

## **Effect of Participatory Art on the Life Satisfaction of Working Women**

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### **Abstract**

Art is an educational activity that can be done in any era or by any generation. Theatre art, which has contributed to the individual and social development of individuals since early times, has had a privileged place in the world of education. New approaches in the science of theatre and pedagogy have emerged in the current age and substantially contributed to participatory art. This current study was conducted regarding participatory art carried out as a theatrical staged work in the eastern Black Sea region of Turkey, Artvin Province, Hopa district. The participants in the study were 14 adult females aged between 28 to 55-years-old. Participants were observed during the staging process of a theatrical work and interviews were conducted. The data obtained were analysed and the effect of participatory art on the women's life satisfaction was determined. It was revealed through the results that there was a significant increase in the life satisfaction of working women who participated in this theatrical work. In research regarding the historical processes of participatory art, the importance of working women expressing themselves through a socio-cultural activity as well as the pedagogical approaches preferred in these studies were also mentioned.

**Keywords:** Adult Education, Art Education, Participatory Art, Women's Studies

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## INTRODUCTION

Adult education, which was perceived in the past as being solely limited to literacy or vocational skills education provided to adults following their formal education, has now begun to be defined more broadly and include a wide range of topics such as how to adapt to society. The concept of adult education, which is defined as public education and/or non-formal education, has been discussed at adult education conferences organized by UNESCO each decade since 1949, and after 1997, adult education has been considered in terms of “lifelong learning”. As a result, new definitions of lifelong learning encompass all forms of learning such as adult education, formal, non-formal, intermittent, and continuing education, which is not limited to only adults (Uysal & Yıldız, 2006).

The idea of social transformation has an important place in adult education. The main purpose of social transformation is that individuals possess democratic values and develop ideas for creating a better society. It is possible to see traces of social transformation in many of the educational projects implemented during the early phases of the Turkish republic. Following Turkey’s war of independence, issues related to education were instrumental in the survival the Republic’s new government, and the transformative and healing power of culture and art was utilized in these educational efforts. In the 1930s, the literacy rate in Turkey was approximately 10 percent, and many revolutionary moves such as secularism, women’s rights, removal of capitulations, closure of religious-based madrasahs and missionary schools as well as the integration of education were carried out to socially transform to the new nation. The idea of developing the social and cultural aspects of people’s lives, especially for those outside formal education and mostly among people in villages, brought about many educational projects. The aim of institutions such as Nation Schools, Community Centres, and Village Institutes was to educate both younger and older generations in how to read and write, gain a profession, and in doing so, instil the values of the new Republic. While it was observed that participation in these institutions was important, it was recognised that participation in folklore, music, painting, theatre, and literature studies also has an important place in educational activities (Sarıkaya, 2010; Yıldız, 2012).

Importantly, in studies regarding public education, bringing together intellectuals and getting citizens to believe in social change has become a national cultural policy in some countries. Among the intellectuals who adopted this change, traces of romantic volunteerism and dedication can be seen in their efforts towards public education. Mayo (2011) states that Gramsci and Friere (DATE) emphasise the cultural and spiritual foundations of volunteering and revolutionary activity. In line with this approach, it can be stated that what was attempted in the public education activities in Turkey during the early Republican period was the effort to raise “organic intellectuals”. Accordingly, so-called palace literature was excluded, and a new focus was placed on the values of folk language, folk literature, and folk culture. The goal sought to be achieved by developing a national culture within the early Turkish republic has been coined the “Anatolian Renaissance” (Akçam, 2013). The enlightened staff during this period were soldiers and civil bureaucrats who became the defenders of secularism as well as the newly established constitutional and parliamentary system. These defenders, who participated in the war of liberation and came to power within the new Republic, were opposed to imperialist occupation by western countries as well as the rules set down by the former Ottoman sultans. The westernization approach of these defenders can be summarized as the ownership and cultivation of their own culture to become an independent member of contemporary societies. As a result, there was a dedicated effort in the early republic period of Turkey that was concentrated on establishing participatory cultural activities which provided an avenue for social transformation among the people.

During this early Republican era in Turkey, Baltacıoğlu, Kansu, and Saygun have a special place in public education due to their roles as leading educators, artists, and thinkers. They raised important opinions regarding the philosophy of the Community Centres’ founded in 1932, which quickly became Turkey’s most comprehensive adult education institutions. A need for dialogue among the public regarding adult education also determined the framework for the art to be carried out in this institution. Importantly, the new managerial staff of Turkish republic believed that social development

would be achieved by starting with the resources of the people's own culture and then developing them further. Community centres were built for the purpose of identifying cultural resources, evaluating folk literature and art, and then developing them in coordination with the public. It was envisaged that the people could be educated with their own cultural resources through activities such as holidays, festivities, performances, trips, balls, talks, conferences, and radio programs. Baltacıoğlu (1950), who gives special importance to theatre art, also referred to the importance of improvisational theatre, which is the main argument for folk theatre in his theory, "Self-Theatre". He emphasized the importance of the "Karagöz", "Ortaoyunu", "Meddahlık" tradition as well as the having the village watch plays for the education of all generations. He also drew attention to the existence of new ideas in theatre discovered by the pioneering theorists in western theatre and how this tradition could play a role in Turkish Folk Theatre (Baltacıoğlu, 1950). Saygun (1940) mentions the importance of the use of choir and collective speech in music education and suggests that choirs established in Community Houses provide regional concerts. In addition, he suggests that folk tales, rhymes, folk dances, and poets who play the saz (e.g., a folk stringed instrument) can also perform in these concerts. Taking advantage of poets who play the saz may also enable the discovery of talents among the public.

Historically, the traditional Karagöz and Ortaoyunu performances based on improvisation have a special place in the community houses of Turkey. These local theatre types, which take their subjects from the values of the new Republic, and the classical western style of theatre accompanying them, had become the fundamental tools of public education. In these representations, which aim to teach the values of the new Republic to the society, raise awareness of citizenship, and enjoy the taste of social life, the topics covered were things such as the importance of the Republican leadership as well as the fight against ignorance and theocratic understanding. The actors of the representations were volunteers of the Community Houses (Karadağ, 1998).

Kansu (1939) emphasizes the appearance of women on the stage in the Community Houses was an important event, because in the recent past a woman's appearance on the stage was considered unacceptable. He also emphasizes that it is easy to understand how a stage movement held by the State and political party members has deep meaning. Importantly, between 1932 and 1950 a network of "cultural circles" was established by the community houses who were in contact with one another through their branches operating in each province, district, and village. The state-sponsored existence of Community Houses as an institution for the implementation of cultural policy, ended with the transition to a multi-party period in Turkish politics that was brought about by the arrival of the Democratic Party to power (Sarıkaya, 2010). Thus, even with the initial state-support, the social lives of Turkish citizens transformed by participation in cultural and artistic activities was greatly interrupted. This change in direction, which directed men to coffee shops and religious communities, and women to their homes, affected the day-to-day existence of citizens and made women less visible in the public arena. Similar interventions and deactivation policies were the closure of the "Village Institutes", which originally worked in coordination with community centres, prepared locals to be village teachers, and were established for the development and awareness of the village as a whole. Today, it is still possible to find traces of these interventions in disadvantaged areas where women lack access to education, marriage, and professional life. Sadly, women are also increasingly victims of feudal cultural concepts that cannot seem to be eliminated from the minds of some in these communities. Over a decade, the rate of female homicide committed under the auspices of honour killings increased 1500% in some areas. In addition, the number of women with protection orders has increased by 171% over an eight-year period as well (Sarıkaya, 2011).

Importantly, through research data regarding how active people are within their daily life as well as in which ways they participate in social life in Turkey (İPSOS, 2016), important clues can be revealed about the cultural life of a community. Accordingly, it is shown in the analysis results of research conducted with 13,799 people in 34 provinces throughout Turkey, the most common activity in society is watching television at a rate of 85%, while 49% society never go to the cinema, 39% never read books, and 66% of people did not even attend a concert, theatre performance, and/or the opera. Furthermore, 81% of society lacks the ability to play a musical instrument, 47% never read magazines, and 86% have not participated in a hobby course. It is revealed through results that today's

society should go through a new, comprehensive “literacy” process to change their approach to cultural life (İKSV, 2017). In 2015, in a Global Citizenship Report covering 40 countries including Turkey, it is shown that 70% of the Turkish respondents’ state that “actively working in the social and political organization” is important. However, the rate of those who are members of a political party is 12%, the rate of union membership is 6% (Turkey is ranked second to last among 40 countries), and the rate of those who are members of sports clubs, cultural or other associations and/or organizations where they can spend their free time remains at 6% (IFCA). Through this wealth of data, it shows that people in Turkey make limited efforts to renew themselves by participating in cultural and/or artistic activities. This may be due to providing an environment in which individuals actively participate in social life requires extensive mobilization of the society, ranging from structural changes to individual efforts. Important duties range from public to civil society and from institutions to individuals with everyone playing their part.

Today, it is seen that many educational activities conducted with Public Education Centres, municipalities, and non-governmental organizations supported by the European Union are aimed at making disadvantaged groups such as women and migrants competent in areas such as professional skills and entrepreneurship as well as integrating them into the marketplace. This situation can be described as “domestication”, where individuals are perceived as objects, not subjects (Yıldız, 2012). Also, socialization and leisure education programs organized by some state and non-governmental organizations reinforce women's traditional gender roles, for example, the opening of activities such as knitting, embroidery painting as well as mother and child education has been observed. Another striking point is that such educational activities often include patriarchal language and hierarchical structure. This means that from the beginning, the process, language used, and production can become problematic for women (Taşkaya, 2017). Rowlands (1998) states that women's empowerment can only be possible by transforming the structure of the power relationships they experience. Thus, adult education can be a tool to provide women with an opportunity of being the subject of their own life. In this respect, the reasons for not attending as much as reasons for attending adult educational activities should be examined. Individual, environmental, physical, and communication-related barriers must also be considered. Additionally, it is important for institutions that take responsibility for female participation and adopt educational approaches, localization processes as well as address innovative gender equality measures in programming and implementation.

Drawing attention to the tales interpreted in a theatre event, Kuyumcu (2018) states that they are shaped according to the needs of the feudal period from which they emerged, for example, the rescuer, modifier and transformative roles are given to men. As in the fairy tales of “Snow White” and “Cinderella”, good women take on the role of being beautiful and waiting passively. He also states that women are described as skilful, flawless, and obedient types who are dependent on their homelife and dealing with housework (Kuyumcu, 2018). In this respect, also important is what kind of theatre education and activities women have and how they approach gender roles within these activities. It can be argued that the works, in which the image of women is objectified and based on traditional roles, can bring more harm than good, and lack a critical perspective. Thus, it is necessary for individual and social development that the management and operation of all planned educational work include a democratic structure.

Freire (1991) states that raising the consciousness of the oppressed will break the culture of silence and fatalism, which in turn will allow the oppressed to become the subjects of their own transformation. As a result, those who are oppressed can regain their own psychological empowerment. Stromquist (1995) states that women become stronger in four dimensions through their participation in adult education, including the empowerment in cognitive, economic, political, and psychological areas. Women gain the self-confidence to understand that they are competent, deserve better living conditions, and can act for their own benefit, which are all indicators of improved psychological strength (Stromquist, 1995).

In the Republic of Turkey's constitution, participatory approaches to art are stated as a general practice that opens the way for people to participate actively in culture and the arts of society based on

the right of each individual to participate, access, and contribute to cultural life. Participatory art approaches include important educational objectives such as creating opportunities that enable people to be individuals who observe, discover, select, assemble, perceive, and express themselves. Important components to these approaches are delivering culture, art production, and services to people as much as possible as well as removing barriers to access, promoting interaction between artists and audiences by improving art education, increasing the quality and quantity of participation, paying attention to cultural diversity, and making creative expression more popular (İKSV, 2017).

In Brecht's "epic theatre" theory, theatre art is an educational activity aimed at the participation of the audience and actors by creating a leap of consciousness within society. The pedagogical understanding proposed by Brecht is extremely valuable in terms of serving social transformation. In this pedagogical understanding, theatre has not been interpreted as a didactic method of education. Instead, it is seen as a rehearsal for the individual to think dialectically in the face of problems, to perceive the changing world, to produce learning, and to determine alternatives. Moreover, the fact that participation in a theatrical play is fun, does not in itself prevent the process of learning (Kemaloğlu, 2006; Sezgin, 2014).

After epic theatre theory, Brecht prioritized pedagogical understanding through her work coined "teaching games". While the audience should approach with a critical eye the process of watching and participating in epic theatre, it is aimed at teaching by participation in teaching games and blurring of the lines between audience and player. Furthermore, Brecht divides the concept of pedagogy into small and large pedagogy; describing small pedagogy (epic theatre) as instances where audience distinction remains, yet the audience are no longer passive receivers and the theatre ultimately serves as the locus of the democratization for society. While large pedagogy is a place where the separation between the audience and the player is eliminated. This pedagogical understanding, which is called "teaching games", provides a new understanding of pedagogy based on the negation of old approaches to theatre and pedagogy. The problem for Brecht is not about the theatre being educational, but instead about what and how theatre should teach (Birkiye, 2006; Kemalolu, 2006).

After the theory of Brecht, August Boal was another artist/educator who influenced today's theatre/pedagogy world through his studies with Friere and due to similarities regarding his close relationship with pedagogy. Freire addressed literacy education in the 1970s based on participation and the humanization of the world. It calls on a process where everyone is aware of the social forces that affect him or her, and as a result, can affect change in the world. Through this process, which is called "liberation pedagogy", the targeted freedom will only be possible through "praxis" directed towards the structures being transformed. A person who is not his master, oppressor, or oppressed is in effect an alienated person. The emancipation of people depends on getting rid of this alienation, and this can be possible through a pedagogy that enables "praxis" as well as encourages participation within a dialogue. It means facing reality, making it objective, and taking action to change it (praxis). Freire states that the great and historical duty of oppressed people is to liberate themselves and their oppressors. Four main points in his pedagogical model are remarkable:

1. The pedagogical issues covered by the process are presented as an unresolved problem with the participants, not from the top to down.
2. The solution of the problem is shaped with the learners.
3. Active actors of the process are teacher-student or student-teachers.
4. The learning process is based on the perception of the problem by objectively perceiving the problem and the discovery of solutions through experience, rather than the transfer of information as in the "banker model" (Ayhan, 1995; Vittoria, 2017).

Based on Freire's ideas, the teaching of artistic languages such as cinema, theatre, dance, and photography was recognised as part of a literacy campaign provided in both Spanish and the local indigenous language that was launched in Peru. In this campaign, Boal was responsible for the Department of Theatre Language, and developed the theory of the “theatre of the oppressed” based on the pedagogy of the oppressed through activities related to theatre language. He emphasized the Greek dithyrambos ceremonies, which are considered the basis of Boal theatre, and based on a collective and interactive form of theatre. According to Boal, in this period, the ruling class had two main interventions within theatre. In the first, theatre was transformed into a form that people could watch but not participate in, while in the second, acting was transferred to professionals who received specific training. Thus, the audience became passive consumers, who transferred their actions and abilities onto the actors. Instead, a performance in the “theatre of the oppressed” should be acted out for the audience and then be performed a second time so that the audience can become involved with the performance and work through social problems presented through play’s storyline. (Sezgin, 2013).

The concepts of participation, improvisation, and dialogue that stand out in the theories and techniques of thinkers such as Baltacıoğlu, Brecht, and Boal, match up with Friere's understanding of education. It is seen that dichotomies such as audience-actors and actors-directors become obscured within the educational practices of many forms of art. In addition, improvisations performed with the audience, in which the cathartic tradition is included, tend to increase the motivation of participants. As a result, participatory art practices based on dialogue have an important function in terms of propagating the right to art for all segments of society as well as developing a culture of democracy.

In Turkey, the number of theatre-based activities, which are performed in public places and have differing goals and utilise unique techniques continue to increase. These include creative drama, drama in education, forum theatre, process drama, imaginative theatre, dramatic play, improvisation theatre, psychodrama, art therapy, and street theatre. Play and theatre techniques are also more frequently being used in activities conducted with children, adolescents, and adults. As in many countries, in Turkey there are a variety of educational activities based on the methods and techniques of contemporary pedagogue and theatre theorists such as Brecht, Boal, Baltacıoğlu, Friere, Heathcote, Bolton, and/or Spolin. Interestingly, the social problems that are dealt with through drama studies in education are handled via life-based workshops under the axis of dialogue. Within these cultural workshops, many problems such as immigration, communication, women's rights, and the rights of children are addressed. Also, the dialogue process allows for the ideas formed in participants’ minds to be revealed as well as emphasizes the determination of models for alternative solutions to social problems.

Importantly, in participatory art it is possible to produce works of art by interacting with professional artists or solely through their own efforts at producing a product with community members (Kelly, 2014). Participatory artwork carried out with women contributes to their awareness of personal problems, allows them to express themselves more fully, and in the end increase their life satisfaction. As a result, the general aim of this current study was to determine the effect of participatory art on the life satisfaction of 14 working women from the Hopa district of Artvin province in Turkey. In Taşkaya (2017), a study carried out regarding participatory art among working women in Turkey, descriptive analysis was utilised to determine the transformative effect of participatory art. However, studies conducted in the field are quite limited when researching this topic, therefore, evaluations regarding theatre based participatory art conducted with working women are considered important in terms of setting an example for future studies and contributing to the literature.

The first meeting with the participants regarding theatre studies in the Hopa district of Artvin province was held in October 2018. The age range for the women participating in the study was between 28 to 55-years-old. The women participating in this current study came from a variety of occupations such as an accountant, cafe-restaurant operator, dentist, Pilates trainer, and a schoolteacher. Although some of the participants were experienced in social cultural activities such as

animal rights activism, women's choir, or women's magazine, none of them had previous drama and/or theatre experience and/or education.

## METHOD

To complete a clear and thorough assessment of working women's level of life satisfaction due to their involvement in participatory art, the researchers in this current study utilised a case study approach. Case studies are defined as an approach used to take an in-depth look at an event, to make various explanations about the situation, and/or to develop, improve, and change the situation (Stake, 1995). In this current study, qualitative interview and participant observation techniques were used for collecting a rich data set. Interviews, which are one of the fundamental data collection tools in qualitative research, are also considered one of the most powerful methodologies used to understand others (Punch, 2014). In the data collection for this current study, answers to a semi-structured interview form which consisted of five questions were evaluated, and additional questions were also queried to obtain more in-depth opinions from participants. Prior to the interview, the purpose of this research was explained to the participants, and most of the interviews conducted as well as the studies carried out during the activities were recorded to create a video and photographic archive for analysis. Each interview regarding the participants' life satisfaction lasted approximately 25-30 minutes, and the data obtained through these interviews were analysed through content analysis. Importantly, data that was similar were gathered into a framework that included certain concepts and themes as well as this data was organized and interpreted in a reader friendly manner (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). The observations made by the researcher throughout this current research regarding the participatory theatre activities were recorded and reported.

## FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

### Observation Process

#### Forming the Group and Working Process

The idea of planning theatre education and activities for working women took shape during a period when the researcher, who has expertise in theatre and drama studies, spent time in the Hopa district of Artvin province in north eastern Turkey to provide pedagogical lessons. The first step was taken when an interview occurred between the researcher and a dentist who had been working in the district for many years, knew the region well, and was involved in the field of art. This initial participant reached out to other women in the district who might be interested in participating in theatre studies, and as a result, the first meeting with volunteers was organised on October 26th, 2018. This meeting was attended by approximately 30 people and took place in a cafe run by one of the later participants. At this meeting, a draft study program was created after the decision was made by some of the volunteers and the researcher to create participatory art through theatre studies education and activities.

During the second meeting held at the same location, the problem of a place where theatre performances could be carried out was determined when a wedding hall operator agreed to allow the group members to utilise the wedding hall facilities. Theatre practice was planned for every Thursday evening from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. at the wedding hall location, which was vacant during the winter season. Also, during the second meeting, the theatre study group began focusing on how to stage a play. The researcher proposed that the group study a play titled *Confrontation*, which was written by Yeşim Eyüboğlu. The content of the play focused on women who were murdered under the auspices of honour killing. The proposal was discussed by the participatory group, and it was pointed out that when the woman is mentioned in the play, people will think about pain, murder, and sadness. As a result, the group stated they would prefer a play that was a comedy. The researcher next proposed the fairy tale of *Snow White*, which was revised to better appeal to the adult actors. Also, the revised version of *Snow White* would be staged under the name *Hopalı Snow White* or *Snow White from Hopa*. In the revised version, the Princess would have grown up with a feminist mindset and cultural

elements from the Black Sea region would be incorporated into the story. The group accepted the proposal, and it was also determined that the male characters would be performed by the female actors. Again, the group met for a third time in the wedding hall, and a variety of preparations were made for the play production. For example, the script for the production was prepared and distributed, the characters for the play were discussed, and some changes were made to the actors' wardrobes during the staging process.

### **Main Characters in the Play**

For the theatre study activities and performance, the group had decided upon staging a reimagined version of *Snow White* that would encapsulate their ideas cultural values. To do so each character was envisioned to address the concerns, interests, and understanding the participants held as women as well as citizens of Turkey and the Hopa district. In the following descriptions the changes to each character are highlighted.

**Snow White:** In her relationship with the Queen, she portrays a rather naive princess portrait, but after encountering the dwarves, she draws on her feminist character and transforms the dwarves by drawing upon a character of struggle instead of solely accepting the duties of cleaning, cooking, and washing up.

**Hunter:** The hunter, who portrays one of the men loyal to the queen, yet in the reimagined play he opposes the order of the queen to kill the princess. He does so because of an ominous dream he had in the forest. The hunter becomes a character who questions the task given him and gradually begins to approach life more critically. (The participants stated it would be more correct for the hunter to have a Black Sea accent.)

**Queen:** The character is ambitious and high-minded. Seeing herself as better than others.

**Mirror:** A character who is in love with Snow White and is the queen's slave and toy.

#### **The Seven Dwarfs:**

**Furious:** A local type character who portrays the status quo.

**Cheery:** The most cheerful character in the fairy tale.

**Young Volkan:** A character who knows and performs Black Sea folk songs very well.

**Sullen:** He is a sullen character because he is tasked with being the reader. He will turn into a happy dwarf when Snow White has him read to the other dwarfs.

**Shy:** This character in the fairy tale has been preserved as in the original.

**Chattering:** This character in the fairy tale has been preserved as in the original.

**Dwarf:** Officer who portrays a dwarf who does not deal with or is not interested in anyone else's business.

**Prince:** He has the role of an incompetent and funny character.

**Witch:** Although the features of this character from the fairy tales is preserved, she is drawn in a new way where she is tech savvy and uses mobile phones in her devious plots and subterfuge.

**Presenters:** It consists of two cheerful characters who convey the transitions in the play at the beginning, middle and end of the performance and do so in a slightly cynical style.



### **The Story (Plot) of the Play**

The group determined how they wanted their version of *Snow White* to be and in doing so the queen in the *Snow White from Hopa* decides to get rid of Snow White whom she considers a rival as well as because of her obsession with her beauty, career, and heritage. The queen tasks the hunter with killing the princess in the woods. However, since there is no forest nearby, the hunter must take the princess to Cerattepe (a mining location). The queen also agrees that the hunter can bring the princess's photo instead of her heart. The hunter convinces the princess to go to the forest by saying they can pick strawberries together. Later, the hunter becomes tired and after falling asleep he has a nightmare. In this nightmare, the hunter's deceased father as well as demons and witches, question the murder he is tasked to commit. When he wakes up, a conscientious accounting of what he is supposed to do consumes his thoughts, as a result, he decides against following through with killing the princess. To find a solution to his problem, the hunter takes the princess to the Borcka market in a nearby district. There they meet up with a photographer and solve the problem by using Photoshop, which is a photo editing software, to create a fake photograph of the dead princess. To convince the queen that the princess has been killed, the hunter has the photographer make photos which make it appear the princess has been killed, he then takes those photos back to the palace to show the queen. Next, animals guide the princess to the house of the seven dwarves somewhere within the forest. Meanwhile, the hunter has gone to the palace to show the queen the photos. However, the mirror accidentally gives away the secret about the trick and the queen ends up killing the hunter. She later disguises herself as a witch and goes after the princess. While Hopalı Snow White is with the dwarves she tries to change things by fighting against feudal understandings. She teaches them how to cook, how to eat with good manners, how to wash their clothes and dishes as well as how to dance. She also establishes order and fairness regarding the household chores. Finally, she encourages the dwarves to develop a habit of reading books. While the dwarves are not at home the queen disguised as a witch enters the house and gives the princess a poison apple. The dwarves discover what they believe to be the dead princess laying in the forest. They become extremely upset and wail in their local laments. Later, the prince arrives on a white horse at the end of the laments being sung and the princess has awoken from her sleep. Ultimately, Hopalı Snow White rejects the prince's proposal for marriage and instead returns to the palace. The princess understands the value of her first love, the mirror, and decides to continue her life with the mirror happily ever after.

### **Arrangements with Participants During the Play Staging Process**

- a. A suggestion from the participant who played the hunter was to revive the hunter instead of having him killed by the queen. In doing so, punish the hunter him with a "life sentence", which is a heavier punishment for people in the Black Sea region than being put to death. She showed the scene she had worked on including her comments and the dialogues of the actors. Following evaluation, it was decided by the group to present both the old and new versions of this scene to the audience. Thus, both versions were performed for the audiences and followed by a small explanation by the character.
- b. The participant who played the angry character, in the scene where she argues with Snow White suggested that it would be more appropriate for her to rebel against Snow White instead of giving up like the other dwarfs. She showed the scene she was working with the other actors, and a tongue twister she used was highly appreciated and ultimately the scene was arranged as she wanted.
- c. The participant who played the mirror character recommended that at the end of the play, when Hopalı Snow White and Mirror reached to each other and were happy, they could use music from a popular Turkish movie "Selvi Boylum Al Yazmalım (My Tall Love with a Red Scarf)". In that popular movie, the male character (Kadir İnanır) is a truck driver, and the participant proposed to go on stage with a model of a truck. She prepared her costume and truck model according to her ideas for the character.

- d. The participants wanted to give their children a role in the participatory art activities. The children frequently attended theatre practices with their mothers and became interested in preparatory theatre as well as the warm-up activities. The children eventually became theatre enthusiasts and were included in the performance. Thus, the group decided to have these children play the roles of Hopalı Snow White's animal friends. Thus, the children who participated in the production gained a bit of on-stage acting experience.
- e. The hunter's use of a local accent, the angry dwarf's rhymes in a local language called Lazca, the cheery dwarf crying at the funeral ceremony in a Hemşin accent, and Young Volkan's songs in the Georgian language were all shaped by the suggestions of participants during the practices.
- f. After the group's theatrical practice reached a certain stage, the decision was made to gain the opinions of professional theatre artists as well as benefit from their experiences. Yeşim Eyüboğlu, who writes and manages games around women's problems, and an artist, Yaşar Neziş Eyüboğlu, who has worked using the Grotovski method for many years within the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Theatre - Research Laboratory were both invited to Hopa. The travel expenses of the invited experts were covered by the proceeds from a pantomime show. Also, the accommodation of the visiting artists was provided through free accommodations from the participating hotel manager.
- g. Workshops were held with the invited artists, and their suggestions were taken regarding topics such as having bigger roles, stage traffic, audience contact, sound and light use as well as the decor and costumes. In line with their suggestions, taking into consideration the wide corridor within the wedding hall, the dwarves' that were going back and forth from the forest within the play, were made to go through the audience and be accompanied by cheerful songs.
- h. The participants also began to organize a play called "*Savaş Alanı Gibi Kadın (Woman Like a Battlefield)*" for the Hopa district to be staged by a group called "Theatre Immigration" that was established by students of Artvin Coruh University. With money obtained from the organization the expenses of the Theatre Immigration group were provided for their participation in the 12th ETHOS Ankara International Theatre Festival.
- i. Choosing Hopa as the geographical region included in the game, the environmental struggle and women's problems in the region were highlighted. Also, the feminist stance and combative character of Hopalı Snow White as well as the many qualities of other characters such as the critical attitude of the hunter, his quest for justice, and animal rights advocacy caused the participants to embrace theatrical performance and form a great group dynamic. The participants also objected to a statement by the hunter, "I sold the mother of this world", because they found it to be sexist, so the line was removed from the script.
- j. The fact that the participants had an opportunity to realize themselves through these theatre activities and that they could convey messages to their society increased their determination to work and be successful. Also, it was observed that the close circle of the participants' friends, who are aware of the theatre practices, occasionally visited and provided moral support.
- k. The design and preparation of the decor was made with the cooperation of all participants. The decor was made and painted together, the costume designs were researched, and the fabrics and colours were decided upon and sewn by the participants with tailoring skills. Accessories were either purchased or collected from the outside

environment. In addition, some of the costumes and accessories such as baskets, axes, hunter's slings, and clothes, the participants preferred to use local authentic products.

- l. The participants worked together to design and print poster flyers and invitations for the play, organized distribution of these items as well as gained official permits for their performance from the district governorship. Also, revenue from the sale of handmade jewellery were utilised for some expenses required to stage the performance. In addition, participants came to the theatre studies with cakes, pies, desserts, tea, and coffee, which they prepared at home or bought at their workplace. They worked in a solidarity democratic atmosphere during their group theatre activities.
- m. The play was staged in the Emre Wedding Hall for 300 people on March 15, 2019, and light and technical support was provided by volunteer university students. The play, which was attended by various party members and mayor candidates, was well-received and applauded. After the play, the actors and audience participated in a dialogue to discuss the performance. During the conversation, the group expressed the district's need for a cultural centre. Following intense demand, the *Hopali Snow White* play was staged on two more occasions on March 29<sup>th</sup> and April 12<sup>th</sup>, with a total of 900 attendees in all. Again, during the conversations following each staging of the play, demands for a cultural centre and animal shelter were expressed by the group members.
- n. As a rule, during the plays there were no seats reserved for anyone except seats which were used by elderly audience members. This rule was not compromised for anyone including close friends and/or relatives. The play staging expenses were covered by the revenues from ticket sales. Also, with these funds a musical night was organized, and the success of the group's performance was celebrated. Importantly, the group was able to support the treatment expenses of the stage staff member who had a heart attack during this time.
- o. After the staging process of the theatrical performances, group members visited the newly elected mayor in October 2019, and requested space be allocated to continue staging these types of events. A hall was provided and the new space, which consisted of a room, a living room, and a kitchen, were transformed into a small stage with the background curtains, chairs, and technical equipment. In their new theatre space, the group began to organize rehearsals and had conversations after watching films. Another room was reserved for the play decor, actors' costumes, and accessories. In the arrangement of the space, shopkeepers' donations were collected and utilised to prepare the space. To continue their dialogue the participants carried out intra-group communications over WhatsApp a social media communication application. The WhatsApp online group was created in October 2018, and each member had a right to comment equally. Through WhatsApp, photos and videos of staged plays and rehearsals were shared among group members and changes to the play and text were discussed through this process.
- p. Through their own effort, during the period of 2019-20 the participants showed their "poetry-drama" work consisting of dramatized poems about women's issues and women's struggle. The play which was staged three times in the Hopa Chamber of Commerce Hall was again staged free of charge in the nearby district of Borçka, as part of the March 8<sup>th</sup> International Women's Day event. The income from these performances were used to support the establishment of animal shelters.
- q. In this new period, movies about women in the Hopa Chamber of Commerce Hall can be seen without any fee. To improve themselves, the group also presented local events such as theatre studies and watching films at their own place. Further preparations

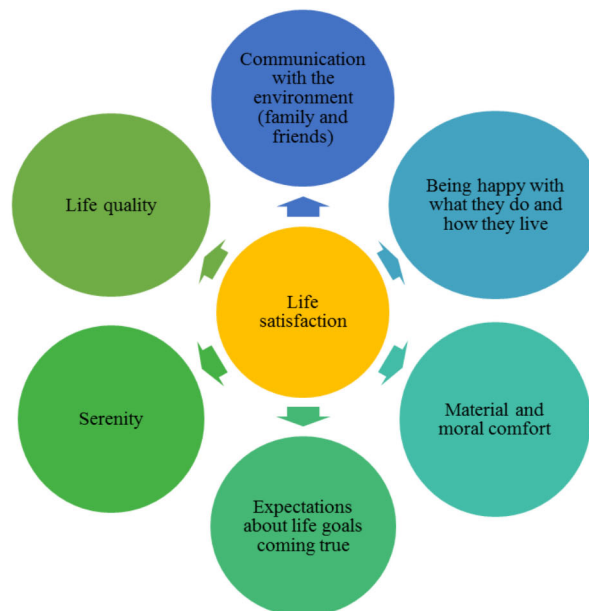
continue to be made for more creative drama activities to take place and the number of new members is growing.

- r. The work carried out by the theatre participants attracted the attention of a national news agency from their region. Through the interviews and videos produced by the news agency, their work was shown in the local and national media.
- s. It was agreed upon to change the group's name to the "Hopa Women Theatre Group" and this name was used for their Facebook page created in March 2020. In addition, for continuity the official web site design is modelled after their Instagram and Twitter page which was created by the community group.
- t. Even though it was necessary for the participatory group to stop their in-person activities due to the SARS-2, COVID-19, corona virus epidemic of 2020, they have been able to share their poems and drama via online media applications such as WhatsApp and Facebook. (Appendix 1 contains the group's Facebook address and news stories about them.)

### Interview Results Regarding Life Satisfaction

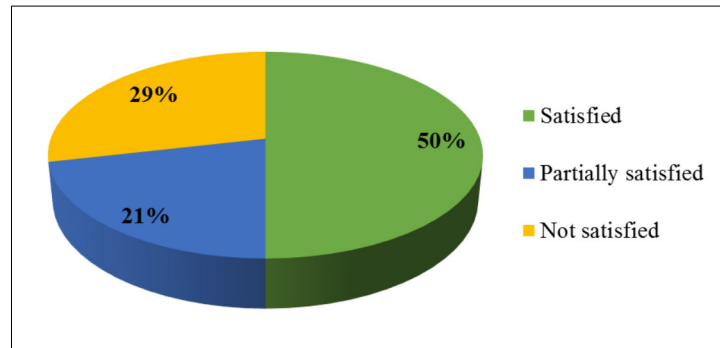
During the interviews, the participants were first asked to answer, "What does life satisfaction mean for you?". The responses provided, as shown in Figure 1, highlight the life satisfaction comments made by participants. For example, the participants provided responses such as quality of life, communication with the environment (family and friends), being happy with what they do in their life, peace, fulfilment of their life expectations as well as material and moral comfort.

**Figure 1. Life Satisfaction**



When the participants were asked whether they were satisfied about their lives, as shown in Figure 2, 29% of the participants answered yes, while 21% said partially, and 50% of participants said no.

**Figure 2. Life Satisfaction Rate**



Within the following statements information is provided to highlight the level of life satisfaction participants stated having in their lives. Direct quotes selected from three individual participants are provided in the following:

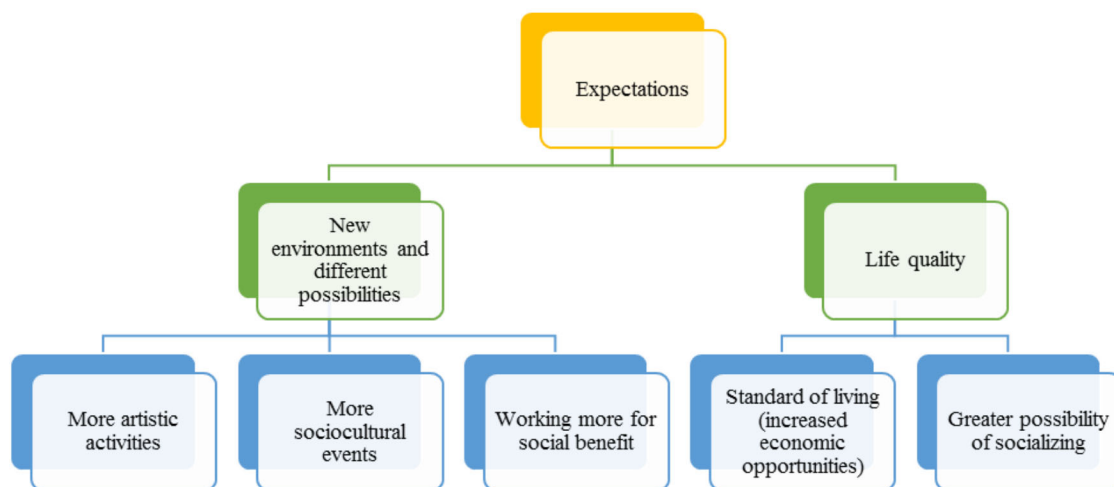
P(4): “I can say that I am satisfied with my life. Because life satisfaction is the most proper way to maintain healthy relationships with my family and friends.”

P(7): “It is not possible to be completely satisfied with life. Because I have a lot of expectations from life and I cannot say that I am satisfied until these happen.”

P(11): “I think I am satisfied with life, for me it means being happy with everything I do and experienced. I am happy with everything good and bad that I do in every environment. Because life is like that.”

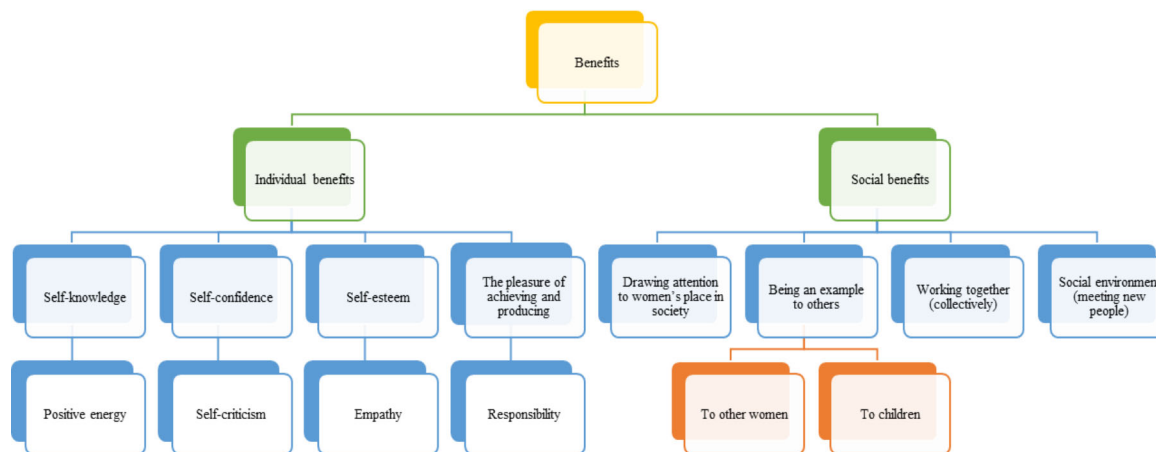
When the participants were asked “What would you like to happen to increase your level of life satisfaction?” their expectations to this question were revealed through their answers. Their expectation responses are arranged under the title of expectations for increased satisfaction and provided in Figure 3.

**Figure 3. Expectations for increased satisfaction**



Next, the participants’ responses to the fourth question regarding “What benefit theatre work provides them?” were classified in Figure 4 as individual and social achievements.

**Figure 4. Benefits of theatre studies**



The participants provided a variety of responses of how participatory theatre activities and studies benefited them. For example, they provided responses such as gaining self-knowledge, self-confidence, self-esteem, the pleasure of achieving and producing, positive energy, self-criticism, empathy, and responsibility. In addition, the social benefits of participatory theatre studies allowed participants to attract attention to women’s place in society, be role models for others (other women and children) and work cooperatively. It also created an environment for them to socialise and meet new people. Three direct quotes were selected from the participants responses to the question “How did theatre studies benefit you?”, and are provided in the following:

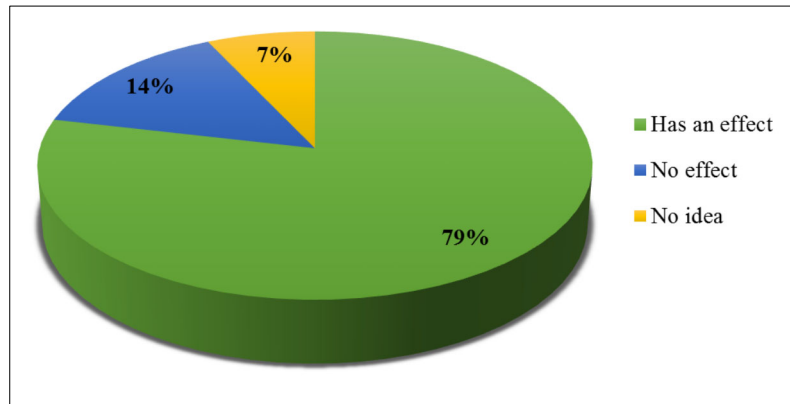
P(1): “I can count many contributions of this work for me. Most importantly, going on stage as a part of a large group, attempting and producing something both increased my self-confidence and I enjoyed the success. Being an example to the children performing with us was also extremely valuable.”

P(5): “I think it contributed a lot to the whole group, such as taking responsibility, working together, and producing something, showing everyone what women can do, and doing something nice and useful. Therefore, I believe that such studies should be increased.”

P(14): “The greatest contribution to me is that I have developed feelings such as self-confidence, self-criticism, and self-esteem. The best thing about other people was to prove to other women that women can achieve anything they want. So, I think we are doing something good not only for ourselves but also for society.”

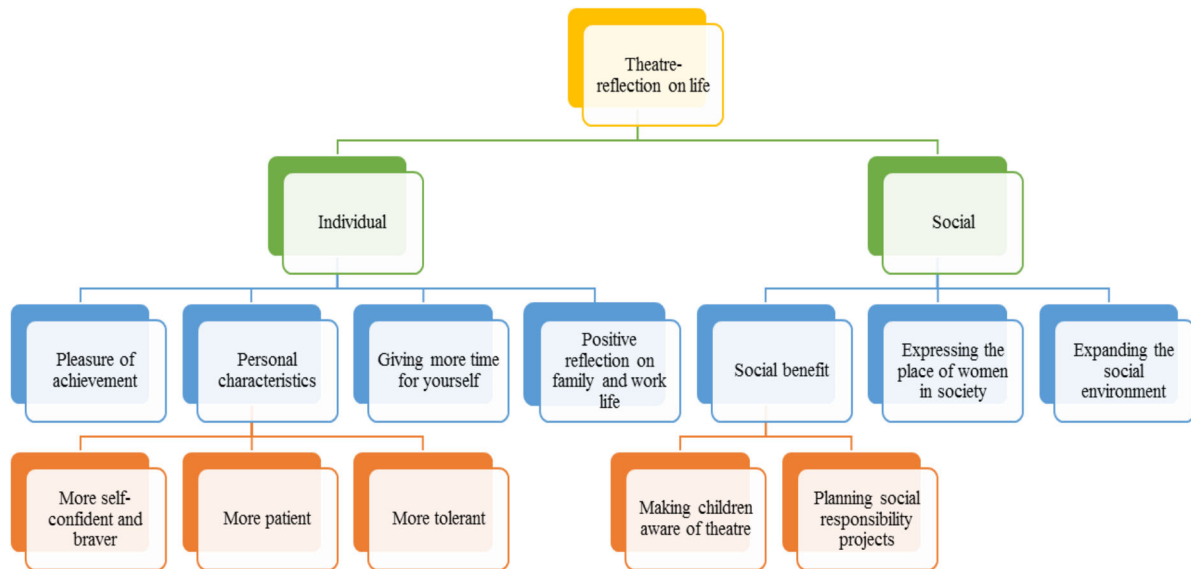
Through the analysis of the data obtained in this current study, as shown in Figure 5, it can be stated that participation in theatre studies effected 79% of the participants’ life satisfaction in a positive way.

**Figure 5. The Effect of Theatre Studies on Life Satisfaction**



Participants’ responses to the fifth question regarding “How theatre studies reflect on their life?” are arranged as individual and social reflections and can be seen in Figure 6.

**Figure 6. Reflection of Theatre Studies on Their Life**



The participants commented on how theatre studies reflect on their life and provided statements such as the pleasure of success, personal characteristics, more time for themselves, being more confident and brave, more patient, more tolerant, and a positive reflection on their family life. The responses that the participants provided regarding their social reflections were social usefulness (making children aware of theatre and planning social responsibility projects), expressing the place of women in society, and expanding the social environment. Again, three direct quotes were selected from individual participants’ responses to this question and are as follows:

P(1): “We did these works without any financial concerns and social responsibility projects that we planned were the most important contribution to our lives. For example, helping animals in a shelter in Artvin and establishing a library in Şavşat... Our aim was to increase the widespread effect of our play (theatrical performance) in this way.”

P(2): “Since theatre works made me happy, this situation positively reflected on both my family life and work life.”

P(6): “The reflection of these works on my life is the pleasure of being able to do something as a woman who was ignored by society. I experienced a process of starting by saying I could, and now being able to say I did. It really makes people feel very good.”

P(13): “Think of women who sit in their home quietly, are drawn to their own corners and do not participate in such activities. Also, consider the women who are part of social life and work life, who work for the society, who work and produce and try to be beneficial to the society with such activities. Of course, these works have a lot of contribution to our lives.”

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

It was revealed in the research results of this current study with 14 women participating in theatre activities in the Hopa District of Artvin province Turkey that their involvement in participatory art through theatre studies and performances greatly increased their life satisfaction (79%). In addition, the participants made several gains from their experiences in participatory theatre, both within their individual as well as their social life, and these benefits were stated by the participants to have led to an increase in their life satisfaction. It was determined from the results of this study that working women need various artwork activities to share and express their feelings and thoughts more freely as well as exchange ideas with each other and develop themselves both personally and socially. In the light of these research results, it can be said that participatory art works that have a liberal pedagogical understanding based on democratic and structure solidarity can socially empower women. Importantly, another result from the analysis of this current research showed that the culture of energy and solidarity created through involvement of group members in these participatory activities can be maintained without the support of a private and/or state institution. As a result, the research group from this participatory theatre group turned into an independent non-governmental organization that advocates women’s rights, has an increasing number of members, and continues to create new art activities.

Also, in this current study it was shown that working women find the theatrical stage as a place where they can feel more alive as well as a place where they can get to know themselves better in areas such as self-recognition and self-esteem. Through these activities, they also gained the pleasure of achieving and producing, positive energy, self-criticism, empathy, and responsibility. Furthermore, participatory theatre studies can provide women with important opportunities to break their traditional gender roles. As a result, it is particularly important for women to take part in art activities where they can convey their demands to society.

In addition, it is important that participatory art works be carried out based on liberating, democratic, and dialogue-based pedagogical ideas where participants can freely express themselves. This democratic and dialogue-based understanding should also be demonstrated in the relations, studies, and products that are staged for the community. Therefore, it should be acted within the framework of an emancipatory pedagogy, where the distinction between director, actor, and audience, which emerged in the development process of theatre art, becomes obscure and participants can also take part in expressing themselves freely. Importantly, the ideas of Brecht and Freire as well as Boal and other contemporary theatre thinkers and practitioners, who form the theatre of the oppressed, should be used as a guide for the planning and methodology of activities to be carried out in participatory theatre. In this way, the participants will be better able to express their problems, break traditional cultural patterns, create their own language, and find the courage to be free. On the other hand, the participatory artwork that is conducted with working women can also be carried out with people from various age groups and occupations such as prisoners, employees, retirees, adolescents, and immigrants.

Furthermore, in the future there is a need for more studies related to culture and the arts in which all segments of society within Turkey can participate. For example, participatory approaches and practices in the field of culture and the arts that can be utilised to mediate social transformation should be supported and expanded. Thus, the efforts of individuals and the cooperation of institutions



are needed when implementing participatory art practices. In this way, active forms of participation can be included into art programs as well as educational programs can be organized to meet the rights and needs for art among people from the surrounding region. It can also be argued that as a way of establishing future cultural policies, there is a need to revitalize the Community Centre activities that were carried out in the early Republic period of Turkey.

It has been found that in many European countries the solution to revitalizing community art activities occurs in “cultural houses”. For example, large and small institutions can provide various venues from a small room to a multifunctional centre building, which can be transformed into a community centre and/or local cultural house to be utilised for meeting the cultural needs of local citizens. It is therefore meaningful that the Hopa Municipality allocated a space for the participating group to meet, practice, and perform. In addition, participants should be encouraged to work together as a group so that they can navigate this process together with their companions rather than their activities being defined by the audience, consumer, and/or customer.

Seeing the field of culture and art as a transformative environment for its practitioners, opening the way for each participant to coexistence despite their differences, and contributing to social development and transformation are contemporary pedagogical approaches that have an important place in lifelong learning. Participatory approaches, which gain momentum when various actors come together and act together, bring positive contributions not only to the participants but also to the social life of those involved. The fact that the theatre performances in this current study garnered great interest within the small district of Hopa and reached 900 attendees, and that performances were requested by citizens from surrounding provinces and districts are all indicators that participatory theatre studies are beneficial for working women. When individuals are actively involved in artwork, they naturally become ambassadors of culture and art to others in their community. As a result, it has been seen that these activities can contribute to practitioners’ self-esteem, support the understanding of diversity, improve cooperation, facilitate solidarity, and cope with the monotony of daily life. When individuals are part of an activity where they enjoy social interaction with others in their community, they become stronger by starting to trust one another and develop a sense of belonging. Ultimately, the sustainability of such activities turns these actors into a cultural circle that enlightens the environment around them and creates an attraction for all to do more.

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## **Appendicies**

The Social Media of Hopa Women Theatre Group

<https://www.facebook.com/Hopa-Kad%C4%B1n-Tiyatro-Toplulu%C4%9Fu-103691181289613/>

Published News Regarding Hopa Women Theatre Group

<https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x7st4gf>

<https://gazetekarinca.com/2020/06/birlikte-yol-yuruyen-kadinlar-hopa-kadin-tiyatro-toplulugu/>

<https://www.facebook.com/SemazenKafe/photos/a.1021069027920294/2687303407963506/?type=3&theater>

<https://www.trthaber.com/haber/kultur-sanat/artvinli-kadin-tiyatroculardan-sokak-hayvanlarina-yardim-468507.html>

<https://www.haberler.com/artvinli-kadin-tiyatrocular-oyun-gelirlerini-sokak-13030296-haberi/>