

**The Little Worlds We Hold:
Shaping artistic identity through co-facilitating a
community engagement project**

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Abstract

This study, written by Vija Moore and Kärt Tambet, has been conducted to gain greater understanding of how we as musicians are affected by working in community based contexts with music. In this study we deconstruct a project that consisted of two different parts. The first part took place at Sofianlehto Activity Centre, which is a care facility dedicated to providing day activities with a multisensory focus that are specially catered to Helsinki residents with multiple disabilities. There we facilitated weekly music sessions with a group of six participants, during which we tried out different approaches of using music as a tool for expression, communication and participation. The second part of the project was the creation of an artistic outcome of the concert “The Little Worlds We Hold” which was a reflection on the experiences and encounters we had at the Sofianlehto Activity Center. The concert was performed for the general public on the 12th of May 2025 as part of the Global Spring festival at the Helsinki Music Centre.

The overarching aim of this study is to investigate how co-facilitating a community engagement project can shape a musical outcome and influence musicians’ artistic identities. To uncover our findings, we approach the research through the main theoretical overarching topic of artistic identity followed by the key concepts of *musical identity; community music and community musicianship; participatory and presentational music making; and relationships between health and music*. The key concepts are further explored through research methods of duoethnography (Sawyer & Norris, 2016) and arts-based research (Leavy, 2022) that is grounded in a reflexive approach (Bolton, Delderfield, 2018; May & Perry, 2017).

The key findings of this research uncover the impact of social interaction in artistic expression, acknowledging the bridging of roles as facilitators and performers, and defining the qualities of artistic expression that are synthesised through emotional experiences. These findings are the outcome of what we experienced in the community engagement project and what became important in composing the music.

Keywords

artistic identity, artistic expression, arts-based research, co-facilitation, community engagement project, duoethnography, musicking, participatory music, presentational music.

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1. Introduction

Rooted in duoethnographic methodologies (e.g. Sawyer & Norris, 2016), this research project by Vija Moore and Kärt Tambet started in the autumn of 2024 out of our shared desire and urge to gain a greater understanding of how we as musicians are affected by working in community based contexts with music. Due to the nature of work in community projects, we are often required to shift our identities (Hübner, 2013) as facilitator and musician. Both identities require infinite resources of creativity and imagination, yet as facilitators, we focus more on the ‘others’ and on providing support, while as musicians, we mostly focus on ourselves and on executing the best performance of a music composition. There is a strong shift of ownership and perception between these two different positions and therefore, we found ourselves wondering how to build a bridge that would hold the values of both identities, getting inspiration and influence from one another. As a result, this research is written from the perspective of two musicians entering the mindset and experience of community engagement facilitators, and based on this experience, approaching our musicianship from a new viewpoint.

1.1 Context of the study

The case study of this research took place during eight weeks in the autumn of 2024 in the Sofianlehto Activity Centre (SAC)¹. This activity centre is dedicated to providing day activities with a multisensory focus that are specially catered to Helsinki residents with multiple disabilities. We, as facilitators, worked with an already established percussion group at SAC that meets every Monday morning for music sessions. The percussion group consists of six clients, who were participants of different genders, ages, and disabilities. In addition to the clients, there were normally three instructors present to support the flow and management of the session. We, as guest facilitators, collaborated with the instructors throughout the whole project and in every session.

During the eight weeks we were there, we tried different facilitating approaches to find the right stimulus for fruitful *musicking* with the participants. *Musicking* is a term coined by scholar Christopher Small (1998) that focuses on the process rather than the outcome. By

¹ We were granted permission from SAC to mention their institution in this study. More about the ethics of the presence of SAC in this project is explained in chapter 3.3 Ethics.

exploring and responding to their reactions, we established an approach where the two of us composed songs with poems written by the group's core instructors in the Finnish language, drawing inspiration from the participants' own ways of expressing themselves and the qualities they brought into the process. These songs turned out to be a powerful tool for communicating with the participants, which the instructors of SAC continue to use to this present day.

The time spent together at SAC was very beneficial for our growth as facilitators and for exploring the capabilities of our artistic expression as a tool for reciprocal communication. The songs we played with the participants created strong bonds amongst them and ourselves, which also shaped the artistic outcome of the project. During the Spring of 2025, the two of us composed music and poetry/prose about our time at the centre and decided that the title "The Little Worlds We Hold" for the resulting concert would represent our experience most directly. This concert was performed for the general public on the 12th of May 2025 as part of the Global Spring festival at the Helsinki Music Centre. In this written work, we will unpack and analyse the artistic process behind "The Little Worlds We Hold" to explore the ways our artistic identities were shaped by co-facilitating the community engagement project.

1.2 Introduction to the artist-researchers

The two of us approach this project with different and diverse personal experiences, both as artists and as facilitators of community engagement projects. In this section, we both introduce ourselves by writing in the first person of our background as individual artists and in previous experiences in community engagement projects.

1.2.1 Our identities as artists in the field

Vija:

My name is Vija and I am a Latvian-born, part-Australian percussionist and performer based in Finland, rooted in both Western classical percussion and traditional Latvian folk music. Early on, in my artistic practice, I have been curious about combining traditional music with contemporary genres. Growing up, I played Latvian folk music and was immersed in the local underground scene, listening to grunge and indie rock and attending concerts with

fellow musicians. Together, we began experimenting with improvisation in these styles, integrating Latvian traditional vocal techniques and timbres, which sparked my curiosity to explore the combination of diverse musical traditions more deeply. Over time, I became more aware about the ways stories were conveyed in different traditions through music. This curiosity grew into a practice of collecting my own stories and exploring the stories of others, which also eventually evolved into community engagement projects, where I worked with participants to transform their experiences into music.

In 2023, I graduated with a Bachelor of Music from the Global Music Programme, Sibelius Academy of the University of the Arts Helsinki. As part of my freelance work, I perform both solo and in collectives. Currently, I am active in two collaborative projects – I play balafon and co-compose music about stories found in news articles with the Latvian adventurous trio *Nielsliens Lielsliens* and I am the vocalist and percussionist for an experimental co-creative folk collective *Tell Your Birds*. Since 2016, I have been composing music for contemporary theatre and dance productions, including arts-based community engagement projects. From 2018-2025 I was the music program curator and co-producer for *Optižūns*, an experimental and multidisciplinary arts festival. During these eight years of curating and co-producing the festival, I am most proud of the initiative of building connections with the local community through artistic collaborations with young people from the region.

Kärt:

My name is Kärt, and I'm a Helsinki-based Estonian musician and cultural organiser. During the last ten years, my biggest passion and focus in music has been on learning about musical traditions of different people and places, and through these exposures, eventually creating my own sonic expression. My roots and educational background are in Estonian traditional music, which I see as a language to use when communicating with other musicians. I am very eager to create and find spaces for intercultural collaboration where the musical traditions, styles and genres can interact and influence each other. I see it as the most powerful way to make the world a richer and more peaceful place.

I obtained my bachelor's degree in Global Music from the Sibelius Academy of the University of the Arts Helsinki in 2022. As part of my artistic expression and action, I have taken part in many music projects and collectives as a violinist and DJ. Currently, I play and

sing in an experimental folk collective *Tell Your Birds*, and co-host music shows in Estonian Public Broadcasting. For the past three years, I have also been the artistic director of an international project and global music gathering *Ethno Estonia*, which is aimed at young musicians around the world.

1.2.2 Our identities as facilitators of community engagement projects

Vija:

I have had the most experience with community engagement projects in a contemporary theatre context, working with location-based communities in small towns close to the Latvian borders. In addition, I have also had a couple of community engagement projects with children, facilitating percussion musicking sessions and co-creative compositions. My motivation to initiate community engagement projects comes from the wish, as an artist, to be in closer relation with people in society outside the bubble of the professional artistic community. In my past experiences, community engagement projects have brought meaningful connections with people I would otherwise not meet or create a bond with. I believe one of the reasons the created connections were so meaningful was because of the artistic tools, like music and theatre, that were used almost as an “excuse” or an occasion to meet, collaborate, and trust each other. The artistic tools gave people a voice and a space to express themselves outside of their usual ways of being, which inspires them to be imaginative and creative. Those experiences gave me hope that implementing community engagement projects is a meaningful experience that benefits both sides.

Kärt:

I have always wanted to see and use music not only as a final product itself but rather as a tool for further social purposes – a voice for a collective expression, a reason to bring a community together, a currency to have a cultural exchange with, or another kind of social intention. The bottom line of all of these is that music has so much power and potential that is often unseen or unused. As a musician, I found my way to facilitation because I wanted to use that power as much and as well as possible.

I have done my exchange studies as part of the Community Music MA programme at the University of York, England. In addition to that, I also conducted a study field trip in Ireland (Dublin and Cork) to learn from and work together with several organisations that are based in the field of community music. Besides these study opportunities, I have led and coordinated a number of youth community projects in Estonia, Belgium and USA. My motivation for the project came from a personal experience when I started to use singing as a tool for (re)connection with my grandmother in a care home for patients with Alzheimer's and dementia. Through that, I witnessed from very close up how much joy and confidence music can offer and how it can be the bridge to communicate emotions. That experience not only offered me the discovery of making music in a healthcare setting, but it also expanded my understanding of music in general.

1.3 Research aim and questions

This research is rooted in duoethnographic methodologies (Sawyer & Norris, 2016), uncovering the ways our artistic identities reformed in the process of co-creating an artistic outcome reflecting our experiences of co-facilitating a community engagement project with a group in SAC. The overarching aim of this duoethnography is therefore to investigate how co-facilitating a community engagement project can shape a musical outcome and influence musicians' artistic identities.

The research questions that address this aim are:

1. How does co-facilitating a community engagement project in an activity centre shape the co-creation of a musical outcome?
2. How does co-facilitating a community engagement project in an activity centre influence our artistic identities?

During the project at SAC, we were making music with the community and about the community, whereas after the project we were making music for an audience about the experience in the community. In that artistic process of co-creating the concert, we were bridging the gap between participatory and presentational music (Camlin, 2014; Turino, 2008). The first phase of the project, with the community in SAC, was created with strong

participatory elements, keeping in mind the qualities of *musicking* – mindful improvisation practiced with active listening (Small, 1998) – as well as relationships, joy, flow, resonant topics, and *synchronicity* (Turino, 2008). In the planning process we designed the sessions with a *communal music making* approach, which is a concept explained by Lee Higgins (2012). The approach emphasises the importance of people, participation, context, equality of opportunity, and diversity (Higgins, 2012).

In the second phase of the project, the two of us in cooperation with chosen fellow musicians (see *Appendix 1. Programme notes, page 1* in Appendices), were composing music and co-creating the concert “The Little Worlds We Hold” about the experience with the community at SAC. In this context, we created the outcome with presentational music qualities – composed, arranged and rehearsed music that is prepared to be performed for an audience (Camlin, 2014; Turino, 2008), but also as part of the artistic intent, integrating the qualities of participatory music – where the aim is to involve as many people as possible from the audience in the performance (Camlin, 2014; Matarasso, 2019; Turino, 2008).

As musicians in the Global Music Programme at the Sibelius Academy, we were exposed to many different forms of intercultural collaborations during the studies. These experiences had a big impact on our musicianship in this project, influencing the ways we created the artistic outcome through collaboration and co-creation. While learning and practicing cultural humility (Bibus & Koh, 2021; Tervalon & Murray-García, 1998) in our studies in the Global Music Programme, we developed skills that supported our work as facilitators. In this artistic process, combining all the previously mentioned concepts, we discovered the ways our artistic identities were reshaping.

1.4 Structure of the written work

The introduction chapter of the work described the phenomena being studied and articulated our motivations behind the implementation of the research project. In the second chapter we outline our theoretical framework and key concepts within the context of this study, accompanied by reviews of previous studies conducted on the subject and literature that defines the key terms we use in our theoretical framework. Chapter three articulates our

implementation of this study in three sub-chapters of the methodological approach, data generation and analysis, and the ethics. In chapter four we analyse and deconstruct the artistic processes behind the components of “The Little Worlds We Hold”. In chapter five we present an interactive dialogue where we discuss our findings from the project and answer the research questions. In chapter six we outline our conclusions of the study.

2. Artistic identity and its reformation through interaction with community

This chapter outlines four main theoretical underpinnings of the key concepts of this study, with artistic identity being the main theoretical overarching topic. The key concepts are accompanied by literature of previous studies conducted on similar topics that act as stable guides for the use of terminology employed in this study. In the following section we introduce our key concepts of artistic identity followed by a subconcept of musical identity; community music and community musicianship; participatory and presentational music making; and relationship between health, wellbeing and music.

2.1 Artistic Identity

Artistic identity is a term that describes how each artist is individually unique, based on their preferences, technique, cultural background, personal experiences and personality (Hargreaves, et al., 2002; Thomson, 2021). In this study, artistic identity is referred to as a broader term to capture the fluidity of our practices that involve our own musical identities at the core and artistic choices beyond the music. To start our exploration of the term, we begin with the definition that artistic identity is something which enables us to look at the connections and interactions between music and the individual (Hargreaves, et al., 2002). Artistic choices and preferences can emerge from inspirations of musical encounters collected over time, or they can emerge from our subconscious just from who we are as people (Turino, 2008). Artistic identities are formed by impactful and subtle experiences throughout the artist's life (Green, 2011; Hargreaves, et al., 2002; Thomson, 2021; Turino, 2008). Our identities bridge our inner world and personal identity with our outer world, our public identity, that we adapt accordingly to our surroundings (Green, 2011). If we were to break down the concept of identity, we could simply state that it is a composition of habits we have selected to represent our own self to ourselves and our own self to others (Turino, 2008).

Nathan Riki Thomson's (2021) research *Resonance. (Re)forming an Artistic Identity through Intercultural Dialogue and Collaboration* supports understanding of the ways artistic identity can be shaped and reformed through certain settings and collaborations. His research examines how intercultural dialogue and transcultural collaboration can be catalysts for the (re)formation of artistic identities. Even though the intercultural and transcultural aspects are

not that relevant for our work, Thomson's work underlines well what artistic identity is, why it matters, and how it can be formed and reformed through meaningful interactions:

Ultimately, identity formation can be seen as an essential part of being in and contributing to the world around us, including being allowed to be who we are and embracing difference and diversity in all its forms. (Thomson, 2021, p. 145)

A research project that has a similar nature to our own project is Kathleen Turner's (2017) artist statement and performance *The Lines Between Us: Exploring the Identity of the Community Musician through an APR approach* as part of her doctoral research. This project was about Turner's experiences bridging her identities of being a community musician and songwriter. Her music and stories drew inspiration from community projects where she worked with children (Turner, 2017). One of the inspiring phenomena of her performance and artistic statement, is the emphasis on the power of arts practice research or APR (Leavy, 2022). By analysing data in the form of artistic work, she uncovers layers of undiscovered truths about identity and forms of expression (Turner, 2017). In Turner's case, she discovers that her artistic identity consists of four major parts as a singer, songwriter, community musician, and researcher, and those parts are the main focus points of how she created her performance. She states,

I utilised my skills as a singer and songwriter in order to better understand my practice as a community musician, to communicate my learning process to an audience, and to become a more empathetic and effective facilitator working in a field that is deeply connected to social justice. (Turner, 2017, p.1)

Artistic identity could be looked at and understood from a very broad perspective but for understanding the profoundness of this term, we suggest breaking it down to underline the musical quality of the artistic identity.

2.1.1 Musical identities

Essentially, musical identity is a subterm we use for our artistic identity as we discover how we reshaped our identity through music practices. It is a topic that is most often viewed from

the cultural background perspective (Hargreaves et al., 2002) but it could also be a sum of many different triggers such as preferences, experiences and skills. Music can also be seen as one of the most fundamental and universal channels of communication (Hargreaves, et al., 2002). Hargreaves, Miell and MacDonald (2002) suggest that music is fairly comparable with a spoken language as it could equally work in shifting, developing and even constructing new identities. We shift and develop our identities through social interactions and the same happens when approaching music in new ways and forms (Hargreaves, et al., 2002).

Lucy Green's (2011) book *Learning, teaching, and musical identity: Voices across cultures* describes the term of musical identity in the context of community engagement and facilitation. According to Green, musical identities are shaped by not only our personal paths of uncovering forms of artistic expression, but also by musical interaction through facilitated musicking in a community or group. Green emphasises the abundance of knowledge that can be learned from participants while being in the role of a facilitator, because we take into account the participants reactions and understanding of music when leading musicking processes. To describe how musical identities are shaped, she states:

Musical identities are forged from a combination of personal, individual musical experiences on one hand, and membership in various social groups – from the family to the nation-state and beyond – on the other hand. They encompass musical tastes, values, practices (including reception activities such as listening or dancing), skills, and knowledge; and they are wrapped up with how, where, when, and why those tastes, values, practices, skills, and knowledge were acquired or transmitted. (Green, 2011, p. 1)

We are used to defining our musical identities through technique, style and genre, but now we uncover an important truth that our musical identities are just as importantly defined through community and social interaction (Green, 2011; Turino, 2008).

2.2 Community music and community musicianship

This research is based on a community engagement project and therefore, we use the term *community music* throughout the whole process of writing about it. As even though the concept as such has gained more and more popularity, it is important to establish a common

definition of it within the context of our project and its aim. In the following section we will outline the literature that analyses concepts and terminology within the field of community music.

Lee Higgins (2012) has brought out in his book *Community Music: In theory and Practice* three broader perspectives of community music. These are: (1) music of community; (2) communal music making; and (3) an active intervention between a music leader or facilitator and participants (Higgins, 2012). Clearly, the first two perspectives are more general and more connected to each other, allowing us to explain almost any community music setting and engagement. The third perspective is more specific and technical and therefore requires a bit more thorough explanation. Higgins (2012) has referred to the third perspective as a phenomenon where the emphasis is on “people, participation, context, equality of opportunity, and diversity” (p. 4). He also breaks down concepts of elitism, arguing how music should be an accessible source for people and that the concept of community music is a form of hospitality. For Higgins, the concept of hospitality in this context is meant to emphasise the nature of community music being about creating relationships, empowering people through expression, and creating spaces of equality. He states that musicians who are working in this way, want to find meaningful, relevant and accessible music making opportunities that include elements such as listening, improvising and musical invention. That takes us to defining the role, skills and behaviour of a community musician.

It is quite clear that community musicians need to simultaneously wear many hats. These could be either a performer, facilitator, youth worker, caretaker, social worker or anything else. David Price (2010) has used a very illustrative metaphorical example for describing this case, stating that a community musician could also be seen as a human version of a Swiss pen-knife, needing various and extended social, musical and organizational skills. Even though these practical skills and the related mindsets are absolutely crucial, it is necessary to not forget about the identifying qualities of a community musician which are the values and beliefs that need to be in correspondence with the job. Turner (2017) describes in her research how community music relies on the hope and vision that all the people have an equal potential to be part of the creative process through contributing in whichever volume and ways it is possible, and that everyone should have the right to access and take part in music-making opportunities. Considering that, sociocultural values and intentions become as important in creating an identity and image for a community musician as the actual artistic

outcome (Turner, 2017).

2.3 Participatory and presentational music making

Our project focuses on outlining the ways the community engagement project in a care setting impacted our artistic identity, which also requires a framework that helps us bridge the gap between the community engagement project and the artistic outcome. Authors such as Camlin (2014), Matarasso (2019) and Turino (2008) have written about the defining qualities of participatory and presentational arts.

For a broader view of how community participatory art became a more established practice in the fields of art, François Matarasso's (2019) book *A Restless Art: How participation won and why it matters* provides a deep-dive reflection based on numerous examples of projects and artworks. Matarasso (2019) emphasises the many possibilities of discovering new ideas through co-creation and the powerful outcomes of creating an open space for people to contribute. According to Matarasso (2019), the direct explanation of the term "participatory arts" is an artistic outcome made by a collaboration of professional artists and non-professional artists, which then developed in another phrasing by Matarasso: "*everyone involved in the artistic act is an artist*" (p. 49). Similarly, the main qualities of participatory arts as defined by Camlin (2014) are inclusion, human relationships, and participation rather than aesthetics, technical virtuosity, and presentability (Camlin, 2014).

Thomas Turino's (2008) book *Music as a social life: The politics of participation* describes presentational and participatory music as a flowing continuum with the performed music, adapting to the contributions of the audience, or precisely performing preplanned arrangements as expected. He delves into a comparison of what participatory and presentational music means, not only conceptually but also culturally. There are many examples of music traditions where participation can mean involvement through dance or musicking together or active listening. Aesthetics have a great impact on the participatory experience in a care setting (Moss, 2021) and adds to the feeling of togetherness and synchronicity in a group (Turino, 2008). In the case of composing music in a community setting, aesthetics play a significant role in a successful co-creative outcome, because those elements secure the continuation of the music in the participants memory and heart (Turino, 2008).

On the other hand, presentational music relies on qualities that focus on performing detailed, contrasting and intricate compositions of music (Turino, 2008). This music is rehearsed with an ensemble or alone for an audience, and distinguishes between defining who is the performer and who is the listener or audience (Turino, 2008). The musician focuses on performing the music the way it was composed and intended, not on inviting active participation (Turino, 2008). In comparison to participatory music, presentational music can also focus more on individual virtuosity, rhythmical contrasts, detailed passages of timbre and changing grooves, as the music is not intended as a supporting foundation for spontaneous participation (Turino, 2008). Participatory music's quality is about encouragement and support rather than self expression through technical skill or presentational performance, which can challenge a performer's usual practice of high demand self expression and creates an experience of music being a medium for serving others (Turino, 2008).

2.4 Relationships between health, wellbeing, and music

As the case study of this research took place in an activity centre with a group of clients who all had various disabilities, it became crucial to be aware of the relationships between music and health. Considerable research has been published in this area from a wide range of perspectives (e.g. Batt-Rawden, 2018; MacDonald, et al., 2018; Moss, 2021; Stige, 2012), many of which have centered the study around terms such as *music therapy* and *health musicking*. As stated by Koivisto: "*Health musicking* is an area including professionals from various fields, and volunteers engaged in health promoting music practices in social and health care" (2022, p. 126) and accordingly stated by Stige: "*music therapy* could be defined as the study and learning of relationships between music and health" (2002, p. 198).

When we talk about the relationships between music and health, as well as their implications to holistic wellbeing of the individuals and communities, we also need to talk about the *care ethics* (e.g., Hoover, 2021). As there is a significant discussion related to the positionality of us as researchers and the vulnerability of the group we worked with, we discuss it in greater detail in section 3.4. To give an idea of what ethics in the context of care represent, Koivisto and Kivijärvi (2025) have explained: "Ethics play a crucial role in guiding behaviour, shaping laws and protocols, influencing decision-making, and fostering social cooperation." (p. 2)

In the frameworks of this research, we will not examine the medical implications of *musicking* at SAC, but rather approach it from the angle of community music which by its own nature shares the same emphasis of the importance of ethical thinking and reflection. The intentions of health musicking are based on improving the health and/or wellbeing of individuals and communities (Koivisto, 2022), whereas the intentions of community music are embedded merely in creating relationships, empowering people through expression and creating spaces of equality (Higgins, 2012).

Considering the points outlined above, when creating or performing music in healthcare facilities, ethics are the fundamental principles that also impact the following creative process and possible outcome. For the project at SAC, the need for ethical perspectives and decisions offered us the framework for making artistic choices, and therefore became a fundamental component of the final artistic outcome.

3. Implementation of the research project

3.1 Methodological approach

This study integrates the research methodologies of duoethnography (Sawyer & Norris, 2016) and arts-based research (Leavy, 2022) grounded in a reflexive approach (Bolton & Delderfield, 2018; May & Perry, 2017). The study requires this combination because the generated data comes from different phases and aspects of the whole process of the project. In the next sections we will explain the use of the mentioned research methodologies in the context of this study.

3.1.1 Duoethnography

We articulate that this research is rooted in duoethnographic methodologies (Sawyer & Norris, 2016) because we study and write about our culture, which is created and experienced within our collaborative artistic practice, from the perspectives of artists and researchers (Adams et al., 2015). In this project we share our reflections and opinions in tandem as a unified narrative, yet in chapter five we open up a dialogue in the traditional writing style of a duoethnography in a play-script format (Sawyer & Norris, 2016). In the context of our project and research process, the duoethnographic methodologies allowed us to reach important conclusions and understandings through valuable discussions and reflections. Throughout the whole project, we helped to mirror and reflect each other through discussions, which was especially helpful when working with a sensitive topic such as this.

As this research is based on duoethnographic methodologies which are framed by the practice of community music, reflexivity became a very crucial component in all the stages of it. For this purpose, we used insights from Sawyer's and Norris' (2016) book "*Interdisciplinary Reflective Practice through Duoethnography*" that illustrates how dialogic and relational forms of research help to facilitate deeply personal and situated understandings. In addition, their ideas supported how we think and experience our practice, and promoted personal reflexivity in the team of the two of us (Sawyer & Norris, 2016).

3.1.2 Arts-based research

One of the key components for this study is self reflection about our artistic practices – individually and also in tandem as a duo (Sawyer & Norris, 2016) – to uncover the key points of the impact of the project on our artistic practice. Arts-based research (Leavy, 2022) is consequently an important approach in this study. The nature of the artistic content, and thus arts-based research, comes as diverse forms of interactive knowledge (Gerber et al., 2012). As stated by Gerber et al. (2012):

Also included in this world-view is the aesthetic ontological concept that art is often the purveyor of truth or enlightenment relative to self-knowledge and knowledge of others. Finally, within this world-view is the belief that the use of the arts is crucial to achieving self-/other knowledge through exploring pre-verbal ways of knowing. (p.41)

We value our artistic data as equal to our research diaries and interactive interviews to uncover the truths that present themselves directly through forms of artistic expression (Gerber et al., 2012).

3.1.3 Reflexive practice

As previously mentioned, reflexive practices were implemented throughout the whole process, aligning with ethical aspects while working with the community (Higgins, 2012; Green, 2011). In addition, we implemented artistic reflexivity by composing music as a form of reflection (Bolton & Delderfield, 2018; Gerber et al., 2012; Leavy, 2022). Bridging reflexive practices and musicking (Small, 1998) is a key point of this research, as we define the ways we were artistically impacted by our work as community music practitioners.

Reflexivity is the process of self reflection about our approach and perspective (May & Perry, 2017). It can happen either in action or post action by analysing events that occurred during practice (Trevelyan et al., 2014). To uncover findings to our research question, we deconstruct the composition process and the musical component in the outcome of our songs through a reflexive approach. Reflexivity practices require accountability for power and voice within the research topic and field (Adams et al., 2015). Accountability helps us to

acknowledge mistakes that further improves our practices which is the baseline of reflexivity practices (Bolton & Delderfield, 2018). There is great importance in drawing parallels between past and present, to consider and define how experiences, relationships and interactions influence our present work (Adams et al., 2015). In the case of this study, by defining our past experiences' impact on the present, we can get closer to answering our research question.

3.2 Data generation and analysis

During the eight-week period of the sessions at SAC, the two of us generated data in the forms of planning notes, research diaries, soundscape recordings and songs. This data played a key role in the creation process for the artistic outcome "The Little Worlds We Hold". During the creation process for the artistic outcome, we generated data in the forms of discussion notes and the artistic content of "The Little Worlds We Hold". We analysed all the data generated throughout the project with an iterative approach where the analysis of the data is developed in cycles. In the next section, we will describe the different forms of data we generated and the analysis process we used for each form of data in the same sub-section, rather than dedicating a separate section of the text for data analysis.

3.2.1 Planning notes for the community engagement project

The data generation started in the first phase of the project by preparing for the sessions at SAC. For that, we met up with our supervisor to plan the following sessions, taking into account both pedagogical and ethical perspectives. It was important to define the meaning of our role at SAC as music facilitators and not as music therapists or other forms of medical practitioners amongst ourselves (Koivisto, 2022). We wrote down notes, made an overarching plan for the eight-week period at SAC, and generated ideas for facilitating musicking with the participants, taking into account their skills and preferences. Before each upcoming session, the two of us would meet to create a plan based on our shared reflections from the previous one. The intention in our groundwork was to emphasise approaches that could create moments of interactive communication through music and musicking with the participants. We analysed our planning notes with an iterative approach through a reflexive awareness. In practice, the iterative analysis consisted of comparing the different outcomes of each session, documented in the research diaries with the expected outcomes in the planning notes. Over

time, during the eight-week period, the planning notes and outcomes of the sessions documented in the research diaries matched more frequently.

3.2.2 Individual research diaries from the sessions

During the project at SAC, we both individually kept a research diary where we reflected on our experiences and the outcomes of co-facilitating the music sessions according to the initial plan. After each session we had planned a designated time and space to write our research diaries which consisted of two different focuses. First, we highlighted memorable moments of connection, joy and increased engagement with the participants during the session. Secondly, we analysed which components of our initial plan for the session were successful and which components needed to be either improved or discarded. The writing style of the entries was informal and applied a narrative approach, describing and reflecting the emotional aspects taking place in collaborative musicking, but also adding practical feedback notes for improving our future sessions. Essentially, the memorable moments of connection documented in the diaries became a valuable and meaningful source for composing for the concert “The Little Worlds We Hold” and for this study.

3.2.3 Soundscapes from the sessions

With permission from SAC, we recorded the sessions as an audio soundscape diary to inspire the generation of the artistic material for “The Little Worlds We Hold”. That being said, these recordings are not treated as data for the study itself. The audio files are kept on an external hard drive and will be destroyed within six months after the completion of this study. The audio files were helpful when composing for the concert, especially with one particular composition – “Intro to E” – which concentrated on recreating the soundscape through listening practices. In our iterative analysis of the recordings, we were noting sonic behaviours and physical reactions from the participants, for example vocal phrases, rhythm patterns and movements that were implemented into the music of “The Little Worlds We Hold”.

3.2.4 Interpreting the soundscapes through duo improvisations after the sessions

A direct approach of analysing and interpreting the soundscapes from the sessions were the improvisation sessions between the two of us. The improvisations took place directly after the group sessions at SAC. These improvisation moments were necessary to frame experienced sonic behaviors and interactions from the sessions in an immediate musical expression. For the improvisation we used a timer for ten minutes and gave ourselves complete freedom to improvise. The improvisations were documented as audio recordings. Unfortunately, as it required considerable time and energy, we did not manage to do it after every session but rather on a few chosen occasions.

3.2.5 The songs from the sessions

An important outcome from the sessions at SAC were six songs that emerged through the improvisations with the group. The songs developed into dedicated compositions about the participants with lyrics written in the Finnish language by the SAC instructors. The reason the lyrics were written by the instructors and not by us was that they knew the participants more personally. It was important that the lyrics would be recognizable and relatable for the participants by incorporating participants' names, favourite things, activities, and specific singular words they frequently use.

The melodies and grooves for the songs emerged during the first sessions through improvisation with the participants. For that, we tried to pay attention to which rhythms, grooves and melodies evoked which kinds of emotional responses from the participants. In addition, we explored the musical elements that the participants individually related to – for example dance grooves, repeating cycles, vocal timbres, fast melodies, clear motifs and natural resonance from the instruments.

3.2.6 Discussion notes during the artistic process

During our artistic process of creating the concert, we documented in written and audio formats the many discussions between the two of us about our reflections and philosophical findings, which we unpack in more detail in chapter five. Using an iterative approach, the notes were analysed to develop recurring themes that guided the planning process of this study and shaped the concepts incorporated into the theoretical framework. During our

artistic process, the discussions eventually formed into prose pieces for the final artistic outcome. In our discussions we were primarily uncovering topics for music compositions, lyrics and the overarching narrative for the concert to tell our story. Another interesting process that surfaced during our discussions, was how we questioned our motivations and intentions of facilitating musicking in a community engagement project at SAC. This was a key moment in underlining our artistic intentions in the context of the community engagement project.

Our discussions reached a shift, by going further from the two of us, to our wider working group of the musicians we collaborated with, to make the music for the final concert come alive. Rather than using direct quotations from our conversations with the band, we focus on reflecting on the challenges, concerns, and processes we experienced as band leaders. We collaborated with musicians from diverse cultural backgrounds, genres, and styles, selecting participants who resonated with and cared about the sensitive topic of the project. It was crucial to inform and explain the context of the music to the band, so they could understand more in depth the function of the music. In our rehearsals we explained our concepts and intentions behind the music, as well as our overall take on the project as a whole.

3.2.7 Artistic data – the concert “The Little Worlds We Hold”

The artistic data for this research are the music compositions and artistic elements created throughout this project for the final concert “The Little Worlds We Hold”. This multimedial data is part of what makes this work an arts-based research (Leavy, 2022), and the data is used in an analytical process of reflexivity. The composed music becomes vulnerable and multi-layered data that contains factual and emotional information. In our analysis process, we also deconstruct the music material by defining qualities of timbre, rhythm, melody, harmony and text to uncover and define our conscious artistic choices to tell the story of the community engagement project. The deconstruction and deeper analysis of our artistic outcome is unpacked in chapter four.

3.2.8 Additional data - the focus group interview with the SAC instructors

Additional data we generated was a focus group interview that we conducted with the instructors of SAC during the project with the participants. Our aim with the interview was to see this project from the perspective of the people who had been part of this group for much longer and had guided all the activities there before we arrived. In addition, it was important for us to get insights to the work that the instructors are doing daily at SAC, and how this work affects their life's other aspects. This interview was not directly used in this research. Instead, it was aimed to inspire us and as an opportunity to establish a stronger bond with the instructors.

3.3 Ethics

The holistic and processual nature of this project is grounded on ethical practices as facilitators in a community engagement project and as artists composing music. The data of this study was not generated directly from the participants in the community at SAC, but from our reflections on the process as researchers. The organisation of SAC and the band members for the concert "The Little Worlds We Hold" who participated in the project did so voluntarily, and were informed of the nature of the project and study.

This written study has been conducted with awareness of the structural ethics and researcher integrity (ALLEA, 2023). This research project was conducted following the guidelines of The Finnish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity and Procedures for Handling Alleged Violations of Research Integrity in Finland (TENK, 2023). Our project also is in line with the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (ALLEA, 2023). In addition, we were aware of other ethics that were more specific to facilitating music at the SAC.

We created our ethical framework after our first introductory visit to SAC, and we continued to develop it throughout the project. In our first visit we were introduced to the instructors, the space and to the general culture of SAC. Then we were introduced to the participants, with the instructors explaining each participant's communication preferences, skills and personalities. The majority of instructors would communicate with the participants through a warm and encouraging attitude. We picked up the communication approach as part of the culture of SAC and implemented it in our own facilitation practice with the community. It was our intention to be aware that in our facilitation practices we would be available for the participants, and reflective and flexible to adapt the musicking according to the participants

(Koivisto, 2022). This project demanded a strong inner compass and ethical understanding considering the given power relations, especially during the music sessions at SAC.

In the same introductory visit we observed the structure and approach of the usual percussion session at SAC, which was deeply rooted in improvisations that followed sonic impulses offered by the participants. While conducting the sessions, it was important for us not to step over anybody's comfort zone or feelings of safety, which is why we tried to take less space during the first sessions and expand it step by step through all the sessions. Our role was not connected to healing or healthcare, but to being music facilitators and therefore, we were not expected to be informed about their medical records. As Koivisto (2022) states:

Relational expertise is also important for many practical reasons, such as that musicians do not have access to the health records of the patients, and do not commit themselves as healthcare workers in any way. (p. 79)

At the beginning of our collaboration with SAC we had agreed verbally and on paper with the organisation to keep the participants and instructors anonymous in our artistic outcome and research. For us it was extremely important to protect the identity of all people in the SAC community. We were given permission to record the sessions with our H2n zoom recorder to analyse our facilitation amongst the two of us and for looking back at the sessions in the later stage of composing music, but not for public use. We were also given permission by the organisation of SAC to write about the events that occurred during the sessions in our handwritten physical diaries.

For the concert we used our diary entries from the sessions with pseudonyms for the participants and we got permission from SAC to use the texts for our artistic work. As we also used two songs from the sessions in our artistic outcome, we got permission from SAC to perform those songs with changed lyrics.

Our position as researchers

We, Vija and Kärt, are the subjects of this study and we are observing ourselves as artists, facilitators and community musicians in the context of this project. We started this research

out of our embedded belief in the power of collaborative music-making, being curious about the ways music interactions work and then influencing us in different social contexts.

The members of the SAC community were the participants of our facilitated sessions, and the members of “The Little Worlds We Hold” band were the participants of the collaborative musicking for the final concert of this project. We see both, the people from the SAC community and the members of the band as individuals who participated in the project but not directly in the study, rather as collaborators and fellow participants with whom we shared this exploration of artistic identity and community engagement. The members of “The Little Worlds We Hold” band were part of the artistic co-creation and therefore, their names are also stated in the credits in the *programme notes* (see *Appendix 1. Programme notes, page 1* in Appendices).

4. Co-creating the musical outcome for “The Little Worlds We Hold”

In this chapter, we will unpack the music and artistic texts we composed for our final concert “The Little Worlds We Hold” which reflected back on the experiences we had facilitating the sessions at SAC. The concert took place on the 15th of May 2025, in Musiikkitalo, Black Box, as a master’s degree final concert that was part of the Global Spring annual festival. The concert poster is shown in Figure 1 and an excerpt of the concert programme described:



Figure 1. The poster for “The Little Worlds We Hold” made by Vija Moore.

“The Little Worlds We Hold” is Kärt Tambet’s and Vija Moore’s way of describing the sentiment of living through a community project.

This master’s degree concert is a collection of reflections about the experiences both Vija and Kärt had, encountering the community at Sofianlehto Activity Center. The eight weeks of music interaction inspired an expanded perspective on their artistic

expression and values. Making music with this community created a Little World that now will continue to exist as long as we hold it.

(Tambet & Moore, 2025, extract from the concert programme. See Appendix 1. Programme notes, page 1 in Appendices)

For framing the metaphorical concept of our artistic outcome, we came up with the idea of imagining the “Little World” that we hold in our own palms as carefully as possible. The “Little World” in that context represents us becoming part of the community we encountered at SAC, but through giving it a metaphorical figure, we hope that others can connect with the idea from their own personal experiences, thinking of a Little World of their own.

In the creation of this concert, we blended our identities as facilitators and musicians, drawing inspirations from the data generated at SAC – the research diaries, the songs, the soundscape recordings, as well as the co-creative musicking with our band members and our own roots in music. These are the core elements that have contributed to the creation of the artistic outcome, and through the analysis and deconstruction of the concert programme, define our findings of this study.

Another fundamental element for the concert was the constructed stage arrangement (see Figure 2). The chosen scenography was an integral component of creating an engaging space for the audience and shaping the figure of the Little World, which draws inspiration from a story that also was part of the artistic outcome (see section 4.2). We followed a circular formation, positioning each musician on a platform and audience between and in front of the platforms. Circular formations are common for gatherings with singing; this has been researched in studies as people tend to keep returning to circles as an engaging formation (Gyovai & Hevesi, 2015). In the center of the circle, we added another platform for an additional stage for the compositions that required us as a duo to be closer to each other. Between the central and circle platforms we left the space for the dancers to move around freely.

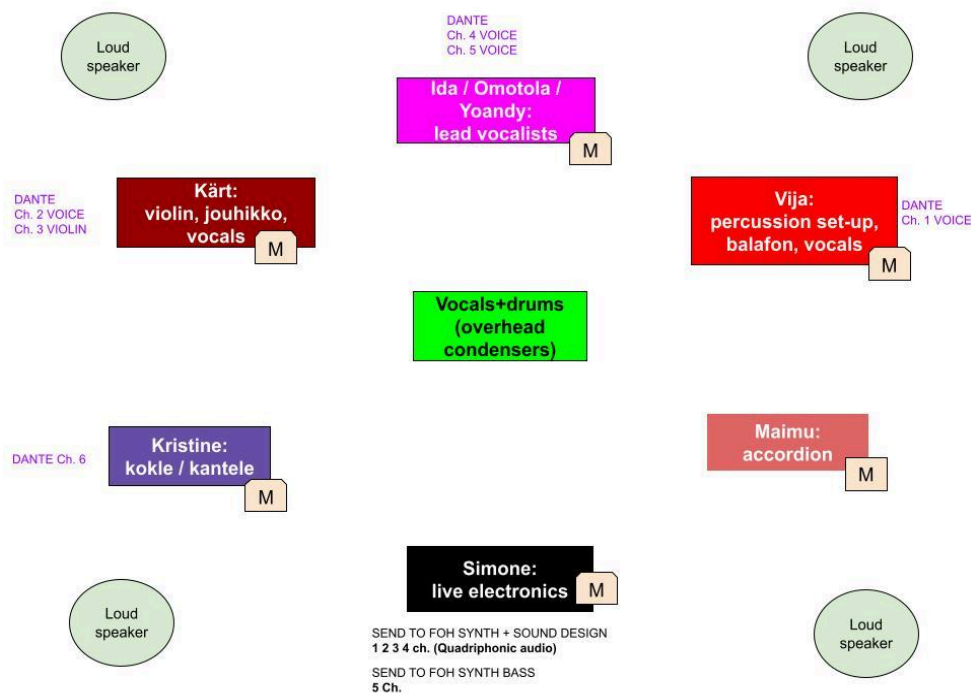


Figure 2. Stage map for “The Little Worlds We Hold”.

In the next section we will unpack all the compositions and texts of “The Little Worlds We Hold” in the same order as they were presented in the concert (see *Appendix 2. Programme notes, page 2* in Appendices).

4.1 “Čukai-ņukai / Tuhkai-njukai”

We were searching for ways to start the concert with an inviting mood. Not necessarily establishing an active space for constant participation, but rather creating a space where we, the performers, were connected to our audience in a closer way, through music and singing.

This song is a common folk song in both Latvian and Estonian traditional repertoire. It has a deeper meaning for us personally, as this was the song that established a connection between the two of us back in 2020. In addition, there has been historically, culturally and traditionally a strong power in people coming and singing together, not only in the Baltics but globally around the world (McClure, 1998). The human voice united in this context represents an idea that was one of the reasons we wanted to do this project in the first place.

Bringing this piece and momentum into our concert gave us an understanding of how approachable it is to invite the audience to be part of the story that is told on the stage. A Little World of its own is created in the space and time of the performance together with the audience and performers. The audience's active participation in the song was incredible as the room was filled with the whole crowd singing back to us. We wrote our own lyrics for the song with made up words in short repetitive syllable phrases, incorporating sounds from our native languages easy enough for the audience to repeat. The reason for this was to achieve accessible participation from the audience without the obstacle of language barriers. The Photo 1. below is from the moment we started to invite the crowd to sing with us in this song.



Photo 1. Photo by Jorma Airola of us performing the song “Čukai-ŋukai / Tsuhkai-ŋuhkai” at the concert “The Little Worlds We Hold” May 15th 2025, Black Box, Musiikkitalo, Helsinki.

4.2 The story of the Ganvie village

During the composing process in Spring 2025, Vija had an intercultural immersion field trip in Benin during the month of February, to learn more about the West African balafon tradition from a griot family based there. In her diary she wrote,

In Benin, I got to experience various forms of participatory music as part of daily life as well as special celebratory events. Music as a happening is meant for active participation of people from all ranges of generations, backgrounds and skillsets, either through dance, singing or percussive playing. There were many spontaneous interactions of music with large groups of people, always with a welcoming spirit. I had the opportunity to visit the floating village of Ganvie on the lake Nokoue. Ganvie is one of the most famous villages in Benin because of its story of how it came to be and because of the people's way of life living on the lake, being one with the lake. In West-African tradition, storytelling with music is a big part of archiving historical events, passing down knowledge from generation to generation. (Research diary, Moore, 2025)

One of our inspirations for the Little World came from learning about the village of Ganvie on the Nokoue lake. The story of how the village was created resonated strongly with us as a metaphor of the idea of what it means to facilitate a community engagement project. In our eyes, it is a lot about people coming together to build a Little World with the community that can be geographical or uniting in other terms, such as friends or colleagues etc. The concert's scenographical concept of the space was also inspired by the world of the floating village of Ganvie. For us, it was important to include this story in our concert to paint a feasible and illustrative picture of that message and feeling. With the help of metaphors and stories, we were finding ways to invite the audience to live through the experience we had.

4.3 "Mitä matkalla näit?"

This song emerged from our sessions over the time period at SAC. It was written and dedicated to a participant in the group as part of the method of composing personalised songs for the participants, which we developed during the sessions. The personalisation came through the use of their names in the songs but also through writing lyrics that would either explain the characteristics of the participant or using words that the participant can recognise and relate to (see section 3.2.5).



Photo 2. Photo by Jorma Airola during the performance of the song "Mitä matkalla näit?" at the concert "The Little Worlds We Hold" May 15th 2025, Black Box, Musiikkitalo, Helsinki.

For the concert, for ethical reasons, we needed to change the lyrics and remove the name of the participant, but the core was maintained in a similar manner as it was in the sessions at SAC. The verse lyrics from the original song that emerged in the sessions at SAC were changed to English to describe the questions we would ask the participant.

An important part of the sessions at SAC was the freedom of movement. The participants would move around the room and so would we, to sit next to one participant and then go to another corner of the room to be with another one. In order to break the stillness of the audience during the performance, we invited two dancers to choreograph movements to this song. We believe that the presence of movement subconsciously makes the audience feel less restrained to being in one place and in one physical position throughout the whole concert. The Photo 2. above is from the concert with the dancers performing the choreography of the song.

4.4 "Set it up!"

During our sessions at SAC, we observed that effective communication with the participants can quite often be achieved with playfulness, not only musically but also through movement in groove. This composition encapsulates that.

Noticing how body language tells a story about the music we hear was another big discovery for us during this project. It feels that western music has been placed into a hierarchy so that melody is first, harmony is somewhere there coming along, and rhythm stays in the background. This project showed us very clearly how the rhythm can actually often be sensed as the first thing that we, humans, physically connect with. To underline the importance of this, we wrote a brief poem that was illustrating the idea of the world with and without the rhythm. The song also included a vocal melody, referencing a phrase that one of the participants was often repeating.

4.5 Journal entries

By reading aloud some of the journal entries that we wrote after the sessions at SAC in our concert outcome, we wanted to first give the audience some context about the community we were basing this whole project and concert on, and secondly, outline these memorable moments that gave us the inspiration for the compositions. These moments framed the concept of celebrating the sentiment of being part of a community, this specific community. Writing down these journal entries and then using them as an inspiration for the musical outcome taught us how humans and their ways of connecting to the world inspire musicians to translate these observations and experiences into the artistic language.

4.6 "Intro to E"

The sessions at SAC were mainly built upon the idea of improvising with percussion instruments, playing around the rhythmic and sonic impulses that the participants offered, and following them with a repetition or a repetitive motion of it.

In preparation of the composition, the two of us listened to the recordings of the sessions to recreate the soundscape through a listening practice that focuses on the sonic resonance. The

suggestion to recreate this experience in our concert was actually given by one of our band members who became mesmerized by the idea of how we approached listening at SAC. Instead of playing the percussion instruments with a rhythmical emphasis, the piece emphasised the sonic resonance that these percussion instruments are able to offer to the listener. For our participants at SAC, this was an especially crucial factor in connecting to the music they heard.

During the performance, we started to walk from the inner circle towards the outer circle. Only small sounds came from our instruments as we carefully passed by members of the audience. Each instrumentalist twisted paths through the dense crowd. One stopped, lifted the instruments close to the audience member's ears and very carefully made a sound, letting the little moment of resonance run through their body. Eventually, all instrumentalists increased intensity and made their way behind the audience, erupting in intertwining percussion patterns with herding calls flying across the room. The Photo 3. below shows the performers walking from the inner circle, approaching the audience with percussion instruments.



Photo 3. Photo by Jorma Airola from performing the song "Intro to E" at the concert "The Little Worlds We Hold" May 15th 2025, Black Box, Musiikkitalo, Helsinki.

4.7 “E”

This was another song that emerged from the sessions with the group at SAC. The song was composed with howling phrases inspired by one of the participants. The lyrics of the verse are saying how “I’m singing to you, do you hear it?” and for the chorus “But what if we would be singing together instead?”. Essentially, we tried to encourage the participant’s howling phrases to be sung in unison with the whole group which evolved to be one of the key elements of our purpose in SAC. Another important factor of this piece was that it was directly impacted by the vocal timbre and phrasing from the participant, creating a new sonic identity within the overview of the whole work.

4.8 Prose text

For the concert we were focused on conveying the message of our experience with the community, and a good tool for that was storytelling. One of our band members, who is a skilled writer, facilitated a writing workshop for the two of us. She gave us prompts in forms of questions circling around the concept of “The Little Worlds We Hold” and what that represents to us. We would react to the prompts in collaborative poems written line by line to later unpack the whole poem and discover new questions. All the poems and discussions resulted in this prose written by our band member (see Figure 3. below).

multiverses holding our universe
handful of billion timelines
within the amplitude of a palm
right here, in the sight of my steps

the little worlds had shapes, and colours and sounds. the streets of these worlds seemed just like
the ones i’ve seen in every town. so busy and yet so peaceful, full of passages and destinations dug
in the same cells that run around my blood vessels.
a street within my universe full of thousand miniverses, holding the same amplitude of time
passing within the same units of our Earth circling the Sun.

it’s a universe of miniverses
amplitude of time passing in the same unit
Seeing the same sun rising and setting, from nearby rooftops and nextdoor windows
what felt foreign, holds the same torch in the heart
a handful of the same sunshines and moonlights

stay with me, these little worlds
i’ll keep in my palms

Figure 3. Prose text written by Kristīne Tukre

4.9 “Itk”

The composition “Itk” (*cry* - English translation from Finnish and Estonian) was inspired by the lamenting tradition in Estonia and Finnish Karelia. Lamenting as such is a musical form of expressing grief or sorrow, and it’s done through combining crying with singing (Arukask, 2011; Nenola & Sinisalo, 1986). Community projects can be inspiring, warm and joyful, but there is also the other side when the time comes to bid farewell, when gratitude and sadness collide. That made a big change on how we saw the metaphorical Little World we created with the community. Through the process of reflecting back to this feeling, we saw it as a momentum of lamenting. In the tradition, the lamenters would improvise lyrics using metaphors that are embedded in the mythologies and folk songs of the local places. In the past, when the tradition was more alive, the lamenters were invited to funerals and weddings to lament for the ones who leave. Their role is to release people’s cry, as there can be overwhelming emotions that by having someone lament about your sorrow, putting it into words and singing it with the cry, releases the emotions with a stream of tears.



Photo 4. Photo by Jorma Airola from performing the song “Itk” at the concert “The Little Worlds We Hold” May 15th 2025, Black Box, Musiikkitalo, Helsinki.

The lyrics were written in Estonian and Latvian with chosen metaphors to represent the community, and verses using the lyric structures as in the tradition of lamenting. We lamented about why the community is dear to us and how leaving the community is affecting us. The Photo 4. above is of us lamenting in the concert performance.

The sonic identity of the song is deeply embedded into the chanting of the laments and for instrumental support we added the sounds of bowed five string kanteles (a traditional Finnish folk instrument). The kanteles embedded also a deeper meaning, as we had played and experimented with them together with the participants and instructors at SAC.

4.10 Final word “To build and to hold”

As the lyrics of “Itk” were written in our mother tongues, we recited miniature monologues in English to unpack the reflections of leaving the community and the greater reasons why this project was so important to us. With that, we wanted to give a moment of pause and to reflect out loud. Instead of quoting the full monologues, here is a condensed excerpt of them:

In this age of civilisation, we as musicians create a form of expression that results in outcomes that contribute to the music industry market. We as artists are motivated to get recognition to be able to generate income from albums and live shows. How can we contribute to wider society through forms of self expression? What creates meaning in our creative lives? In the end it’s all about the people around us. People are the ones that matter, and therefore having environments and opportunities to bring people together is more valuable than anything. (direct quote Moore & Tambet, 2025)

4.11 "This Little World"

The song “This Little World” is a manifestation of our artistic metaphor, which is also part of the title of our artistic outcome, the concert. The lyrics were written in collaboration with one of our band members, who is a soulful vocalist and a poet, and were inspired by Bob Holman’s poem “The Beginning of Language”. In the poem, rocks were described as people, as living beings that dreamt of walking and talking. The song was composed as a love letter to the community, to the Little World that smiles and shines, and that we appreciate in its own way of being.

The second half of the song was based on an Estonian *labajalg* (English translation - *flat foot*) dance (Kapper, 2020). For that we combined two tunes found from the Estonian Folklore Archives, and rearranged them for the band. The tradition of the dance is based on small, continuous and equal steps leading from one spin to the next, which for us represented and celebrated the way how our Little World spinned and evolved through the time given to it.

4.12 Thank you song

The thanking part at concerts is usually done as a separate moment that can easily interrupt the created world within a performance. For us, it was important to keep the world we had built up going from the very beginning until the very end. So instead of talking, we sang a song to express our gratitude to all the people and organisations involved in this project. The lyrics were written to the melody of the song “Čukai-ņukai / Tsuhkai-njukai” which we sang with the audience in very beginning of the concert, creating a full circle moment.

5. Findings made through an interactive dialogue

In this chapter we examine our findings from analysing the data generated in the community engagement project at SAC – the research diaries, session recordings and songs, along with the data generated from the “The Little Worlds We Hold” – the discussions during the artistic process and direct artistic data. To answer our research questions, we review our findings from the generated data in a conducted interactive dialogue between the two of us, written in the traditional writing style of a duoethnography in a play-script format (Sawyer & Norris, 2016).

Earlier in this study, we defined our conceptual frameworks along with literature that supports it in chapter two, and in chapter four we have deconstructed our artistic outcome “The Little Worlds We Hold” to uncover our findings and answer our research questions. In this chapter, the findings are grouped into three overarching topics. The first topic addresses how social interactions directly impact our artistic and musical identities. The second topic examines the ways our identities shift between the roles of a facilitator and musician, and consequently the role of an audience in correlation to the performing musician. Lastly, the third topic reviews the key elements of transforming emotional experiences into artistic expression.

5.1 Social interaction and engagement is the foundation

Kärt:

What I have always sensed in some ways, is that artistic identity is shaped firstly and mostly through social interactions, as also Hargreaves and others (2002) have explained. Our project was a lot about exactly that – social awareness and social interactions, about how to work with people and music, and what are the connection points between these two. Obviously, there are more than a billion different versions of that and therefore, they affect us differently as well. It depends on who we are collaborating and interacting with but also on how we do it and on how it relates to both parties of this interaction. So for us, the big part of this social interaction was the group that we encountered and even further, the individuals in that specific group. To be fair, the whole group setting was anyway different from what we are used to but so were the people within that group, inspiring us individually and differently. I feel that we really needed to search for new ways of communicating through music which

itself, as again Hargreaves and others (2002) have stated, is one of the most fundamental channels for it. In the context of our work and in the context of the position we held, there was a lot of stepping over the familiar and how we normally approach music making.

Another aspect to look at about human interaction and working in these settings with people and music, is the honest purpose of doing it. I feel that the reason why we wanted to make that project happen in the first place, came from the realisation of how music-making and music itself has gone further from human perspective and human connection. It has gotten more technical, more electronic, more business oriented, more produced, and not so much purposed and in a way “real” anymore. Searching and finding this kind of a humanness and humanity in music-making was something I got to observe a lot from the education perspective on my study field trip in Ireland this autumn. I visited many different organisations where the curriculum itself defined music as a tool for social inclusion – I find this to be an incredible quality that music can offer to us, and I think it becomes clear to everyone that in the big picture, it matters much more than any technical execution of music.

Talking about social interaction and inclusion brings me to looking more closely at what it means to communicate through music and what are the ingredients that are needed for it. That obviously depends on who we are communicating with in which context, but facilitating music-making at SAC with participants who had various developmental and cognitive disabilities, gave me a sense of many new possible layers of musical communication. As Thomson (2021) has also observed and discussed, it often leads to finding more physical and physically resonant aspects of it – how do we listen, feel, see and possibly even taste the music we hear. Considering that, we also make new conclusions about how to make music that people then can listen, feel, see and taste from their own perspective.

Vija:

I could react to what you said about the social interaction shaping artistic identities and how we developed the communication with the participants, as those observations are one of my biggest takeaways from the project. During our time at SAC, I was greatly impacted by observing in real time the sincere reactions of the participants to the music’s mood. This made us compose songs that match with their personalities and preferences, which also created a closer bond with the participants. We paid close attention to different sonic behaviors and physical reactions that occurred in the interactions. These behaviors and

reactions included vocal phrases, eye contact, smiles, laughter, rhythm patterns, ways of listening, experiences of resonance and movements. All of those components became part of our communication with the participants through techniques of mirroring and dialoguing, which are techniques Moss (2021) had also used in her work of musicking with patients. These experiences of communication at SAC also led to my awareness on how music becomes a medium for communicating gently and how it creates moments of tenderness, also as Moss (2021) explained: “Firstly, music transformed the hospital bedroom for a few moments, just as music is used on an aeroplane to calm nervous passengers, or in aerobics classes to promote movement” (p. 4). I remember when I sang one of the songs for a particular participant, they walked up to me and just looked me in the eyes with a smile on their face, then walked away. This was the first time we had a direct interaction because of the music, and made me reflect on the importance of experiencing that kind of connection as a musician.

We wanted to implement into the outcome of “The Little Worlds We Hold” these reflections about the social interactions. The goal was to recreate what we felt at SAC. For example, the song “Set it up!” was one of the biggest challenges to put into words, both in terms of its meaning and explaining it to our band. The song was a new composition and didn’t have lyrics that would tell our story directly, it was an instrumental piece created about our general mood when being with the participants at SAC. While conducting this study, I have been able to more clearly explain that the song represents the importance of playfulness and being available for the participants. Upbeat rhythms and grooves created opportunities to support moments of self-expression from the participants. This made me expand my awareness of my role as music facilitator which was to do more than give moments for musicking together or as Moss (2021) has put it: “I have time to spend an hour with my client, listening, offering opportunities for self-expression, validation of identity and offering support.” (p. 14). I felt like the playfulness and being available for the participants also opened me up personally to be more attentive.

5.2 Facilitator qualities influencing the artistic outcome

Vija:

It was very interesting to figure out how to keep the participatory qualities we had implemented at SAC with a concert that is pre-composed. When I analyse our process in this

project, especially when creating “The Little Worlds We Hold”, I think about the different qualities of participatory music and presentational music, which are concepts that have been beautifully researched and explained by Turino (2008) and Camlin (2014). I think the participatory qualities we put into effect had a lot to do with the physicality of the space by putting the audience and band in a circle, and by having the dancers in the performance to break the barrier of stillness. I think the general practice in SAC was finding these subtle ways to create bigger impacts of making everyone in the room feel included. Those were discoveries for me because the community had a specific threshold for participation in comparison to what I had learned about participation during our studies at the Global Music Programme. I had learned about participation through more complex music involvement with tools like body percussion, singing in unison or creating harmonies, but with the community at SAC, the focus wasn’t on synchronised music participation. The focus was on creating flow and connection with actions like sitting next to the participants as we play music, making eye contact, joining the participant’s impulses, creating a physical space that serves connection – these are also participatory qualities. That experience shifted my understanding of participation towards a concept grounded in engaged presence, where being present can be a form of co-creation, as articulated by Matarasso (2019).

During our artistic process, we searched for ways to make the audience feel more connected and engaged: by making the stage map into a circle; by engaging with the audience directly through music with “Čukai-ņukai / Tsuhkai-njukhai”, “Intro to E”, “Thank you song”; by moving around the space in “Mitā matkalla nāit?” and “This Little World”. Since our project, I have paid more attention to the different ways a performance can have a participatory nature. I think about a participatory nature that does not directly ask the audience to participate but creates a space that makes the audience feel as an active participant and eventually participates in active music making from their own initiative. This also shifts the power dynamic for the audience, by giving them ownership of their participation, as also discussed by Matarasso (2019).

Kärt:

Totally agreed, and continuing on that note, I remember that we got some beautiful feedback from an audience member at the concert – it was about how they had felt over a long time being taken care of by the performers as an audience member. And this idea stayed with me. Firstly, because it greatly represents and expresses the core idea and dream we had for this

project – people and inclusion – and how happy it makes me that it also came through in the context of the concert performance itself. And secondly, when I now go to concerts myself as an audience member, I’ve noticed that the first thing that I always sense is how I am seen by the musicians on the stage. There is always a role to carry out for all the people being present at music making and I think it’s clearly sensible if the artists on the stage see the audience and make them being seen, being part of what they do, similarly as Turino (2008) has expressed. This doesn’t mean that the audience has to have an actual practical involvement but rather that the audience is the one the music is made and performed for. I have gone to many concerts where I have felt that the musicians play more for themselves rather than for the other people in the room, which is not strictly a bad thing, but it’s just not a culture I personally resonate with.

So, in the end, I feel that the project taught us a lot about defining the role of the audience through learning how to see and involve people in the room in music-making, and through experiencing how people always sense and relate to music from their own individual experiences and characters.

5.3 Coding the emotional journey into a musical expression

Kärt:

I feel that another important and huge process we needed to go through in order to build a bridge from the project to the concert and for creating the whole artistic outcome, was mapping and analysing the emotional journey we experienced throughout the period of the SAC sessions. Even though it sounds a bit cliché to talk about music, emotions and the connection between these two, it became incredibly important in the context of this research. We wanted to thoroughly analyse all the aspects of the different stimuli that made an impact on our artistic identities, so it was quite impossible for us to just overlook the emotional stages we went through. In a way, I would describe it so that we needed to “code” that specific and raw experience into a musical expression, in which case, as Pratt (1952) has written, music can be seen as the language for experienced emotions.

In addition to composing new material and reshaping the material from the sessions, I found myself looking to the past to find metaphorical illustrations for describing musically the emotional discoveries made. In general terms, I find folk music to be very narrative in nature

and full of colourful explanations about things that have happened with people or with the world which Kapper (2020) has written about from the point of view of Estonian people and traditional music. As we both have a background in the folk music field, it felt like a great tool to use it as part of our musical expression. For example, we had the lamenting in which case we used the tradition as a foundation and inspiration but then composed our own lines based on that. And we also had the intro song, which I still remember singing with you, Vija, for the first time many years ago and fighting over whose song is it originally then. We also used an Estonian flatfoot which describes pretty well how a traditional dance can symbolise and characterize a certain feeling and paint an illustration of the idea behind it.

Through the process of coding our emotional journey into music, we also tested the limits of how much we actually need to explain personal experiences so that the people can understand the context and feelings behind the piece of music. I think we might have overpushed with the need of explaining everything we felt at SAC. Thinking back now, it was maybe a good lesson for us to learn that not everything needs to be understood in the same way. As artists, I guess we can only say so much and the rest we need to leave for the listener to interpret however they want, following Turino's (2008) similar discussion.

Vija:

I agree, on stage and in the rehearsing process, our emotional map became the foundation for the music we composed. As we had mentioned in the third chapter, our research diaries from SAC and discussions during the composition process pointed to the interactive knowledge music provides as described by Gerber et al. (2012). It is funny how much evidence we experienced at SAC in the power of music alone to communicate, as also we discussed earlier in our first finding, yet we still needed to find the words to explain ourselves. Then again, that is where the collaboration with the co-writers became meaningful, as they helped us put those emotions into words as well. I remember working with one of our band members when we wrote the lyrics for the song "This Little World". We had a couple of sessions of writing poems and phrases together, and in order to do that, I had to explain to him what my intentions were with that song. It was a bit of a challenge, as I had already composed part of the music where I wanted to encapsulate the feeling of light, warmth and love that comes when working with a community. After working on different verbalisations of this feeling, the song turned into a love letter to the community, to the Little World. The inspiration came

from a poem I found – “The Beginning of Language” by Bob Holman. It was an integral process of putting meaning into words for music that had already done that.

And as you said, Kärt, it was another meaningful process to connect our emotions to narratives in our folk music traditions. Growing up playing and singing Latvian folk music, I often performed in contexts where our group invited the audience to join in singing the choruses and repetitions. The nature of our folk music traditions are embedded in collective storytelling through participation in song and dance. In our cultures, there is a sense of familiarity in the sonority and the unspoken “rules” of participation implied in the music. For me, I felt that finding parallel narratives in our folk music traditions supported my emotional map for the moments of opening and expanding the space from the two of us to the audience in the room. Especially, when I think back to the process of learning the “Itk”, which is a composition based on a tradition that includes the framework for improvising lyrics, but just as importantly, the breathing technique to evoke a cry as foundation for the lamenting, as also explained by Nenola & Sinisalo (1986). In the concert, this was a truly vulnerable moment where we expressed our grief, which is an emotion I don’t usually directly express on stage. By building the composition on the Estonian and Finnish-Karelian lamenting tradition with a clear framework and sense of purpose, I felt safe to dig into the grief and bring out my tears onto the stage.

As for the storytelling in the concert, we had to figure out ways to create the same sense of meaning we had in our story for the audience or as Small (1998) describes this process: “coming together to share intimate and personal cultural moments with strangers” (p. 39). The storytelling was our way of ensuring the audience is provided with clear context and explanation for the music. We received feedback after the concert that there were too many storytelling texts that in some ways didn't help to provide the context that we hoped that it would. When explained further, the music itself already had strong narratives embedded, that one could say the texts and storytelling became repetitive. Which makes me think that with the participants at SAC, we were focused on creating meaningful moments of music, also as Turino (2008) writes when talking about participatory music, and that it didn't matter so much about who understands clearly what information.

6. Conclusions

With this research, we want to express our sincere belief in the power of people coming together through music and in doing so, enriching the lives of all those who belong in this momentum and community, this Little World created. The research supports another embedded belief of ours which is that musicians can shape their artistic identities through engaging the approaches of facilitation and collaboration in musical interactions with people who relate to music in diverse ways and further, transforming the emotional impacts into artistic expression.

The aim of this study was to find answers to our research questions:

1. How does co-facilitating a community engagement project in an activity centre shape the co-creation of a musical outcome?
2. How does co-facilitating a community engagement project in an activity centre influence our artistic identities?

Through the analysis of the data of the project at SAC and the data from “The Little Worlds We Hold”, we distinguished components that became important to our artistic practice. These components, in discussion with the theoretical concepts outlined in this study, were defined into three key findings:

The first key finding being that *reciprocal social interaction and engagement form the foundation of artistic identity*. Through collaboration in socially engaged settings, we established a deeper understanding of the role of music as an occasion for non-verbal communication. We observed how these interactions transpired through direct musical qualities – phrases, timbres, rhythm patterns and other sonic characteristics of people which also become tools of communication. These musical interactions not only uncover new ways of communicating, but new ways of creating relationships as well.

Our experience at SAC made us more aware that music plays an important societal role, other than just entertainment. Music provides a foundation for connection between people, which is one of the main reasons behind the rapid increased development of the community music field (Camlin, 2014; Green, 2011; Higgins, 2012). The phenomenon of implementing this awareness into artistic work brings us to our second key finding.

The second key finding is how the qualities of facilitation influence the artistic outcome. By paying attention to how the music communicates with the community, we can implement participatory elements that inspire social interaction in a performance. It is also important to note that the participatory nature of a performance can vary from an invitation for active participation to creating a space that acknowledges the audience's presence and engagement. An engaging space can be created by various approaches. For example, by changing the physical position of the musicians in relation to the audience, or breaking the audience's experience of constant stillness by implementing movement in the performers. Additionally, musicians can approach audiences through caring interactions such as eye contact and directing sound towards individual audience members, emphasizing attentiveness on an individual level.

The third key finding is the coding of the emotional journey into a musical expression. Being musicians, our form of expression serves as a platform for sharing personal experiences and stories. These stories are shaped through social interactions and meaningful connections, yet there is emotional information that is nearly impossible to put into words. In order to interpret our emotional memories into music, we can use the tool of reflective arts practice (Gerber et al., 2012) by finding parallels from folk music, poetry, movement, soundscapes and stories. These parallels supported the narratives of our emotional journey by providing an additional and more recognisable context for the listeners.

This research has contributed to literature that expands the connection between studies of artistic identity and studies of community music. With this project, we hope to raise the idea that musicians playing in socially engaged settings and creating spaces for community gatherings of music, is not aimed only for the 'others' but is rather something that equally inspires to look and search further the idea of what are the different ways musicians can approach music. Our observation for finding these different ways is rooted in keeping our artistic identity in fluid motion by being conscious of our social surroundings. While being in relation with the world around us, we learn to shape and simultaneously sustain our artistic identity.

This research is a starting point of a longer journey of discovering how the two different environments and occasions of music making – the music sessions in an activity center and

the artistic process for a presentational outcome – communicate with each other, and how much does one affect the other. The created methodology in this project continues to grow, and the collaboration of us - Vija and Kärt that was established during this project, continues to develop both artistically and as community musicians. Besides working together, our dream is to bring the ideas and experiences of this research to our home countries, where the topic has not yet been widely researched. Additionally, we see the lack of training and inspiring musicians to see the potential and impact of community engagement projects. By accomplishing the journey of this research, we are greatly motivated to continue the exploration, both together and separately, with many visions and dreams to follow next in our work as musicians, community project facilitators and researchers.

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Appendices

Thank you to: **Sofianlehto Activity Center** and all the kind people working there and welcoming us so openly

Sibelius Academy and the **Global Music Department** for all the offered opportunities and the beautiful years of being part of this inspiring community and to our dear band members who contributed artistically and so much beyond

The Little Worlds We Hold
is Kärt Tambet's and Vija Moore's
way of describing the sentiment of living
through a community music project.

Thank you! Kiitos! Paldies! Aitäh!

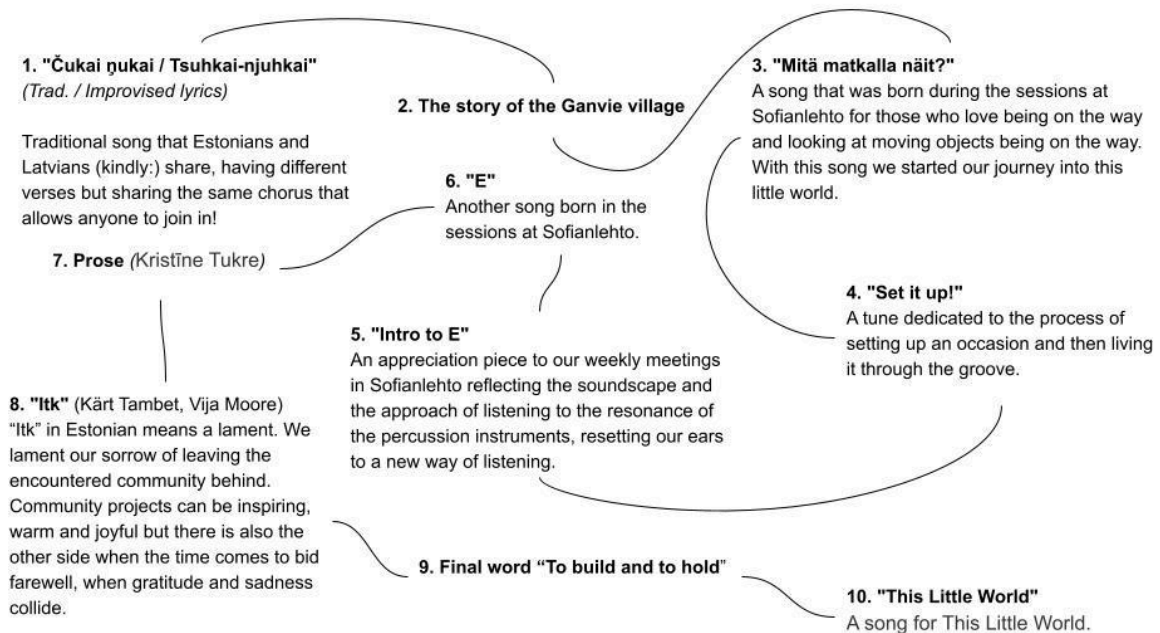
“The Little Worlds We Hold ”

- Simone Spampinato – synthesizer and sound design
- Kristine Tukre – concert kokle
- Ida Marie Jessen – voice
- Maimu Jõgeda – accordion
- Omotola Adeshina – voice
- Yoandy Jimeno – movement
- Linda Uusihakala – movement

This master's degree concert is a collection of reflections about the experiences both Vija and Kärt encountered with the community at Sofianlehto Multisensory Activity Center.

The eight weeks of music interaction inspired an expanded perspective on their artistic expression and values. Making music with this community created a little world that now will continue to exist as long as we hold it.

Appendix 1. Programme notes, page 1



Appendix 2. Programme notes, page 2