

Sociodrama in Finland – an environmental context
(from book *Sociodrama in a Changing World*)
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Sociodrama Developments in Finland

The first psychodrama experiences in Finland took place in the 1960s; however, sociodrama became more familiar when Zerka T. Moreno taught her first Finnish course in Kuopio in 1977. Immediately following that, she started with Merlyn Pitzele the Beacon training programme in Finland which ended in 1983. With her guidance, sociodramatic families and work places were created and sociodramatic roles studied. In 1979, a group of 22 Finnish enthusiasts visited Beacon for a week and familiarized themselves with sociometry and playback theatre as well. In 1983, the first Finnish psychodrama directors had taken their practicum exam and then graduated, including: Kaija Kaalamo, Pirkko Hurme, Gyrit Hagman and Riitta Hillos-Vuorinen, who also became the first Finnish TEP in 1992. Besides training, Riitta developed sociodrama especially in familial and educational context and used stories as a starting point in public sociodrama sessions. Later, sociodrama was applied in Finnish prisons, and in occupational peer groups. Bibliodrama came to Finland from Germany in the 1980s. Zerka Moreno's last workshop in Finland was in the summer of 1988.

In 1985, societal sociodrama was introduced, during the first visit of Marcia Karp and Ken Sprague; Finnish sociodrama expanded to include ethical and political themes. When Marti Lindqvist graduated from the Holwell programme in Finland in the late 1980s, he used sociodrama in his lectures on social ethics and on the ethics of health care at Helsinki and Tampere Universities. He was particularly concerned with equality and the rights of minorities such as refugees, mental patients, sexual minorities and people whose lives had changed because of HIV. He developed a training programme on sociodrama, wrote about the topic (Lindqvist, 1994, 2005) and held regular sociodrama groups until his early death in 2004.

Many Finnish psychodramatists have travelled and exchanged ideas with others around the world. Foreign sociodrama trainers have visited Finland repeatedly, among them Warren Parry and Anthony Williams from Australia, David Swink and Peter Pitzele from the USA, Ella Mae Shearon from Germany and Mario Buchbinder from Argentina. A strong playback theatre tradition emerged when Deborah Pearson came from Australia in 1990 and, later, Jonathon Fox from the USA.

In the 1990s and 2000s, training has diversified to include, for example, sociodrama where acts follow each other on consecutive days or during long training programmes. Also, at times, archetypal sociodrama based on the Finnish national epic *Kalevala*, with its traditional poems of ancient heroes, has been used on training courses at Moreno-conferences, of which the association of Finnish psychodrama trainers (MOPSI) has been an active generator. Finnish trainers and directors have also collaborated to publish psychodrama books in Finnish to complement the international literature (Niemisto, 1999; Janhunen & Sura, 2005; Aitolehti & Silvola, 2008).

Throughout the 1990s, the use of sociodrama expanded in Finland to address organizational questions and training, in private firms, the civil service, NGOs and the church. Today it is used in relation to development, coaching individuals, and training people in new fields of work. Sociodramatic tools are applied to sociology in big corporations and to occupational, educational or communicational contexts. It is also used for personal development and therapeutic purposes.

A topic of special interest has been the environment. Here are three examples of my own practical work in the environmental context since the 1990s, plus a section of suggestions for those who may be interested in such work themselves.

SOCIODRAMA IN AN ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT

1. Workshops for environmental administration

A series of two-and-a-half day residential workshops were held for professionals working in environmental administration; the aim was to support the staff in their daily work. Separate workshops focused on different areas of diffuse pollution in water protection; agriculture, forestry and the peat industry. The participants were mostly men and included technical people, naturalists and lawyers with varying amounts of experience. They came from all around the country and did not know each other well beforehand. Because work with Morenian tools is always voluntary, a short description of the methods to be used was included in the workshop brochure.

The themes, participants and location of the workshops changed according to the focus area. The director needed to be both strict and accepting in order to create trust and to keep the group on theme. Methods and timetables were modified freely during the workshops. In order to exchange tacit knowledge (Nonaka, 1995) among the participants, their own conceptions of their work were explored. A common mental model (Senge, 1990) of their work and operational environment was elaborated upon by using a 'relatiometric' symbol-work approach, inspired by Moreno's sociometry (Partanen-Hertell 2002, 2009b & c; Moreno, 1953). In addition, their ability to understand and interact with interest groups, like farmers, town managers, conservationists and industrialists, was enhanced by sociodrama (Moreno, 1985). New operational models and the needs of the staff for knowledge were explored. Expert lessons on environmental issues alternated with Morenian creative work. Information about current environmental regulation and research were given out.

After the lectures, the group was warmed up to the action process anew. In turn, ideas and insights aroused during the Morenian process were documented and reworked into personal goals and decisions. Often the participants would create a network for sharing their work-related problems after the course (Partanen-Hertell 2005).

Warming up by storytelling

One of the workshops was concerned with water protection in agriculture. There were fourteen participants, all without any previous experience of Morenian methods; the use of Morenian tools alternated with ordinary lectures. The group was small enough to function as a team and, at the same time, was big enough to explore various perspectives. Only a few

knew each other previously. Warming up began in the evening, when the group was sitting in a circle without any protective table in front of them.

The theme was approached through storytelling, each person sharing with someone they were unfamiliar with. People told short, true personal stories about water protection, first in pairs and then in fours. Finally, the whole group gathered together to discuss what the stories brought to mind. The group was directed towards an open, respectful dialogue. All the weighty agendas, such as interest groups, attitudes towards them and relationships at work, came to light during the discussion. Experiences, know-how and feelings were shared vividly; the free discussion continued late into the evening in a Finnish sauna.

Symbol-work creates common mental models

The next morning the director continued warming the group up by asking '*what new issues or feelings had arisen during the night*'; also the quieter members were encouraged to talk. Attention was turned to mental models describing participants' everyday work. A mental model is a representation of the surrounding reality in a person's mind; it could also be called an immaterial cultural conserve (Moreno 1985). Because it develops through thoughts, experiences and feelings, it can be modified by action.

The director started creating a common mental model for the group by placing a blue scarf in the middle of the floor to represent a lake, around which the practical part of the group's everyday work could centre. Then she asked about the factors and elements that interact with the lake. When a participant responded, she asked him to look around in the room to choose an ordinary object that could symbolise the element he brought up. Then he would place the object in the 'right' location in the 'scenery'. He would describe how its colour, shape or position symbolised the element and its links with the lake. He also explained what kind of dynamic, tension or anticipation it had towards other factors in the model. Similarly everybody picked up one or two objects in a spontaneous way. As the group warmed up, people also started to add personal items to the model like keys, watches and even shoes. If the approach is familiar to the group, toys, masks and fantasy items may also be useful.

Once the excitement about building the model had subsided, the group pondered, first in pairs, about what kinds of elements, links, and dynamics this visualised common mental model highlighted, as well as what might be missing or in the 'wrong' place. This discussion brought up difficult issues or elements, which were also added to the model. In the end, the whole group talked about the reality this concretised mental model, or relatiogram, was representing and their own position in it. Many wanted to physically try standing in their own or someone else's 'place' in the model.

A group of fifteen people may use 30-50 items to reconcile their inner mental models and make a concrete common one. Sometimes it is worthwhile photographing the resulting model. Usually the groups are very satisfied with their composition, which now constitutes their common view. At the same time, a common language has developed. According to the feedback, this process reshaped the participants' personal mental models of their work and this they started to perceive their tasks and networks in a new way. After this, the group is able to identify which situations are 'hot' or 'cold', e.g. where things are not functioning

well or big changes are occurring. The model can also easily be used to question old and discover new perspectives.

Sociodrama deepens understanding

Using the common mental model the group chose the issues that needed a closer look through the methods of sociodrama or role-training. The issues should be ones that the participants really can influence. Often the theme is too broad and needs focusing. It is important to keep the connection between the mental model and the sociodrama clear to everybody.

In this example the group chose the theme of 'Influencing Diffuse Pollution caused by Agriculture'. One target was to support interaction with interest groups. An authentic encounter for sociodrama was found between an environmental authority and a farmer whose actions had resulted in complaints to authorities. If the farmer was not willing to change his behaviour, stronger and more laborious tools would have to be mobilised. At first the group charted tools used to influence a single farmer, such as visitations, clarification of the activities on the farm, working out an environment protection and financing plan and subsidies, as well as court proceedings.

When the sociodrama began, the stage was built up and the roles were described. The group created a farm in southern Finland, by the side of a river. There had been complaints about the pesticide tanks, which were not being properly treated. The main building and an old cow house went up on the stage, using tables and chairs, and further off there was a machine shed. Faraway from the riverside, the green pastureland spread out, but only a narrow green protection zone kept the eroded riverbank apart from the fields.

For characters in the sociodrama, the group first created *Farmer Matti*, a man with strong attitudes and an alliance with farmers' organisations. His wife, *Maija* was well-educated but, for the present, unemployed. She had her own opinions, but she listened to her husband. Their 24-year-old son *Mikko* was educated at an agricultural school. He cherished 'green thoughts' and argued with his father. The environmental authority representative *Pekka* was in a car, driving closer to the farm in order to discuss the complaints with the farmer. His task was to handle the action on the complaints in an objective way.

In this drama, the director let the group choose the first people to take on the roles. At appropriate moments, the director suggested to the role-holders that they choose somebody to take over the roles. There were several role-takers for each role; there were even competitions for who would hold particular roles. The role-taking deepened at every turn. *Farmer Matti* and *Pekka* turned out to be the central figures in the power struggle, openly trying to influence each other's will. It was important that many participants had the chance to play these key roles. Additionally, the behaviour of worldly-wise negotiators in those roles passed on tacit knowledge about how to handle situations like this.

In the sociodrama, *Pekka* rolled in one Tuesday in June at eleven o'clock, at the mealtime, because '*then everybody will be present at the farm*'. He was shown to wait in the living room, while the farm folks were eating in the kitchen. After the meal *Pekka* chatted with

Farmer Matti, Maija and Mikko in the living room, drinking coffee. *Farmer Matti* was not willing to come along to the fields or riverside, but in the end *Pekka* succeeded in persuading him to set out in the car. The conversation about the green field that should be broadened further from the riverbank moved from resistance to consent. As bait, *Pekka* used scenery, compensations and subsidies. From this matter *Pekka* moved on to the more difficult topic: flushing out the pesticide tanks. Step by step, they moved to look for a proper place for the tanks, and a possibility of mutual understanding arose. At the end of this scene, the director put an end to the sociodrama, the role-enactors were released and the stage was cleared.

Sharing feelings and insights happened in groups of three; people were not allowed to judge others' experiences. The participants demonstrated obvious trust, respect and compassion towards each other. This processing of feelings and understanding contributed to using experiences in sociodrama to evolve systems intelligence (Hamalainen & Saarinen 2007). Sharing continued spontaneously on into the evening.

Processing the sociodrama and lessons learned

Next morning processing started with the questions:

- What kind of attitudes, beliefs and norms were driving the choices and relations *Farmer Matti* and authority representative *Pekka* as well as the other characters at the various stages of the sociodrama?
- What was important in the encounter between the farmer and the authority from the perspective of their interaction?
- How is it possible to improve influencing with such a farmer?
- Did anything else relevant happen in the sociodrama?

The group talked about the course of the sociodrama and their own personal, emotional and intellectual insights for a long time. They discussed how to interact with a farmer and what goals should be met first. The participants seemed to be excited about the sociodrama. Examining the counter-roles and empathy towards them had opened insights that can be compared to catharsis. Finally the group developed written guidelines for influential communication in their work.

Further work during the course

One the same day, the group wanted to create another relatiogram or common mental model, of issues linked to cowsheds. This time colourful post-its with key words and arrows were used to describe subjects and interactions between them. Problems were discussed first in small groups, then all together. Solutions and conclusions were documented.

In the evening, the participants expressed a need to deal with their demanding work at an emotional level. Because feelings are an essential prerequisite to genuine decision-making, a possibility opened up to influence their practical work. The participants were asked to move

a year forward in their minds and to write an 'annual report'. It should include personal accomplishments, and what they had required; external constraints or changes were also to be documented. In pairs, the writer listened to his 'report' being read out by the other, who also added a final statement to it. The pairs warmed up and came out with important statements. The individual goals at work for the following year were formed in an optimistic atmosphere. Afterwards everyone wrote for himself a plan of action for the following year.

On the last morning, the group wanted to create yet another sociodrama. The theme was a village meeting where the possibility to save a lake from pollution was discussed. At first all the characters that were needed were written up on a flipchart: environmental authorities, various land owners, local opinion leaders, representatives of NGOs, media, and the biggest polluters like piggeries and the peat industry. The participants could choose their roles and no role reversals were made. This time, roles were rather stereotyped but some well-known real representatives of interest groups were caricatured. Laughter functioned as catharsis. Afterwards it was easier to truly step into the shoes of those counter roles.

In the afternoon, there was a lecture on manners of speaking. The course ended with a final discussion about experiences, insights and learning. The participants were advised to remember confidentiality and to integrate their experiences for a few days before sharing them with outsiders. It was also possible to contact the director afterwards if needed.

2. Waking up yesterday's environmental catastrophes

Sociodrama was used in an EU-funded project, where real environmental pollution accidents were simulated, so that past reactions and decisions could be understood. The target was to create material for the Pro Healthy Life CD-Rom, a narrative approach to educational multimedia for professionals and decision-makers which deals interactively with environmental health issues (Jaspi *et al*, 2002). The CD-Rom was produced in three languages. It includes hypertext, videos and www-linkages, and functions like a computer game. Environmental and academic experts and students from Finland, Estonia, Sweden and Ireland took part in several sociodramas, which were combined with symbol-work, documenting and analysis.

One of the sociodramas explored the so-called Karkoia-accident that happened several years ago in Finland. In the town of Karkoia, the drinking water was found to contain chlorophenol, and was not drinkable; at first nobody knew where the chlorophenol came from.

The sociodrama took place in the premises of Kuopio University, where one of the fifteen participants was an environmental scientist who had served as an expert during the Karkoia crisis. The other participants were not familiar with the case beforehand. Nobody was familiar with sociodrama.

After warm-up, the characters of the sociodrama were named, such as the mayor, municipal physician, health inspector, journalist, environmentalist, schoolteacher, parent, pupils, managers of the waterworks and the sawmill that later was revealed to be the polluter. The participants chose their roles from these. The director gave the roles of the environmental expert, radio, TV and newspapers to the scientist familiar with the case.

At the beginning of the sociodrama, people could hear the local radio issuing a warning about drinking tap water. The sociodrama 'lasted' several weeks; every day TV, radio and newspapers followed the situation and gave new information to the public. The mayor and doctor, as well as the health authority, were acting under pressure from the publicity. They were asked what solutions they had and how they intended to organise everything. The others were upset and afraid. It took several days until the delivery of good water was organised and several weeks until the reason for pollution was discovered. After the crisis was over, a post-mortem of the accident followed locally and in the national media. In the end, the characters were asked to write a letter to somebody they wanted to reach. The sociodrama ended with some sociometric choices between the roles and sharing.

In order to make use of the sociodrama process, reactions to pressures, purposes of choices, and the course of events were discussed. The environmental scientist stated that he was astonished that everything went just like during the real Karkola case. The whole workshop was documented and analysed later in detail to find out how professionals and decision-makers could be trained interactively to encounter these kinds of accident.

3. Demonstrating the use of sociodrama and action methods in planning

The aim of using Morenian methods can also be to create collaborative planning and systems-intelligent behaviour, and common mental models for managing international environmental issues. The use of these methods in planning has been demonstrated in several international workshops for environmental experts, authorities and professionals of group processes (Partanen-Hertell, 2009a & b).

Two workshops have been connected to seminars of EU-funded environmental projects. One was the international seminar on collaborative planning of natural resources management, where most of the participants were from Western Europe. The other was the final seminar of the project Transnational River Basin Districts on the Eastern Side of the Baltic Sea Network, where there were many participants from Russia, the Baltic countries and Poland. Even though translators were needed in the latter workshop, sociodrama was still used.

The first workshop lasted for one afternoon and was named: *Use of Action Methods in Collaborative Planning; experimental group-work*. There were ten participants, scientists and planning with no previous experience of sociodrama. The warm-up began with postcards. Everybody picked two pictures: one of them somehow described their role in their everyday work and the other was connected to collaborative planning. In groups of three they discussed their cards, after which the whole group gathered around a big table. The cards describing their roles and tasks were placed, one after another, with a few words, on one end of the table in their 'right' place in relation to each other. When it was done, the pictures formed a model of the group that was present. In the same way, the pictures describing collaborative planning were placed at the other end, forming the common relatiogram, or mental model, of collaborative planning. The group talked about the models and the connections between them.

Then the group was asked to come to an open space on the floor. An imaginary map of Europe was created, so that everyone stood in their own country and town. From the places, people described what kind of scenery could be seen from their doorsteps. From this topic, the director led a discussion about an imaginary place where some collaborative planning of natural resources would be needed.

Using symbols like scarves, stones, shells and twigs, the group created, on the table, a river valley between two countries. Cities, factories, mines, fishing areas, fun parks, infrastructure and inhabitants were created using magnets, ropes, pieces of Lego and other small objects. 'Hot' and 'cold' spots on this common imaginary relatiogram were identified and discussed in small groups. thereafter, the group decided what it wanted to look at more closely, using sociodrama. The theme that emerged was a process, where a private company wanted to buy land from the city and private landowners in order to establish a large recreation area *'to benefit the region'*. Later on in the sociodrama, it turned out to be an extensive investment with hotels and golf courses that would have destroyed the natural habitat and way of life for most of the inhabitants. It would also have influenced the relationship between the two countries.

People chose their roles freely. They were asked to step into the shoes of a role that surfaced from within, and begin to walk. The director asked one person after another who he was, where and what he was doing. She also asked questions about time and connections between people and institutions. The group started to build the scene in their roles. The main action concerned various public, official, closed-door and hidden meetings. Some roles turned out to be crucial. The director used several sociodrama techniques such as: focusing on a spot, interview, soliloquy, role reversal, secret tasks, changing time, dreaming, recognising own physical reactions in the role and having several people one after the other in the same role. The roles were typical but had personal features as well.

After sharing, participants wrote, on coloured post-its, the goals, attitudes and plans of all the roles they had taken and the organisations connected to them. The main characters and organisations in the sociodrama were further analysed. Later various topics were discussed, such as how processes concerned with natural resources should be managed, which interest groups should be part of the process from the beginning, and how to find out in advance their values and hidden agendas. Participants were impressed by how quickly it was possible to get to the fundamental issues by using sociodrama.

SUGGESTIONS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SOCIODRAMAS

Environmental issues may often be urgent and complicated, and cover a wide geographical area. They tangle scientific, economic and social viewpoints together, as well as national and cultural interests. Sustainable solutions are based on goals which, while seldom identical, are at least geared in the same direction. Environmental negotiations may end in deadlock; thus solutions require respect for opposing views. They demand interactive and interpersonal communication whereby multiple professional and national languages may be in use. The process is also intrapersonal, thus demanding the readiness to modify personal ideas, goals, and value systems. Great interest lies in the possibility of uniting common planning and

negotiating methods with Morenian tools, which reach the subconscious wisdom and increase internalised knowledge.

Morenian methods aim at exploring, experiencing, and learning by doing. In this context sociodrama is a group action method in which participants act out agreed-upon social situations spontaneously. As people explore various issues through sociodrama, they put themselves in other people's shoes in order to understand themselves and others better (Sternberg & Garcia, 2000).

The director of environmental sociodramas should especially bear in mind the following:

- Analyse the task, the site, the goals and the stand-points of the different participants well in advance: be clear about the political dimensions and how this ties in with your own set of values (Weiner, 1997). This means questions like:
 - Are the participants homogenous in any way?
 - What kinds of official and invisible power structures are present?
 - Which specific issues could safely be worked out with powerful Morenian approaches?
- Name 'secretaries' to document the process and its results, if needed.
- Lead a slow and safe warm-up, with methods appropriate to the participants, the task and the theme, especially if the group is not familiar with sociodrama or each other. In work-related groups, the warm-up should always be directed to professional roles, and undue exposure which could cause embarrassment later should be avoided. If necessary, the director should warm up and cool down both the group and/or its individual members during the process. Occasionally, for instance when the participants are psychodrama trainees, the director may aim at a more intimate level, paving the way for deep personal responses.
- Build confidence in the group. In conflict situations, it may be wise to work with the parties separately at first.
- Respect the participants' resistance and defences from the outset, as they may arise from knowledge, hidden agendas or values. By studying these, the director may find out how to utilise them in the process.
- Externalise and concretise material and immaterial networks, sites, countries, and mental models by using sociometry and relatiometry before the sociodrama, when needed. Also beliefs, values and emotions can be externalised. Conflicts may arise from mental models and other views which are assumed to be similar to one's own but which actually are different. The aim is to be able to create a collective perception and a common language.
- Aim to increase the participants' experience of various roles.
- Provide enough time for emotional and intellectual sharing. Sociodrama is a method for diagnosis, and for changing participants' attitudes and mental models on a deep

and personal level. It may awake strong feelings. Often seeds leading towards common solutions may be found in participants' own experiences and the unconscious knowledge brought out in various roles.

- Analyse the outcome so that participants will be able to understand it, otherwise the sociodrama might later be misinterpreted as a play. Often this takes more time than the sociodrama itself. Sociometry, like statues and other action methods, are effective tools to explore the layers and structures present in the sociodrama. This creates a good basis for utilising the outcome.
- Support and motivate the participants' decision-making, responsibility and willingness to make changes; demonstrate full respect for all the ideas as to how to use the findings out in the real world setting. The director should pay attention to which steps forward are likely to give the best final outcome and the least risk of insoluble conflict. This usually means working with resistance, where the group has to carefully sort out how the various targets, needs and wants are linked together.
- Attach the results of the process to the 'official' work and real life of the participants. This means finding ways to document the common understanding reached, to consolidate the commitment and to implement decisions.

The themes of environmental sociodramas may be various, such as:

- Traumatic past and future catastrophes;
- Changing attitudes and means to manage the environment;
- Social, economic and environmental diversities and eco-refugees;
- Small scale issues, such as concerns regarding a home-lake.

Target audiences may include project leaders and teams, trainers and consultants, scientists and politicians, landowners and students, psychodramatists and ordinary people.

It may be useful to create a fictional case, but usually the work should strive to stimulate the participants' real operational environment. In this way, it becomes more realistic to understand and evaluate the structure, processes, objectives, values, habits and mental models present. Even if the participants are only sketching real-life institutions, networks, and events, they will usually have enough experience of those to grasp situations and to find resolutions to environmental problems. Here, sociodrama is an effective tool and it can serve as a laboratory for testing different solutions.

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