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# **EXPERIENCES MADE BY THE SWEDISH NGO SKÅDEBANAN IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CULTURAL PROJECTS WITHIN THE PRISON AND PROBATION SERVICE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY**

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Degree Project in Criminology  
30 Credits, Two-year Master  
Criminology, Master's Programme  
May 2023

Malmö University  
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Edirisinghe Arachchige, N. Experiences made by the Swedish NGO Skådebanan in the implementation of cultural projects within the Prison and Probation Service: A qualitative study. *Degree project in Criminology 30 Credits*. Malmö University: Faculty of Health and Society, Department of Criminology, 2023.

## **ABSTRACT**

*Background:* Cultural projects are increasingly being implemented to help inmates cope with their situations. Nevertheless, research has been scarce in relation to the experiences of the cultural workers implementing the projects within the Prison and Probation Service (PPS).

*Objective:* The study intends to explore the experiences of Skådebanan's cultural workers in the implementation of cultural projects in relation to the Swedish PPS and the inmates. More specifically, the study addresses two research questions: (1) How do cultural workers experience the interactions with the inmates while implementing cultural projects? (2) How do cultural workers experience the relations with the Prison and Probation Service while planning and implementing cultural projects?

*Method:* Data was gathered from six cultural workers, working in five regional associations, through four surveys and one interview. These were qualitatively analyzed using a thematic approach. The themes found were then interpreted using Goffman's theories on "total institution" and the "dramaturgical self".

*Results:* The results showed how, according to the cultural workers' perspective, their interactions with inmates and their relations with PPS were mostly positive, with the exceptions of few challenges.

*Conclusion:* This study can give insights into the interactions that cultural workers have during the implementation of cultural projects with the inmates and the PPS, which might be helpful in the understanding of challenges and facilitators of the implementation process. Nevertheless, further research is needed.

*Keywords:* cultural projects, cultural workers, Goffman, inmates, NGO, Prison and Probation Service, total institution

*Word count:* 7.367

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# 1. BACKGROUND

Research has shown how the implementation of opportunities in prison might be helpful for the inmates in coping and better deal with the difficult and isolating environment of the penitentiary setting (Miklòsi, 2020). In fact, recently it became common for prisons to offer a series of cultural programs (such as music, art, writing and theatrical projects) that have been proven to have beneficial outcomes on the inmates (Littman et al., 2020). In fact, arts-based projects have been increasingly implemented in prison institutions because of their positive effects on the inmates' mental health and for their fundamental role played in prisoners' rehabilitation (Wilkinson & Caulfield, 2017; Caulfield et al., 2016). Such projects are supposed to be important for their self-esteem and personal growth (O'Keeffe & Albertson, 2016).

In Sweden, prisons are organized by the "Swedish Prison and Probation Service" (PPS) (termed in Sweden as Kriminalvården), which is known to be based on a rehabilitative perspective towards the inmates (Norman et al., 2022).

In the implementation of such cultural programs, of importance is the presence and assistance of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that can complement prisons' activities and objectives (Miklòsi, 2020). Nevertheless, for these external agencies to implement projects in prison can be a difficult task. There are different challenges that one needs to overcome such as inadequate resources or designated areas, arduous administrative procedures but also skepticism by the institution and the inmates (O'Keeffe & Albertson, 2016). Therefore, it is of utmost importance to better understand the experiences of the individuals that implement cultural projects, in order for the inmates to fully enjoy their beneficial effects but also to improve the collaboration between the different actors (cultural workers, inmates and PPS).

This thesis intends to explore how the cultural workers of a Swedish NGO experience the interactions with inmates and the Prison and Probation Service.

## 1.1 Previous research

Within the existing literature, few are the academic studies that research the experiences of cultural workers or NGOs in working in collaboration with Prison and Probation Services while implementing projects for inmates. Reese (2017), explains the difficulties found when implementing an education project, in different prisons in California. He mentions how working in a prison environment means that the project has an uncertain future and how unpredictable events might disrupt the project. He further explains how important it is to have the staff of the prison excited about the activities and how, in their case, although negative at the beginning, the staff became more open to the effective role of the implemented projects (Reese, 2017). Norman (2017) shows the importance of sport projects within the prison environment and how, by using Goffman's theory of "*total institution*", sport activities are used for different objectives by officers and inmates. The latter engage in sports as a way to better deal with the restrictions imposed by the prison and the former implements the activities as another way to control the inmates (Norman, 2017). Norman et al. (2022), through a mixed method approach, managed to understand the challenges and facilitators in the implementation of a parenting project for men and women incarcerated in Swedish prisons. For instance, a fundamental challenge was the limited resources allocated to the project and insufficient support from the Prison and Probation Service. Moreover, the study

reported as facilitator the active commitment of the workers but also of the officers for a successful implementation of the project (Norman et al., 2022).

A large body of literature focuses on the effects that cultural projects might have on the inmates. Different studies use a qualitative approach by interviewing the inmates and the staff about their opinions on their participation in the project (Caulfield et al, 2016; Atherton et al, 2022; Wilkinson & Caulfield, 2017; Mundt et al, 2019) and other used a quantitative method by quantitatively analyzing surveys and questionnaires (Coticchia & Putnam, 2021; Vila Ortega et al, 2020; Gussak, 2007). Littman & Sliva (2020) managed to, in their systematic review of 25 studies, report the different outcomes of prison arts projects on the inmates found in research. For instance, they found that a large proportion of studies presented the effects on inmates' increased self-confidence and motivation or better self-perception. Moreover, a good percentage of studies showed how after the inmates participated in prison programs, they felt better connections to the other participants and a more trusting atmosphere within the institution (Littman & Sliva, 2020).

## **1.2 Problem Discussion and Relevance to the Field of Criminology**

Given the growing role of cultural projects in prisons as methods of rehabilitation and promotion of desistance from crime, studies evaluating their effects have become increasingly common in research. Nevertheless, it is still complicated to understand the specific mechanisms that promote the inmates' rehabilitation (Cheliotis & Jordanoska, 2016). Interviewing the cultural workers that implement such cultural projects, might be helpful to criminologists in exploring their rehabilitative nature and the characteristics that might promote desistance, from the point of view of the professionals that work with the inmates. In addition, the prison environment can make the implementation of cultural projects difficult, because of its secure nature and its power struggles (Mazza, 2008). By documenting the cultural workers' experiences, criminologists can explore the challenges and facilitators of the implementation process of the projects within the Prison and Probation Service. Moreover, as previously mentioned, NGOs are becoming increasingly important within the criminal justice system since they can compensate for the pitfalls of PPS (Miklosi, 2020). Therefore, it is important for the non-governmental organizations, who intend to provide these services, to fully understand the implications that the prison environment and the inmates might have on their work (Mazza, 2008). Ultimately, this might be helpful in the understanding of how the cultural workers perceive the inmates' and staff response to the cultural projects, and how these affect their projects.

## **1.3 "Culture for life": a project by Skådebanan**

Skådebanan is a Swedish non-profit organization that, between 2019 and 2022, created a pilot project named "Culture for Life " which intended to provide cultural projects in different prisons around the country. The organization is divided into the main national office and other eight regional associations that, with the support and fundings from Postkodstiftelsen and the Prison and Probation Service, work with local detention centers to involve inmates in projects with which they can work on and discover their creativity (Sarring, 2022). Each of the eight regions focuses on a specific project offered by professional artists, hereinafter referred to as cultural workers. For instance, in Skåne, at the Kristianstad institution, inmates get the opportunity to participate in a music project where they can arrange and compose their own songs. Whereas, in Västmanland, at the Hinseberg

penitentiary, a writing circle was implemented to improve the writing skills of the participants. Other projects involve painting and art workshops, singing, bibliotherapy and theater. At the basis of these projects, lies the idea that once individuals explore and experience their own creativity and culture, then they can discover new tools to make different choices in their lives (Sarring, 2022).

#### **1.4 Goffman's theories on "total institution" and the "dramaturgical self"**

Goffman presented the concept of "*total institution*" mentioning and describing the different forms that can be found in society such as mental hospitals, monasteries and, in line with this thesis, prisons (Ellis, 2021). These total institutions are characterized by the fact that all the activities that an individual would normally perform in different locations are centralized in one and in close contact with people in similar situations. Moreover, these individuals are separated from the rest of society for a certain period and they must live their lives following the regulations of a specific authoritarian figure, which in the case of the prisons is the staff (Norman, 2017). In addition, all the activities that take place within the prison are carefully scheduled according to a timetable that was created in accordance with the institution's objectives. Another important characteristic of total institutions is that there is a substantial division between the staff and the inmates (Smith, 2006). In fact, according to Goffman (2017), these two worlds are very different from each other. On one side we have the inmates who are isolated from the rest of society and have to live within the institution whereas, on the other side, the staff works on the premises for a certain amount of hours per day and then gets to join the outside community. In addition, between the two groups, separation is made even greater given the stereotypes each feel for the other. For instance, the guards see the inmates as hostile and unreliable while the latter sees the former as patronizing and arrogant.

The theory on "*total institution*" will be an important tool in the analysis of the results because it will allow a better understanding of how cultural workers experienced the implementation of cultural projects in prisons, showing how their perspectives might (or not) challenge this paradigm. Moreover, it will be fundamental in examining the interactions between cultural workers, inmates and Prison and Probation Service, uncovering possible power struggles intrinsic to the nature of total institutions.

Another important concept introduced by Goffman concerns the "*social situations*" and the "*self*", which both became the basis for his strain of research about the connections between individuals (Raab, 2019). Social situations are circumstances where individuals have some sort of intrapersonal exchange and they end when the second to last person leaves. The self is considered to be a version of themselves created within the social situations which does not endure outside of them. To explore these elements, Goffman decided to use the analogy of the theater, its different stages and the "*dramaturgical self*". The actor must and will show a respectable self based on its audience's perceptions, in the "*front stage*" where the performance happens. Whereas in the "*backstage*", the performer is able to rehearse and test the qualities presented in the front, where he can exchange opinions with other actors in the same social situations. Therefore, the self can be seen as having a dual conceptual meaning: on one side we have the real performer and on the other side lies the self rehearsed to please the audience (Raab, 2019). In the prison context, once the inmates enter the institution their identities and characteristics, such as makeup, piercings, and clothes, are taken away with a method that Goffman calls "*mortification of the self*". This gives even more power to the prison over its inmates (Ellis, 2021). For this reason, the inmates create a sort of personal space where they

can cope together with the restrictions imposed by the total institution and it allows them to construct a different role than the one expected by the prison. This is a concept that Goffman calls the “*underlife*” (Norman, 2017).

Goffman’s concepts on “*dramaturgical self*” and the interpersonal exchanges on front and backstage will be fundamental in the study of the different roles played by the actors in the total institutions. In fact, these will be applied in order to explore the cultural workers’ perceptions of the roles played in the interactions by them, inmates and Prison and Probation Service in the implementation of cultural projects.

## **2. AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The aim of the thesis revolves on two main objectives. First, the thesis intends to explore the experiences made by the cultural workers, during the implementation of cultural projects, in the interactions with the inmates. Second, the research aims to better understand the relationships between Prison and Probation Service and the cultural workers, along with any challenges or facilitators that might emerge during the planning and implementation phases of the cultural projects. Therefore, it aims to examine the role of cultural workers in relation to both the inmates and the Prison and Probation Service, through the experiences made during the provision of the cultural projects.

The specific research questions are:

- How do cultural workers experience the interactions with the inmates while implementing cultural projects?
- How do cultural workers experience the relations with the Prison and Probation services while planning and implementing cultural projects?

## **3. METHOD**

The approach used in this thesis is of a qualitative nature, inspired by a phenomenological approach, where data have been collected through interviews and surveys. In the next sections, an explanation on how the data was gathered and analyzed is given.

### **3.1 Participants and procedure**

The participants to this study have been selected because they were the professional artists who between 2019 and 2022, with the Swedish NGO Skådebanan, implemented cultural projects in prisons across Sweden. The study included six cultural workers who were part of five distinctive regional projects (two of which were not part of the original project in 2019, but were created only subsequently), out of a total of eight projects being implemented in Sweden.

In order to gain access to the cultural workers' experiences, a contact has been made with the Chief of the organization who forwarded, both in English and in Swedish, the informational letter (see Appendices A and B) and interview guide (see Appendices C and D). Due to privacy reasons, the Chief of the organization could not divulge their information contacts therefore instructions were provided in the information letter, regarding the procedures for gathering material.

Given possible language barriers, since the cultural workers predominantly spoke Swedish, the author decided to give the participants a choice regarding how to respond to the questions. The cultural workers that felt comfortable expressing themselves in English answered the questions with a short oral interview through Zoom (approximately one hour). The ones who did not feel comfortable in doing an interview, had the possibility to answer the same questions, in a written form in English or in Swedish. Four participants decided to answer the questions in a written form and two (which will count as one "file" in the results section since they worked on the same project) were willing to have the Zoom interview.

### **3.2 Interview guide**

The interview guide used to collect data is divided into five sections focusing on different elements of the cultural workers' job. The first and second sections of the guide focused on background information such as questions about the activities implemented and their previous professional experiences. The third category of questions were related to the experiences of working in collaboration with the Prison and Probation services. The fourth section asked about the interactions between cultural workers and inmates. The fifth section was to conclude the interview guide and to allow the respondents to freely sum up their thoughts.

Part of the interview guide was developed following Goffman's theories. In fact, the sections about Prison and Probation Service and the inmates were refined using as starting points the concept of the prisons as "*total institution*" and by applying the "*dramaturgical self*" notion, especially in relation to the questions about the change of acts over time between inmates, guards and cultural workers.

### **3.3 Method of analysis**

A thematic approach was used to analyze the data collected. In qualitative research, thematic analysis is an important tool used to discern and study the emerging themes or patterns present in the data, in a detailed way (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). This approach allows researchers to carefully analyze each category separately which helps in better understanding the phenomenon at hand (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

The chosen program of analysis was NVivo (Release 1.7.1, March 2023), a software package that helps researchers in automating their qualitative analysis process while elevating it to a more thorough and professional research (AlYahmady & Alabri, 2013).

The analysis was conducted in the following four steps. The first step was the transcription of the interview as well as the translation of the surveys. In fact, three out of the four written answers were in Swedish and therefore needed to be translated into English. This first step is important for the researchers because it allows them to familiarize themselves with the collected data (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018).



The second step that was taken, once the data was uploaded on NVivo and translated, was the coding process. Sentences or words that could be helpful in the deeper understanding of the interactions of cultural workers with inmates and Prison and Probation Service, were inductively coded. This inductive approach to coding, unlike the deductive method, allows the researcher to create codes directly from the data which results in a more descriptive and comprehensive analysis of the material collected (Vaismoradi et al., 2013).

The third step of the analysis consisted in the creation of themes. These are important findings within the data which are directly correlated to the research questions of the study (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). In fact during this process, the codes have been aggregated into two main categories, corresponding to the two research questions: “cultural workers’ interactions with the inmates” and “cultural workers’ relations with Prison and Probation Service”. These were then themselves divided into subcategories containing a number of nodes which were helpful in recognizing patterns of opinions and experiences amongst the participants (see Results and Analysis section).

At this point, it is possible to interpret the correlations between the themes and subthemes found during the coding process (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). In fact, the fourth step consisted in the interpretation and analysis of the themes found, in relation to Goffman’s theories on “total institution” and the “dramaturgical self”, as previously mentioned.

## **4. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The current thesis did not include any sensitive data and therefore it did not require a specific ethical approval. The interviews and surveys were made up of questions to which the participants answered based on their professional opinion and experiences.

Nevertheless, in order to avoid any harm and protect the participants, researchers need to be aware of the different ethical principles that qualitative studies might entail (Orb et al., 2001). Informed consent is an important element of ethical research that researchers need to pay attention to. Through informed consent, participants of the study are thoroughly informed about the content and aims of the research which will allow them to voluntarily decide if they would like to be involved, or not, in the study (Orb et al., 2001). Therefore, in following the Swedish laws on ethical approval, an informational letter (both in Swedish and in English) was sent to all the participants through which the author clearly presented the intentions of the thesis and the guide to participate (Appendix A and B) (Swedish Government, 2003). In addition, it was clearly expressed that their participation was voluntary and they could refrain from the research at any moment up to the final submission, which would mean that the data gained from them prior to the moment of withdrawal would be discarded. The author also mentioned that the thesis would be publicly available on the DiVA portal through Malmö University and that they would personally receive a copy. Given the fact that contact with the participants was not direct, consent was given by the participants’ answers to the survey.

Given the power struggles between inmates, cultural workers and Prison and Probation Service, it is important to minimize risks of harm to all of the actors. Therefore, a second important ethical issue is confidentiality and privacy. Researchers need to handle the data, throughout the different steps of the study, in a way that does not undermine the respondents’ personal and sensitive data (Kaiser, 2009).

Therefore, in relation to this study, the participants have been informed that no personal information or sensitive data would be collected nor used in the research. Furthermore, the results of the interviews and surveys have been reported anonymously, by using numbers assigned to each of the data collected, and with attention to any detail that could potentially identify the participants or third persons.

In addition, the information letters were followed by the questions created for the survey/interviews for the participants to know its content beforehand. This was done so that the participants could ponder whether they were interested in participating or not but also for them to decide whether they could handle an English interview with the author or if they preferred to answer in Swedish in a written form.

## **5. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS**

This chapter will be divided following the two research questions. In fact, the first section will present the results concerning the interactions between cultural workers and the inmates, whereas in the second one there will be presented the most important answers in regard to the relations with the PPS. The results presented here are based on the perceptions of the cultural workers on their own experiences.

As previously mentioned, the results of the analysis will be interpreted using Goffman's theories.

### **5.1 Cultural workers' interactions with the inmates**

According to the themes found and their interpretation, one can generally argue that the cultural workers experienced the interactions with the inmates in a positive way, with the exception of a few challenges noted by the participants. In fact, the analysis of the data found a number of issues that might have contributed to their interactions. These can be summed up in these categories: perceived positive impacts of the project on the inmates, inmates' personal development, positive relations established with each other, challenges working with the inmates and importance of projects as social gatherings. *Table 1* presents the themes found in relation to the questions about inmates, the number of files where the theme was found and their frequencies, which are able to further support their relevance within the data.

Table 1: Themes found when analyzing answers in the “inmates” category

Themes	Files*	Frequency of references
Perceived positive impact of projects	5	22
Personal development	4	9
Positive relations	5	13
Challenges of working with inmates	2	5
Projects as social gatherings	3	4

\*Number of files where the theme was found (out of 5)

**Perceived positive impact of projects.** All participants acknowledged the different positive effects that these projects have on the inmates. Two of the respondents mentioned how participating in the arts-based projects they were implementing, would help the self-confidence of the participants. The respondents also noticed the positive moods the inmates were in when doing the projects. According to the cultural workers they could see how much focus the inmates were putting into their tasks and how, session after session, they seemed happier and more curious. In addition, one respondent mentioned how their clients were not only happy because they could get out of their cells but also because they “*are calmer and feel better*” (Survey 4).

**Personal development.** Three respondents mentioned how they noticed and they have been told that, by participating in the activities, the inmates underwent a series of developments. For instance, by taking part in a writing course, the cultural worker could see how the writing skills and language of the inmates got better over time and, close to the end, how they would “*dare to write more personally*” (Survey 1). The inmates themselves even responded to an evaluation that “*they had grown as people*”. Through writing, the clients were able to critically think about their lives and their ambitions. The images that the inmates drew became more expressive and full of feelings.

One could argue that the first two themes, about how cultural workers recognized personal development and the positive impacts of the projects on the inmates, might challenge Goffman’s concept of prisons as “*total institutions*”. In fact, these interactions that the respondents had with the inmates might suggest that prisons cannot be considered anymore exclusively as institutions where inmates spend their time excluded from society but instead, prisons can now be seen as places where, through cultural projects, inmates can personally grow as individuals and work on themselves.

**Positive relations.** Another element that contributed to the interaction was their positive relationships. The cultural workers mentioned how their exchanges were always “*smooth*” (Interview 1) with mutual respect, trust, and equality. Few participants recognized how the inmates opened gradually over time. The atmosphere in the room was always pleasant and they were able to joke and banter with each other. One cultural worker also noted how the

inmates felt that they could talk freely and in fact, they established a friendly relationship. On the same line of thinking, a second respondent expressed the impression that the inmates needed someone that would listen to their thoughts and about their lives. They managed to open with the worker about topics that they have never told anyone.

In regard to this and following the “*dramaturgical self*” concept, one can argue that cultural workers present themselves, on the front stage, in the role of supporters who intend to help the inmates through a difficult moment of their lives. This allows to have a relationship based on mutual trust which, in return, favors the inmates in playing a different role of what is expected by the total institution of the prison. A role that is usually performed in the backstage, where the actors are able to openly express themselves, without suppressing their feelings or identities.

***Challenges of working with the inmates.*** A category of codes was found in relation to possible challenges in working with the inmates. A cultural worker found it difficult to work with big groups of clients because it caused a lack of control over the situations. In addition, another respondent observed how often the exercises proposed were too hard for some inmates to work on therefore they had to be changed with less difficult ones. The cultural workers also recognized how the activities could change suddenly depending on the moods of the inmates, so they had to be more spontaneous in regard to finding appropriate activities. Arguably, the tailored experiences that the cultural workers have offered the inmates might be in line with Goffman’s ideas on social situations. In fact, according to the inmate’s expectations and attitudes, the cultural workers are able to modify their acts in order for the participants to fully enjoy the beneficial impacts of the cultural projects. This might further suggest how the frontstage of the cultural workers changes continuously, along with their experiences and lessons learned.

***Projects as social gathering.*** Cultural workers pointed out how such cultural projects are important as social gatherings. In fact, in a variety of activities the inmates were asked to talk about their thoughts and opinions so that they could discuss and work together. According to one cultural worker, some participants decided to join the projects also to meet new people and connect with the other residents of the institution who might share the same passions. One can argue that the cultural workers, their projects and their interactions might allow the inmates to create their own “*underlife*” based on creativity and similar enthusiasm over a shared passion. Following Goffman’s concept, this underlife rooted in constructive relations, and facilitated by the interactions with the cultural workers, might be important in coping with the restrictions imposed by the total institution.

## **5.2 Cultural workers’ relations with PPS**

In answering the second research question, we can say that both challenges and facilitators have been found in terms of how the cultural workers experienced the relations with the PPS. *Table 2* shows the five themes discerned from the surveys, with their frequencies and files.

Table 2: Themes found when analyzing answers in the “Prison and Probation Service” category

Themes	Files*	Frequency of references
Challenges with prison settings	4	14
Difficult attitudes of guards	2	5
Positive cooperation with prison staff	4	8
PPS’s positive feedback on projects	4	7
Relations between prison staff, inmates and workers	3	4

\*Number of files where the theme was found (out of 5)

**Challenges with prison settings.** Practical challenges of implementing cultural projects within the Prison and Probation Services have been found throughout the answers. Challenges concerning the arduous security procedures of the prisons, the final decision of detention centers who can disrupt the projects for any reason or the sometimes difficult communication between cultural workers and PPS, might be in line with Goffman’s concept of “total institution”. In fact, this perception of cultural workers might highlight the image of prisons as institutions with their own regulations and with their own power hierarchy. Therefore, for cultural workers it is important to present themselves as collaborative actors, who understand their position in the distribution of power.

**Difficult attitude of guards.** Cultural workers mentioned how, in some instances, they could notice difficult attitudes from the guards. In fact, from their point of view, some guards were sometimes “frustrated” (Interview 1) because to allow the inmates to participate was a double job for them. Additionally, a cultural worker explained how nowadays guards often work under pressure, with many inmates and not so many resources. Another respondent shared the same feelings, saying how he felt that some of them might have been “disturbed” (Survey 3) by the fact that they had to make time within the schedule for these sessions. Arguably, this might be in accordance with the vision of the prison as a total institution. In fact, following Goffman’s ideas, to add the cultural projects within the strict timetable of the prison might be difficult if the cultural projects are not seen as their main priority.

**Positive cooperation with the PPS.** In the collected data, there was also positive feedback about the collaboration with the Prison and Probation Services. The cultural workers mentioned how the staff of the Prison and Probation Service were really welcoming, helpful and happy for their presence. The guards seemed to enjoy the projects and treated them in a good manner. In addition to this, one can also say that if the cultural workers were able to provide these services to the inmates, it is because of the Prison and Probation Service that allowed their presence within the premises and in their schedules. Besides, as mentioned before, the PPS, along with Postkodstiftelsen, funded different projects which also proves their appreciative attitudes towards the projects.

*PPS's positive feedback on projects.* Another important pattern found was about the positive feedback of the Prison and Probation Service to the projects. In fact, the participants mentioned how the guards were often impressed and happy about the projects. They saw a positive change in the inmates while they were part of the project and in some cases, their relationship even got stronger. Overall, the cultural workers recognized how the staff of different institutions saw a potential for these projects in helping the inmates.

The positive cooperation with the PPS and their supportive feedback might suggest that the prison environment is not as sealed off as a “*total institution*” should be. Guards and cultural workers show a cooperative frontstage together which makes the stage, in this case the prison environment, a more constructive and beneficial one.

*Relations between prison staff, inmates and cultural workers.* The last theme was interesting because it gathered the opinions of the cultural workers on the relationships between guards and inmates and the differences in attitude when compared with the relations between guards/inmates and themselves. An important finding here is about the fact that, according to the cultural workers, the inmates were probably more open and friendly with them than with the guards because the cultural workers did not have any form of authority and because they are part of the society that the inmates hope to go back to. Ultimately, these factors had a positive impact on their connections with the prisoners who were more relaxed and open. This shows how, according to the participants, the roles of guards and cultural workers are perceived as being different from each other. As a consequence, the inmates will show distinctive front stages depending on the attitudes, expectations and roles of their counterparts within the social exchange.

As perceived by two cultural workers, these projects helped, in some instances, to rekindle the connections between guards and inmates. One can argue that the stereotypes that Goffman refers to when talking about the division between inmates and guards (2017), can be overcome in the implementation of cultural projects.

In addition, a cultural worker recognized how in some cases inmates feel like they must create “*facades*” (Survey 5) with each other and therefore it is important for the cultural workers to show that the inmates can open with them. This might suggest that while inmates might create a distinctive front stage role in the relations with other prisoners, cultural workers can connect with their backstage “*self*” allowing the inmates to enjoy genuine interactions where “*their shield breaks*” (Survey 5).

## **6. DISCUSSION**

Through the analysis of the results, we managed to better understand the cultural workers' perceptions of their interactions with the inmates and the Prison and Probation Service. In fact, we managed to understand and analyze, through Goffman's theories, how cultural workers perceived their interactions with inmates and the relations with the PPS as mostly positive, with the exceptions of a few challenges. For some extent, their perceptions added different dynamics between these three actors to the idea of prisons as “*total institutions*” but reinforced the concept of the “*dramaturgical self*”, viewing the power struggles and roles played within the prison environment.

In these sections we will try to understand: how our findings relate or differ from previous research, the strengths and weaknesses of the chosen method, limitations of the study and suggestions for future research.

## 6.1 Results

*Interaction between cultural workers and inmates.* Findings about the cultural workers' perceptions of their interactions with inmates, indicate how cultural workers acknowledge the positive impacts of the cultural projects and the positive relations built during them. The results might further suggest that the supportive role played by the cultural workers, in the implementation of their projects, can allow the inmates to show them their backstage roles. In fact, this seems to empower inmates to freely open about their thoughts and past experiences with the cultural workers. Furthermore, as a challenge to the implementation of cultural projects, the results might demonstrate how the front acts of cultural workers need to be susceptible to continuous changes based on their audience's moods and attitudes. In addition, we saw how, according to the cultural workers, these projects are important as social activities which, one might argue, can help inmates in creating an "*underlife*" based on creativity.

It can be argued that the analysis done using Goffman's theories on the "*dramaturgical self*" and "*total institution*", might be able to give more insights on how the roles of cultural workers and inmates intersect with one another, possibly giving new nuances to these approaches.

Research on the specific interactions between cultural workers and inmates is limited, therefore to discuss the findings in relation to previous research, studies in similar fields and with similar participants have been chosen.

For instance, Mazza (2008) in his study on social work in prisons, might give interesting insights in relation to the positive interactions between cultural workers and inmates and the perceived differences between relations concerning guards and inmates. In fact, as reported by the author, differently from the role played by the guards, social workers are not paid to rule over the inmates but instead, they are there, on their own accord, to support them, without constraints, in this difficult moment of their life. Therefore, this perception of the cultural workers as "*professional and outsider*" is fundamental in allowing them to have a more trusting connection with the inmates (Mazza, 2008; 258). Therefore, it can be said that Mazza's findings are in line with the results of the present study.

In relation to the challenges of working with the inmates, reported by the cultural workers, Dennard et al. (2021), although with a different group of participants, found similar results. In their qualitative study about the experiences of several prison workers (including officers, nurses and educators running vocational services), they documented how, according to the participants, working in such an uncertain environment, susceptible to changes and depending on the attitudes of the inmates, can be challenging (Dennard et al., 2021).

*Relations between cultural workers and Prison and Probation Service.* For what it concerns the answers about the relations with the Prison and Probation Services, the cultural workers expressed their interpretation on facilitators and challenges found while working within the prison grounds and rules. These answers are fundamental because they allow not only to understand the obstacles of working in such environments, but they can also be

helpful in understanding how cultural workers and PPS collaborate with each other in order to implement the cultural projects.

It has been mentioned how some of the findings of this specific theme are, to some extent, in line with the vision of prisons as “total institutions”. Specifically, the results suggested that the cultural workers found different challenges in the implementation of the cultural projects, given by the security regulations and the power of the prison institutions. Also reported by Mazza (2008), security is of utmost importance. In fact, the author mentions how the social worker, being an individual that does not belong within the prison, must go through a certain amount of security scrutiny which ultimately underlines the power struggle that the prison has within its premises (Mazza, 2008). This concept of power, presented also by Goffman, can be similarly seen in our findings in relation to how the Prison and Probation Service is able to suddenly stop the implementation of these projects. Mazza (2008) explains how these elements demonstrate how much power the prisons have not only on inmates but also on those who access the institution, which in the case of this study are the cultural workers and their organizations. Few respondents have also mentioned how, from their perspective, some officers were frustrated because implementing the project was double work for them. On this matter, recent studies have shown how the prison environment can have negative effects not only on inmates but also on guards and their mental health. Prisons present different challenges such as overpopulation of inmates, poor investments and insufficient staff which play a detrimental role in the guards’ well-being. Therefore, a lot of them might feel stressed and have burnout symptoms (Dennard et al, 2021) which, arguably, might have consequences on their relations with the cultural workers.

Cultural workers also mentioned the positive feedback and relations they had with the guards, which to some extent might challenge the idea of the prison as a total institution. According to Ellis (2021), Goffman’s paradigm has different shortcomings which show how prisons cannot be seen anymore as institutions that are completely isolated from society. To prove this point, the author mentions how the guards leave the prison everyday after their shifts or also the fact that families and acquaintances of the inmates are allowed to visit and contact them on a weekly basis (Ellis, 2021). In addition to this and in line with the results of this thesis, we have now seen how cultural workers are also allowed within the premises of the prison and they do bring influences from the “outside society”, which inevitably makes the institution “less total” than how Goffman theorized it to be.

In addition, the positive feedback of the Prison and Probation Service in relation to the cultural projects, can be seen as fundamentally important in the relations with the cultural workers. In fact, as discussed by Miklosi (2020), it is essential that NGOs and the PPS are able to collaborate together to “*reach positive goals*” (Miklosi, 2020; 130).

## 6.2 Method

Qualitative methods are important tools that allow us to research individuals’ insights and opinions on particular thematics (Miner-Romanoff, 2012).

In the Criminology field, quantitative methods are more commonly used. Nevertheless, qualitative approaches are becoming fundamental in order to complement and add to the statistical data (Miner-Romanoff, 2012). Qualitative methods are also fundamental in the in-depth understanding of a given phenomenon, from the point of view of those living it (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). In addition, it can be said that this study is inspired by the phenomenological approach allowing a better understanding of the experiences of individuals



(Dukes, 1984). This technique enables researchers to delve deep into “*participants’ detailed subjective experiences*”, from which insightful implications can be drawn and studied (Miner-Romanoff, 2012; 7).

A fundamental strength of using the qualitative method is that researchers are able to investigate a phenomenon, from the subjective and interpretative point of view of the participants (Ikeyi, 2021). Therefore, researchers are able to better understand social contexts, their meanings and how they operate (Mason, 2002).

Nevertheless, this approach has its challenges. For instance, when interpreting the data, it is important that the researchers are able to carefully explain how they defined a finding, but without making it an indisputable truth (Mason, 2002).

### **6.3 Limitations and further research**

Having presented the results and discussion of this thesis, it is important to acknowledge its limitations and the future research needed.

An important issue of this thesis concerns the language barriers between the author and the respondents. As mentioned earlier, the original idea was to have oral interviews, thus the creation of the interview guide. After talking to the Chief of the organization, it was soon accepted the fact that not many cultural workers would have felt comfortable expressing themselves in English. Therefore, an important limitation is that the research could have had three more respondents from other regional projects, but they may have resigned from participating due to possible language issues. In addition, findings could have been influenced by possible misinterpretations caused by language barriers. The surveys have been translated from Swedish to English and therefore nuances given by the language, might have been lost in this process. Therefore for future studies, researchers might want to have the language competencies, either their own or through professional translators, which will be helpful in the analysis of the results.

Another limitation concerned the fact that, amongst the cultural workers who participated in this study, two were not part of the original projects, when they were created. For this factor, the cultural workers might have given slightly different answers in comparison to the ones who were there when the projects started, especially in regard to the questions about the relations, and their establishments, with the Prison and Probation Service.

Furthermore, in the discussion about the results of the study, the difficulties in finding previous research on the matter were mentioned. Therefore, future research should strive to further engage in this field of studies to better understand interactions and relations of cultural workers with inmates and prisons.

In addition, future research might want to include the professional opinions of the Prison and Probation Service’s staff and of the inmates to give a more comprehensive vision of the implementation of such projects. This might allow us to draw conclusions based on the point of view of the clients of such projects, of the non-governmental organization but also from the point of view of the people that daily work within the system. Nevertheless, as it transpires from the thesis, it is known how difficult and time consuming it is to have access to the prison's premises to establish contact both with the inmates and with the guards.

Therefore, it is fundamental for researchers to carefully plan their studies in the interests of all the parties involved and with a focus on ethics (Roberts & Indermaur, 2008).

## **7. CONCLUSION**

Throughout the thesis we have been able to better understand the experiences of cultural workers in the implementation of cultural projects in prisons. By adopting a thematic analysis of the answers to surveys and by applying Goffman's theories on total institution and the dramaturgical self, we analyzed the answers and we located them within the bigger picture of previous literature on the matter.

The insight into the relations between the different actors involved in the implementation of cultural projects in prison, from the viewpoint of the cultural workers, can be fundamental in the Criminological field. By understanding the roles of each of the actors involved, criminologists can study not only the importance of cultural projects but also the challenges and facilitators of their implementation in the prison environment. This research might be helpful in the understanding and improvement of the implementation process of such cultural projects.

In conclusion, we can say that working within prisons as an "outsider" has its difficulties, given the intrinsic nature of such institutions. We have seen how, from the perspectives of the cultural workers, the inmates seem to enjoy participating in projects and are able to connect on a certain level with the workers. The prison setting and how it is regulated appears to be somewhat of a challenge for the implementation of these programs. Nevertheless, we managed to understand how a positive cooperation with the Prison and Probation Service is possible, with many guards acknowledging the positive impacts that projects have on the inmates.

However, there is a need to further research the perspectives of the cultural workers on the interactions and relations with inmates and Prison and Probation Service, in order for the inmates to be able to, thoroughly and continuously, participate in such projects and get access to their positive effects.

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# **APPENDIX A**

## **INFORMATION LETTER AND INSTRUCTION (English)**

My name is Noemi Edirisinghe Arachchige, and I am an international student from Milan, Italy doing a master's degree thesis in Criminology at Malmö University.

I'm contacting you since you have experience as a cultural worker in the project "Kultur för Livet". I find Skådebanan's work within the Prison and Probation services important, and my thesis intends to explore the experiences you and your colleagues have made during the project. Specifically, experiences made in relation to inmates and the Prison and Probation services before, during, and after the project.

I wish to make a brief interview with you. For content, see attached document. Due to language reasons, this interview could be done in two ways depending on how comfortable you are in English.

1. If you consider that an interview in English feels comfortable for you, the interview could be done orally as a brief, approximately 60 minutes online (Zoom) interview that will be recorded. The interview will be in English, but you will be able to express certain issues in Swedish. In this case, I would appreciate it if before March 20th you can contact me by email or phone (see below) so that we can schedule an interview time as soon as possible.
2. If you consider that an interview in English doesn't feel comfortable for you, the same interview could also be done in the format of a Swedish survey. In this case, you answer the attached questions in writing, whereupon you email me your answers no later than the 29th of March.

In both cases, and given possible language barriers, you might receive a couple of follow-up questions through email, for me to better understand the answers you gave during the interviews.

No personally sensitive information will be collected nor presented in my thesis. Participation in this research is completely voluntary. Up until the time point when the thesis should be submitted for examination, you will be able to withdraw from the study at any point, which will mean that the data gathered from your answers will be discarded. Once it's graded, the thesis will be publicly available through the DiVA Portal at Malmö University. In addition, I will personally send you a copy.

Please, contact me by email ([Noemi.edi@gmail.com](mailto:Noemi.edi@gmail.com)) or phone (xxx-xxx xx xx) to inform me whether you are willing to take part in the interview, and which of the above two alternatives you prefer for the interview.

Looking forward to knowing more about your work and the project!

## **APPENDIX B**

### **INFORMATION LETTER AND INSTRUCTIONS (Swedish)**

Mitt namn är Noemi Edirisinghe Arachchige och jag är en internationell student från Milano, Italien som gör en magister uppsats i kriminologi vid Malmö universitet.

Jag kontaktar dig då du har erfarenhet som kulturarbetare i projektet "Kultur för Livet". Min uppfattning är att Skådebanans arbete inom Kriminalvården är viktigt och därför önskar jag i mitt examensarbete utforska de erfarenheter du och dina kollegor har gjort under projektiden.

Min förhoppning är att kunna genomföra göra en kort intervju med dig. Intervjuns innehåll bifogas med denna information. På grund av att jag själv har begränsningar avseende svenska kan intervjun göras på följande två alternativa sätt beroende på hur bekväm du är i engelska:

1. Om du anser att en intervju på engelska känns bekväm för dig, föreslår jag en kort muntlig intervju (ca 60 minuter) som spelas in via Zoom. I detta fall kommer intervjun huvudsakligen att hållas på engelska, men du har möjlighet att lämna enstaka svar på svenska. Jag uppskattar om du innan den 20 mars kan kontakta mig via epost eller telefon, se nedan, så att vi kan schemalägga en intervjutid så snart som möjligt.
2. Om du anser att en intervju på engelska inte känns bekväm för dig, föreslår jag att du medverkar genom att besvara bifogade frågor skriftligen på svenska eller engelska, du väljer själv utifrån vad som passar bäst. När du har besvarat frågorna ber jag dig att skicka dina svar till mig via epost (se nedan) senast den 29 mars.

I båda fallen, och med tanke på eventuella språkbarriärer, kan det hända att du få ett par följdfrågor via e-post, detta så att jag bättre förstår svaren du har lämnat.

Ingen personligt känslig information kommer att samlas in eller presenteras i min uppsats. Deltagande är helt frivilligt och du kommer att kunna dra dig ur studien när som helst fram till dess att uppsatsen lämnas in. Om du väljer att återta din medverkan efter att du besvarat frågorna kommer dina svar inte att användas i uppsatsarbetet. När uppsatsen är betygsatt kommer uppsatsen att finnas allmänt tillgänglig via DiVA-portalerna vid Malmö högskola. Jag kommer personligen att skicka en kopia till dig.



Vänligen kontakta mig via e-post (Noemi.edi@gmail.com) eller telefon (xxx-xxx xx xx) för att meddela mig om du är villig att delta i intervjun respektive vilket av ovanstående två alternativ du föredrar för intervjun.

Ser fram emot att få veta mer om ditt arbete och projektet!

# APPENDIX C

## INTERVIEW GUIDE (English)

### 1. PROJECT

- **1.1. Before:** Could you briefly explain the background, content, and activities that you planned for the present project, including where and how it was going to be implemented within the Prison and Probation Services? Were there any challenges you had to face while planning the project?
- **1.2. During:** Could you tell me when the project started, for how long it was running, and possibly if it is still running? What do you think could have been improved?
- **1.3. Future:** How will the work continue and what are your plans? How do you see the role of cultural projects in the future?

### 2. SKÅDEBANAN STAFF

- **2.1. Before:** What is your professional background? Did you have any experience working in a similar setting and/or with inmates? What were your expectations, and how did you prepare yourself for this type of work?
- **2.2. During:** What was your general experience of doing this project? Was it different from what you initially expected? What was different compared to how you usually act?
- **2.3. Future:** What is your thought about the future, and will you in some way continue this work? Based on your experiences, do you have recommendations for others that are thinking about doing similar work?

### 3. PRISON AND PROBATIONS SERVICE

- **3.1. Before:** From your perspective, how was the collaboration established and what were their expectations before starting the project? How did they act?
- **3.2. During:** From your perspective, how was the collaboration with the prison while running the project? Were they helpful in the implementation of the project? Do you think that the project had an impact on the staff involved? How?  
Do you believe the staff acted differently with you and with the colleagues/inmates? Did their actions change over time?
- **3.3 Future:** In your way of thinking, has the project altered the perspective of prison and probation services? Based on your experiences, do you have recommendations for others that possibly are thinking about a collaboration with the prison and probation services?

#### **4. INMATES**

- **4.1. Before:** How did you establish contact with inmates, and how did you initially look at their expectations of the project? How did they act?
- **4.2. During:** How were your interactions with them? How was the project received by the inmates? Who decided to participate and who did not, and for what reasons? What impact do you see the project and participation has on the inmates?

Did their act change over time? Do you believe the inmates acted differently with you and with other inmates/prison staff (frontstage and backstage)?

- **4.3. Future:** In your opinion, what short-term and long-term impact do you think that culture has on inmates? Based on your experiences, do you have recommendations for others that possibly are thinking about doing cultural work with inmates?

#### **5. CONCLUDING REMARKS**

- **5.1.** Is there anything more you would like to add in relation to your experiences in planning, implementing, and future directions of the cultural projects in the Prison and Probation services?

# APPENDIX D

## INTERVIEW GUIDE (Swedish)

FRÅGEFORMULÄR (på svenska)

### Instruktion

Nedan finner du ett antal numrerade frågeområden och frågor som jag ber dig besvara. Lämna dina svar skriftligen i ett separat dokument och var noga med att numrera dina svar enligt detta frågeformulär. Vid eventuella frågor är du välkommen att kontakta mig. När du är klar ber jag dig skicka dina svar till mig via epost.

Tack på förhand.

### 1. PROJEKTET

- **1.1. Planering:** Kan du kortfattat förklara bakgrund och innehåll för de aktiviteter som du planerades för projektet, inklusive var och hur projektet skulle genomföras inom kriminalvården? Fanns det några särskilda utmaningar som du var tvungen att bemöta i planeringen av projektet?
- **1.2. Genomförande:** Kan du berätta när projektet startade, hur länge det pågick, och eventuellt om det fortfarande pågår? Vad tycker du kunde ha förbättrats?
- **1.3. Framtid:** Hur kommer arbetet att fortsätta och vilka är era planer? Hur ser du på kulturprojektens roll i framtiden?

### 2. KULTURARBETAREN

- **2.1. Planering:** Vilken är din yrkesmässiga bakgrund inklusive bakgrund kulturarbete? Har du någon erfarenhet av att arbeta i en liknande miljö och/eller med liknande populationer? Vilka var dina förväntningar och hur förberedde du dig för denna typ av arbete?
- **2.2. Genomförande:** Vad är dina viktigaste erfarenhet från att genomföra projektet? Blev det annorlunda än vad du ursprungligen förväntade dig? Vad var annorlunda jämfört med hur du brukar agera?
- **2.3. Framtid:** Vad har du för tankar om framtiden, och kommer du på något sätt att fortsätta detta arbete? Har du utifrån dina erfarenheter några rekommendationer till andra kulturarbetare som funderar på att göra liknande arbete?

### 3. KRIMINALVÅRDEN

- **3.1. Planering:** Utifrån ditt perspektiv och vad du har sett, hur etablerades ett samarbete och hur ser du på Kriminalvårdens förväntningar innan projektet inleddes? Hur agerade de?
- **3.2. Genomförande:** Utifrån ditt perspektiv, hur var samarbetet med Kriminalvården när projektet pågick? Var de behjälpliga vid genomförandet av projektet? Hur tror du att projektet påverkade den inblandade personalen?  
I förhållande till projektet, finns det anledning att tro att Kriminalvården agerade annorlunda gentemot dig respektive gentemot kollegor och fångar?
- **3.3. Framtid:** Utifrån din erfarenhet, på vilket sätt tror du att projektet har medfört någon form av förändring avseende Kriminalvårdens arbete? Har du några rekommendationer till andra som eventuellt funderar på att samarbeta med Kriminalvården i framtiden?

#### 4. INTERNERNA

- **4.1. Planering:** Kan du beskriva dina erfarenheter av att etablera kontakt med de intagna. Hur uppfattade du deras förväntningar på projektet respektive hur tolkar du deras ageranden?
- **4.2. Genomförande:** Hur såg din interaktion ut med internerna under projekttiden? Hur mottogs projektet? Vilka interner uppfattar du bestämde sig för att delta respektive vilka bestämde sig för att inte delta, och av vilka skäl? Vilken inverkan uppfattar du att projektet hade på de som medverkade i projektet respektive inte medverkade i projektet?  
Uppfattar du att deltagarnas agerande förändrades över tid? Tror du att de du mötte i projektet agerade på ett annorlunda sätt mot dig i jämförelse med hur de agerade mot andra interner och anställda?
- **4.3. Framtid:** Vilka kortsiktiga respektive långsiktiga effekter tror du att kultur har på fångarna? Utifrån dina erfarenheter, har du några rekommendationer till andra som eventuellt funderar på att göra kulturarbete med intagna?

#### 5. ÖVRIGT

- **5.1.** Finns det något mer du skulle vilja tillägga om dina erfarenheter av planering, genomförande och framtida inriktning av kulturprojekt inom kriminalvården?

## **APPENDIX E**

### **SHORT SURVEY (English)**

#### **BEFORE**

1.1 Could you briefly explain the background, content, and activities that you planned for the present project, including where and how it was going to be implemented within the Prison and Probation Services? Can you also describe if there were any challenges you had to face while planning the project?

#### **DURING**

2.1 Can you briefly describe how the project was viewed by the Prison and Probation Service? Please tell us about how the cooperation worked, whether the Prison and Probation Service was helpful during the project period, whether you saw the Prison and Probation Service's actions change over time, and whether you feel that the Prison and Probation Service's staff acted differently towards you compared to how they act towards colleagues and inmates.

2.2 In your opinion, how was the project received by the inmates? Please tell us about the impact you saw the project having on the inmates, if you saw the participants' behavior change over time, and if you perceived that the people you met in the project acted in a different way towards you compared to how they usually act towards other inmates and the staff.

#### **FUTURE**

3.1 Finally, I ask you to briefly reflect on what effect you think culture can have on prisoners in the short and long term, and what role you think cultural projects can have, in the future, within the Prison and Probation Service.

# APPENDIX F

## SHORT SURVEY (Swedish)

### PLANERING

1.1 Kan du kortfattat berätta om projektets bakgrund, vilka aktiviteter som planerades, samt hur dessa skulle genomföras inom Kriminalvården? Berätta gärna också om det fanns några utmaningar under planeringsarbetet?

### GENOMFÖRANDE

2.1 Kan du kortfattat berätta om hur projektet mottogs av Kriminalvården? Berätta gärna om hur samarbetet fungerade, om Kriminalvården var behjälpliga under projektiden, om du såg att Kriminalvårdens agerande förändrades över tid, samt om du uppfattar att Kriminalvårdens personal agerade annorlunda mot dig jämfört med hur man vanligtvis agerar gentomot kollegor respektive de intagna.

2.2 Kan du kortfattat berätta om hur du uppfattar att projektet mottogs av de intagna? Berätta gärna om den inverkan du eventuellt såg att projektet hade på de intagna, om du såg att deltagarnas agerande förändrades över tid, samt om du uppfattar att de du mötte i projektet agerade på ett annorlunda sätt mot dig jämfört med hur de vanligtvis agerar mot andra interner och anställda.

### FRAMTID

3.1 Avslutningsvis ber jag dig kortfattat reflektera över vilken effekt du uppfattar att kultur kan ha för fångarna på kort respektive lång sikt, samt vilken roll du uppfattar att kulturprojekt i framtiden kan ha inom Kriminalvården.