

**REITTEJÄ KONTULAAN  
BRINGING THEATRE TO THE SUBURBS OF HELSINKI  
AND LETTING THE YOUTH SPEAK**

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In Finland, we also tried to discover if and how art is segregated between different areas and regions, and most of all, what could be done about it. We went to visit a very special and inclusively built theatre project in an eastern suburb of Helsinki, called Kontula. In the project, some dozen of local youngsters have been the main producer of the theater performance. The youth, aged 13-17 were interviewed by the scriptwriter, dramaturgist Juho Gröndahl. The stories told and things said in these interviews and group discussions formed the core of the play, which the group then started rehearsing with the director, Ms Eveliina Heinonen. The play does have some more fictional parts, but most of the time the youth are actually playing themselves on stage. This co-operation, Elinpiirejä: Reittejä Kontulaan became an inclusive and touching theatre play that lets the voice of the local young people be heard in the way it was not before.

For many of the participants, this has been their first touch with the world of theater. This is the case also with a 13-year old Miia.

- It has been amazing, to meet all these people and rehearsal the play together. It does play a role that it is here in Kontula, where I live. This made it easy for me to join since I don't have to travel far for it! For the young people here it is inspiring. I think we now get people to listen to us better than before; this has given us a good opportunity to speak about things we find important, the young actress explains.

The play is based on stories told by the youth, and many parts of the text were transcribed from the interviews word-by-word. This gives the actors an exceptional opportunity to speak out loud about the topics they think are relevant and let the grownups as well as the bigger audience to hear their stories.

As vary the ideas and thoughts of the youngsters, so do the topics the young performers have brought up to the play. They talk about prejudices grown up people have against youth; about problems they might have in their families and the hard time of being different and getting to know who you are and who you want to be. The youth are from various backgrounds which gives the play a unique set of views and opinions.

- This, Kontula, is kind of area where variety of different people live; the themes of the play are very diverse. It's been a richness that it's not only same kind of people or young people who participated but the differences in backgrounds brings in different kinds of themes and topics, says Mr. Gröndahl, the scriptwriter of the play.

**Finnish theatres are more actively going to suburbs and areas, engaging more audience**

Both the director and the dramaturgist think that bringing theatre to the suburbs like Kontula is really important and also a growing trend.

- There is also political will to bring in theatre to people who otherwise might not participate. Also theatres are searching for new audiences, says the director Ms Eveliina Heinonen.

Kontula was quite long considered as a rather dull and left back suburb of eastern Helsinki. It hasn't been known for many cultural events or activities; quite the opposite. The aim of the project still isn't to do any social work but rather to engage young people with theatre and arts and to let them talk about topics they think are important.

- Kontula is actually a better place than its reputation might be. There are nowadays lots of activities going on, and for instance the youth house has several cultural activities to offer for the locals. It's been real fun to work here and the group has been just great. I feel that the young people who participated were really brave somehow, says the scriptwriter Mr. Gröndahl, 30.

The youngsters participating are excited as well. Many of them want to do more theater after the Elinpiirejä project.

- This has been the most amazing thing ever, and I will never forget about it. This is not my first experience with theatre but it's definitely the biggest. It's also very important since I do believe that this way we get to say things we otherwise might not be able to get to speak out to e.g. our parents or the politicians. I feel influential when I'm on the stage. I'm very glad, Paula 17 years old says.