

Exploring the Transformation of Habitus: a Case Study of Forum Theatre in Estonia

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Abstract: Habitus is a key concept in Bourdieusian social analysis, which is used to explain (lack of) change in society. Bourdieu was optimistic about the possibility of change in society, but he did not provide an exact recipe for this. I will try to fill this knowledge gap by providing an empirical example of transformation of habitus. In order to achieve this aim I will utilize a Participatory Action Research method called Forum Theatre from my fieldwork with the Russophone minority in Estonia. In results, I will address the change of habitus of participants.

Keywords: transformation of habitus, participatory action research, Forum Theatre

Explorando la Transformación del Hábito: un Estudio de Caso del Teatro Interactivo en Estonia

Resumen: El hábito es un concepto clave en el análisis social de Bourdieu, que se utiliza para explicar (la ausencia de) el cambio en la sociedad. Bourdieu era optimista sobre la posibilidad de cambio en la sociedad, pero no propuso una receta detallada para el mismo. En este artículo intento aportar a esta carencia proponiendo un ejemplo empírico de transformación del hábito. Para conseguir este objetivo utilizaré el método de Investigación Acción Participativa denominada Teatro Interactivo en mi trabajo de campo con la minoría rusoparlante en Estonia. Como resultado, abordaré el cambio del hábito de las personas participantes.

Palabras clave: transformación del hábito, investigación acción participativa, teatro interactivo

1. Introduction

Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus and capital are used as a metatheoretical framework to analyse the social world (Bourdieu 1977, 1986). The interconnectivity and relations between these concepts constitute the core of practises of subject positions and co-constitute the objective structures of society which, in turn, constitute the subjective structures. Habitus, a central concept in the Bourdieusian approach, plays a pivotal role in these relations.

This kind of Bourdieusian approach is often deemed to be deterministic (e.g., see Atkinson 2020), explaining why changes in society are not likely to happen. However, Bourdieu himself was more optimistic about the possibility of change; he stated that it *is* possible to transform the habitus of individual subjects; however, he did not provide an exact recipe for this. This paper addresses this knowledge gap by contributing with an empirical example.

The article is built on two major pillars. First, I will provide a theoretical framework for transformation of the habitus, and, second, I will illustrate the process with an empirical example, using a participatory action research (PAR) method called Forum Theatre (FT). The main idea in PAR is that research is done in collaboration with participants; FT is an empowering method, where spectators of a theatrical play are invited to break the so-called fourth wall, and become *spect-actors*, therefore co-creating the play and being involved in the whole research process. This allows to research the change of habitus simultaneously, from the perspective of researcher, and research participants. The article therefore has multiple aims: First, to address the knowledge gap to Bourdieuseian approach in transforming the habitus, and, secondly, to research if the PAR process will influence participants habitus; if yes, then how and to what extent.

The article is structured as follows: First, I will provide an overview of the concept habitus in the Bourdieusian approach, followed by the elaboration of the division between primary and secondary habitus. This is followed by introducing the education framework of Dewey and Freire. Second, I will present a participatory action research method called Forum Theatre, and show how it could be used to transform habitus, based on the ideas of Dewey and Freire. This is followed by an example of my empirical fieldwork with the Russophone minority in Estonia. I will conclude with discussion on the process of field research and my findings.

The innovation of this article is built upon the above-mentioned idea of the separation of habitus into primary and secondary habitus, followed by a Bourdieusian abstract ‘recipe’ to address the change of habitus, implementing concepts like ‘scientific reflexivity’ and ‘artistic creativity’ (Gorski 2016, 288) for achieving transformation. I will share a case where FT as a method transformed the habitus.

2. The significance of habitus

The action research process presented in this paper combines Forum Theater as Participatory Action Research with two core concepts from Bourdieu, scientific reflexivity and artistic creativity. To make the connection between action research and these concepts, the paper builds on the work of John Dewey and Paulo Freire. Consequently, the following subsections address Bourdieu’s concepts first and Dewey’s and Freire’s next.

2.1. Key Bourdieusian concepts

As mentioned, habitus is one of the key concepts in the Bourdieusian theoretical framework. The separation of habitus from the field and capital is done here only on an analytical level; typically, in the analysis, all concepts are intertwined and simultaneously observed. Habitus is defined by Bourdieu as the property of actors – “a structured and structuring structure” (Bourdieu 1977, 167). Three distinct, but interconnected meanings of ‘structure’ are present in this definition: 1) the term “structured” refers to the idea that past experience influences agents, the most notable being family and the education system – e.g the primary and secondary habitus; 2) “structuring” refers to the idea that past experiences constitute an agent’s practices and, lastly, 3) it is a “structure” in the sense that it has some inner consistency.

For Bourdieu, habitus is used as a concept to explain why change is so hard to achieve, and how society and the subjects in society reproduce power structures, social inequality and positions in social space. From habitus, subject positions get the ideas and thoughts of what is normal and natural – e. g., recognition – but, at the same time, the mechanism is also present for other groups in society – e. g., misrecognition (Bourdieu 1986). In essence, habitus is about the way subjects feel and think, the way they act and, in its most abstract form, how they are. So, for Bourdieu, habitus consists of mental attitudes and perceptions of the past; in the present, at the same time, it constitutes subject positions' practices.

Habitus can be approached from a dual perspective – primary and secondary. The primary perspective sees habitus as produced by the family and more resistant to change, while the secondary habitus, which is acquired later – mainly in the education system – is more likely to change (Costa and Murphy 2015). Or, as Bourdieu and Passeron (1979, 73) put it:

In the present state of society and of pedagogical traditions, the transmission of the techniques and habits of thought required by the school is first and foremost the work of the home environment.

As noted above, the habitus of children is formed by the family and it manifests itself in practices, such as actions in real life. The education system encourages children to reflect on the 'patterns of thought, perception or expression which have already been mastered unconsciously' (Bourdieu 1993, 228, quoted in Hooley 2013, 215). Habitus as such tends to reject new information and reproduces itself; the thought patterns and practices that are happening are largely unconscious. The issue seems to be that the education system in schools does not challenge existing mental frames – rather it reinforces them. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) conclude that, even though the education system has a transformative purpose, it is often incapable of doing so because of the cultural capital inherited from the families.

As a solution, Bourdieu and Passeron (1979, 73–74) claim that the education system should be more egalitarian – thereby reducing inequality – and that this is possible by 'rational' pedagogy, which does not yet exist:

Any real democratization, therefore, presupposes that these things be taught where the most disadvantaged can acquire them, that is, in school; that the area of what can be rationally. [...] But *rational pedagogy is still to be invented*, and can in no way be confused with the pedagogies we know at present [...] (author's emphasis).

Bourdieu stated that changing habitus requires, as a first step, reflexivity – making the invisible visible – followed by specific physical techniques:

While making things explicit can help, only a thoroughgoing process of countertraining, *involving repeated exercises*, can, *like an athlete's training*, durably transform habitus (Bourdieu 2000, 172, author's emphasis).

In sum, for Bourdieu, habitus is a central concept which explains why subjects act in a society in a particular way; it consists of two parts: primary habitus – which is constituted by family – and secondary habitus, where the field of education plays a key role. The transformation of habitus *is* possible but it needs some kind of reflexive analysis and some sort of creative approach (Gorski 2016). However, before demonstrating the Forum Theatre method, I will demonstrate how these changes can be achieved in the education system.

2.2. Pragmatist Dewey and transformative Freire

In this section I use literature that is referential in action research to set some practice related principles that I consider consistent with Bourdieu's theoretical contribution presented in the previous section.

Dewey (1910) has developed a theory of education which states that the main goal of education should be developing problem-solving skills (e.g. critical examination) in children. This means creating new habits, transforming the natural tendencies of the brain and helping to get rid of the useless habits, which children already have. Dewey claims that children develop habits and they continue to use them as long as they are useful – as long as they work. These habits come from past experience and prior knowledge (ibid, p. 13). So, the education system should not solely pass on information to the children, e. g., the knowledge part should not be viewed as an end in itself.

When a child encounters something new – a problem, then they need to step out of their “comfort zone” and analytically address the issue, reflect on different variations about it. In the reflection phase Dewey (1910) separates two stages: a) state of perplexity followed by b) act of searching or investigation. This means that during the reflection the students choose a new potential solution (a consequence), try it out and if it works, then this becomes a new habit for dealing with this kind of problem. So the idea is to apply this specific case in the future, to generalize. According to Dewey, the whole idea of education should be developing these kinds of habits in children, equipping them with the ability to learn.

However, Freire suggests that his problem-posing education should be an alternative way, where “men develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality but as a reality in the process of transformation” (Freire 1970:71). Here is one of the key elements from Freire that are used to experiment in practice with participants, e. g., subject positions Bourdieu's theory. If Bourdieu, in essence, described habitus as nonconscious, then one of the ideas in Freire's theory is to make the habitus and the oppression visible – to become conscious of the structures in society and the mechanism of the oppression. This will be further elaborated with the help of Forum Theatre.

It should be noted, that similarly to Dewey, Freire is not talking about changing the subject of what is being thought to students, it is more about changing the paradigmatic approach how people interact – it should be “democratic and transformative relationship between students and teacher, students and learning, and students and society” (McLaren and Leonard, 1993:27).

Dewey and Freire's ideas overlap in many important aspects. First of all, they both see education (similarly to Bourdieu) as a way of domination or reproducing status quo. Also, they are both (contrary to Bourdieu) quite optimistic about the possibility of changing what education can bring to an individual. Secondly, they both see that previous experiences of a person influence vastly their possible actions towards problems. They see the problems as a way of learning, an experiment, where one's consciousness can change. They see these experiences precisely as education.

Thirdly, Freire and Dewey see the role of a teacher differently – a teacher is not just a holder of information, rather an active subject in this process and the same can be said about the student. This means transforming the role of the teacher. Lastly, they both see that via education it is possible to transform society, for Dewey towards democracy and for Freire

towards more radical socialist tradition. In the following section, I present a participatory action research method called Forum Theatre, which directly addresses contributions of Dewey and Freire.

3. Forum Theatre as a Participatory Action Research (PAR) method

On the one hand, the use of PAR methods is becoming even more popular than before (Bussu *et al.* 2021). The key idea in PAR is that research is done *with* the participants, not *on* participants. It is a form of action research, where researchers collaborate fully with the participants with the aim of transforming the latter in an ongoing process. It emphasises co-learning, participation and transformation (Greenwood, Whyte and Harkay, 1993)

PAR is considered to be political and aims to empower marginalised groups (Marshall and Reason 2007). In addition, PAR is considered to be not only a social research method but also a ‘process and as a goal that social research should always strive to achieve’ (Greenwood, Foote Whyte and Harkavy 1993, 175). This means not only that PAR is a research method but, in addition, that it aims to achieve large-scale commitment by participants.

On the other hand, Forum Theatre is used by social activists and drama educators across the world and, in recent years, has received increasing academic interest, for example in publications such as the *Sage Handbook of Action Research* (see Guhathakurta 2020), *The Sage Encyclopedia of Action Research* (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller 2014) or *The Routledge Companion to Theatre of the Oppressed* (Kelly, Boal and Soeiro 2019). Forum Theatre is considered to be a tool in participatory action research (for a detailed explanation see Wrentschur 2021).

Forum Theatre (FT) aims to give power to oppressed communities, enabling them to empower themselves (Boal 2000). The fundamental idea behind Forum Theatre and, in general, in Theatre of the Oppressed (TO), is that, if someone can perform actions on a theatrical stage, then this experience will help them to perform these actions (e.g., Bourdieusian practices) in real life too. Here, I do not address other methods of TO (e.g. Rainbow of Desires, Legislative Theatre, etc. – see Boal 1995 and 1998 for more information); rather I focus on Forum Theatre since this is the method that works at an individual level, rather than a psychological (Rainbow of Desires) or system/legislative level (Legislative Theatre). To be clear, FT as such does not focus only on the individual level; instead, it takes general problems and demonstrates them in a way that is understandable to an individual, although the ultimate aim is also to generalise these findings and apply them at a societal level.

The epistemological and ontological ideas of Forum Theatre are based on Freire’s (1970) critical pedagogy, where the key concept is transformation. For Freire, education should be about a paradigmatic approach to how people interact – a ‘democratic and transformative relationship between students and teacher, students and learning, and students and society’ (McLaren and Leonard 1993, 27). Ontologically, as mentioned, Forum Theatre-based methods are aligned with action-based researchers, where the aim is not only to explain the reality but also to change it (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller 2014).

One of the most comprehensible ways to think about how Forum Theatre works as a method is to imagine a traditional play in a theatre. Usually, people go to the theatre, they take

a seat and observe a scripted play – they become spectators. A typical theatrical play consists of different issues, problems, dramas and conflicts. The actors perform the play and the spectators watch what is happening on stage. The people are clearly distinguishable into two separate entities – actors and spectators – one group being active performers and the other being passive receivers. Forum Theatre aims to reverse this distinction. This method invites the spectators to become “spect-actors” (Boal 2000). This process is usually controlled by a facilitator (known as the Joker in the TO system), who acts as a mediator between the actors and the spectators.

Like traditional theatre, in Forum Theatre, a play is also presented to the audience. The play is typically based on a problematic situation inspired by real-life events. After a short presentation, the Joker starts a critical discussion with the audience, inviting them to deliberate on what has happened on the stage. The audience is offered an opportunity to discuss what they saw – what happened, what the main issues were and how this situation might be solved, etc. This is the “scientific reflexivity” part, which Bourdieu insisted on in transforming habitus. The spectators are engaged in dialogue between themselves and the actors, therefore becoming spect-actors.

As a next step, the audience is invited to “break the fourth wall” and transform themselves from being just “talking heads” into being even more active spect-actors. This means that any member of the audience can not only suggest possible solutions to the issues observed on the stage but can also have the opportunity to replace actors on the stage and try out their own strategy for solving the issue they witnessed – e.g. “artistic creativity” – thus fulfilling the second criterion. The stage becomes a “sociological experimental site” (Wrentschur 2021, 637).

Typically, different solutions are proposed by the spect-actors and are tried out by the same people on the stage. The aim is not only to solve this particular situation but also to train people in how to react in similar situations in the future. Using Bourdieusian language, subjects not only passively receive information but, via reflexivity and actually trying to solve the problems – using their voice, their bodies – are also transforming their unconscious habitus, because they are being exposed to new experiences which directly influence their habitus. It could be said that, through this method, invisible parts of the habitus are made visible, upon which participants are then offered a chance to transform them.

It would be too simplistic to address Forum Theatre as a role-playing exercise – in fact, quite the contrary. The learning that subjects experience shares many similar traits with John Dewey’s (1910) pragmatist education, the main goal of which is not to pass on information but, rather, to develop problem-solving skills which can later be generalised. This type of education means that new habits are created by transforming the natural tendencies of the brain and, at the same time, helping to get rid of the useless habits which children already have – the central claim in Dewey’s approach is that children develop habits and continue to use them as long as they are useful, as long as they work.

In conclusion, by using Forum Theatre, it is possible not only to reflect upon problematic issues but also to take an active role and rehearse for any future similar situation. This perspective builds on educational ideas of Freire and Dewey, who both saw education system as a way to transform children habitus. Therefore, FT not only addresses the conscious and unconscious levels of learning but also helps to access the so-called “other” knowledge (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller 2014) which is crucial in transforming the habitus of the dif-

ferent agents; these, as stressed before, are the two main criteria required by Bourdieu to transform the habitus of a person.

4. Fieldwork with the russophone minority in Estonia

4.1 Positionality and role of the facilitator

I first provide some initial remarks about my own practical experience with implementing methods like Forum Theatre in Estonia and its neighboring countries. For more than ten years I have been using methods like, *inter alia*, Forum Theatre, process drama (a drama method where the students and teachers are working in and out of role) and improv theater (spontaneous, improvisational theater) in Estonia and elsewhere. I have worked with different age groups, with people who are unemployed, have mental health issues or are from different ethnic backgrounds, etc. Usually the aim has been to address specific issues, like communication between group members, oppressions in the labor market or developing social skills. I have also written several handbooks on this topic. This previous experience is vital because Forum Theatre is a demanding set of techniques for a researcher.

In qualitative research, especially in methods like PAR, it is vital to reflect on your own role and position. Reflexivity is also about being empathetic and engaging in critical self-reflection (Pacheco-Vega, 2016), which is also a common idea for TO. I am aware that my positionality have affected my research, but it is common in qualitative research. More important than being ‘objective’, is to reflect honestly on my positionality, or as Berger have put it “As such, the idea of reflexivity challenges the view of knowledge production as independent of the researcher producing it and of knowledge as objective.” (Berger, 2015:220). Keeping that in mind, my ethnicity is Russian and ethnicity is a delicate matter in Estonian society. So the question I had to repeatedly ask myself before the research and during it were the following: How will my ethnicity influence participants in my research? Will they be more open to me since we share similar backgrounds? Or will they think of me as an outsider? Keeping all these questions in mind and deliberating upon them, I believe that I managed to become an insider, part of the group, since they opened up and shared their thoughts and ideas with me.

4.2. Aim and the description of the group

As mentioned previously, the aim of this article is to see whether and how Forum Theatre as a method can change participants’ habitus. This knowledge will provide an interdisciplinary approach to explain change in habitus, which is useful to more sociological, Bourdieusian scholars, but also provides a background for often more practical PAR community, explaining a wider theoretical context of achieving change in habitus.

My PAR process lasted around 10 months and involved activities with a group of young people. It was carried out in cooperation with a small theater company in Estonia (VAT Teater) and a vocational volunteer theatrical group (Lendav Lehm). I was invited to use forum theater as a method to gather information from Russophone community, which would serve as

a basis for a play, focused on young people issues in Estonia. The project was implemented by VAT Teater¹ and partly funded by the Goethe Institute in Estonia². I was in charge of working with the Forum Theatre to gather information for VAT Teater play, and all participant (in case of underage participants) signed the form where all their rights and obligations were listed. The Ethics committee of Tallinn University was consulted with creating the consent form.

The 19 participants were aged between 14 and 21 years old. Also, there were two group leaders, who were a bit older. In total, we held workshops, every week, from March to June and from September to December 2021, which lasted, on average, two hours each. Some weeks we were not able to meet because of the COVID-19 restrictions. Some participants were involved only in the first half, while others joined after the summer break; however, in total, six participants were present throughout the whole process. I used a field diary during these sessions and gave them my feedback after each session. In addition, two focus-group interviews were conducted with participants, in June and December. During the ten-month period, in addition to our weekly meetings, we also conducted six workshops with participants in a local school to gather input for performances, which we did later in the school. In total we did eight forum theater performances, six in the above-mentioned school, one to another theater group and one focused on integration issues in Estonia.

Most of the people had no prior experience, either with Forum Theatre or with acting in general. They did not know each other very well. While the majority had Estonian citizenship, one of the participants had Russian and one of them Ukrainian citizenship. They shared few similar features: their native language was a minority language in Estonia – e. g., the Russian language – and they were all pupils in school or students, the exception being the older group leaders.

4.3. Process description

In Forum Theatre (Boal 1979) the personal stories of participants, which include conflicts and oppression, are collected via different methods. Kaptani and Yuval-Davis (2017) have noted that Forum Theatre as such consists of workshops and a play. The workshops aim to transform the typically passive spectators into active actors (e.g. spect-actors). Usually, in workshops, different situations of oppression and conflict are discussed and presented to each other in smaller groups. The workshops aimed to prepare participants to take part as actors in Forum Theatre plays. We used a set of games and exercises (Boal 1992) in our workshops. These and other tools used in theatrical practice are used to develop the participants' personal stories into collective and more abstract relations of power inequalities.

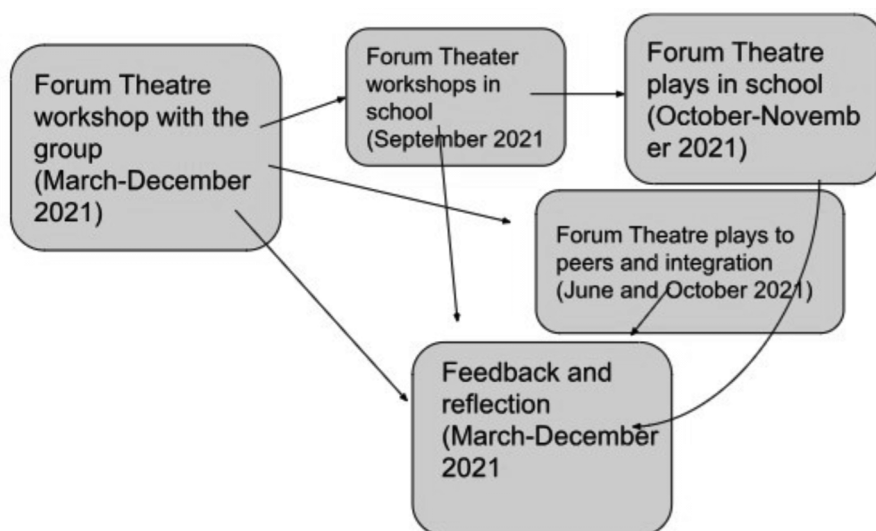
In the first two months, the aim was to “warm-up” the group – meaning that they got to know each other – thus creating a welcoming and trustworthy atmosphere. Then we started preparing for plays, coming up with different issues that we wanted to tackle – for example, miscommunication between different ethnic groups, mask-wearing in public spaces, bullying in schools and problems between pupils and teachers, etc. In addition, we conducted six workshops in a local school with children. The workshops were done in cooperation between me and participants, and the aim was to gather the data from pupils as an input for the forum

1 More information <https://vatteater.ee/en/lavastused/woke-vihane/>

2 More information https://www.goethe.de/ins/ee/et/ver.cfm?adress_IDtxt=Cieszyn&event_id=22700122

theater play which we later performed at the school. At the same time, the participants who did the workshop received an opportunity to try out different exercises and have a role as a facilitator. In addition we had two other performances. One play was conducted to discuss miscommunication issues between different ethnic groups in Estonia and was conducted to another theater group. Other forum theater play tackled citizenship issues in Estonia and was performed as a play during an integration focused event. In all the plays the group participants were actors and I served as a Joker. As they are not particularly relevant for this research, the content and the spectators of the plays are not discussed in more detail here, but the impact of these performances and workshops are taken into account in the next section.

Figure 1. Workshops and play.



5. Results

The main aim of my empirical research was to find out whether this 10-month process had any influence on transforming the habitus of these participants, and if yes, then how and to what extent.. I combine my own fieldnotes (research diary) with my observations and with respondents' thoughts and opinions on the process. I also took videos of the performances, photographs and had two focus group interviews with the participants. The gathered data was rich, thick and vivid. I used thematic analysis for all the data and will present the findings in two interconnected themes: participants' experiences of the process; their understanding of FT and the influence of FT on their habitus. I will not describe all the events separately, rather I look at the general result of this process what happened from March to December 2021.

5.1. Experience of the process

I addressed the experience by asking participants different questions about what they remembered from the process, how they felt during the process, what emotions they had and why they voluntarily kept coming almost every week to the workshops, etc. It was necessary to address this from multiple perspectives since the participants were relatively young and it is not sufficient just to ask directly about change in their habitus, since it is largely unconscious.

All the participants agreed that this process had been fun; in general, they had positive feelings toward it. They particularly brought up the beginning of our workshops, where we played different games and exercises, one of the aims of which was to create a sense of equality between participants and a democratic context. The results show how crucial it was to take the time and put in the effort to enable the people to get to know each other and feel comfortable sharing personal stories. For example, one of the participants shared her own mental health issues and reflected upon the time when she had depression and suicidal thoughts.

From the first day I was like WOW, I want to know more, this is very interesting. It was fun, interesting, a little bit scary, because, well, it was a new thing, but then I became comfortable and, yeah, I liked it a lot, it was interesting.

The participants also mentioned that they liked the process of creating a Forum Theatre play, although FT itself was confusing to them before they actually went on the stage for the first team. They had never before experienced this kind of activity, where there is no director *per se* but where all the ideas are discussed together and they can voice their own opinion. In Forum Theatre it is important for participants to see things from different perspectives, rather than only from their own perspective, as the following quotes show:

- The idea of Forum Theatre, that we have a problem and we solve it through a play, that was interesting.
- I was just interested that I understood, well, that I can live here in a real-life situation, I can experience different ideas about what to solve. It like, I felt so free, every time the situation is different.
- Then, this, just, you have a problem, you get into this and then you solve it with different possibilities, I mean, yeah, that was interesting.

The part the participants liked the most was the performance. Participants reflected that they were nervous, especially before their first performance because they had little to no experience. However, as the performances started, many of them relaxed because, in Forum Theatre, they did not have fixed sentences that they needed to memorise; rather it was a more improvisational process, where they got to know their character and where creativity was encouraged. Of course, there are different ways of doing FT, some of which do encourage memorising detailed lines but this was not the case here. This provided a lot of learning opportunities for participants: as they demonstrate:

- I liked that people came onto the stage and showed their perspective, You understood immediately that you can do it differently – before I didn't think about it.
- Today somebody tried something and my first reaction was "What crap! It will not work". But today it was like, we didn't come here to criticise, who is good and who is bad, and I realised that we see the world differently and experience differently. I don't know, I am kind of inspired, I would like to go to on the street and propose that we change this world!

- Yeah, for the 7th Grade, it was similar to what they proposed, but they came and tried to solve the problems, that was cool because You could really see that they had this problem in school.
- The cooperation with other people – especially with this Estonian group – and I liked that we raised this issue of the language barrier and not wearing a mask on a bus and it was so cool to change between the languages; it was a good experience in communication and I liked it.

I asked the participants to reflect on Forum Theatre – what it meant for them, how they would explain it to other people and so on. For the majority, it was difficult for them to express exactly what it is. In collective discussion, they argued about whether Forum Theatre is meant to solve problems or just to raise issues for discussion.

- No, it is more like, thinking about some problem, and then seeing possible solutions from people, and yes, I mean, You can solve the problem with this.
- Rather, you know, as discussion but, for the participant, he sees his idea implemented and for him, that might be a solution.
- Yes, you can, like, uncover a problem, make them visible to people.

Some participants had an opportunity to attend workshops with me and also, under my supervision, tried to be the Joker in performances. They valued this experience as it showed them how to perform in a role where they need to facilitate the process.

- I felt this moment, and then it was interesting and cool, that you didn't have to know it all, you had to use questions as a weapon, and it was very interesting what they were saying. Yeah, I kind of got to work it, but not for long, but yes, it was interesting.

5.2. Interpretation of the influence of Forum Theatre

Initially, I asked participants to think whether our workshops (conducted with outside participants) and our performances (eight in total) had any impact on them. Some were quite optimistic, some more pessimistic. What is interesting is that, usually, more playful learning is considered to be more effective with younger age groups; participants expressed the idea that, for younger people, the learning might be more unconscious but for teenagers and grown-ups, the reflective part is more thought-provoking.

- I think the one with citizenship, that made the people think.
- Yeah, like, they remember it but don't remember it, so maybe next time they have, like, some knowledge of what to do with it.
- I think that, for older children, it had some influence but younger children, I don't think they will remember anything when they grow up.

One spectacular case happened during one of the performances. We conducted a play where the teachers disliked some of the students without having any objective reasons and one class of participants identified with this theme. They said that it was exactly their situation and then they started rehearsing how to stand up to their teachers as a whole class. The case was about a male teacher who was treating female students as lower class and was constantly commenting on the clothes and appearances of the girls. In addition, he showed a much more relaxed

attitude towards boys, and graded girls harsher. All the girls felt very frustrated because of it, and the boys also agreed that this kind of behavior was not justified. We rehearsed different options of confronting the teachers by boys and girls, going to the principal, writing letters to officials, talking to parents, etc. Unfortunately, I do not know how these things evolved, since the focus of my research was on the experiences of the initial group, not on the participants from the school.

- Well, yes, for that 10th Grade, it was like a revolution.
- Yes, for that 10th Grade, definitely, it influenced them.

It was difficult to ask them directly if Forum Theatre had had any influence on them. So I addressed this question from different angles – what new things they had found out, whether they now looked at something more differently, whether they gained any new skills, etc. In the beginning, they focused more on the knowledge aspect – that they found out what Forum Theatre is, that it bettered their improvisation skills, that they became more confident and discovered things about citizenship or bullying, etc.

- A lot of practices with performing, acting skills and all this.
- Finding out what Forum Theatre is, all these games that we played were good, might use them... Found out some new things in general, like what kind of person someone is.
- I was, like, more confident.

Later, they started reflecting on their own perceptions of what had changed over time. Many of them mentioned that they approach some situations differently, that they are able to understand that there are multiple perspectives on different issues and that they have implemented some of these problem-solving skills in real life.

- Well, problem-solving, if there is a problem, then I immediately think how I can solve it, like I rethink my life, what I would do in this situation, and think of different options.
- I, like, saw bullying in my school and then I stepped in and I, like, used Forum Theatre to solve the issue in my school.
- I saw one situation in school, and then I was like, oh this like Forum Theatre.
- These topics that we discussed, they, like, they are about me also. You, like, look at things from another perspective, like I can pause this moment and think about different outcomes, what someone else would do.
- I was, like, fascinated by how people think, like, every time, this expands your point of view on this situation and I think I should take it with me to everyday life.
- Well, it is weird but I feel like I increased this skill, to, like, look at things from another perspective, that I am used. I have a perspective, but if I imagine there is another perspective, what is it? It happens in your head, helps to resolve situations. You can understand, or imagine what another person thinks.
- I think that Forum Theatre is a very good practical activity to develop empathy, because how would you do it otherwise?
- We can prepare ourselves for the situations we get in, not, like, what is right and what we shouldn't do but, like, it is a real-life situation and it can be resolved in different ways, you can approach it differently.

6. Discussion and conclusion

During this ten-month process, I felt that this group became a closer and tighter-knit community. This is definitely one of the key things to take into account when looking at quotes from interviews. These people spent quite a lot of time together, sharing their thoughts and emotions, ideas and fears. It is evident from my observations, notes and interviews that people liked coming to the workshops and performing. Usually, I started the workshop with a welcoming circle, where everybody would say their name, answer a random question proposed by me and how they felt, on a scale from (lowest) 1 to 10 (highest). Usually, by the end of the workshops, everybody's mood was improving. This is a simple, yet effective indicator of what kind of connections these workshops managed to constitute.

As is evident from the results, people in general enjoyed the process – the games, discussions, exercises and the performing and analysing different real-life situations. The workshops were firstly built upon getting to know each other and then two key Bourdieusian ideas – scientific reflexivity and artistic creativity – were implemented. We had a healthy balance between discussing and acting and it seems that it was successful from the perspective of enjoyment. Since the participants mostly had no prior experience in acting and Forum Theatre is an atypical format, it took time and effort to prepare them for the plays. We worked on the content of the plays together, having already implemented the ideas of Freire and Boal in the workshops.

The performances were, for the most part, liked most by the participants. They highlighted the moments which were a learning experience for them – when they started to see alternative solutions to issues, when they were surprised by propositions from the spect-actors and when they had to overcome difficulties in acting on the stage.

This study builds upon other studies, which has explored TO and its effect. For example, Österlind (2008), has shown in her work that Theatre of the Oppressed can make individual habitus visible and also provide tools to facilitate the change. More specifically, this study builds upon this, and takes it a step further, by not only making habitus visible, but continuing on exploring the possible transformation. The central issue of this article – the question “Did it change participants’ habitus?” – can be answered with yes, but with reservations. Since the primary habitus, formed by parents, is difficult to change, the focus was on transforming the secondary habitus. The results from my fieldnotes and focus- group interviews clearly show that problem-solving skills, empathy and the willingness to see the world from another perspective were all there and had improved, at least from the perspective of the participants.

On the one hand, since “talking the talk” is only one part of habitus and real-life practices are a different part, it is too difficult to conclude with certainty that their habitus has been transformed radically; however, it is safe to assume that this experience has transformed their habitus at least in some aspects. On the other hand, since habitus is about the way we see the world – what we (mis)recognise – then it could be said that some transformation took place. To conclude, Forum Theatre as a method *can* be utilised to transform the secondary habitus of subject positions but it is a long process and needs diligent procedures in order to achieve success. Further research is needed on evaluating and measuring the change of secondary habitus.

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Declaration of interest statement

The author reports that there are no competing interests to declare.

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