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# AVTRYCK I DET OKÄNDA- *FORCING THE IMPOSSIBLE*

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## RESEARCHPLAN

### INTRODUCTION

During the last years, we have been met with increased amounts of statements indicating that people are sceptical towards research and scientific inquiries. The idea that science will save humanity and solve all world problems seems to have lost its hold on human imagination. Furthermore, the latest COVID-19 situation has shown that an increasing amount of inaccurate information about the pandemic has been spreading across the globe.<sup>1</sup> Simultaneously, the latest barometers on how much people in Finland trust science and research seems to indicate an increase in trust.<sup>2</sup> One way to understand how so differing statements and reactions can exist simultaneously is to speak about the horizontalisation of knowledge, described by Bengt Kristensson - Uggla, in *En strävan efter sanning - Vetenskapens teori och praktik* (2019). This term indicates that reliability of scientific methods and trusting research to give us knowledge has not decreased. However, an increasing amount of people see themselves as experts on interpreting and giving valuable opinions about the research that is presented. Alongside this phenomena, individual narratives are taken to be highly valuable - personal experiences can thus be placed side-by-side with years of laboratory work of experts, and thus be stated as an equally important "voice" to consider. The horizontalisation of science leads, according to Kristensson - Uggla, to a situation where hierarchical institutions, like knowledge production at Universities, cannot take their position as distributors of scientific claims, for granted.<sup>3</sup> Universities, like other societal institutions, need to learn how to both co-operate with different kinds of knowledge mediators and communicate their research findings through new path-ways. This project - *Forcing the Impossible - Avtryck i det Okända* - seeks to facilitate and train for both these forms of competence.

As Fine Arts professor Kai Lehtikoinen has suggested, we think that art and the process of creating art can support researchers in these challenging tasks. During the dance conference Stre-tch, in Turku, in October 2019, Lehtikoinen

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<sup>1</sup> Bavel, J.J.V., Baicker, K., Boggio, P.S. et al. 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Tiedebarometri 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Kristensson Uggla 2019, 10-12.

highlighted the dilemma his students are faced with when today's world asks artists to be hybrid in their engagement with society. He spoke about a movement turning away from viewing the traditional sciences as capable of solving the wicked problems that the world is faced with. Instead, more and more people and organisations are turning towards artists in hope of finding tools and ways to solve the challenges they meet. Lehtikainen showed many research areas wherein artist collaborations are sought these days: education, health and medicine, workplace development, innovation and entrepreneurship.<sup>4</sup> Lehtikainen continued his keynote by stating that even when artists carry a full capacity of skills in various areas and can, for example, model exercises that improve group cooperation capacities, it is still unreasonable to expect artists alone to solve problems like war, disease, food shortage, political instability or racism. Therefore, Lehtikainen encourages artists to seek collaboration with experts in other fields to create the kind of synergy needed. It is here that the project *Forcing the Impossible - Avtryck i det Okända*, gets started.

#### PROJECT AIMS AND PARTICIPANTS

The first aim of this project is to enable the meeting place and collaboration of artists and researchers that Lehtikainen is commending. The project will not only create a platform where artists and research groups can meet -it will also provide an opportunity for dialogue and cooperation. We aim at creating space for and facilitate productive conversations to which both artists and researchers may arrive with their unique experience and walk away from feeling enriched and inspired. These meetings strive to enable a dialogue that creates something new for each participant. Contrasting to earlier projects where artists and scientists meet, this project also aims at studying what exactly transpires, and how differences are dealt with, in meetings of this kind. The defined aim of this particular project is to show that art may be used not only to illustrate scientific methods and content but to actually stimulate, challenge and awaken people to new insights. During the course of the project, the particular researchers participating in the project will be trained in science communication. One of the end-results of this project will be artworks. Artistic research methods will also be used as part of the process.

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<sup>4</sup> See the WHO report 2019, the results from ARTSEQUAL and TILLT, but also more philosophical approaches like those of Jonna Bornemark: *Filosofiska rummet* avsnittet Identitet, 14 November (2019); *Det omätbaras renässans - En uppgörelse med pedanternas herravälde* (2018).

Bringing together artists and researchers in collaborative projects is neither new nor unique. Platforms for cooperation have been created before by Floating Platforms and AmosLAB, from which this project is learning. In Turku, networks with similar aims (Abo Agora and the Donner Institute for instance) already exist and are part of our partnerships. What is new with this particular project is the extent of collaborations and the choice of research methods combined with the fact that the project itself is a platform for research.

With extent of collaboration, I mean that all of the Centres of Excellence and research profiles at Åbo Akademi University have been invited to collaborate in both the process and end "product" of this project.<sup>5</sup> We will gain a broader spectrum of collaboration than earlier projects have been able to provide. The researchers involved represent the following areas: The Future of Democracy - Center of Excellence in Public Opinion Research (FutuDem), Center of Excellence in Cellular Mechanostasis (CellMech), Center of Excellence in Bioelectronic Activation of Cell functions (BACE), Minority research, the Sea, Technologies for a sustainable Future and Solutions for Health.<sup>6</sup> One to four researchers from each area will be trained in research communication and be invited to dialogue with both artists and the general public, in the public space of an Arts and Science Festival.

The amount of artists and range of artistic fields involved further creates a complexity and diversity within this project, in a magnitude that has not previously been explored. The main artists and fields of artistic media involved are seven. Many more people working in the arts will however be provided sustenance through this project. What artists can gain from this collaboration is not only means to provide a livelihood, but an opportunity for practising the skills of cooperation, and the possibility to take part in societal discussions and knowledge production in a new way.

#### RESEARCH COMMUNITY AND PROJECT PLAN

The foremost way in which *Forcing the Impossible - Avtryck i det Okända*, differentiates itself from the earlier artist and researcher collaborations mentioned, as well as from projects and events that might be occurring around Finland concerning the Year of Research-Based Knowledge

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<sup>5</sup> One of the Centres of Excellency declined our invitation to collaboration due to time-concerns.

<sup>6</sup> Research groups have been described in more detail in the attachment: Science and Arts profiles.

(designated by the Ministry<sup>7</sup>), is that this projection itself provides a platform for research. As a researcher functioning as an ethicist working ethnographically within the interdisciplinary project BACE, I have two tasks. The first one is to study what kind of Ethics inform the research community I am part of, and which types of ethical dilemmas are revealed therein. The second task is to study how researchers from different fields learn to communicate across disciplinary and non-research oriented boundaries. This project, *Forcing the Impossible - Avtryck i det Okända*, will be extending both the questions of research ethics and communication into new dimensions. By inviting a larger pool of researchers into the project, I will receive a broader set of materials for analysis. Most importantly, the aspect of communication between scientists and people outside of their field of research becomes more articulated when artists are invited into the project. Furthermore, the Arts and Science communication festival will also create a novel opportunity to welcome a more general public into the studied discussions.

These studies will be conducted in the following manner: I will be present recording the meetings between artists and researchers, observing how dialogue and collaborations are formed and developed. In the meeting between an artist and the research group, the researcher/s will present their research to the artist in such a way that based on the dialogue that emerges between the researchers and the artist, a piece of art can begin to develop. The artist will, based on the story about the research conducted, and/or the research field the researcher has presented, make a continuous inquiry until some kind of artistic idea arises. The artists are encouraged to ask questions about the research, and the researchers may continue to explain what their research is about until the initial impressions of a possible piece of art can be presented. As an observer of this process, I will be putting particular attention on how a dialogue emerges. What are the main challenges or obstacles for fluent communication? When/how/where do the researchers and the artist meet each other? How are obstacles for communication dealt with or approached? Does the dialogue arrive at discussing Ethical dilemmas? Who initiates these? How are these dilemmas approached by the artist/ the researcher?

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<sup>7</sup> Ministry of Education and Culture (2020) 2021 declared as Year of Research-Based Knowledge under the heading "Knowledge belongs to us all".

The second aim of the project - to train the researchers in Science Communication - will be provided for in two steps. The method of this training is to engage the researchers in artistic interventions. The first science communication workshop will be held before the researchers meet the artist. (Early Autumn 2020) The second training is held before the public speaking engagement that will happen at the Arts and Science Communication Festival. (Winter 2021) Before the second training, I aim to have analysed the material from the interaction with the artist, in order to provide accurate and personal details on what could be developed in the communication situation. To my task of delivering communication workshops I bring, not only my tools as a researcher, but also my skills as a dancer and a licensed Nia Technique Instructor and educator. The workshops will be built on elements from the world of dance and performance. They aim to teach people skills of awareness, listening and communication with intention and integrity as well as custom made feedback from the conducted research findings.

## RESULTS

The dialogue between artists and researchers will lead to the exhibition of seven different artworks/performances during the Arts and Science Communication festival that will be held in Åbo, in May 2021. Each day of the week-long festival there will be different exhibition openings and performances open to the public. At each event, we will arrange a public meeting with the artists and researchers, where each party gets to share experiences from the process and discuss the joint artwork and the research it has evolved from. In these presentations, the researcher will be having a dialogue not only with the artist but also with people in the audience. The audience will be engaged in the conversation with the help of digital tools and applications. Does the event show that the artists and researchers have developed in their ability to communicate through the process they have gone through? How are they able to meet the questions and ideas raised by the public? Have they developed tools to identify and engage with things that may hinder communication?

Both a feedback session with the artists and researchers, as well as gathering information from the discussions in the public space - showing the questions raised by the public - will provide results and materials for further analysing. By examining the emotions, thoughts, associations and ethical dilemmas arising

from the meetings of artwork and science communication, with the public, we aim at better understanding how and by which tools Science Communication could be further developed for future situations.

The results of this project are thus not only the production of artworks, a festival and a process-related learning situation. The goal is also to gather and analyse information about Science Communication so that the way researchers communicate both with people within and outside of their fields of study could be better understood and developed into more efficient forms of knowledge mediation. These gained insights into Science Communication will serve as an advantage for the particular researchers involved in this study, by preparing them for public speaking engagements like The Night of Science and for communicating their research findings to media, stakeholders and societal decisions makers. Also, the artists will through this project develop their ability to cooperate with researchers touching on topics of societal importance.<sup>8</sup>

The gathered material will also display what kind of questions and dilemmas interest, intrigue and awaken curiosity with the more general public when it meets art and research. These kinds of results can later be used in a more general strategy for how Universities today may communicate their scientific results in a new way. Furthermore, this material may also show the ethical concerns and critique against research that needs to be addressed in order for the research community to gain a deepened trust and acceptance with those that are sceptical to the work or methods of the science community. Are hybrid researchers and art-collaborations a fruitful partner for Universities, in their quest to make science known and understood? Does an increased collaboration between scientists and researchers lead to more creative and deepened capacities to solve societal problems and generate more relevant scientific knowledge? These are the results the project *Forcing the Impossible - Avtryck i det Okända* wants to pave the way for. In the most general terms this project wants to find increased insights into and awareness of the research that is conducted at Åbo Akademi together with providing a platform for artists and research collaborations.

## ETHICAL DIMENSIONS

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<sup>8</sup> Already the Floating Platforms project was able to show that artist-research collaborations of this kind can be beneficial for both partners in future developments.

The research I will be conducting within this project is of such a character that it is almost impossible to secure the anonymity of the researchers involved. The fruitful completion and accuracy of the results of this study will entirely depend upon the trust and mutual understanding created between me, the researchers, and the artists. As I am both a researcher and an artist, these capabilities help in establishing a safe and trusting environment. All participants have been informed and are aware of the fact that I will be both actively participating in- and studying the phenomena and process we are taking part of. With the researchers, I will function as the leader and serve as a teacher in the communication workshops. Naturally, this creates extra tension, underlining the need for accountability within the project. These aspects are accounted for with a high level of transparency in the processes, with clear information about the aims and reasons of each step in the plan, as well as with the overarching goal of the project itself. Furthermore, the type of results that this type of project can achieve is not in terms of evaluating or proving specific strategies or methods. Instead, the focus will be on gaining deepened knowledge of- and insights into processes as well as conceptual and thematical areas of understanding.

Each participant will be signing a document on informed consent where it is made clear that participation is voluntary and that the cooperation can be terminated at any point in time. On top of this, the direct quotes or other kinds of personal standpoint that would be valuable for academic publication will be displayed to both researchers and artists before they may be approved for public scrutiny. One other option for meeting the challenge with anonymity is to let the participants of this project stand in the publications with their names. I do not see a reason for why names should be used in the studies - particularly when some of the participants are publicly known persons. This has led me to the conclusion that results should be published in a way wherein questions of individual recognition become irrelevant. The results of this study will not have an interest in personal experiences but overarching structures, traditions, cultures and forms of organisation.

The analysis and storage of the research materials happens in the Nvivo program that is installed on my personal computer. The storage can be reached only through a password protected procedure, and storage occurs on a secure Cloud server.

The materials gathered from the discussions and dialogue in the public space will be completely anonymous. The application in use will ask each participant for informed consent when logging into the system and ask them to approve the answers being used for research. Storage of these materials follows the same procedure as the ethnographic materials of this project.

#### TIMELINE

Summer 2020: Workshop in Science Communication for researchers involved in the project.

Place: Turku Archipelago.

Autumn 2020: First meetings between artists and research teams.

Place: Turku.

Winter 2020: Continued meetings between artists and research teams.

Place: Turku.

Winter 2020 - Spring 2021: Artists work with the artistic project.

Spring 2021: Researchers have their second Workshop in Science Communication

25-27th of May 2021: Arts and Science Communication festival

Place: Turku.

Summer and autumn 2021: Analysing materials from the discussions in the Public Space.

Winter 2021: writing and publishing materials from the findings of *Avtryck i det Okända - Forcing the Impossible*.

2022-2023: Suggestions for a plan of Ethics and Science Communication for researchers at Åbo Akademi.

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PARTNERS OF CO-OPERATION

ABOAgora <https://aboagora.fi/>

AmosLAB <http://www.amoslab.fi/>

ARTSEQUAL: The Arts as Public Service: Strategic Steps towards Equality, <http://www.artsequal.fi/about>

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