideas for physical activity.

The Day care center in Mikkeli, (Mikkelin Päiväkeskus) is a place that offers seniors and disabled people different activities during day time. Clients do not live there, but they visit there on daily basis. Seniors and disabled people do not necessarily get enough physical activity during their time out of Day care center, so we wanted to offer them possibility to learn new ways of being active. Day care center was very good place to reach those target groups.

VOMB project worker, Petra Muraus contacted the day care center (manager Aija Laasonen) after first period of cooperation with ESEDU (in Autumn 2017), presented the project and offered cooperation. When we presented the project and cooperation possibility to Day care center manager and other professionals, they were extremely interested in cooperation. They told us, that this kind of activities are very important for their clients, not only for physical well being but also from social inclusion perspective.

At the same time Xamk's students (community education) were encouraged to plan and implement idea competition and physical activity among seniors and disabled people on their own physical ability level.

### Co-operation in numbers

People involved	Spring 2017 (March, April)	Autumn 2017 (October, November, December)	Spring 2018 (February, March, April)
Immigrants and refugees	89	49	47
Seniors (elderly people)	0	8	9
Disabled people	0	7	7
Community educator students	15	19	9
Finnish language teachers	7	7	6

Project staff	2	2	2
Day Care Center professionals (manager, social workers, nurses)	0	5	5
Number of implemented activities*	27	35	26

\*Implemented activities: at least 30 min at the time (different physical activities, idea competition and testing ideas)

As we can see in the table, numbers are different (according to time), when the cooperation and activities were implemented. In the Spring 2017 we started only with immigrants and refugees and we were able to reach all Esedu students at that time.

Because we just started the first period, it was great way of learning through culture of experimentation and learn how we could do it better next time.

We have learnt that immigrants and refugees with better language skills and higher education were not so eager to participate in our activities, since they already have some knowledge about opportunities for physical activities in their free time.

In the next sessions we focused project action only for those immigrants and refugees who were eager to participate and to learn new ways of taking better care of themselves.



Picture 1: Getting to know different physical activities

In second and third period of cooperation we also included seniors and disabled people. For the both periods we have implemented activities with the same groups but with different students (Xamk).

Community educator students in the first period were randomly put into groups, but in the second and third period they got a chance to choose with which special target group they wanted to work.

The people who were important for the cooperation were Esedu Finnish language teachers. We have cooperated with 7 of them. They told us, that this kind of cooperation was very important for them, since they are language teacher and do not have much experiences in physical education. They are able to use some of our activities and games in the future inside their classroom. It gives them a fresh action and encouragement for immigrants during language learning.

During the project, we learned that Esedu teachers role was crucial for success. If they understand the value of functional tasks and physical activity, positive influence were also seen in immigrant students activity level. In this case, communication will also be more successful when the groups own teacher is closely involved in planning. Because in the first period teachers were not really involved in that process, we have change that for second and third period. Teachers were sent activity plans and timetables for their groups, where they were asked for the comments. They were in contact with XAMK students and project worker Petra Muraus during the activity period all the time.

Another finding was that the experimental culture may not always be learning something new. It can also be the application of learned models to new or different target groups. However, it is important that students themselves have to test ideas and get feedback on their work.



Picture 2 : Trying new physical activities

Xamk's Community Pedagogy Students participated in the project as a part of the Physical Education (5 ECTS) course.

Main goals at the course are:

- You are able to justify the importance of physical exercise for individuals' growth and development and for the wellbeing of communities.
- You know the major theoretical framework of physical education and how to apply it to achieve social and ethical education objectives.
- You are able to plan, organize, instruct and evaluate physical education sessions in different environments.
- You recognize different manifestations of young people's sports culture and gain experience in new kinds of sports.

Contents at the course

- What kind of theoretical models can be used to explain the variety of different individuals' physical activity behavior and their relationship to physical activity overall?
- How can you use physical education instruction methods and sport environments to achieve different kinds of educational objectives?
- What kind of know-how do you have of physical education instruction, and how do you identify your development needs?
- What kind of trends do you observe in the current sports culture?

In theoretical lectures and practical demos (4 ECTS / 5 ECTS) students had chance to learn framework for their practical part of this course. After that, their task was to design each of 4 tutorials for physical activity with special groups, execute them, and finally write a self-assessment of their experience.

Students met with their groups for 3 or 4 times. First the idea was to visit the group and do some physical activities, but through discussions we noticed, that they should meet more often and first get to know each other better. They have to get to know them better (their needs and interest), to be able to inspire and encourage them in the future.

After getting to know their own group, they organized "idea competition", where they collected ideas for physical action with using different methods (games, drawing, acting, discussing etc..). Those ideas were collected and the ideas were their starting point for planning. Their 3rd and 4th meetings were based on testing new ideas and also groups got to know local sport facilities with guidance.

## What was experienced and learned?

### Immigrant and refugees

Project team noticed, that immigrants and refugees can be divided into two groups from the point of view of success in this project. Students actions brought joy and enthusiasm for something new to do for about 70 % of immigrant students. Many of them come from very different cultures and countries than Finland.

Some of them are asylum seekers, the level of education may be low and the life in Finland differs greatly from their home country. In this case, exercise and leisure activities are also strange. For example, in many Muslim countries, sports opportunities are organized only for men. Women activities outside the home are very limited.

In our activities some of the women were able to try physical activities (football, strength training, cycling, nordic walking, different games...) for the first time. They told us that now they can play different sport games with their children in the afternoons. Some of them started to visit gym and some told us that they have bought new sport equipment.

During the activities women were encouraged to take better care of themselves, so we started gym group for the women with local multicultural organization MIMOSA, where they can visit gym facilities once a week for free and get free guidance as well.

Approximately 30 percent of the Esedu's students experienced exercise planning and physical activities more critically. This group of immigrants are coming from Russia and the neighboring areas (other EU countries). Many of them are married or in relationship with a Finnish person. They often have better language skills and more experience in western sports culture. Finnish culture is more familiar to them. According to our experience, this group is also more challenging to get involved in operational projects.



Picture 3 : Combining language learning with physical activity

Community pedagogy students succeeded in their goals planning and implementation of physical exercises, especially with the groups with less experience in Finland. These people were really enthusiastic about exploring, learning and experiencing Finnish forms of physical activity and sports culture.

The groups illustrated their own sport ideas by drawing, crafting and acting, because their Finnish language is still lacking. These means of involvement encouraged people involvement when everyone was given the opportunity to share their own aspirations regarding physical activity.

Also many of them come from small neighboring villages, where there is less access to opportunities for social interaction and different kind of sport. Families and childcare may be reasons for little leisure time and the opportunity to take part is limited. The exercises and action also brought the desired boost for learn Finnish language in everyday situations.

From practical exercises, the Squirrels, the Easy ball and the Precision games and for example the Frisbeegolf, were well succeeded experiments. The central result was that there are many safe and easy-to-learn physical activities in Finnish sports culture, as long as they are enough easy to learn. Many immigrants seemed to have weaker physical fitness condition and motor skills than Finns of the same age. Many of advanced Esedu immigrant students wanted to continue and become more and more familiar with Finnish sports culture.

### **Seniors and disabled people**

Seniors and disabled people that participated told us that not just learning new ways of being active, but also being able to spent time with others (Community educator students) meant a lot for them. They learn new games to play with their grandchildren.

Because of different physical limitations, the activities implemented were simple, like chair exercise, different varieties of bowling etc...at the same time Community educator students were challenged to involve also brain training and other aspects into activities.

Often social aspects in physical activity are the most important things for senior people or person with special needs. Physical things and influences comes after, when they first feel happy in a nice group with others. Building that kind of atmosphere is the instructor's main goal.



Picture 4 : Activities in Day Care Center

### **Community education students evaluation**

South-Eastern Finland University of Applied sciences community educator students (43) that were involved in the cooperation during their studies, were able to get practical experience on instructing the special groups. For some of them this experience had long term impact for their future professional career. They decided to do their final thesis connected to VOMB project and some of them continued their practical training with our project.

Students had already had former studies about instructing groups, but now they faced new challenges because of different cultures and groups with special needs. Also challenging was the instruct immigrants with really poor Finnish language skills. Short sentences, simple words were needed. Of course sport and different kinds of activities are often easier to instruct, when you can use pictures or simple models to get action started.

As a summary of students's self-evaluations, one can say that they are well integrated into a community-based pedagogical work. It is based on building inspiration, involvement and goal-oriented guidance. The community educator does not have to be a professional of physical activity, but he / she must identify the places of education and guidance where exercise can be utilized.

In this case, the hub does not go up to what is done, but rather how it is done. From this point of view, Nordic walking or playing petanque gets different meanings than just the physical load or skill associated with the physical exercise. Social factors such as encouragement to experiment and working together should be at the center.



For many community pedagogy students, the project was the first long-term goal-oriented guidance with people with immigrant backgrounds or special needs. The challenge was exciting, but at the same time encouraging.

Many students told that they had really joyful and positive interaction with target groups. This gave the courage to guide adult people, even though there was not necessarily a common language or it was supposed to be created. On the other hand, good planning was needed, but at the same time a bold action to inspire people and to create ideas.



Picture 5 : XAMK students after interesting session with immigrants

## Final words

Testing culture of experimentation with different special target groups was a success. We have learnt that being physical active and same time learning new things brings a lot of joy to the people. We can combine physical activities with language learning and active social life. With different parties involved we can always create good working atmosphere and meaningful cooperation.

*“My ideas are heard!”*

*“I can do it!”*

*“I like to be in this active group!”*

Culture of experimentation includes these three important factors for individual’s motivation: personal autonomy, experienced qualifications and social support.

The most important thing for us was, that we were able to inspire immigrants, refugees, seniors and disabled people to be more physically active. Same time we gave students opportunity to test and learn about culture of experimentation.

Project staff involved:

Petra Muraus, Project expert, Southern-Savo Sports Federation (Eslä)

- Planning and managing time schedules of all parties involved
- Knowledge of backgrounds and opportunities of the immigrants and refugees involved.
- Organized cooperation with Day Care Center and brought everyone together.
- Participated in all the activities implemented, to be able to develop and improve the process.

Lassi Pöyry, Senior lecturer, South-Eastern Finland University of Applied sciences (Xamk)

- Responsible for preparing and educating community educator students,
- Monitoring their planning, implementation and especially evaluation after the activities.

#### Sources

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