

The ReMake Cafes as a source of well-being: being, doing and interacting as motivations to participate

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Introduction

The main goal of our study was to explore the range of motivations among residents of Helsinki to participate in ReMake café activities. While the literature on repair cafés often emphasizes the importance of repair cafes as communities for advancing citizen-driven progress in circular economy (e.g., Moalem & Mosgaard, 2021), our study brings forward additional aspects related to participation in repair and repurpose events, like improved well-being. In contrast to the focus on “having” as the main source of well-being, our study engages with the framework of fundamental human needs (Max Neef, 1991), highlighting how human well-being is dependent on different existential categories, including being, having, doing and interacting.

Recent studies have explored the drivers behind visiting the repair cafes, identifying environmental concerns; profiting from knowledge, skills and available materials; the desire to demonstrate the importance of repair; being part of the social movement; emotional and functional value of goods (Luukkonen & Van den Broek, 2024). Our study extends these findings by examining the motivations to participate through existential categories that contribute to fundamental human needs and improve human well-being.

Research context & method

Our study is based on data collected during ReMake café meetings organized monthly, between August 2023 – May 2024 (9 events). ReMake cafes were organized in the premises of the Museum of Technology in Helsinki, Finland. The ReMake cafes are similar to traditional repair cafes, where people can come to repair their goods and get advice from skilled repairers. In addition, the ReMake cafe

meetings included other circular activities, such as doing crafts and repurposing, as well as hands-on workshops (e.g. learning how to grow mushrooms using spent coffee grounds).

The activities of the ReMake café were funded by City of Helsinki with the aim to improve the socializing opportunities for senior citizens and promote inter-generational exchange of skills. Due to this, information regarding ReMake cafes was distributed through networks like Finnish Pensioners Federation. In addition, information appeared on city website devoted to events and happenings, so it reached citizens of different ages. The data consists of 16 qualitative interviews and a short survey distributed among the participants of ReMake Cafes (n=63). Despite the focus on senior citizens, the visitors were of varying age groups (Table 1).

Table 1. Age of the survey respondents.

Age	Percent of respondents
Under 30 years old	17,5
30-39	23,8
40-49	15,9
50-59	12,7
60-69	14,3
70-79	15,9
Total	100

Results

Overall, visiting the ReMake Café was a pleasant experience, as 76% strongly agreed and 21% agreed with the statement: “The event was worth my time”. About 3% of the respondents strongly disagreed with the statement. The information distributed on the pages of city of Helsinki generated interest towards ReMake cafes as urban happenings,

attracting all kinds of citizens, not just the ones who are interested in circularity. For instance, 29% of the survey respondents indicated that they had no previous repair experience.

Our preliminary analysis of the motivations to attend ReMake cafes shows a much wider variety of reasons than just repair of goods. For instance, in the multiple-response question on participation modes, the social aspect was highlighted: 56% of the 63 respondents said they listened to other people's stories and followed the activities of the participants. In addition, 51% wanted to socialize and meet other people. Less than half of respondents reported that they repaired the goods they brought with them and about 5% taught or helped others to repair.

Qualitative interviews provided further insights on the motivation of the participants. First, it became apparent that engaging in repair activities together with others was important for motivating to actually get the repairs done. It came up that an organized occasion, with a place and different tools and materials being available on-site were important motivators. It was also essential that repair professionals were available to give advice on the best way to repair the items. Some participants had broken or torn items for years before seizing this repair occasion.

Participants commented on relaxed settings, the nice chattering of the participants and the repairers, and the feelings of being social without the pressure of buying anything. The interviewees observed that on-site events have the advantage of people having the chance to directly interact with repairers, but also with each other. Even if sometimes online repair tutorials are convenient, the on-site interaction was experienced as motivating and inspiring. Some of the interviewees did not bring anything to repair, but came to watch activities and follow the event out of curiosity.

Discussion and conclusions

The ReMake cafes in our study offered a wider range of activities to their participants than a typical repair cafe. Yet we found similar motivations for participation as in previous studies focusing on the drivers to visit repair cafes, such as access to expertise, skills, tools

and materials (Luukkonen & van den Broek, 2024).

In addition, we found that participants often had mixed motivations that drew on categories of being, doing and interacting (Max Neef, 1991). On top of repairing (doing), participants valued engagement with others (interacting) as part of the experience. Some participants came to ReMake cafes without any goods to repair, as they wished to just be present in the event (being). Since the event was of non-commercial nature, the possibility to learn was experienced as encouraging and relaxing.

The main limitation of this study is related to the fact that the event was advertised as a possibility to do repair and socialize. So, it probably attracted participants inherently interested in social aspects. However, the success of the ReMake cafe events in fulfilling the needs for being and interacting along repair and repurpose indicates that it is important to consider these aspects in mainstreaming circular consumption practices and positioning them as activities that positively contribute to several existential categories relevant to human well-being.

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