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To cite this article:

Tapani, A., & Sinkkonen, M. (2022). The role of new social ties in creating meaningful life. *International Journal on Social and Education Sciences (IJonSES)*, *4*(4), 486-504. https://doi.org/10.46328/ijonses.405

International Journal on Social and Education Sciences
2022, Vol. 4, No. 4, 486-504 https://doi.org/10.46328/ijonses.405

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Article Info

Article History

Received:
31 March 2022
Accepted:
25 September 2022

Keywords

Social capital
Social ties
Meaningful life
Work
Communality

Abstract

This article suggests that communities and social ties support the feeling of being meaningful. The theoretical concepts discussed here are social capital, community, and new forms of social ties. The data consists of 969 answers from citizens of different ages from three cities. Despite the possibilities of new global social ties, Finns seem to be quite traditional when it comes to a meaningful life: the sources of communality are "old communities" such as work, work communities, families, and relatives. The self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) fits well with Finns: it is important to recognize personal competence. Nevertheless, it is not enough to be competent: people need to be related to others but also have enough autonomy among others. After covid-19 and the period of enforced remote work, we need new ways to build communality and relatedness in creating and maintaining traditional and new social ties.

Introduction

Connectivity and relatedness are in key positions while we start to discuss meaningful life. Research results from 2013 until today show that the Nordic countries have all been in the top ten every time the World Happiness Report (WHR) published its annual ranking of countries. Nordic citizens experience a high sense of autonomy and freedom as well as a high level of social trust towards each other, which play an important role in determining life satisfaction (Martela et al., 2020).

The context of this study, Finland, needs some explanations. Philosopher and active societal influencer Tommi Uschanov (2012) claims that the meaning of being a Finn could be described as "being alone in a good way". Its meaning seems to be more positive compared to the expression "to be on one's own". There are some studies of the Finnish culture that explain it as uniformity, unsubtlety, similarity, and scantiness (Alapuro, 1988; Mäkelä, 1985; Tarasti, 1988). It is said that Finns understand each other with few words (Uschanov, 2012). Does this study reveal some points on what it means to be a Finn: are Finns really so quiet and live as alone as some stories tell?

Professor of Social Psychology Klaus Helkama (2015) studied Finnish values and noticed that there is something stable in them: Finns respect application and hard work. The ten universal values are power, achievement, hedonism, stimulation, self-direction, universalism, benevolence, tradition, conformity, and security (Schwartz 1992) but Helkama (2015) added "work" to the list because it makes a big deal in the Finnish context. According to Helkama (2015), Finns are very work-oriented and work plays a bigger role in forming people's identity than in Hungary, Norway, and the United States.

Decent work is seen as a fundamental right to human well-being (ILO, 2008). Tragically, there are not often possibilities for meaningful work that could support human flourishing, as far as international research is concerned (Veltman, 2016). Another world is still possible, claims Sultana (2021), and so do we. As far as Finns are concerned, work has played a significant role in daily life since the myths of "suo, kuokka ja Jussi": *In the beginning, there were a swamp, hoe, and Jussi (*Linna, 1960).

The aim of this article is to study how communality and especially new social ties are connected to living a meaningful life. Our approach is to study what makes a life worth living: where are the possibilities of feeling communality and how are they connected to theoretical views of humans as social beings. The data consists of 969 answers from citizens of different ages in three Finnish cities.

We, the authors, are Finns and social psychologists. We share the idea that to become a full human being there is a need for significant others (Mead, 1962). The main concepts to discuss here are social capital, community, and new forms of social ties. We will start with the concepts, combine them with data perceptions, and conclude with impressions of meaningful daily life in the Finnish context, and the working life's role in it.

Social Capital – A Tool for Making the World a Better Place for All

Social capital is a concept that has been discussed a lot but is defined badly. It is used for explaining for example local learning outcomes (Hanifan, 1916) or there is an attempt to describe it by weak and strong connections that people have (Granovetter, 1973). French Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1986) connects social capital with economics: in order to make the best out of social networks there is a need for time and not everyone has it. It also goes vice versa: if persons have social capital, for example, plenty of networks, it is possible for them to add their economical capital (Bourdieu, 1986). American Sociologist James S. Coleman (1988b) claims that social capital differs from other forms of capital because it lies in social constructions, not in separate individuals, like human capital. Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1994) disagree on the benefits of social capital: Bourdieu's idea is that it is for privileged human beings, but Coleman says that also marginalized persons can benefit from it (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1994). Social capital is defined mostly by social settings: it is connected to interaction, trust, and networks between human beings. Social capital deals with relations and how different groups work. Interest in social capital means being interested in how people interact in families, neighbourhoods, and workgroups. People are seen as interactive society members, not only as citizens or consumers. (Bowles & Gintis 2002; Putnam 2000.)

A very common understanding of social capital shares Bourdieu's (1993) ideas: the amount of social capital of a single person depends on the wideness of networks but also on economic and cultural capital. Individual capital deals with personal skills but social capital deals with trust, social connections, shared norms, and relations between people and communities (Healy, 2004). Bourdieu (1988) claims that people want to build networks that are useful for them later. According to Coleman (1988a), social capital is a feature of communities.

It is said that nowadays it counts a lot who you know, not what you know (Fine, 2007). In building relationships, there is a norm of reciprocity: human beings have plenty of persons around who have some duties towards them

and at the same time, they have duties concerning others. The best resources for social capital are relations where members interact with each other, not only for each other (Coleman, 1994; Gouldner, 1960; Lictermann, 2006).

The concept of social capital is also criticized about the missing definition (see e.g. Portes, 1998) and because it has not had anything new to add to the discussion lately: belonging to a group has always been seen as valuable for human beings and communities. It is also said that because the definition is missing, all interactions can be understood as social capital (Fine, 2007; Portes, 1998; Portes, 2000). The visions of social capital are also seen one-eyed: for example, according to Professor of Public Policy Robert D. Putnam (2000), social capital is a good thing, and its collapse is a bad thing. Putnam is said to be very conservative when thinking about the sources for social capital: he only sees the traditional ties, such as families and neighbours, but there are new forms of social ties (Chambers, 2006), which we will discuss later. Some researchers believe that by adding social capital even very big problems could be solved, for example for Putnam (2000) social capital and increasing it is a possibility to solve almost all problems: it facilitates wellbeing, education, economic status, health, happiness and citizen activation (Putnam, 2000). Professor of Education John Field (2003) says that the force of social behaviour is overstressing: he claims that persons who are good at networking are better at gaining health services. Therefore, they have better health because they are able to seek health services among their networks and human resources (Field, 2003). It has been suggested that we should talk about the optimization of collective resources, not their maximization (Woolcock, 1998). There is a need to discuss even these dark sides of social capital, for example, preference of the personal group and stereotypical disrespect for others or reinforcement of inequality in which case contacts of all group members are not of the same value (Field, 2003; Portes, 1998). Social capital is meant to make society a better place to live. But there will always be persons who are not members of any group or network and the reality of groups is also a lot more mixed than any theories can explain (Farrar, 2001; Day, 2006).

Community as a Source for a Meaningful Life

In the “good old days”, there were communities that we could call “Gemeinschafts”. They were the one and only form of community: family relations and village communities were the original ways to form a community. The community meant a long-lasting connection and working together toward shared aims (Tönnies, 1955). Then something changed in society. New needs and ways, like rationality and in artificiality, to be in the community arose (Tönnies, 1955). It was a time for “Gesellschafts” (Tönnies, 1955) which had their origin in individual needs for being together. Such a “new” society is very unpredictable and thus there is a question of how long a time we can plan for communality when the time is described as a “cornucopia of choices” and as discontinuities (Day, 2006).

Communality has been discussed mostly as positive, but it may also cause social exclusion when individuals are seeking communities that would serve themselves best (Bauman, 2001; Day, 2006). The community can be seen as a reaction to the prevailing uncertainty. Temporariness in society has released individuals from restrictions: it enables personal choices but also causes anxiety for a personal place in society because people turn more and more to contexts where they feel at home (Bauman 2001; Day, 2006).

In the social-psychological view, community and belonging to a group have connections to the personal identity-forming project. The easiest way to define identity has been the age, gender, professional status, culture, race, nationality, or language but in many cases, identities overlap (Rummens, 2003). Identity is always in process and there is always some imaginary in its unity; it remains in the process and develops all the time (Hall, 1999). Identity also contains a distinctive aspect: some people want to describe themselves by what they are not. Disidentification from the "others", from the outgroup, is an essential element in forming a strong ingroup (Kärreman & Spices, 2007). Identity, especially religious and ethnic identity, has been the root of describing who I am. Nowadays identity is becoming the main, or sometimes the only, source of meaning in this period where nothing is stable (Castells, 2011).

According to Philosopher of Psychology, Social Psychologist Rom Harré (1983), social and personal identity projects are ongoing at the same time. The social identity project means that people need to adapt as much as possible to the social heritage of their community. After that, they must try to convince others of their dignity and suitability. Through the personal identity project, human beings develop their privacy and uniqueness inside the social identity. This means that people do not only adopt social features from others but try to differentiate their personalities from others (Harré, 1983). Mead (1962) has a very social view of human beings' identity development. Persons try to find their identity in interaction with others, by observing others and adjusting their behaviour accordingly (Mead, 1962).

New Forms of Social Ties

There is a significant change in the structure and volume of social interaction related to technological development. New technologies have been feared to cause loneliness, although there is no unambiguous evidence of this (Saari, 2016).

It is said that in Western countries the traditional sources of collective identity like family, nationality, and ethnicity are worn out and do not offer significant social connections or feelings of safety. The phenomena that Putnam (2000) is talking about - not having time for relationships because of TVs, cars, less spare time, and the ageing of the collective generation - are said to be only a feature of the individualized lifestyle and individualized relationships (Beck, 2000; Field, 2003; Putnam, 2000). Putnam (2000) also stands for face-to-face interaction and does not pay attention to virtual or online communities. The family and community, without a doubt, are the main sources of social capital (Putnam, 2000). Other researchers, such as Field (2003), see online interaction tools as compensatory or complementary sources for forming new communities (Field, 2003). New identities and virtual communities are built by using mobile phones and the Internet. The changes in people's social relationships lead to new forms of social connections based on movements and networking in the information society (Chambers, 2006). New researches show that television is not the reason for not making communities work: teenagers interviewed in the US did not even understand the possibility to watch television on someone else's schedule (Castells, 2011). Social media is a double-edged sword when it comes to loneliness. On the one hand, social media promotes the phenomenon of "alone together" and, on the other hand, asymmetrical interaction predisposes to loneliness (Saari, 2016).

Professor of Media and Cultural Studies Deborah Chambers (2006) suggests that instead of communality we could start to think of the concept of friendship. The focus would be not on the community, but on individuals. There is a trend that people would like to describe themselves by their relationships, not by their heritage or old community traditions such as class or nation (Chambers, 2006). When we think of human beings surviving uncertain situations in the changing world, the concept of friendship would sound safe and nice. Among friends, I can be what I am, and I can count on friends – so far. The idea of friendship substituting the "old forms" of communality is not universally accepted: women's lifestyle choices expressed by the desire for freedom in relationships are seen as threats to society, their destinies as wives and caretakers (Chambers, 2006).

What are friends and friendships? Urban dictionary (2019) defines a friend as a person who loves you and whom you love and who is a loyal partner; the word has its origin in the verbs love and honour. Philosophical Researcher Neera Kapur Badhwar (1987) defines friendship "as a practical and emotional relationship of mutual and equal goodwill, affection and pleasure". Friends are described to be various and multiple, a group that is not a well-defined social group (Hänninen & Lötjönen, 2020), a link to weak social ties (Granovetter, 1973). There is also discussion in the Finnish society if a good friendship could replace physical activity and if a `good amount of social life` could do the same well-being effect as spinning or running. According to Professor Marko Elovainio from the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, if there is no one to whom your life is meaningful, you are in a weak spot (Puttonen, 2013). Sociologist, Professor Juho Saari (2010) notes that Finland is changing toward a "friendship society". Outside their family (parents and siblings), Finns usually rely on friends for loans, mental health, relationships, and some other matters instead of other relatives.

This leads us back to the concept of social capital: people purposefully form networks that are useful for them now or later (Bourdieu, 1986). Social ties also increase mental well-being (Puttonen, 2013). Being a part of a community benefits its individual members by creating what they are. Chambers (2006) calls this reciprocal individualization: self-identity but also mutual relations are the focus.

We earlier raised the meaning of networks in forming personal identity. In this era of discontinuity, the personal identity can be a project identity or network-based identity. Project identities arise when people notice that their dominant identities are not anymore working or significant in changed situations. For example, in studies of teachers' competencies in the reformed Finnish vocational education, it was recognized that teachers need 53 different skills while working with students, working life partners, and colleagues (Tapani & Salonen, 2019). Using these skills in different contexts means different identities for teachers: instead of the traditional identity of the teacher in the classroom, the new situations evoke the need to form an identity as a reformer of working practices, a counsellor, and sometimes a person who produces employees to the labour market (Kukkonen, 2018). The demand for new identities can originate from the individual who reflects the needs of the environment and the generalized other (Mead, 1962). In these situations, there is a need to challenge prevailing, obvious mental constructs. This is done by individuals who want to join and make changes in things of high value to them (Castells, 2001; Heikkinen & Huttunen, 2002). Castells (2001) claims that a human being becomes a true self only by joining a collective and thus finding a source for personal identity is vital for development. Identities and their sources are embedded in historical contexts: they are constructions that are built on the historical, cultural, and

geographical memory (Castells, 2001). The self and self-identity are liberated from rules and regulations of the past through changes: personal activities can be facilitated by accessing information, in the Internet or other ways of online communication which make individuals responsible authors of their life (Chambers, 2006).

Technology-based forms of communality are means to rebuilding communalities and community connections, for example smartphones today have more power than computers, claims Callagher (2018). There are some studies concerning the new ways of interaction. For example, Kaban (2021) shows the possibilities and restrictions of social media tools in school-family communication. Smartphone addiction has been studied in the sense of leisure satisfaction and leisure boredom (Serdal et al., 2022). Technology can be a good servant but a bad master: there are also some opinions of how is changes life easier but at the same time, more isolated. For example, youngsters are involved on their devices and communication is a lot of technology-to-person instead of face-to-face contact (Brownstein, 2015).

Freedom and possibilities for choice also make living uncertain. Friendships can be ended at any time if one or both parties believe the relationship is no longer beneficial. In these new times, if individuals fail in aspects of their lives, in education, work or love, they can only blame themselves, not the structures. An important question is how much new social ties legalize self-centeredness or nonchalance and how well they pay attention to otherness (Chambers, 2006). It is a question of alone or together; a self-oriented life or a life for and with the others.

Work as a Source of a Meaningful Life

Studying working life and human experiences of it is significant because some researchers show that it is more important to experience work more meaningful than prosperity and happiness are (King & Napa, 1998; Lancaster & Stillman, 2010). It is possible that in the future the relevance of work is stressed even more because the World Economic Forum claims that the workplaces of tomorrow will offer experiences of dignity and possibilities for individual growth and development (WEF, 2018).

According to the self-worth perspective, an inspiring environment affords possibilities for feelings of being acceptable and respected (Covington, 1992). The feeling of being valued as oneself is a base for self-confidence and the meaning of life. If people do not have the feeling of dignity, they have weaker possibilities for respect for other people (Himanen, 2012). Everything that adds the experience of autonomy and competence, for example, positive feedback, the experience of success, and the support of the community, maintains the positive extension (Deci et al., 1999; Deci & Ryan, 2000). In their self-determination theory (SDT), Psychologists Edward Deci and Richard Ryan (2000) share the understanding that humans have psychological needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Even if these features are said to be innate and of a psychological origin, all elements of SDT deal with social points of view. Competence refers to individuals' unique talents in a group which benefit all group members; they fit well with the idea of relatedness that has its origin back in the hunting society: there was more cooperation than hunting alone (see e.g. Packer & Ruttan, 1988). Since then, it has become an important value in resource sharing and mutual protection, ensuring the more effective transmission of group knowledge to the individual and a more cohesive social organization. Autonomy plays a big role in steering personal life: it offers

the possibility to regulate actions and prioritize processes toward more effective self-maintenance (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Some research on working life shows that meaningful work produces added value for the whole society (Blom & Hautaniemi, 2009). Vice versa, if employees feel that there are minor possibilities for steering their work, it easily leads to early retirement (Lahelma et al., 2012). A study on Finnish teaching staff shows that it is important to work according to personal capabilities and feel a connectedness to larger environments and society (Tapani et al., 2022).

Method

As material for the research, we used a questionnaire that was delivered online in three Finnish cities, Tampere, Lahti, and Kuopio. Tampere has 238,140 inhabitants and close to half a million inhabitants in the Tampere Region, which comprises Tampere and its neighbouring municipalities (Information on Tampere, 2020). Lahti has 120,000 residents and is a center for a region of 200,000 people (Lahti info, 2020). The population of Kuopio is approximately 119,300 and about 600,000 people live in the city's catchment area (A brief introduction, n.d.). The cities were chosen because they all are the centers of their regions and are willing to add commonality among their inhabitants by involving them in developing the city together.

The title of the questionnaire was “survey of experiences of dignity and meaningfulness”. In this article, our material consists of answers to a question on the questionnaire:

- Describe the matters and situations in which you feel or have felt that your life is meaningful and that you are valuable.

The request for answering the survey was presented via Internet pages of the cities, in several face-to-face meetings and seminars. The questionnaire was open for three months in autumn 2019, from September until the end of November. The whole data consists of 969 answers from 15-64- year-old citizens. The answers of different age groups are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Age Groups and Answers to the Questionnaire in Total

Age	N
15–24	67
25–34	182
35–44	222
45–54	215
55–64	203
65–74	69
75+	11
Total	969

In the age group division, we did not separate students or retired persons. The overall aim was to see what components make life worth living.

As a method, data-driven content analysis was applied (inductive content analysis) to the research (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). First, the data was reviewed multiple times. Separate expressions of meaningful life experiences were identified in order to identify the differences and connections between the studies (Silverman, 1993). Similar words or sentences were collected under related themes. Among the experiences of a meaningful life, we separated expressions of work, workmates, or work communities. The coding process according to Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin (1990) was applied: in open coding we named and categorized the phenomenon through close examination of the material (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The units linked with the experience of meaningful life were the words or sentences in the respondents' answers. After this, we reduced the themes (Schreier, 2012; Mayring, 2002). We attempted to identify specific features: the context in which the phenomenon of a meaningful life is embedded and the conditions that give rise to it. Finally, the selective coding integrated categories to a grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) – in this case, the constructions of a meaningful life in the Finnish context and the role of work in it. We were aware of existing theories and pre-knowledge during the research process although a data-driven approach was applied.

Results

As a result, we could identify dozens of original phrases, eight generic categories, and four main categories concerning meaningful life. We present them in Table 2. All the elements of meaningful life based on the data are shown here.

Table 2. Experiences of a Meaningful Life from Subcategories to Main Categories

Subcategory (original phrases)	Generic category (main themes of a meaningful life)	Main category
My work in the social sector My work as a nurse My work in family care My work with substances abusers and persons with mental problems My work in the cultural sector My work as a special needs teacher Youth work I work as a teacher and the work in teaching and upbringing is meaningful for students' future	Professional identity makes being meaningful	Work and related communities as sources of meaningfulness and dignity
I can use real life experiences when I lecture for students and can affect their professional identity My work fits well with my personal values I have been able to work with societally meaningful things	Doing valuable things in job	

Subcategory (original phrases)	Generic category (main themes of a meaningful life)	Main category
I feel well at my working place and my work makes an adequate living I can affect the future society via my work Meaningful encounterings at my work Me and my colleagues can solve problems I feel I do meaningful things when patients are satisfied My work helps others I can use my strengths at work and help others by using these skills		
When I finally got a full-time salaried job, I felt meaningfulness again. I feel more important for the world when getting paid for my work. Rationally I do understand that by volunteering I made great things for culture. Having a permanent job	Work defines self-approval	
If I can help somebody and do something good. If it is not possible by helping others concretely, it is possible by paying taxes.	Unselfishness	Volunteering and helping make life worth living
Work and hobbies are meaningful things when you can also give something to others through them. Volunteering and communal work are important especially when paid work does not give the experience of meaningfulness Volunteering and acting societally give meaning to my life.	Volunteering and freetime communities	
My meaning as a part of the community is clear: when I have meaningful and at times, developing roles in my work and freetime, I can feel important in some communities. When I get acknowledgement at home, work or from friends. All the situations when people praise me, in one way or another.	The feeling of necessity	
Children Wonderful and healthy children	Traditional social ties	Connections in daily life as a base for dignity

Subcategory (original phrases)	Generic category (main themes of a meaningful life)	Main category
When my children were born and following how they grew up		
Family		
Work and family		
Family that is closely connected		
Being a parent		
Being a mother		
Being a spouse		
Being a grandparent		
Being a mother and a partner		
Being a grandchild and a child		
Being a workmate		
Having a loving spouse		
Having a good and satisfactory sex life		
Grandchildren		
Friends		
Being able to spend time with my mother who is getting old		
Family relations with my husband, friends, sister, parents, and workmates		
Love		
Being happy in my couple relationship		
Having a husband		
I feel I am trusted, and people like to be with me		
I am a needed supporter for my close people and others		
Being healthy		
Being able to do physical exercises		
Taking care of my own and my spouse’s health		
Daily life and work are meaningful		
Gardening at my cottage in the summertime		

Subcategory (original phrases)	Generic category (main themes of a meaningful life)	Main category
Our life is something bigger than just navel-gazing. I claim that a meaningful life has to do with love and love from the "upstairs". Experiences of nature and a tidy and nicely built environment where history is present are valuable experiences for me.	Seeing human life as a part of the nature	Oneself as an agent in the universe
Fulfilling oneself	Creation and satisfaction	
The experiences of trust and respect between people and that daily life is going smoothly and safely are valuable. I am happy that in my hometown and in Finland the infrastructure works and we have trust in authorities and citizens.		

Next, we will have a look at how the results relate to the theoretical framework. We concluded that the main points of social capital are that it is embedded in social ties, owned by communities and networks, trust, memberships, and multifold interaction are needed to reach it. The keywords of social capital are communities and reciprocal interaction. At the core of communities lies the idea of communities as a reaction to uncertainty. The members of the community have something in common and belonging has a role in forming their identity, also based on the aspects of ingroup - outgroup thinking. In the ingroup, the identity is formed through expectations of the group, but personal traits of the identity can be shown through aspirations of differentiation. In these unpredictable times, identity plays a huge role in being. Virtual communities, friendships, and network-based identities are mentioned as new forms of social ties. These new forms of social ties challenge the prevailing, obvious mental constructs. Freedom and possibilities of choice also make living uncertain. An important question is how much the new social ties legalize self-centredness or nonchalance and how well they pay attention to otherness. In Table 3, we will view how these theoretical settings fit into the Finnish contexts.

Finally, we will continue with the notes concerning work in Table 2 and 3. The question was what makes life worth living and especially, what meaningful life is and what role work play in it. In table 2, we can notice that work plays a huge part in making life worth living. Work and related communities are found as sources of meaningfulness. Volunteering gives meaning to life, too (category: Volunteering and helping make life worth living). Volunteering is somewhat problematic: in some answers, it is said that volunteering gives life meaning. In other cases, paid work gives real meaning; some respondents even note that they feel full citizenship when they pay taxes.

Table 3. Main Categories of Experiences of Meaningful Life connected with the Theoretical Framework

Main category	Connection to social capital	Connection to communities	Connection to new social ties
Work and related communities as sources of meaningfulness	My role is important for the whole community and society	I am an important part of the work community	Not mentioned
Volunteering and helping make life worth living	By helping others I also get meaningfulness and more social capital in my life	My role as a helper is important in my community	Traditional views
Connections in daily life as a base for dignity	Daily life with fellow people is very meaningful	Traditional communities play a big role	Friendships are mentioned, main points are still traditional
Oneself as an agent in the universe	I feel safe, connected and can be creative	Universal views on communities	Mental ways of belonging

Looking at the theory connection on work's role, we can notice that there are connections to social capital and communities while considering work as an important part of human life. Work, especially paid work or permanent work, adds the feeling of participation.

"*My contribution is important to the whole community and society"*

and relatedness

"*I am an important part of the work community"*.

Via volunteering, it is also possible to add social capital

"*By helping others, I also get meaningfulness, more social capital to my life*"

and belonging to a community where their role is recognized.

"My role as a helper is important in my community".

New social ties do not play a big role: belonging to work communities and helping relatives or those in need are more important. Interestingly, workmates are not defined as friends here, although it is possible that some respondents also help workmates.

We can summarize by saying that traditional communities play a big role in living a meaningful life. The fellow people and their well-being are something that keeps the Finns going. New social ties and connections are not much mentioned in the data. Work communities but also family life, children, grandchildren, relatives, and work are important sources of meaningfulness. The results show that for meaningfulness it is important that people's role in the community is visible and recognized.

Conclusion: Social Ties connected with Meaningful Life and Work

The aim of this article was to study, what makes a life worth living: where are the possibilities of feeling dignity, and how does this relate to theoretical views of humans as social beings.

By an overall look at the results, we can notice that social ties are remarkable in making life meaningful. We could identify dozens of phrases describing meaningful situations and experiences, eight generic categories, and four main categories. A life worth living is created by work and related communities, by volunteering, living a good daily life, and the feeling of being a part of something bigger. The communities and social ties that support feelings of being meaningful are work communities, hobbies, and volunteering communities, especially those where a person can help others, and the traditional family and friendship communities.

It was easy to connect meaningful life with social capital: we could identify the feeling of being an important part of different communities. It was also important to be a part of society and special groups (e.g. work teams). The personal contribution was realized by helping others and volunteering – these actions added social networks and, in that way, social capital. Fellow people were important. To belong, to be a part of communities added the feeling of security and made it possible to be creative in personal choices. It is noteworthy that social connections play a huge role in the feelings of meaningfulness. In myths and legends but also in scientific descriptions (see e.g. Uschanov, 2012), Finns are said to be not so well connected with others, living quite alone and not being so communicative. According to our results, we can notice that there are communality features also in the Finnish mindset. Maybe it is just a part of the mindset that there is no need to make any noise about this, and as Uschanov (2012) mentioned, short expressions are all right for Finns. The same applies to communities: helping or working with others makes people feel being important parts of the communities. Traditional views are remarkable but there are also signs of connections to universal communities, being part of something "bigger" and noticing personal roles in them. Most communities are traditional, connected with families, relatives, and work communities. The concept of family is not defined here but we share the idea of it being diverse. The new or more open social ties can be noticed in the data in comments on mental belonging to bigger entities. The signs of the new social described by Chambers (2006) do not play a big role in the Finnish ways of living a meaningful life. This is an interesting note because the Finns are said to be a lot depending on their smart phones and other devices: in one study, it was noticed that even on summertime there were 133 net using times per day per person (Koistinen, 2018) and that there is therapy available for even elementary school-aged children to get rid of smartphone addiction (Piirainen, 2018).

The most surprising result of this research was not that the *new* social ties do not exist but that work, and work communities still play such a big role in living a meaningful life in the Finnish context. Finns seem to be quite traditional when comes to the sources of a meaningful life, despite the global possibilities of connecting worldwide. Work, especially paid work, defines personal identity and meaningfulness in the community and society. Sharing personal expertise and helping others is also a remarkable source of a life worth living. This all comes back to humans being very social in their nature (Mead, 1962): there is a need for being a member of a significant group. However, it is not enough: there is also a need for the group to accept their competence and for

making personal choices, being autonomic among others. A meaningful life is a combination of social ties but also self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and it seems to be also strictly connected with universal values (Schwartz, 1992) with the Finnish twist (work) (Helkama, 2015). There is a need to have a special status in society (paid work connected with power, connection to competency). There is a need to be respected by others (helping others adds the feeling of achievement, and connection to relatedness) and work offers a special place for it. Helping others and feelings of respect add value to working life and other parts of social life (eudaimonic, see Ryff et al., 2021). Having individual possibilities to create new things with others adds to the variety of life (stimulation; connection to autonomy). Independent choices and being alone in a good way, "alone with connections to others", offer a possibility of freedom (self-determination). Respecting nature and seeing personal role as a part of something bigger (universalism) are important. Meaningful life in the Finnish context cannot be described without meaningful others: there is an urgent need to feel that the loved ones also feel well (benevolence). Finns seem to respect the traditional habits, such as hard-working, volunteering and helping each other as sources of a good life (tradition). Especially grandparents and relatives, like children and spouses, were taken into account in daily life (conformity). It is important to be healthy, have hobbies, and have good relations with each other (security). In Finnish traditionalism, work played a big role in meaningful life: paid work was a base for a good living. This shows some signs of commitment to work. To work is meaningful for the wholeness of life and seems to form one base for individual`s well-being. To commit to work can serve as a source for daily well-being, by filling the basic psychological needs, for example being a valuable member of the community (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Same kind of result is found among academicians: a positive significant relationship was encountered between the psychological well-being levels of the academicians and their organizational commitment levels (Yalçın et al., 2021*)*.

In the conclusion of this research, we can state that meaningful life is built on the individual's work, including competence, autonomy, and relatedness (SDT, Deci & Ryan, 2000). However, working or living alone is not enough. In order to feel that life is meaningful, we need other people and the community to bring security, traditions, conformity, benevolence, and universalism which make life worth living. And that brings us back to where we started, Mead`s (1962) theory: to become a full human being there is a need for significant others. Workmates and managers play a huge role in feeling that personal work is important for the whole organization and for colleagues. It is important to remember this when considering organizational renewals and remote work. Employees need feedback, they need to be seen by colleagues and by managers. It is not fair even for Finns to leave them to work alone. This data confirms that meaningfulness and feelings of belonging at work are significant factors for well-being in whole life.

Experiences of relatedness during enforced remote work (covid-19) show that lack of communality has have many consequences: rates of loneliness have been high, and it has increased stress and exhaustion (Groarke et. al., 2022; Lunde et al., 2022). Because of this, we need new ways to build relatedness (Tapani et al., 2022).

Among teaching staff, it was noticed that dignity increases if personal work is visibly connected with the wholeness of the organization and if staff can work on their strengths (Salonen & Tapani, 2020). Meaningful life and meaningful working life seem to go hand in hand: if persons are recognized and respected at work, it adds to

their dignity in whole life. This is not enough. There is still a need for loved ones to do well. Finns seem to be somehow eudaemonic of their nature: they cannot be happy with their achievements alone. They need acceptance of their competencies, but they want to take care of others, too. Using Mead´s (1962) words, significant others count. Even at workplaces. Even among the silent and icemen Finns.

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