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Young people navigating musical lives: Considering arts participation as agency in cultural authorship

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Abstract

This study explores young people's arts participation through music-making in Finland and the factors that may regulate that participation. It seeks to understand the construction of active modes of arts participation in and through adolescents' musical life courses. The interview study was conducted with young people ($N = 18$) participating in musical activities in formal and nonformal learning spaces, such as music institutions or activities offered by municipal youth programs. By introducing five musical pathways based on young people's life courses, we explore the ways that adolescents negotiate individual and collective meanings as creative agents in their musical lives. The study shows that access to music education, webs of support, and continuity of musical activities are the key factors regulating young people's arts participation through cultural authorship.

Keywords
art-based youth work, arts participation, cultural authorship, formal, music education, musical agency, musical life course, musical pathway, nonformal, young people

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Introduction

For more than two decades, a growing number of music education scholars have argued for the necessity of changing the ways we think about young people as music learners and cultural agents, and about the physical or mental spaces in which musical learning takes place (Carroll, 2020; Gee, 2005; Green, 2001; Green, 2008; Jenkins, 2009; Kallio et al., 2014; Kastner, 2020; Koskela et al., 2021; Mantie, 2008; Ng, 2020; O'Neill, 2012; Partti & Westerlund, 2013; Reynolds & Beitler, 2007). Responding to young music learners' diversifying needs and taking their aspirations as a legitimate starting point for action call for recognizing "who they are and what constitutes their current musical and cultural ecologies" (O'Neill, 2012, p. 10). As O'Neill

(2012) points out, “there is always a temporal and spatial dimension to music learning” (p. 2), both of which need to be considered when trying to understand the ways music learners make sense of their own musical histories—and their futures. In Finland, the core curriculum for the *Basic Education in the Arts* (BEA) (Finnish National Agency of Education, 2017) provided by extra-curricular music schools cites composing as one of the key elements of music instruction. Yet there is no research into how the formal music school system actually supports young people’s creative musical production, nor into how the young people who engage in creative musical production outside the Basic Education in the Arts receive their education.

In this study, we approach young people’s music learning through their participation in various musical activities, aiming to illuminate the ways young people construct active arts participation throughout their musical life courses in Finland. We particularly aim to understand young people’s active arts participation through music from the perspective of musical agency and cultural authorship. By agency, we refer to an individual’s or a group of people’s ability to make meaningful choices to achieve set goals (Samman & Santos, 2009, p. 3), and as a subject’s situational and “embodied potentiality to form intra-active relationships with material structures, discourses and intersubjective environments” (Coffey & Farrugia, 2014, p. 472). Agency can therefore be seen as the ability to act in relation to various cultural and social factors, and musical agency as one’s own *conception* of the range of possibilities to enact and interact musically within changing arenas (e.g., Karlsen, 2011). Young people’s musical agency allows them to negotiate their individual room for action and their contributions to collective endeavors (Karlsen, 2011, p. 111) that enable or limit shared creative enterprises and cultural participation. Cultural authorship can be understood to be shaped through agency, creating practices, and voice (Ferreira, 2016; Greene, 1995; Pytash, 2016; Regelski, 2008), and can be examined through the concept of *cultural production* (e.g., Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013, pp. 225–226). Cultural production emphasizes people’s interactions in specific contexts and the ways in which meanings are negotiated and constructed in social spaces. In this view, culture is above all what people *do*, and artistic practices offer symbolic creativity within people’s everyday lives. The cultural production approach therefore challenges “the very concept of the arts as mobilized to justify exclusion through notions of talent and artistic ability” (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013, p. 223) and the hierarchical systems determining who has the right to cultural authorship and who does not.

Young people’s cultural authorship can be seen to rise from “acts of creative meaning-making” (Pytash, 2016, p. 54) when engaging in individual or joint artistic endeavors in various social spaces. In this study, rather than being viewed as presenters or reproducers of existing musical culture, young people are here seen as *authors of culture* (Väkevä & Ojala, 2013) – as creative agents constructing musical authorship in and through music-making. Within these musical practices and spaces, young people become “authors of their own musical lives and histories” (Regelski, 2008, p. 10). In other words, creative musical expression such as composing, songwriting, or music production can be seen as a form of exploring one’s own lifeworld and inventing new semiotic spaces that enable various kinds of collaborations with others (Väkevä & Ojala, 2013, pp. 15–17).

In music education, musical agency has rarely been considered together with cultural authorship, even when understood as one of the fundamental objectives of arts participation and music as cultural practice. Sociologists Vanherwegen and Lievens (2014) suggest that such an understanding is bound by social class, and is more applicable to upper-class individuals. Lower-class individuals mainly experience an instructional effect, such as learning how to sing or play an instrument, when participating in arts programs (p. 467). But when it comes to

creative musical production, the situation might not be so straightforward. Cultural authorship is shaped by agency and does not depend solely on social class. However, within Basic Education in the Arts musical agency seems to have become connected to developing instrumental skills rather than to creative musical production, regardless of the social background of students. This connection demonstrates the limits of the formal music school system in supporting young people who identify themselves as cultural authors.

All in all, the ways in which young people map their cultural landscapes are driven by diverse cultural, social, and socio-economic mechanisms. This qualitative study followed a narrative approach (Bold, 2012) in which the relationship between arts participation, agency, and authorship is examined through young people's experiences and stories.

Agency in cultural authorship and arts participation

People's engagements with arts and culture have long been of interest to researchers. To participate in culture signifies a two-way engagement: to join in existing culture and to participate in changing it, "both key processes of creative expression" (Glăveanu, 2011, p. 62; also Kröner, 2013). According to Novak-Leonard et al. (2014), cultural participation can be viewed conceptually along a spectrum from narrow to broad, with the former seen as a division between the artists (producers) and the audiences (consumers). A broader understanding of cultural participation instead calls for seeing "networks and social circles [as] influential in terms of self-identification, activities undertaken, and taste development" (Novak-Leonard et al., 2014, p. 7). Consequently, capturing a wider range of cultural participation (and thus arts participation) calls for new terminology that encompasses a considerably wider range of activities (Novak-Leonard et al., 2014, p. 7).

As a notion, creative and expressive modes of cultural participation resonate with Brown's model of *five modes of arts participation*, particularly with two of the five modes, namely *inventive* and *interpretive* arts participation (Brown, 2004, pp. 11–12; Novak-Leonard & Brown, 2011, p. 32). Inventive arts participation can be understood as an act of comprehensive and original artistic creation that is not valued for the associated skill level. Interpretive arts participation, however, encompasses either the individual or collective recreation of existing artwork (Brown, 2004, pp. 11–12).

To date, there have been only a few studies on active modes of arts participation (Mansour et al., 2016; Reeves, 2015; Vanherwegen & Lievens, 2014; Villarroya, 2015). According to Villarroya (2015), scholars use a number of terms such as "active involvement in arts," "amateur arts," "active cultural participation," or "arts engagement" when studying arts participation. Vanherwegen and Lievens (2014), who studied the mechanisms influencing young people's active arts participation in Belgium, found that neither socio-economic or cultural background nor general school education has any significant net effect on active arts participation. Instead, due to the long-term and specialist training required by arts disciplines, such effects were found when participating in out-of-school arts education programs. These out-of-school arts programs are still strongly "rooted in the socialization patterns of upper-class families" (p. 464) in many other countries. Indeed, in Finland, a clear majority of students participating in extra-curricular activities within the state-funded Basic Education in the Arts system are girls with a middle-class background (Aluehallintovirasto, 2014; Suominen, 2019). In addition, children and adolescents with culturally diverse backgrounds, including the

Indigenous Sami people in Finland, are typically absent from out-of-school arts programs (Kallio & Länsman, 2018). Clearly, the Finnish music education system requires structural reform to better offer accessible and democratically founded opportunities to young people (Ilmola-Sheppard et al., 2021; Väkevä et al., 2017). By exploring the ways adolescents construct their musical learning and cultural authorship, this study aims to illuminate who these young creative agents are, what constitutes their musical landscapes, and—by addressing their narratives to music education policy-makers—what factors might enable or limit their arts participation.

Research question

In this study, we aim to understand modes of active arts participation in and through music by exploring the ways adolescents navigate their pathways in music and construct musical agency while searching for cultural authorship. Utilizing interviews of young people who make music in various formal and nonformal learning spaces, we ask how young people narrate their musical pathways and the processes of meaning-making while engaging in musical practices as creative agents.

Context of the study

As in many countries, in Finland, music is one of the most popular out-of-school activities among young people. Indeed, approximately 35% of girls and 26% of boys participate in music activities in their leisure time (Salasuo, 2021). Along with the music education provided by comprehensive schools,[1] formal music tuition is offered by the *Basic Education in the Arts* (BEA) system,[2] supported by a state-funded nationwide network of music institutions. Yet, Basic Education in the Arts reaches less than one-fifth of these young music learners (Aluehallintovirasto, 2014), whereas the others participate in music-making in nonformal spaces such as activities offered by private, public, or third-party sectors,[3] which provide platforms and activities to attend individually or in a group (Kuoppamäki & Vilmilä, 2017). These activities may take many forms and can be low cost or free of charge: for example, song writing workshops provided in open spaces by a nonprofit association in collaboration with municipal youth programs.

Data and research approach

The study was motivated by the observation that, although the core curriculum for Basic Education in the Arts cites composing as one of the key elements of music instruction (Finnish National Agency of Education, 2017), the formal music school system does not seem to adequately support young people who identify as cultural authors. Moreover, because Basic Education in the Arts only reaches less than one-fifth of young people who engage in out-of-school music activities, we wanted to identify the other musical spaces in which young people's cultural production takes place.

The data were generated using a combination of biographical and semi-structured interviews with adolescents (N = 18) (Cohen et al., 2007). Eight participants were female and ten were male, aged 14 to 20. The selection of the interviewees was made based on performances at a youth music festival and participation in open-access songwriting workshops or extra-curricular music schools. They all participated in music activities in formal (n = 5), nonformal (n = 11), or both formal and nonformal (n = 2) learning spaces such as music institutions or youth clubs. Other key attributes taken into consideration while generating the narrative accounts were gender and regional diversity: at the time of the interviews, ten of the interviewees lived in the Helsinki metropolitan area, five in middle-sized cities, and three in small municipalities. Their socio-economic and cultural backgrounds varied considerably.

The first author interviewed young people (n = 8) from three different regions who were learning music mainly in formal settings during the ArtsEqual initiative. ArtsEqual (2015–2021) was a multidisciplinary research initiative that explored the potential of the arts as a public service to increase participation and social well-being in Finnish society. The second author interviewed adolescents (n = 10) acting in nonformal musical spaces during the Finlandia 2.1 initiative, also in three regions. The Finlandia 2.1 project organized songwriting workshops for young people between 2013 and 2018. The project combined music-making, youth work, and "new ways of knowledge production." The connection between the two initiatives was made through the young people's music festival.

In the interviews, which lasted between one and one-and-a-half hours, the informants were asked about their life courses, including childhood, adolescence, family ties, and friends; their musical engagements and experiences in music-making and learning music; and their perceptions of the meanings of music in the lives of young people. Both authors approached the interviewees as musical agents, and their narrations were understood as being bound by those events that they themselves recognized as meaningful (Anttila, 2006).

The data were analyzed using narrative analysis (Barrett & Stauffer, 2009; Bold, 2012), and following life course analysis (Shanahan et al., 2016). When conducting the analysis we did not seek to generalize the findings, but to explore the musical life courses of the participating young people through their narratives, keeping in mind that "narrative creation usually encourages reflexivity and acknowledges that truth and certainty are unstable" (Bold, 2012, p. 13).

Life course theory (Elder et al., 2003) refers to a multidisciplinary paradigm for the study of people's lives, structural contexts, and social change. Making childhood and adolescent transitions visible helps in identifying mechanisms of continuity and discontinuity, which are useful to better understand the complex body of person and context (Shanahan et al., 2016); this is also significant when trying to illuminate the factors that may drive young people's arts participation through musical agency and cultural authorship.

We followed the ethical guidelines of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity that the ArtsEqual and Finlandia 2.1 research initiatives were engaged in. A consent form was required from all interviewees; or, for minors, from a guardian. Before the interview, we discussed the purpose and methods of the study with the participants, such as the use of pseudonyms. When reporting the findings we have taken care that the anonymity of the interviewees is not compromised.

Findings

Navigating musical agency and cultural authorship within five musical pathways

We identified narrations that depicted the interviewees' experiences of meaning-making when navigating their musical lives by how they recognized the various musical spheres in which they acted as musical agents and cultural authors. We examined their life courses as illuminating the factors that defined the individual musical pathways in the narrations. Three factors that had a significant impact on the formation of the musical life courses were identified: (1) access to music education, such as available music tuition or living place; (2) webs of support, including important motivators like family members, peers, or teachers; and (3) continuity of musical activities. We constructed five musical pathways (Table 1) that we understand as ongoing processes in which learning may take on varying forms and intensities.

Table 1. Five Musical Pathways.

Musical pathways	Musical pathway starts	Significant encounters	Learning spaces	Specific to the pathway	Interviewees
PW1: Extensively supported formal pathway	Early childhood	Role of family strong; music teachers supportive	Formal learning space; commercial productions	Professional career hopes; access to tuition; Strong support webs; ongoing learning	Ester, Naomi, Tim, Eva
PW2: Self-forged pathway	Primary school age	Music teachers encouraging; family supportive	Nonformal learning space; later also formal learning space	Learning oriented; exploring with musical activities; individual navigators	Matt, Emily, Philip
PW3: Family and nonformal activity-oriented pathway	Early childhood	Role of family significant; making music with family; exploring music with peers	Nonformal learning space	Nonformal activities significant; learning by doing; desire to learn	Jake, Patrick, James, Teresa
PW4: Open-access oriented pathway	Early childhood	Family facilitating opportunities in music; later peers significant	School music education significant; nonformal learning space	Rock bands with peers central; learning with peers	Nora, Tina, Oliver
PW5: Peer-oriented pathway	Adolescence	Acting with peers crucial	Youth clubs significant	Peers facilitating opportunities; learning with peers	Holly, Owen, Mike, Rick

PW1: extensively supported formal pathway

Ester, Naomi, Tim, and Eva all started their musical training in early childhood, and their mothers were an important source of inspiration when applying to an extra-curricular music school. They all participated in several musical activities: learning one or more musical instruments in a music school, participating actively in school music education, singing in a choir in commercial productions, or playing in a pop or jazz band. They all had plans for musical careers. Importantly, they all received extensive social and economic support from their families and teachers, as well as their music schools, to pursue their musical ambitions. A sense of direction, agency in learning, and inner goals guided their musical pathways (see Table 1).

Connected to this sense of direction and agency, the ability to author one's own musical life independently (Regelski, 2008, p. 10) stood out clearly in the narrative accounts. For example, as a form of *inventive* arts participation (Novak-Leonard & Brown, 2011, p. 32), Ester saw her songwriting as a natural continuum to her earlier classical violin studies, and aimed at creating her own artistic style as a singer-songwriter, and an international career in music:

> I've always wanted my music to be somehow different, on a higher level artistically. It's because I've been doing classical music for so long [. . .] it's more technical, it's highbrow culture, more complex theoretically, so I'd like to make use of it.

Tim also saw his musical development as a process in which absorbed skills lead to new skills. For him, the projects in which he was able to independently determine the musical content and implementation were particularly meaningful, as was the case with his examination concert. For that concert, he chose the repertoire, assembled the players, was in charge of the rehearsals, and finally acted as a pianist and a bandleader in the concert.

On this pathway the individual's musical agency particularly stood out: all of the young people had easy access to music-making and focused on developing their own individual musical skills. For Tim, however, who in his adolescence switched from classical to pop and jazz piano—and who saw himself as "more a band player than a solo player"—the meanings of music-making intertwined especially with the processes of exploring collective musical agency and the experience of what it takes to act and interact musically with other people (Karlsen, 2011, p. 116; also Small, 1998). Thus, for him, arts participation was highlighted through collective endeavors.

PW2: Self-forged pathway

All of the interviewees on the self-forged pathway started their musical activities in their primary school years. Matt and Emily started to learn an instrument with private teachers. Filip, instead, applied to an extra-curricular music school at the age of 9. Emily experimented with different instruments, while Matt and Filip stood by their first choices. Both Matt and Emily were accepted to an extra-curricular music school rather late, in their adolescence. They were also both active in nonformal music activities. All three had hopes for a musical career (see Table 1).

Characteristically, all of these young people were learning-oriented. However, in contrast to PW1, their musical pathways were not straightforward. Matt and Emily experimented with

musical activities in various nonformal and formal arenas. Filip mapped his musical pathway independently because he believed that there was no music in his home. In that sense, the musical pathways of all three can be described as self-forged. Consequently, they all showed notable agency in authoring their musical lives (Regelski, 2008, p. 10). In their narrations, the shaping of self-identity (Karlsen, 2011) as a form of musical agency stood out clearly, like in PW1.

The narrative accounts included a number of positive experiences of agency related to versatile identity work, such as a sense of autonomy or empowerment. Indeed, on the self-forged pathway arts participation manifested in an ability to make individual choices when authoring one's musical life. Despite this strong sense of autonomy, however, silent signals can also be identified in the narrative accounts. For example, Matt and Filip both expressed how they lacked peers at primary school with whom to share their musical interests. Matt, who had taken private lessons in piano, remembered:

> It was just that no-one else was interested in it [classical music]. So, I was a bit different from the others, and they wanted to bully me for that [. . .] at the time it was quite heavy.

Matt also described a friend who stopped playing piano in his primary school years because he was pressured by his friends, who viewed sports to be a more suitable hobby. All in all, his narrations described a peer group negotiating a "local ideal of hegemonic masculinity" (Manninen, 2010, p. 62) in which the arts were not included. In that sense, Matt's choice to stick with music can be seen as resistance to a "boy-code" (Risner, 2007, 2009) pursued by his friends. Later, when he changed to another school and a music-specialized class, the experiences of collective musical agency became particularly important for him, and he was able to make "some real friends." Consequently, for the boys on this pathway, the challenges in arts participation came down to a lack of collective meaning-making and a sense of belonging.

PW3: Family and nonformal activity-oriented pathway

The beginning of the musical life courses of Jake, Patrick, and Teresa go all the way back to their early childhood. For them, the low-profile daily music-making that they took part in with their family members was not just a way to engage in meaningful relationships within their families but was also an important environment for early-stage musical learning and *cultural production* as part of everyday life (e.g., Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013) (see Table 1). For example, Jake saw his father as a musical role model, and started to play in the same church band:

> I remember how I looked up at him [. . .] how on earth can he play all those different instruments, and I wanted to be able to do it one day, too. And ever since, when at the age of five . . . I began to learn [to play instruments], I started to make my own music as well.

Later in their adolescence, these young people found their way to music-related youth work. The music activities provided in nonformal spaces engaged them in music-making conclusively and shaped their musical pathways. Characteristic of this pathway was the use of joint music-making as a way to explore "what it means to interact socially in the world" (Karlsen, 2011, p. 116). Consequently, for these young people, it was collective endeavors through which cultural participation took place. Moreover, their agency was distinctive in searching out opportunities

for music-making and their energetic attitude toward nonformal music activities. Teresa, for instance, described how she participated in an open-access songwriting workshop "simply out of curiosity," thinking that she otherwise might "miss something important for [her] future."

Evidently, among these young songwriters, the challenges in accessing music activities that would support continuity in music learning seemed to drive their sense of musical agency, authorship, and arts participation. Despite that, they all actively looked for learning opportunities in various spheres.

PW4: Open-access-oriented pathway

Nora, Tina, and Oliver all had significant experiences in music already in their early childhood. The connecting factor was how their families facilitated opportunities for music-making, rather than actually sharing in the music-making. Even though the families or music teachers were supportive, a strong self-directiveness in making music was typical for this pathway.

Both Nora and Tina became interested in music at an early age. They participated in various short-term, nonformal music activities by, for example, experimenting with different instruments with private teachers. Nevertheless, neither of them could find either the space or activities for sustained music-making. Later on, in their adolescence, both found a musical community at school. Indeed, scholars (Bennett, 1980; Green, 2001) have emphasized the school's role in the formation of bands as social spaces to share musical interests and aspirations, and also in offering varied resources to explore music. This is evident in Nora's narration:

> Our music teacher told us that in his point of view a music classroom is useless if it isn't used outside of classes. [. . .] And I took it like literally. [. . .] He was so jazzed up for the fact that I was always using it [the classroom] so actively.

Oliver, instead, started his own rock band with his classmates at the age of 10. After playing together for a year, the band started to practice regularly in a nonformal rock school, receiving instruction from a band tutor. Oliver stayed with the rock school for eight years, playing in a number of bands, some of them with his original bandmates. According to him, sharing ideas and making choices when rehearsing or writing songs together was easier with a common history: "it's just that the same guys have been there from scratch [. . .] we haven't grown up apart from one another, but together and alike."

According to Green (2001), friendships and the sharing of musical tastes play an important role in young people's musical learning practices. For Nora, Oliver, and Tina, joint music-making with peers in nonformal spheres was a central path toward arts participation. For Oliver, the rock school facilitated an arena for continuing and structured *inventive* and *interpretive* arts participation (Novak-Leonard & Brown, 2011, p. 32). Having a chance to build his musical pathway alongside his peers played a significant role in the development of his musicianship. For Nora and Tina, creative meaning-making was actualized in "exploring collective identity" through "collaborative musical actions" with their bands (Karlsen, 2011, p. 116).

PW5: Peer-oriented pathway

In contrast to the other pathways, Holly, Mike, Rick, and Owen became interested in music relatively late, during their early adolescence. The defining factor was their involvement with music together with peers. Hence, the collective dimension of musical agency was significant through-out the peer-oriented pathway. Together with their peers, they engaged in music-making facilitated through youth work, as Mike describes:

> She [an acquaintance] said do you wanna come and check out the place [a music studio at a youth club] . . . And we went to see the studio. We were excited. [. . .] And then we made a song there. . . My first song.

Owen also told how he took his friend to the studio with him, introduced him to the others, and showed him around. Hence, unlike in the other pathways, these adolescents also facilitated opportunities for their peers. They said that sharing opportunities and skills complemented their own. According to Holly, making music together with her friend Lisa (who had studied clarinet and guitar at a formal music school) accomplished something that neither of them could have done alone. She saw her friend as "musically super-talented" and herself as someone who brought "atmosphere" to their joint musical projects. Karlsen (2011, p. 116) notes that affirming and exploring collective identity in and through music is a mode of musical agency where joint self-images are created. Holly described her engagement with a collective identity through fan culture:

> In the seventh grade [aged 13] I had no significant experiences of music. [. . .] Then my friend started to listen to this [punk rock] band and was like, they are so good. [. . .] probably the big moment was when we went to their gig. [. . .] All that sense of community. . . there was something holy happening there. It was so spiritual and it affected me, and I thought, I want to be like them. And then we went and bought a guitar and just started to practice.

For Mike, Rick, and Owen, exploring their collective identity was manifested in writing songs together with their peers. The ongoing dialogue within the music-making processes affirmed the sense of collective identity.

The characteristic of the young people on this pathway was that they all experienced their musical skills to be insufficient compared to others who, for example, had made music longer or had had some tuition beyond music classes in school. Rick originally became interested in music through Mozart samples found in Windows XP, yet it was not clear to him how to access music-making or start to learn it. This showed in his own views of his potential for musical production, making him feel "a little envious."

Nevertheless, these adolescents did not become discouraged by this feeling of being an underdog. Instead, they actively aimed at developing their musical skills within the settings they could access. Novak-Leonard and Brown (2011) suggest that "the settings in which one participates in arts activities have many symbolic, practical, social and behavioural connotations" (p. 30), referring especially to the attending level of participation, such as going to a concert. This was also visible in the peer-oriented pathway, in which the active modes of arts participation were connected to one's own understanding of the potential to enact musical agency in a specific space or sphere: adolescents developed "a sense of ownership" toward the

nonformal spaces they used. Moreover, developing a sense of belonging through musical agency and authorship was a key factor for arts participation.

Discussion

In this study, we depicted the ways young people narrate their musical pathways and their processes of meaning-making when engaging in musical practices in formal and nonformal learning spaces in Finland. By concentrating on young people's experiences of musical agency and authorship, we sought to illuminate the processes of creative meaning-making and the means of constructing arts participation in and through music by focusing on active modes of arts participation as ways of authoring cultural practices. We viewed these modes of arts participation from the perspective of inventive and interpretive arts participation (Novak-Leonard & Brown, 2011, p. 32), and acknowledged young people as cultural agents and authors shaping their own musical lives and the world around them. Our analysis explored the ways agency in cultural authorship drives young people's arts participation. The narrations depicted not just the various modes and ways of arts participation, but also the *sense* of it.

The active modes of arts participation (Novak-Leonard & Brown, 2011, p. 32) were manifested in each pathway, albeit not identically constructed. The findings indicate that the *ways* of arts participation in and through music varied considerably between the identified pathways. The ways of active arts participation recognized here resonate with Glăveanu's (2011) view that "creative expression is at once an individual, social and cultural act" (p. 50). However, as mentioned above, the emphasis seemed to vary not only in the individual aims but also in the main focus of music-making on each pathway.

Arts participation as a clearly individual act was highlighted in *the self-forged pathway* (PW2). The adolescents on this path were all strong individual navigators, finding their own routes and ways of music-making. For them, the sense of cultural participation had been shaped through self-forged experimenting in multiple learning spaces, sometimes contesting the surrounding expectations and norms such as the "boy-code" (Risner, 2009). Arts participation as an individual act also appeared in *the family and nonformal activity-oriented pathway* (PW3) and in *the extensively supported formal pathway* (PW1). The difference here was that music-making in PW3 was both an individual and social endeavor. Adolescents on this pathway were actively looking for musical learning opportunities within nonformal activities and were determined to participate in all available opportunities. They saw that arts participation in and through music was possible only through developing musical skills, and was actualized by making music together with peers and family members. In contrast, the interviewees representing PW1 had a clear understanding of music as a cultural practice and saw their own musical activities as a natural continuum of a historical musical canon. This applied both to playing classical music as well as to composing their own music. The high level of musical skills they possessed offered opportunities for music-making in various arenas. In other words, for them, music-making was foremost an individual and cultural act.

For the young people on *the open-access oriented pathway* (PW4), the key to arts participation was music-making as a social act. For them, arts participation was actualized equally through nonformal activities and nonformal spaces. For these adolescents, making music together with peers in free or structured social situations was central. Their attitude toward music-making was straightforward and unproblematized. Finally, on *the peer-oriented pathway* (PW5),

music-making was simultaneously a social and cultural act: “a way to get their voices heard in society” rather than just “an art form.” In addition, acting with peers was a key factor for these self-learned musicians when engaging in music-making.

In our analysis, we noticed that the interviewees had a “gut feeling” of how they positioned themselves in their musical landscapes. This feeling seemed to drive their musical agency and authorship, and at the same time was shaped by it. Alongside the modes and ways of arts participation discussed above, we perceive this “gut feeling” as possessing a *sense* of arts participation. As we see it, the sense of arts participation as one’s own mindset is connected both to identity formation (Novak-Leonard & Brown, 2011, p. 32) and to acting musically in the world. Above we have proposed that the ways of arts participation varied between the pathways. Similarly, when looking at each pathway we noticed that the *sense* of arts participation also alternated.

The variations in the sense of arts participation were clearly evident when comparing the narrations of young people on the *extensively supported formal pathway* (PW1) and the *peer-oriented pathway* (PW5) regarding the steps in music-making. For Ester, classical music had always meant highbrow culture—something technical and theoretically more complex—but also definitely something to relate with and try to achieve. She also saw herself as a part of that musical canon when writing her own songs. Hence, “the sky is the limit” depicts Ester’s sense of arts participation. In comparison, Rick, whose first inspiration in music was Mozart samples found in Windows XP, was uncertain about existing opportunities for engaging in music-making or learning music. Even after actively making music for years, he talked about those first experiences as highbrow culture, still abstract and not part of his current musical landscape. Instead, Rick’s sense of arts participation grew to be more attached to music as a means of publishing one’s visions socially. Rick’s narrations seemed to be in line with those of all the young people on the *peer-oriented pathway* (PW5). For them, the phrase “hear me out” illustrates their sense of arts participation.

When considering the sense of arts participation from the perspective of musical agency and cultural authorship, similarities can be traced between the interviewees on the *self-forged pathway* (PW2) and the *family and nonformal activity-oriented pathway* (PW3). This is evident in terms of taking an active stance in building up their musical lives. The sense of arts participation among these young people resonates with the post-subcultural approach that Ferreira (2016) describes as an *arts of existence*. These adolescents were oriented “towards acting on the world, taking advantage of the best it has to offer and as much as they can” (p. 74). They were strong navigators when looking for opportunities for music-making and learning. In the narrative accounts of the young people on PW3, this stance became evident in the “no chance should be missed” attitude. Instead, what defined the adolescents on PW2 was their obvious ownership of making choices. In fact, they clearly acted as “authors of their own musical lives and histories” (Regelski, 2008, p. 10) by participating in musical activities in both formal and nonformal learning spaces and making “I author my own way” their guideline.

Differing from the other pathways, on the *open-access oriented pathway* (PW4) the sense of arts participation took varying forms. Nevertheless, a straightforward and unproblematized attitude toward music-making can be recognized as a connecting factor. The sense of cultural participation in these young people can be seen as a continuum in the spirit of “let’s just make music.” This leaning toward the “cheerful side of existence” refers to the youth scenes based on the “ethics of celebration” (Ferreira, 2016, p. 74).

Conclusion

In this study, we have considered the relationships between musical pathways and active modes of arts participation. The potentials and limits that drive young people's musical pathways simultaneously shape their arts participation within their micro-cultures such as families, peer groups, youth clubs, or music schools, as well as in wider communities and societal environments (Glăveanu, 2011, p. 61). Indeed, among these young music-makers access to music education, varying support networks, and continuity of musical activities seemed to be the key factors regulating their arts participation and agency in cultural authorship. As Gould (2007) points out, access to educational resources is related to the power issues associated with young people's access to making educational choices. This access is regulated by various social and cultural factors, such as one's knowledge of existing opportunities or types of tuition, gender, or even age. Nevertheless, not all young people are interested in formal music programs, which tend to offer limited opportunities for individual creative expression and independent art-making. Not only does this suggest that institutions need to learn and transform, but that the way young people are perceived in music education also needs to develop toward a broader view in which they are not merely seen as music learners but simultaneously as cultural agents and authors of their own musical lives.

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Notes

1. School music education aims at offering conditions for diverse musical activities and cultural participation, and includes, among other things, popular music and the use of rock band instruments. The focus in teaching is on holistic growth, self-expression, and cultural citizenship (Finnish National Agency of Education, 2014).
2. Basic Education in the Arts is a voluntary activity based on the Framework Curriculum (2017) of the Finnish National Board of Education, which offers both a general and extended syllabus. The students pay a tuition fee, and for the extended syllabus, they are usually selected through an entrance examination. Basic Education in the Arts is goal-oriented, progresses from one level to another, and provides, when needed, skills for vocational music studies. The tuition in Basic Education in the Arts involves one-to-one instrumental or vocal teaching and group subjects such as playing in small groups or an orchestra, and music theory and history classes.
3. Along with private teachers, commercial music schools provide tuition in diverse musical styles ranging from classical to rock band instruments and early childhood music education. Furthermore, municipal youth work offers activities in open spaces and facilitates the availability of band rehearsal rooms and opportunities for studio work, albeit not tuition as such. The third-party sector consists of a large number of various nonprofit associations, liberal education centers, and congregations, and is an important provider in the Finnish culture and youth work scene.

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