

**'I DARE TO
BE WHO I AM
AND DARE TO
EXPRESS THAT'**

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FORW[→]RT

'I DARE TO BE WHO I AM AND DARE TO EXPRESS THAT'

What art & culture means for eudaimonic well-being of youngsters
in Tilburg Noord

Public version Master Thesis

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INTRODUCTION

Tilburg Noord is an area with high cultural and ethnic diversity, especially concerning the neighbourhoods Stokhasselt and parts of Heikant/ Vlashof. Issues such as poverty, undermining and distrust have been here for years. At the same time people also feel pride and experience community spirit. Not starting with trying to solve occurring problems, but starting with strengthening, supporting and enriching what talents and potentials already exist, that's the basic premise of the ForwArt project. ForwArt's purpose is to create a so-called cultural ecosystem in Tilburg Noord to increase the perspective of young people living in Tilburg Noord and is actively working on making visible what cannot yet always be seen: **the potential of the youth**. In ForwArt, eleven cultural and social partners aim to work together to explore in what way art and culture can contribute to this social transformation aimed at **increasing perspective for young people**. Several youngsters have participated in various activities included in ForwArt. But what has it brought the youth so far? The need to answer this question, has among others resulted in a master thesis which focused on what participation in project ForwArt means for the well-being of youngsters living in Tilburg-Noord. For this thesis, youngsters aged between 8-25 years old that participated in different artistic and cultural initiatives in Tilburg-Noord were interviewed. This booklet is a condensed edition which provides a concise and clear visualization of the main findings that emerged from talking with the youth about their participation and how their well-being has developed.

BELANG VAN EUDAIMONISCH WELZIJN

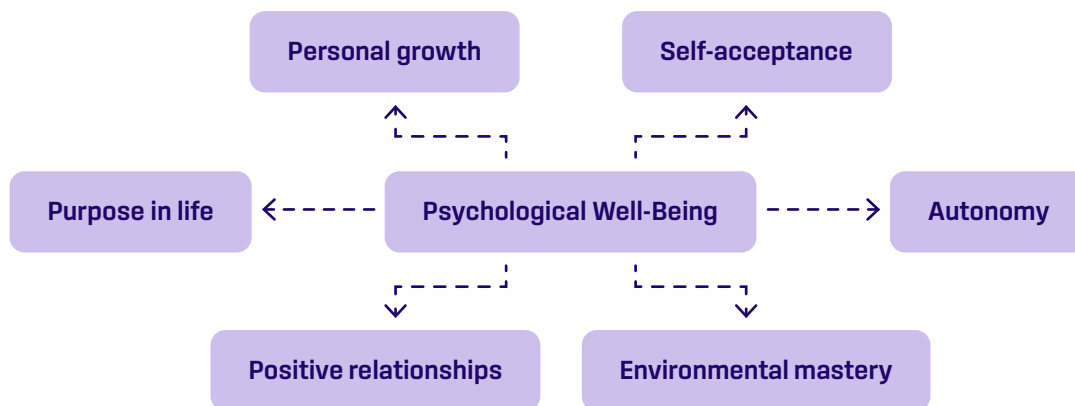
To increase the future perspective of the youth living in Tilburg-Noord, project ForwArt purposely focuses on unlock the potential of the youth. The youth in Tilburg Noord has the strong urge to grow and develop and have dreams that they would like to realize. This can be difficult when these youngsters grow up in an environment with fewer opportunities for self-development, which in turn can have a negative impact on their well-being.

The artistic and cultural initiatives from Project ForwArt aims to ensure that the youth feel heard and seen and that they have the opportunity to discover and develop their talents, resulting in a broader future perspective. When we talk about the importance of aspects such as self-fulfilment and talent discovery, we are interested in the youngsters eudaimonic well-being and how to help them improve it.

What is eudaimonic well-being?

Eudaimonic well-being refers to a type of happiness or well-being that arises from living a meaningful and purposeful life, rather than simply experiencing pleasure or positive emotions.

Eudaimonic well-being is associated with deeper and more sustainable forms of happiness that come from living a meaningful and fulfilling life. [2, 3, 4]. To measure the youngsters eudaimonic well-being, we made use of Ryff's eudaimonic [also called, psychological] well-being framework. This framework, visualized in Figure 1., consists of six dimensions.



Figuur 1. Ryff (1989) Psychological well-being framework

1. SELF-ACCEPTANCE. Self-acceptance is the way an individual perceives themselves. It shows to what extent individuals recognize and accept their strengths, flaws, emotions, and attitudes and the judgment they have towards different aspects of their past, present, and future.

2. ENVIRONMENTAL MASTERY. Environmental mastery is the individual's ability to choose or create environments suitable to his or her psychic conditions. Put differently, it is the capacity you have to manage your life and the world around you.

3. AUTONOMY. Autonomous people want to make decisions based on their values, motivations, and morals, without the influence of others.

4. PERSONAL GROWTH. Personal growth can be seen as a lifelong process that starts when we are born. In this process, individuals learn to both evaluate and improve their talents and qualities.

5. POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS. Positive relationships with others benefit individuals' well-being and life course: it offers support, causes individuals to learn about society and can improve their social skills.

6. PURPOSE IN LIFE. People who are both confident in life and function positively, have goals, intentions, and some idea of the direction they are heading towards.

THE YOUTH SPEAKING

The interviews with the youth reveal that they found that participation in ForwArt's initiatives made them both *experience and improve* their eudaimonic well-being. To be specific, they mentioned that participating in the activities has: 1. made them become more future oriented, 2. let them see their own potential, 3. helped them bond with others, 4. made them feel good about themselves and 5. supported autonomous behavior. Regarding the dimension environmental mastery, youngsters said that they did not have any noteworthy experiences. Moreover, the youth mentioned that they also learned a lot during the activities, from each other as well as about new topics and skills. It is worth noting that the stories told by the youth do not specifically belong to only one dimension of eudaimonic well-being. Ryff's eudaimonic well-being framework might be separated into six dimensions, but there is an overlap and continuous interplay between these dimensions.

WHAT DID THE YOUNGSTERS TELL US ABOUT.....?

1. Becoming future-oriented

The first theme that was brought up by the youth was purpose in life. The youth mentioned that participating in the activities from ForwArt made them think more about the future and the opportunities they have. What was remarkable was that the youth thought about their future in three distinct ways: 1. Careerwise: what am I going to do later in life, 2. Conventionally: wanting a good income, a family and house but also 3. what they could mean for the neighborhood.

'Yes, there was a moment when I thought, yes, I have to do more, for the neighborhood, say, or for myself as well. I also use the qualities that I have well, I don't have them for nothing, so to speak. To also give something back to the neighborhood and to develop myself in this as well. I study social studies, which fits perfectly with this.'

One of the youths mentioned that participating in the activities gave her and other girls more future prospects as a religious woman. She used to think about the future in terms of traditional jobs. This was acknowledged by multiple girls during the activities. They said that in the Moroccan culture, girls are usually only allowed to do traditional studies or work traditional jobs such as social work or nursing. However participation opened her eyes to the possibilities around her.

'By participating in The Scene I have also come to realize that there are also options outside stable jobs, so for example in arts and sports, you can also find a job in that, but not many parents see that yet...'

Another youngster acknowledged that participating in the Scene Boyz, gave him a goal to work towards to in life. Besides going to school and hanging out with his friends, he now is determined on becoming an actor. This indicates that participation in this activity gives him a sense of direction or meaning in life.

What was also regularly reflected in the answers of the youngsters was that they figured out new interests.

'Being T-reporter has really helped me orientate myself to see what I like. Making videos, I do that a lot now, especially on TikTok and YouTube...and that's because of T-Reporters that I gained interested in that.'

This was even mentioned among the youngest participants:

'That those dancers, like [name] I didn't know that there was also a profession. Just like we do here.'

These quotes highlight the importance of allowing children to explore diverse fields of art and culture. Without participating in such activities, they might not have discovered these interests or maybe even potential career paths.

2. Seeing own potential

The second theme that could be deduced from the interviews was that the youngsters started seeing their own potential. They mentioned that they found new talents when they start participating in the activities and that they also started looking at their own talents in a different way. Some of them were even positively surprised by their own abilities. This theme seems similar to the first theme, but this theme is about finding out your own talents, while the first theme is more centered around discovering interests.

'For example, I never really expected that it would actually work out...the acting... That is something new you discovered about yourself.'

'In the beginning you do not think anything of it, but when you are doing it, you are like mmm I do kind of like this or I can do it anyway. Because sometimes you see that someone else is struggling with it, and then you [I] do it well, so you think by yourself, hmmm so I can apparently do this.'

3. Bonding with others

Bonding with others was talked about most during the interviews. This theme not only focuses on whether one has friends and feels supported but also on what an individual gains from having friends/ connections. The answers given by the youth could be divided into two kinds:

1. Feelings of belonging in the group

The youth denoted that when it comes to the feeling of belonging to the group, they not only felt accepted and heard in the group, but they also felt that the other participants or friends from the activities were supportive and motivating.

'I feel very accepted within the group and I also hope that when new people come they feel just as accepted but I don't know it's something with the scene when you walk in.. even if someone does not know you then do they speak to you anyway.'

2. and building friendships and connections

Answers given by the youth show that participating in the activities also made respondents either become better friends with each other or helped them build friendships and gain connections.

'It [participation] has helped me make friendships and connections.'

'I was arguing with someone here, and now we are friends.'

Moreover, participating in the activities was perceived by the youth as a mean to build their network, which they can use later on in life.

'I have to do an internship next year and I happened to be talking to [name] about it, he is from the police. He was very hospitable, he said, if you want to do an internship here, send me a message and we can see what we can do.'

4. Feeling good about yourself

This theme expresses to what extent respondents feel good about themselves when participating in the activities. Based on the answers given by the youth, most participants feel proud, confident, and more comfortable with themselves. The youngsters thus perceive the activities as a place where they can be comfortable and confident.

'I do look at myself differently in the sense that I have become more confident. As a T-Reporter you are now often in front of the camera and when you see the footage back it is funny that you have all that attention on you.'

'I have gotten less insecure about that [her pronunciation], and thus more confident about that instead.'

This is important cause when youngsters see themselves in a positive light is easier to preserve future perspective compared to when this is not the case.

5. Feeling autonomous

Feeling autonomous is about whether respondents feel that they can make their own decision without being influenced by the opinion of others during the activities. Even though, in general, the majority of young people believe that they have the freedom to act independently during activities, the extent differs per activity.

'I can decide everything on the spot, which can be difficult sometimes. But I really have a lot of independency in what I say and what I do at the T-Reporters.'

'He [the teacher] asks us: what do you guys like to do, and then he does is. I like that. He does what we want to do.'

6. Learning from each other, new skills and about new topics

These aforementioned five themes relate to Ryff's dimensions of eudaimonic well-being. However, another theme could be observed in the answers given by the youth. This last theme is about what the respondents learned during the activities. This learning aspect is not specifically mentioned in Ryff's eudaimonic well-being framework but nonetheless of great value to the youth concerning their future prospectives. The youth mentioned that they not only learned about new skills but also about new topics and from each other.

'I would say that I just have learned more about it [different cultures] and that I got to know more people from different cultures.'

Not only did they learn about each other cultures, differences in upbringing and to become less judgmental, but they also learned that they are not the only ones struggling in life which may be a relief to some. This might also be the reason why respondents feel supported by the group.

'You get to hear things, see things, that you actually did not expect so quickly from someone. So I am really surprised with that, when you see or hear something from someone you did not expect from someone.'

Besides learning from each other, participants also learned about new topics. This theme seems similar to the first two dimensions of Ryff's model, where the youth denoted that they found out new interests and talents, however, this theme is more focused on getting new knowledge in the form of information and training. Being interested in these topics is something that can come out of it. The youth for instance mentioned that they learned about different subjects during the activities, indicating that the activity they participate in values that its participants learn about different topics. This is very beneficial to children and adolescents, especially when they are young and are trying to figure out the interests and talents they have. This process is easier when you get introduced to several of them.

'That was also someone, who also came to talk philosophy and it was about Cultural Appropriation within the Asian Community, that's what she was talking about. I learned a lot about that too. She herself was of Asian descent and she was a philosopher, and she did a thought exercise. Actually, there were a few interesting workshops at the scene. But I secretly forgot about it. But I did learn something from that.'

Lastly, participants said that they not only discovered new talents, those are things they are good at, but instead, learned new skills in general. Most respondents say that they learned speaking in front of groups. Meaning that most activities require participants to present themselves or the work that they have done.

'We did really get a training in okay how do you speak in front of groups, how do you network, and of course you learn more when it happens here, how do you speak to someone?'

Besides revealing that participation in ForwArt's initiatives does make the youth both experience and improve their eudaimonic well-being, these stories also show that these activities have helped the youth to let them see and use their own potential.

CONCLUSION

This research sought to answer the question: *what does participation in project ForwArt mean for the eudaimonic well-being of children and adolescents living in Tilburg-Noord?* After interviewing the youth it becomes clear that participation in project ForwArt initiatives influences the eudaimonic well-being of children and adolescents living in Tilburg-Noord in a positive way. Participation makes children and adolescents become more future oriented by making them **think more about the future and the opportunities they have**. Participating also made the youth **aware of their own talents** which resulted in them **seeing their own potential**. Further, the youth all acknowledged that engaging in the activities helped them **bond with others** and **build their network**. This is in line with previous research and theorising. The importance of having relationships and building your network to use it for future purposes, is frequently discussed in the literature about social capital [7, 8]. Two kinds of social capital can be distinguished: bonding and bridging. Both bonding and bridging are likely to occur during the activities. Bonding is when an individual connects to people from their group, such as family, friends, or people from the same community [7, 8]. Bridging is when individuals connect with individuals from other social groups but with different socioeconomic backgrounds, interests, or other characteristics. These other social groups may provide the individual with access to resources the individual normally would not require in their own social group. These resources are mostly non-materialistic in nature; they often occur in the form of knowledge, advice, support, or linking them again with other people.

Moreover, the youngsters voiced that partaking in the activities make them **feel good about themselves** and supports **autonomous behavior**. This answer given by the youth is in line with the self-determination theory. Feeling autonomous, in combination with the need for competence and relatedness (or connection), are important aspects in achieving self-determination and personal growth [9] and are central to both the self-determination theory as well as Ryff's eudaimonic well-being framework. People that are self-determined are able to manage themselves, make confident choices and can think on their own [10, 11]. Being able to act autonomously is important because people that are autonomous feel in control of their own life because they are able to make choices independently without experiencing the constraint of others.

All these aforementioned qualities are of great importance for the youth in **increasing their future perspective**. Besides these dimensions of Ryff's eudaimonic well-being frame, the youth also mentioned something in addition, namely: **learning** new things (**subjects**) and **skills** and learning **from each other**.

The stories told by the youth do not only emphasize the importance of how art and culture can improve their well-being, but also show what young people find important during the activities: what makes them come back every week. This knowledge is valuable because it paves the way for ongoing, new or improved initiatives that aim to increase the future perspective of the youth.

If the initiatives within ForwArt are to truly contribute to the positive development and well-being of young people, it is of great importance to pay attention to the presence of the qualities - as outlined in this thesis - that actually contribute to this.

RESEARCH APPROACH

This study made use of qualitative research has been conducted in two phases. Phase one consisted of conducting a literature study that explored what participation in art and cultural activities does for the well-being of youngsters living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and structuring the interviews based on Ryff's eudaimonic well-being framework. During this phase, researchers also attended various ForwArt initiatives to get an idea of what the young people participate in.

The second phase consisted of approaching youngsters living in Tilburg Noord that participated weekly in these activities. In total, 10 interviews were conducted with youngsters aged between 15-25 years old. In addition to these interviews, three small group interviews took place with a total of eleven children aged 8-12 years old that participated in the activities of Corpo Máquina Society. To read the full thesis. This report and its findings are based on this [thesis](#).

We are grateful for all the stories that youth so candidly shared with us.



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APPENDIX

ForwArt and some of its initiatives

Corpo Máquina

Corpo Máquina is a choreographic platform that cuts across existing structures. They work in Tilburg Noord on the crossover between dance and freestyle football, together the children and youngsters from the neighbourhood, freestyle footballers, Tilburg skaters, art students and dance and theatre professionals. The interaction creates meaningful encounters between people from diverse backgrounds and a variety of energies, languages, styles, skills and talents.

<https://corpomaquina.nl/>

Noordvoerders

Noordvoerders consists of a group of four adolescents that are committed to giving the youth a voice when organizations are making plans for Tilburg-Noord. They find it important that during these projects, young people are involved and heard in the neighborhood. Together with these external organizations, they want to tackle problems in the neighborhood such as poverty, health, unemployment, and education. They also develop their own initiatives through which they contribute to a stronger voice of youngsters in Tilburg Noord.

<https://www.noordvoerders013.nl/over-ons/>

The Scène

The Scène is a meeting place in Tilburg-Noord for girls and young women. Every week they meet on Wednesday evenings to eat together and look for stories. These stories will be visible through vlogging, dancing, filming and cooking. Their aim: "through the wide variety of workshops that The Scène will organize, we hope to find out where the energy goes, to get to know each other and the neighborhood better and from there to find new and fine forms to share stories with each other, from each other, to learn and to empower each other"

<https://www.the-scene.club/>

T-Reporters

T-Reporters are part of Omroep Tilburg, the local broadcast company. They create diverse, accessible, creative and qualitative content with, for and by Tilburgers. They will do this by training young children and adolescents as T-Reporters. "The T-Reporters are young people from Tilburg-Noord who, as citizen journalists, bridge the gap between the neighborhood and the project by investigating and communicating"

<https://www.forwart.nu/reports/>

De Boyz Scene

The Boyz Scene is an acting group consisting of a small group of boys. Under guidance of a professional actor, they learn what acting is about, what rehearsing can mean to you and work on a short performance.