

# HOW TO PARTICIPATE IN PARTICIPATORY MUSIC MAKING AT A CONTEMPORARY FOLK MUSIC FESTIVAL: RUNOSONG NESTS AT THE VILJANDI FOLK MUSIC FESTIVAL AND *PELIMANNI* EVENINGS AT THE KAUSTINEN FOLK MUSIC FESTIVAL

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**Abstract:** The article studies, compares and analyses participatory music making at Estonian and Finnish folk music festivals. By comparing the empirical research materials collected during comprehensive fieldwork in 2004–2019 from the *regilaulupesa* (Eng. runosong nest) of the Viljandi Folk Music Festival (Est. Viljandi pärimusmuusika festival) in Estonia and from the *pelimanni* (Eng. folk musician, fiddler) evenings of the Kaustinen Folk Music Festival (Fin. Kaustisen kansanmusiikkijuhlat) in Finland, answers were sought to the following questions: What kind of participatory music making takes place at these folk music festivals? What are the social dynamics between and within the groups and individuals in participatory music making situations? How are the primary and secondary functions of music making formed? As a result of the qualitative comparative phenomenological research, it was found that although in participatory music situations at Estonian and Finnish folk music festivals the musical behaviour of participants and the social dynamics of groups could differ radically, they still strive for direct musical experience at a community and personal level and bring the older musical tradition closer to the contemporary people. During participatory music making the secondary function, that is, musical behaviour directed outside the group, could turn naturally into a primary function – musical activity that unites the community and fulfils its internal needs. Situations of participatory music making at Estonian and Finnish contemporary music festivals revealed the common music making as a cultural, social, creative, and emotional phenomenon which has symbolic and direct connections with traditional Finnic folk music culture.

**Keywords:** participatory music making, folk music festival, ethnomusicology, musical behaviour, empirical fieldwork

The field of contemporary music festivals is like a rich soundscape, set by musical, social, historical, economic, and even political sound colours. The distinctive feature of folk music festivals against this general festival background is the association of the music that sounds there and the cultural and social context surrounding it with the traditional lifestyle and worldview, which ideally also considers it natural to involve a person in community activities, including music making. Thus, one would think that today's big folk music festivals are an open environment for everyone to take part in musical life, whether it is by performing music, enjoying it or participating in its creation here and now.

But what is the situation in reality? In academic research, folk music festivals appear mainly as events for performing and listening to music. Usually, research focuses on creative practices, changes in tradition, history of the event, and social reflections. However, the classification of music festivals based on Swedish experience refers to carnival-type festivals, where sometimes the border between performers and listeners disappears (Ronström & Malm & Lundberg 2001: 58–59; see also Ronström 2016).

One such festival, which combined the characteristics of a carnival-type party and a music festival and maintained a balance between participation and performance activities was the Falun Folkmusik Festival – one of the models for the Viljandi Folk Music Festival. The festival was based on three equal components: concerts, courses, and folk festivity. The model for the last part of this triplet was earlier gatherings of traditional violinists and a carnival party (Falun 2023).

Since experiences and practices have become the central cultural goods in today's world, it is important to take a closer look at the situation and possibilities of participatory music making at folk music festivals. Participatory music making is also a relevant topic because studying it helps to understand, more generally, the nature of this impact and importance of music making for both the individual and the community.

The aim of this article is to compare the possibilities and situations of participatory music making at Estonian and Finnish folk music festivals and to analyse the roles and behaviour of the participants. The article seeks answers to the following questions: What are the participatory music performances that take place at the Viljandi Folk Music Festival (Est. Viljandi pärimusmuusika festival) in Estonia and at the Kaustinen Folk Music Festival (Fin. Kaustisen kansanmusiikkijuhlat) in Finland? What are the social dynamics between and within the groups and between their members in the participation situations, including musical behaviour, self-expression and establishment through music making, and which changes occur in roles? How are the importance of music

making in a group and the change or blending of primary and secondary functions manifested?

The research of the Viljandi and Kaustinen festivals was initiated and has been supported by my hobby of traditional music making, as well as my work at the Estonian Folklore Archives of the Estonian Literary Museum. I have performed at the Viljandi festival as a singer and violinist and have been doing volunteer work since 1999. Since 2005, I have participated in the Kaustinen festival as a member of Antti Koiranen's Finnish traditional music ensembles Nuolipelimannit and Koiranen Kollektion. Through the opportunity to participate, I came into good contact with the organizers and musicians of both festivals, which facilitated carrying out ethnomusicological fieldwork.

The first part of the article examines the concepts and theoretical background of participatory music making and provides an overview of the previous studies and research methods in Estonia and Finland. The second part introduces the conducted fieldwork and the methods used to deal with participatory music making in this research. The third part presents the participatory music situations selected for analysis from the Viljandi Folk Music Festival in southern Estonia and the Kaustinen Folk Music Festival in western Finland: these are Viljandi *regilaulupesa* (Eng. runosong nest) and Kaustinen *pelimanni* (Eng. folk musician, fiddler) evenings. The fourth part consists of an analysis of examples of participatory music making. This is followed by topic-related discussion, results, and conclusions.

## **RESEARCH THEORIES, CONCEPTS, AND METHODS**

The theoretical approach and terminology of social aspects of music, including common music making, have been shaped and conceptualized by American ethnomusicologists Alan Merriam (1964), Alan Lomax (1968, 1976), and Thomas Turino (2008), New Zealand-English social scientist Christopher Small (1999), German musicologist Ernst Klusen (1986) and others.

The music of a participating nature has also been described and studied through the empirical material of one musical tradition by several researchers from the Nordic and Baltic countries, among them Heikki Laitinen (1994), Ingrid Åkesson (2006), Guntis Šmidchens (2014), Ingrid Rüütel (2005, 2006) and Taive Särg (2014).

Alan Merriam suggested that music as a process should be studied on three analytical levels: conceptualization about music, behaviour in relation to music, and the sound of music. Without concepts about music behaviour cannot occur,

without behaviour musical sound cannot be produced, and music itself in turn shapes the concepts about it. Merriam considered the principle of treating music holistically as central to understanding music making (Merriam 1964: 32).

Alan Lomax's extensive study of traditional music in the 1960s aimed to find connections between community singing style and social organization. The cantometric method created for this purpose used the term "singing style" in a broader sense. The singing style included the social structure of the singing group, musical qualities, voice generation strategies, linguistic and cultural features, as well as the performance of singing and its arrangement. Lomax stresses that knowing the community's way of life is crucial for the interpretation of the musical tradition (Lomax 1976; see also Allpere 1988; Rüütel 2022: 31–32).

The contemporaries and classics Merriam and Lomax, who influenced each other as well as the circles of ethnomusicology, both highlight in their works the importance of studying music as action and behaviour. They emphasize the inseparability of thinking and theoretical understandings, social and aesthetic aspects in making music. Thus, their approach provides the theoretical background supporting this study for a comprehensive understanding of participatory music making.

Several social science theorists who have influenced ethnomusicology as well, have also recognized that music is a phenomenon that is closely related to human cultural and social behaviour. Christopher Small discusses the context and organization of music performance as an influence on social dynamics, explaining how the concert situation creates a set of hierarchies and subgroups, separating audience and players, as well as audience members from each other. He shows that music making can follow more diverse social patterns, which in turn allow new social groups to emerge and change the roles of the individuals participating in the group (Small 1999: 16; see also Hadar & Rabinowitch 2023). From the point of view of this article, it is relevant that in a music festival situation, people communicate with each other through participation in musical activities, and the impact of this music can only be assessed through experience (Small 1999: 20).

Ernst Klusen distinguishes, based on performance, primary, secondary,<sup>1</sup> and mixed functions of a folk song. Singing in the primary function, or "inward", occurs between group members for their own use and is not intended to be performed for an audience (Klusen 1986: 185). Secondary performance, that is, performing for people outside the group, is related to the secondary function of singing – audience-oriented performance (ibid.: 189). Intertwining of primary and secondary functions can occur in situations where singing has a primary function, but the specific singing situation is initiated from outside of one's

group by a secondary stimulus, performance to others. Primary and secondary functions, with their combinations, transitions, and overlaps, characterize the living forms and realms of common song (*ibid.*: 192–193).

Thomas Turino divides music making into four categories: participatory, presentational, recording, and produced music. Participatory music is a situation where all those present freely and actively participate in a common musical being: playing an instrument, singing or dancing. In the case of presentational music, the performers and the audience are clearly separated. The audience can sing or dance along to the musicians performing on stage, but they are not the focus of the event. High-fidelity recording is a documented recording of a stage performance or a faithful imitation of a live musical situation. Studio sound art is a music recording, the production of which uses professional audio technical capabilities and the result of which cannot be reproduced in real time (Turino 2008: 26–27).

Klusen's and Turino's views complement each other in formulating the musical processes and functions that arise in the group. In the context of the current research, their treatment of primary and secondary functions and categories of music making forms a network of concepts, based on which the musical behaviour of groups of people in participatory music making can be more thoroughly described.

In today's anthropology and ethnomusicology more and more attention is paid to the researcher's own direct experience. The self-reflection and phenomenology provide the theoretical and methodological background for its approach. Self-reflection is defined in science as a personal analysis process during which a person actively becomes aware of the values, beliefs or understandings underlying their actions, as a result of which their new knowledge is formed, learning takes place and behaviour changes (Bolton 2001).

Phenomenology is a philosophical tradition that seeks to understand the world through people's direct experience. In the case of the phenomenological method, qualitative research methods are mainly applied – interviews, conversations, and participant observations. Analysing the functioning of the community and the behaviour of its members helps to make sense of the social dynamics of situations. Since the researcher's own subjective and conscious experience is preferred as the subject of phenomenological research, and the researcher's scientific approach is aimed at discovering new things, phenomenological qualitative research as a method is relatively free and flexible (Orbe 2009: 749–751; Lester 1999: 1). In applying the phenomenological method, I have been inspired by American ethnomusicologist Vanessa Thacker's doctoral thesis devoted to the study of Irish folk songs (Thacker 2018).

Estonian and Finnish traditional music researchers have used several interdisciplinary collection and research methods in the study of musical events, including participatory music making, according to the broad perspective of ethnomusicology. Qualitative structured, semi-structured and dialogic or conversational interviews and quantitative multiple-choice and open-answer paper and online questionnaires have been used in the research of traditional communities, hobby collectives and professional ensembles that practise folk music. Researchers have highlighted that oral material collected in an informal and free conversational atmosphere and open-text questionnaires yielded significantly more relevant data than limited-choice responses (Laitinen 1977; Rüütel & Tiit 2005, 2006; Särg 2014; Kästik 2014).

One productive method in the context of documenting Estonian and Finnish folk music culture has been participant observation, collecting data while participating in the activities of the researched community. This type of activity provides an opportunity to understand and make sense of the studied culture and its inherent values and their significance through collecting and describing the observed situations (Särg 2014; Haapoja 2017).

Participant observation is often accompanied by audiovisual recording, which provides an opportunity for auditive and visual analysis afterwards. An older but still relevant way of storing data is also taking written notes and keeping a fieldwork diary. One should be prepared to use such an old-fashioned but still sufficient documentation method in situations where audio and video recording is not possible or appropriate due to technical problems, a suddenly arising collection situation or the sensitive or special atmosphere of the situation (Kuutma 1998; Rüütel 2000; Haapoja 2017).

The method of handling the fieldwork materials has often been the transcription of the recordings and a detailed, thick description of the collection situation. In this case, the relevant research method has been close reading of source texts created by the researcher, that is, repeated reading and thorough consideration of the material (Geertz 1973; Kuutma 2008).

## **PARTICIPANT OBSERVER IN PARTICIPATORY MUSIC: WORK PROCESS AND METHODS**

Festivals have become one of the central and beloved forms of folk music experiencing in both Estonia and Finland in the second half of the twentieth century (Kuutma 1998; Rüütel 2004; Määttä 2005; Asplund 2006). This article focuses on the comparative study of participatory music making at two folk

music festivals: the Viljandi Folk Music Festival in Estonia and the Kaustinen Folk Music Festival in Finland.

The Viljandi and Kaustinen festivals have grown out of communities that value folk culture and are interested in the revival of traditional music. These two music events have basically the same goals – to make the local traditional music culture more understandable for today’s people and, at the same time, to bring the diversity of the world’s folk music culture closer to people (Kõmmus 2019: 134).

The Viljandi Folk Music Festival first took place in the town of Viljandi in southern Estonia in 1993. Estonia’s largest folk music festival was based on the enthusiastic activities of the teachers and students of the Folk Music Department of the Viljandi Cultural School, which promoted learning traditional music naturally, experientially and by listening. A direct model was the Falun Folkmusik Festival in Sweden, where young musicians who studied in Viljandi had the opportunity to participate several times in the early 1990s. The Viljandi festival takes place over four days in the last weekend of July. Until 2023 the party had an average of 800 performers and an about of 26,000 listeners per year (Kõmmus 2005; Kiviberg 2019; Viljandi 2023).

The Kaustinen Folk Music Festival took its beginning in the village of Kaustinen in the region of Central Ostrobothnia in western Finland in 1968. The biggest folk music party in Finland emerged from the playing traditions of local folk musicians (Fin. *pelimanni*, Eng. folk musician, fiddler). Traditional participatory music making has been a natural part of the festival life there since its beginning, as local musicians were self-evidently involved in the running of the festivity (Asplund 2005). The festival takes place in the second week of July and lasts for seven days. Until 2023 the number of performing musicians was 4,000 on average and the annual audience is about 48,000 (Laitinen 1977; Cantell 1993; Määttä 2005; Asplund 2005; Kaustinen 2023).

Observing, collecting and comparing data concerned with common music making during the folk music festivals of Viljandi and Kaustinen has been a long-term ethnomusicological journey. Some of the collection and research methods used in this research were selected from among the methods listed above before the beginning of the fieldwork process, some were developed during the research and analysis according to the concrete situation.

During the period of fieldwork, in the years 2004–2019, several qualitative interviews were conducted with team members, performers and listeners at the Viljandi and Kaustinen folk music festivals. Dozens of hours of audio and video recordings were collected from both parties, written records were made and fieldwork diaries were kept. Festival publications, programmes, flyers, newspapers and audio records were archived. A significant amount of empirical

material was collected as a result of the participant observations carried out in Estonian runosong nests and Finnish *pelimanni* evenings.

The materials from the Kaustinen festival were collected by the author of the article during the fieldwork done as an individual researcher. At the Viljandi festival, fieldwork was carried out in cooperation with researchers and employees of the Estonian Literary Museum, the Estonian Folklore Archives and the Estonian Traditional Music Centre. Kanni Labi, Aado Lintrop, Triinu Ojamaa, Taive Särg, Olga Ivaškevič, Airika Harrik, Maike Tubin and many other colleagues and collaborators have made their valuable contribution to documenting the festivals. The collected video, audio and photo materials are stored in the Estonian Folklore Archives of the Estonian Literary Museum, and in the possession of the author of this article.

I have considered qualitative semi-structured conversational interviews to be one of the appropriate ways to capture participatory music making as a process at folk music festivals. When creating relevant questions for a broader study of festival culture, I used as examples Heikki Laitinen's overviews of festival research topics (1977, 2003 [1989]) and the survey questionnaires prepared by Ingrid Rüütel and Ene-Margit Tiit for the Baltica festival participants (2005).

The full version of the qualitative interview questionnaire about the Viljandi and Kaustinen folk music festivals contained 12 broad topics, which were divided into more detailed questions. Since 2004, I have used the following topics in preparing and conducting several different interviews and questionnaires related to festival culture: 1. the time when the festival started; 2. the birth of the idea of the festival; 3. the message of the festival; 4. the impact of professional folk music education on festivals; 5. the festival as an all-inclusive folk music party; 6. the musical face/character of the festival; 7. the musical content of the festival; 8. concepts of folk music; 9. the influence/social pressure of society and audience on the festival; 10. economic strategies for organizing the festival; 11. the festival team; 12. cooperation of the festival team with other organizations (see Kõmmus 2005).

In the interviews for the current study on common music making at the Viljandi and Kaustinen festivals, I focused on one of the aforementioned topics – the festival as an all-inclusive folk music party, the possibilities, importance and necessity of free participation, singing, and playing instruments at a contemporary folk music festival. This broader topic was divided into more detailed questions. It was rather a survey plan, because the wording and emphases of the questions formalized before the fieldwork varied and changed during the conversation according to the experiences and preferences of the interlocutors in making music together. The questions to discuss were the following.



1. How long have you been participating in runosong nests / *pelimanni* evenings? How did you join this event, hear about it, get here?
2. How important is the possibility of free music making, singing, playing instruments at a big organized festival?
3. Can singing and playing instruments together unite a random group into a cohesive community? What is needed for this: a suitable place, a common repertoire, an inspiring atmosphere, the presence of instruments, organization or randomness?
4. What have you experienced, found out, learned thanks to making music together: new folk songs, musical instruments, techniques of singing and playing instruments, the effect of singing together, discovering your own musicality?
5. What is the meaning and significance of making music together for you personally? What have you felt, experienced emotionally thanks to participatory music making: the courage of self-expression, self-confidence, creativity, sense of belonging?
6. What does the term “the musical mother tongue of the people” mean to you?

The total number of interviewees and conversation partners was estimated at 40, with whom I communicated both in larger groups and person to person. In more detail, I documented 14 conversations held in Viljandi and 10 in Kaustinen, the written data of which are in my possession. The discussions did not take place in a planned and targeted way but were shaped according to the situation. Since sound recording did not feel natural and comfortable in every situation, it was easier to take notes and records and keep a fieldwork diary afterwards. Participants in the conversations were interviewed anonymously. The reason for this approach was to create a relaxed and informal atmosphere that would encourage free conversation.

To approach the collected materials, I followed the example of the works of Taive Särg (2014) and Heidi Haapoja (2017), who have documented and researched the singing of runosongs in modern singing situations. When analysing the collected sources, I used the thick description of the interviews and situations, in which I was guided by the works of the American anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) and the Estonian culturologist and ethnomusicologist Kristin Kuutma (1996, 1998, 2008).

Taking into account my fieldwork done during a longer period and at different festivals, I have followed the qualitative comparative phenomenological approach, which includes several qualitative methods, e.g. participant observation, interviews, and conversations (Orbe 2009: 749–751; Briggs 1986; Õunapuu 2014; Vuori 2021).

During the participatory music fieldwork, a need arose to apply self-reflection as a data collecting method (Bolton 2001). As the initiator of qualitative interviews and conversations, I first told the interlocutors about my experiences of singing and playing instruments and the personal and professional interest that developed under their influence. In the informal atmosphere created in this way, people were mostly open about expressing their opinions, both alone and in a group. Self-reflection still required prior self-analysis and understanding of my own musical behaviour. Such a self-reflective process, in turn, facilitated the analysis and understanding of the material obtained during conversations and observations.

## **CHARACTERIZATION AND FORMATION OF RUNOSONG NESTS AND *PELIMANNI* EVENINGS**

Estonian and Finnish ethnomusicological tradition, as well as its applied direction, the study of the revival of music, has been significantly influenced by a local special feature – the common Finnic runosong tradition, which has a long and rich history of collecting and researching. The runosong heritage has been considered one of the important and unifying features of the musical cultures of Estonian, Finnish, Karelian and other Finnic nations (Kallio & Frog & Sarv 2017). The musical tradition, which was in a dying phase from the end of the nineteenth century, has shown signs of revival since the beginning of the global folklore movement in the 1960s (Rüütel 2004; Hill & Bithell 2014). The participatory music making opportunities brought to life at today's Estonian and Finnish folk music festivals, including runosong nests and *pelimanni* evenings, are one part of such a process of revitalizing local folk music.

### **Runosong nests**

The Estonian name *regilaulupesa* (Eng. runosong nest) was first introduced in 2007, when the Viljandi Folk Music Festival was dedicated to the Finnic runosong. A common singing area was opened in the courtyard of the Kondas Centre, the centre of naive art named after local naive artist Paul Kondas. In the following years, song nests were also held in other places of the festival area, including on the free or green stage of the festival.

Both professional and hobby musicians were invited to the runosong nest, and at agreed times they led song circles, in which all who were interested were invited to sing along. The repertoire consisted mainly of runosongs, but newer

rhymed folk songs were also sung. The socially free atmosphere offered a new opportunity to participate for those festival visitors who were used to passive listening at big concerts.

There were also free singing gatherings, when the lead singers and the repertoire were shaped spontaneously. Since the singing area was usually outside the festival's chargeable area, many people used the opportunity to spend their free time singing comfortably together during the breaks, after or even instead of the official programme.

The organizers of the Viljandi festival were inspired by language learning to create a runosong nest. In language pedagogy the theory and practice of language nests have been developed in which all communal communication takes place in the language being studied. Through so-called language immersion, children self-evidently acquire language by communicating naturally (see Language nest 2023). The first language nests were established by the Maori in New Zealand in the 1980s. The children were taken to study there with older people who spoke Maori as their mother tongue, and only Maori was spoken together. This was done both to learn the language and to increase pride in one's culture (Davis 2019).

Based on the same principles, Võru language nests for children were created in Võru County starting in 2004. The language nest was meant as a kindergarten or a kindergarten group working with the language immersion method. At the start of the project children were spoken to in their own language on some days of the week, but as time went on, on every day of the week (Mattheus 2004; Nutov 2011; Plado & Faster 2020).

Observational data and conversations with the participants in the first runosong nest held in 2007 allow to assume that the idea of acquiring cultural behaviour through direct experience reached folk music circles through Võru language and culture enthusiasts who were also involved in organizing the first singing nest. The founders of runosong nests were also inspired to follow the parallel of language learning by knowing that the Hungarian composer, linguist and philosopher Zoltán Kodály, as well as the Estonian composer and advocate of Finnic folk music traditions, Veljo Tormis, figuratively called folk song the musical mother tongue of the nation (Kodály 1971; Rüütel 1999; Tormis & Lippus 2000).

### ***Pelimanni evenings***

During the fieldwork done at the Kaustinen Folk Music Festival, gatherings with common playing of instruments and singing together attracted attention. These events were not part of the official programme of the festival but took place

in a free party atmosphere and in various places to which people had access. There was no definite name for such gatherings, but since the participants in the musical performances mostly called themselves *pelimanni* (Eng. folk musician, fiddler) and the jamming and singing mostly took place in the evenings after the official programme, I call these meetings *pelimanni* evenings.

Kaustinen *pelimanni* evenings, where primarily folk instruments are played together but also singing occurs, are a natural continuation of a long-standing community tradition, in which local folk musicians, such as the local legendary violinist Konsta Jylhä, played and sang together at village parties and anniversaries, weddings and funerals. With the birth of the Kaustinen Folk Music Festival in 1968, common music making gained a new momentum and over time opened up to singers, instrument players and regular party guests from outside the community. The repertoire of playing together has naturally expanded, diversified, and become more modern. However, participatory music making as a phenomenon has been preserved in a way close to communal tradition (Asplund 2005: 91–93; Koironen 2006).

The places and participants of these meetings were not permanent but formed naturally: the participants gathered spontaneously in a free festival area, in cafes or in lodging houses. The lead singers and instrument players were both local *pelimannis* and professional musicians who played instruments and sang together. Everyone could come up with their favourite piece or song, start with it and encourage others to join playing or sing along. Usually 1–2 players would start playing some well-known tune and were joined by other players and singers during the first verse.

The song repertoire generally consisted of Finnish newer fun and vigorous dance songs with final rhymes (Fin. *rekilaulu*) and long melancholic ballads (Fin. *balladi*), but runosongs belonging to the older song layer were also sung. Popular folk songs and author songs heard and learned from the festival stage also sounded.

## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PARTICIPATORY MUSIC MAKING SITUATIONS

The analysis of the material collected during the participant observation revealed characteristic and similar features that emerged at both events. When making music together, the inner and outer spheres of the group often became more flexible, the dividing line between the artists and the audience accepted in a normal festival situation became more diffuse.

It was interesting and at the same time required discretion to observe and document situations in which all those present had the opportunity to musically express their musical preferences, attitude to the situation and the feelings arising during the event through active participation. This also led to situations in which invited lead singers and active participants could start a musical dialogue with each other.

The roles of leading and following singers could even be changed, if, for example, the singers in the crowd took over the song with the “right words” or intervened, in their opinion, with more suitable songs. This could be done in a supportive and accepting manner, as well as in a competitive and provocative way. Through active music making, it was possible to reach a level of social and creative as well as emotional and personal communication, which has common features with the traditional community lifestyle.

In order to exemplify these statements, I will analyse two examples observed and captured during participant observations made at the Viljandi and Kaustinen festivals in 2007.

**The first example** is a competitive situation that arose in the runosong nest of the Viljandi festival, where two different singing groups met.<sup>2</sup> The first group was a well-known folklore ensemble with long-term performance experience, which was invited to lead the song nest. The singers performed a traditional village wedding competition song with ritual cursing between the groom’s and the bride’s relatives, led by two choirs, imitating primary singing.

The second group was a circle of friends of women with considerable experience in singing together. They intervened in this song situation by interjecting and oversinging a freely improvised dance song and running between the two rows of wedding singers with a tail dance.

The unexpected competitive intervention significantly enlivened the atmosphere of the singing nest, which had turned into a concert. Interlude singers and runners clearly enjoyed influencing the situation and manifesting their attitude. After a couple of brisk rounds, the intervening group sat down again and watched the first group’s reactions to the situation with interest. A conflict situation arose, where the first group was visibly disturbed by the interference but continued to perform in a professional manner. The singing group ended their presentation with dignity and then calmly left the runosong nest.

After talking to both sides separately, the leader of the first folklore group admitted that she was shocked by the situation. Unlike the usual stage performance, their ensemble had prepared a workshop-style event, where they planned to perform the programme of wedding songs in a pedagogically exemplary way and equipped with explanations. The other people in the runosong

nest were not directly invited to join the wedding singers, but they were not forbidden to sing along from their place.

The female singing fraternity was visibly excited after the singing incident. They explained that at first they had no plans to interfere in the situation, but the theme of the song nest and the dynamics of the event encouraged them to participate with their own song. The performing folklore ensemble was invited to show competitive singing and ritual chanting of two wedding choirs. The group of friends came to listen with interest to the thematic hour advertised in the programme of the runosong nest, but as the “wedding” progressed, they came to an understanding that the idea was good, but its implementation was lifeless in their opinion.

They came up with an idea and perceived a suitable opportunity to make the whole situation more authentic and engaging with their oppositional participation. The singers also said that they got encouragement for this from their experience at the Seto traditional village party, where women’s *leelo*<sup>3</sup> choirs tried to outsing each other with sonorous voices and beat each other with words, and thus also held a singing competition.

At first glance, there had been a personal and emotional confrontation between the two groups, a violation of the rules of courtesy, which the singing group invited to lead the event seemed to have the right to establish. In essence, however, the conflict was triggered by the broader idea of bringing back the participatory singing to the runosong nest, preferring natural group singing over a performance situation. Singers from the audience signalled this with competitive singing action.

Such a “singing competition” between two groups vividly characterized the interweaving of the primary and secondary functions of participatory singing formulated by Ernst Klusen (1986). There was a situation in which singing had an intellectual and emotional task that united the ensemble: learning wedding songs, reconstructing the song ritual and reviving the tradition. But the specific singing situation was initiated by an external stimulus, that is, an invitation to perform with a thematic programme to others.

The singing function of the second group was clearly primary, that is, based on the needs of self-expression within the group. It happened spontaneously for the mutual entertainment and excitement of the group members and, due to its improvisational nature, was not intended as a performance for the others, but as an encouragement to them as members of the wider group to participate.

The given example, in which different functions of participative singing began to compete within one situation, demonstrates a mixed function arising from the intertwining of primary and secondary ones (see also Särg 2014). In an atmosphere conducive to free musical expression, an intermediate situation

arose, in which the participants were two active singing groups that knew their own group's internal dynamics and repertoire well. In the controversial singing situation, primary and secondary approaches were represented. At the same time, both groups were involved in a natural situation of participatory singing, in which they communicated with each other through singing, resulting in a new quality that changed the participation functions and roles.

**The second example** is a collective improvisation of a folk song that arose during the participation performance at the *pelimanni* evening of the Kaustinen party. On an ordinary evening of the festival, in the festival accommodation place, a musical meeting took place, in which a family ensemble, a folk instrument group and musicians and singers who freely joined them participated. An older member of the ensemble started a runosong, sometimes recalling the song and words, but still studiously continuing. It was a folk song with a simple runosong melody and narrative text. The leading singer's goal was to introduce to the audience, through performance, an older runosong and to give a style example of it. Since it was not a widely known song, no one could support the singer at first.

After a few verses, accordion players began to support the singer, playing a simple accompaniment to the tune. The group started humming along to the tune, and when there was a pause in the words, they tried to come up with the words and create new verses, cautiously at first but then more vividly. As the song progressed and gained momentum, everyone present happily joined in, singing along to the song.

The initiator of the song calmly gave up her leading role and joined the choir. A couple of younger co-singers naturally took over the part of the leader and improvised the words in the runosong style with the encouragement and support of the other participants. They sang about what, who and how was seen and experienced there and then. Improvising a common song brought excitement, fun and creative joy to everyone present. In the course of participatory singing, the pedagogical performance, which initially had started as a secondary one, turned into a primary creative experience confirming the group's cohesion.

Talking to the first singer afterwards, she expressed her sincere enthusiasm that the song developed from her solo performance to a common improvisation, and that the musical experience had a unifying effect on the group. She experienced her change of role from the leader to a follower as positive and necessary for the success of the song. The new lead singers were in turn surprised and excited by the logical structure of the runosong, its inspiring effect and the support of the group. They said that they did not experience their own setting of words as a performance for others, but as a creative activity involving all the participants.

This is an example of a participatory singing experience initiated by a need of creativity and a change of roles influenced by the natural dynamics within the group during collective music making. According to Klusen's (1986) approach, this was the primary function of singing, in which improvisation took place within the group based on the need for its members to express themselves creatively and unite the community. According to Turino (2008), it was a participatory music situation in which there was no distinction between the performers and the audience. The primary goal of singing and playing instruments together was to actively involve all the participants, who naturally began to play the necessary roles in the given situation.

## **DISCUSSION AND RESULTS**

At first glance the examples described above seem different in character and nature. In the first – Viljandi – case, the secondary and primary singing functions were in opposition. Through the contradiction, the differences in the ways of expression and behavioural strategies of the groups that took part in the participatory singing situation and through them the establishment of their communal role became vividly evident. Contrasting the primary and secondary approaches highlighted the different needs and goals of groups carrying their own intra-group lore.

In the second – Kaustinen – example, it was a change in the singing function that took place during the participatory situation, a natural transition from performing, that is, the secondary function, to singing together, that is, the primary one. The exchange of positions of the community members took place naturally through collective improvisational activity, which gave the group a creative and uniting experience.

At a closer look, both situations are genuine examples of participatory music making. The whole group gathered to participate in the event was involved in a singing situation, during which smaller active groups expressed their views, communicated, and influenced each other through singing.

During the participant observations made for this study in Estonia and Finland, it emerged that in the participatory music performances participants tried to approach the communal performance of the runosong in different ways and to get an immediate common singing experience. Singing nests and playing evenings became meeting places for people belonging to the so-called folk music network, while also being open to new interested folk music lovers who were less familiar with this tradition.



Although participatory music making was semi-spontaneous at these festivals, because meeting places and times required agreements depending on the festival programme, its content and nature, that is, participatory music making, still had natural social parallels and cultural connections with the old Finnish music tradition. In the folk culture of the Finnic peoples, singing together was also, to a certain extent, a part of organized events, such as family and calendar holidays (weddings and rituals), festivities and gatherings (youth swinging evenings and parties following bees), etc.

Based on the ideas of the folk song as a nation's musical mother tongue popularized by Kodály and Tormis, the participatory music making that was documented at the Viljandi and Kaustinen festivals can be seen as the emotional, creative and social language of communication of a community. In the context of participatory singing at both Estonian and Finnish festivals, experiencing the old folk songs sung by new participants was similar to a natural language learning process, where the means of self-expression, experience and courage were gained during active participation in the tradition process. Thus, singing, which started in the secondary function, that is, performing to others, could carry out the primary function – participatory music making with insiders through shared positive or even negative experiences.

## CONCLUSION

Contemporary folk music festivals, which bring new life to traditional music, have become part of the revival movement of folk culture and provide an appropriate substance for examining the situations of participatory music. The Viljandi Folk Music Festival in Estonia and the Kaustinen Folk Music Festival in Finland have grown out of communities that respect older folk music heritage while adapting it to the world music culture. At these events, the old tradition is revived and presented in an understandable and engaging form for today's people.

The main goal of this article was to observe the situations of participatory music making at contemporary folk music festivals in Estonia and Finland and to analyse the musical behaviour and roles of those who participated in them. In order to do it, the article examined the runosong nests at the folk music festival in Viljandi and the *pelimanni* evenings at the folk music festival in Kaustinen.

The comparative study of folk music festivals in Viljandi and Kaustinen has been a long-term process. Since the beginning of the fieldwork, carried out at these festivals in 2004, I have observed the collection and research methods used by other researchers who have studied music festivals. Their fieldwork at

folk music festivals has usually involved participant observations, qualitative interviews and quantitative questionnaires, and audiovisual and written recordings. Detailed transcriptions of audio and video recordings, thick descriptions and close reading of written records, collecting situations and fieldwork diaries have been used as methods of analysis of the collected materials.

In this article the runosong nests of the Viljandi Folk Music Festival and the *pelimanni* evenings of the Kaustinen Folk Music Festival are approached through self-reflection and qualitative phenomenological methods, that is, participant observation and qualitative interviews.

Considering the internal, sometimes sensitive group dynamics in the participatory music making situations, it was mostly preferred not to use audiovisual recording technique but to make notations in the fieldwork: making on-site and later notes, writing descriptions and fieldwork diaries. The information received has been thickly described in detail in terms of content and context.

Based on these empirical fieldwork materials, answers were sought to the questions of what kind of participatory music making takes place at these folk music festivals, what are the social dynamics between the groups and people being involved in participatory music making, and how the primary and secondary functions of music making are formed.

Therefore, two situations of singing experienced and collected during participant observations at the Viljandi and Kaustinen festivals in 2007 were compared and analysed more closely. In the first example, which featured the runosong nest of the Viljandi Folk Music Festival, a competitive confrontation arose between two singing groups. The second example from the *pelimanni* evening of the Kaustinen Folk Music Festival was about the creation of an improvisational song by a unitary singing group.

In Viljandi runosong nests and Kaustinen *pelimanni* evenings, a process of open participation developed naturally, which provided an opportunity for both creative cooperation and competitive confrontation. It was interesting to observe how the positions and roles of individuals and groups changed during participatory music making in both cases. Despite the different strategies, all approaches served the same purpose: to bring the tradition of older folk music culturally, creatively and personally closer to the contemporary festival participant. In the course of striving for this goal, the secondary function, that is, musical behaviour directed outside the group (performance, teaching) could turn into the primary function, that is, musical activity that unites the community and fulfils its needs (e.g., common creation, sense of belonging).

During the participant observations made in Estonia and Finland, it turned out that although in participatory music situations the participants' musical behaviour could differ radically, they still tried to get direct emotional singing

experience in a community and at a personal level. Comparing the described strategies and functions of participatory music making revealed the similarity of shared music making at Estonian and Finnish festivals as a cultural, social, creative and emotional phenomenon.

Contemporary participatory music making observed at folk music festivals has both symbolic and direct connections with traditional Finnic folk music culture. The positions and relationships of active leaders and passive observers, the motives and goals of action can dynamically change and get mixed in the course of free musical activity, just as it has happened in the traditional syncretic village community. The traditional song culture could also consist of the cooperation or competition of different groups within the same tradition and the mixing of the primary (internal) and secondary (external) functions of the musical life realized with their participation, which in the end could lead to new qualities that strengthened the group internally.

Participatory music making at contemporary folk music festivals in Estonia and Finland, including runosong nests and *pelimanni* evenings, are musical encounters worthy of attention and research. This kind of events in a narrower sense fulfil the tasks necessary for the functioning of festival participants' communities and, in a broader sense, the goals of reviving folk music. In this way, emotional and educational singing and playing together helps to develop people's personal creativity, thereby raising their self-esteem and creating a sustainable sense of community among the participants. On the other hand, participatory music making helps to popularize folk music as the intellectual and emotional mother tongue of local people, and thereby broaden people's positive attitude towards world music.

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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The terms “primary” and “secondary” are not evaluative or hierarchical in any way for Klusen or in this article but are based on the common language of denoting the closer, related to oneself, and the more distant, separated from oneself, with the words “this/first” and “second”.
- <sup>2</sup> Estonian Folklore Archives of the Estonian Literary Museum. ERA, DV 515. Runo-song nest of the Viljandi Folk Music Festival < Viljandi parish – Taive Särg, Helen Kõmmus (28.07.2007).
- <sup>3</sup> Seto *leelo* is the traditional polyphonic singing style of the Setos living in southern Estonia (Seto 2023).

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- ERA, EV 18–27. Runosong nests at the Viljandi Folk Music Festival 2008. Video recordings by Aado Lintrop, Taive Särg. Materials are archived at the Estonian Folklore Archives of the Estonian Literary Museum in Tartu, Estonia.
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- ERA, EV 350–361. Runosong nests at the Viljandi Folk Music Festival 2019. Video recordings by Maike Tubin. Materials are archived at the Estonian Folklore Archives of the Estonian Literary Museum in Tartu, Estonia.
- Interviews with organizers, performers and participants of the Viljandi Folk Music Festival in 2004–2019. Recordings and manuscripts by Helen Kõmmus. Materials are in the possession of the author.
- Interviews with organizers, performers and participants of the Kaustinen Folk Music festival in 2005–2019. Recordings and manuscripts by Helen Kõmmus. Materials are in the possession of the author.

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