

Abstract

The environment and sphere of tasks of the municipal social and health care sector are going through changes. The implementation of the changes requires collaboration between different parties with an emphasis on interaction. However, only a few or undeveloped methods have been used when developing the collaboration.

The main objective of this research and development project was to enhance communality and build opportunities for dialogue among producers of social and health care services and municipal decision-makers through methods of applied theatre. The project was conducted within the municipalities of the Centre for Basic Social and Health Services Oiva. The sub-objectives were to promote work well-being as well as participation and involvement of municipal citizens, and to create, develop and implement ideas in the community. These objectives were approached with the methods of research-based theatre.

The theatre method consisted of active phases. In story-telling sessions of the first phase, the stories enabled the researchers to grasp the experiences of elected officials, leading public servants, employees and municipal citizens in the decision-making processes. In the next phase, these stories were used to create a theatre session based on dramatized scenes where the voices of the different parties were heard through the interpretations of the actors. The theatre session, enabling participation, acted as a forum for discussion and reflection for defining development goals and for ideation, and as a basis for planning how development actions might be implemented. The participants appraised the research-based theatre method excellent for grasping issues that slow down or complicate different kinds of decision-making processes. The method also encouraged discussion on issues that were felt difficult. In this experiment, however, the aim of concretely enhancing the communality between different parties was not quite reached due to the small number of participants in the theatre session. Otherwise the project was able to involve and invite people to participate quite successfully despite the practical challenges.

The story material, the theatre session scenes and the joint discussion during the session served as a basis for a video guide aimed for the social and health care sector. Named Filia-Sofia (wise daughter in Greek), the guide makes invisible relationships between people and issues visible as well as enables discussion on issues that are usually not discussed and gives guidance on how to utilize them in municipal development. By way of the six short videos in the guide, it is possible to bring up questions and have discussions on, for example, what kinds of challenges and problems a given change will cause to different parties who should take the responsibility of a given matter, and what kinds of experiences and interests are related to the change. Filia-Sofia aims to speak to people behind their status by making their thoughts and experiences visible to one another. The guide is available for use in Finnish and Swedish on the internet (www.lut.fi/filiasofia).

Keywords: research-based theatre, community development, municipal development