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Wellbeing for older people – intergenerational collaboration with well-maker-spaces

This paper discusses the possible role of 'well-making spaces' to collaborate with other institutions in community in order to promote the health and wellbeing of older people. This suggestion is based on the experiences gained in an international Erasmus+ -project Handmade Wellbeing in 2015-2017. The aim of the project was to design and conduct craft workshops in elderly care settings that would have the potential to enhance the wellbeing of the participants. The focus was on older people who either live in a care home or live at home but are not able to look for activities independently and instead attend senior day care.

Many recent academic studies reveal that engaging in craft activities has a positive influence on the wellbeing of craft hobbyists and also older people benefit from creative activities. These studies reveal that arts and crafts activities can strengthen the feeling of being able and in control over one's life, which has positive health outcomes especially for older people. Engagement in making can enhance mood and gives a possibility to forget worries, boredom, and even helps coping with pain and illness. Making also helps sustaining brain health and hand function, both essential for older people to cope with the activities of daily life.

Also social connections play an important role in wellbeing. Creative activities offer opportunities to connect with others through shared interests. Especially group activities promote social interaction and reduce loneliness and thus, have a chance to enhance wellbeing. In the workshops of the Handmade Wellbeing project, the older participants were especially satisfied with the possibility to connect with younger generation, as the workshops were guided by craft student teachers and learner artists. The young appreciated the possibility to learn about the lives of older people and traditional ways of making things.

During the project it became obvious that there are many challenges in bringing creative activities to care settings. Usually the nursing staff has relatively little experience of creative activities, thus having varied, interesting activities requires collaboration with artists and crafts experts. One of the major challenges in this collaboration is the lack of suitable working spaces, tools and materials in care settings, and the lack of funding for them. Individual artists who collaborate with these settings have to arrange the funding of the materials and bring them in with them to the care setting.

These challenges brought up the idea of a closer collaboration and synergy between different parties of the community, instead of individual providers working and searching for funding by themselves. Makerspace community has expertise and ideas of creative work, but they also have the space, tools and possibly other materials. It would be beneficial to utilize these assets to many purposes for different target groups, both by providing activities in makerspaces but also taking activities to settings that cannot arrange the activities by themselves. Especially intergenerational workshops would offer many people the much needed community connection.