Aims
The purpose of this paper is to present an arts-based research project aiming to construct a philosophically consistent grounding for Joseph Beuys’ concept of Social Sculpture. The focus is on scrutinizing the importance of an arts-based method in theorizing Beuys’ thinking. In addition, the paper will introduce the key arguments of the research asserting that Social Sculpture is fundamentally a pedagogical project. After all, Beuys regarded pedagogy as the most important means to mold the society – the ultimate artwork: “To be a teacher is my greatest work of art.” This relates to what Beuys calls an extended (expanded, enhanced) understanding (concept) of art – what we could also call “a (r)evolution of thoughts”.

Methodology
Composing a coherent philosophical grounding for Beuys’ thinking is a complicated task. In the research project at hand this is done by scrutinizing various kinds of Beuys-literature and reflecting the emerging elementary ideas against both Beuys’ artworks and researcher’s own artworks that have been inspired by Beuys’ oeuvre. Reflections are subjected to a phenomenological rigor in order to offer them a philosophically solid grounding.
The artistic process described in this paper consists mainly of preparation of an exhibition that will take place in Nokia in April 2016. The exhibition is called “Freedom relations” and consists of sculptures and installations. Through the exhibited works the aim is to scrutiny the concept of freedom as a relation and its significance for Social Sculpture.

Framework
The research is ontologically grounded on phenomenology and especially its connections to artistic practices. It relies mainly on Merleau-Ponty, but partly also on Heidegger because of his special interest on sculpture. For Beuys, freedom is an essential concept that recurs throughout his writings and public appearances. In this research, freedom is considered a relation: one can be only free in relation to something. This standing point makes it relevant to contemplate the special meaning of a sculpture in regard to Social Sculpture. Existing in space by its character, a sculpture always demands a relation with the spectator – or even a passer-by.

Relationship to the call
From the mid 1960’s until his death in 1986, Joseph Beuys’ career turned more and more into the politics, and so did his artworks, too. By his on words, Beuys gradually lost his interest in making visually interesting art, instead he loaded his massive works with meanings that were more or less hidden in materials and forms. He regarded the actual artworks as process waste with some value as historical documentations, the true artwork being the change in the society that he might have sparked. To put it simply, for Beuys, being an active and responsible member of a community was to be an artist, but it is challenging to swiftly turn his thinking and Social Sculpture into a pedagogical form – although the pedagogy is in there. This paper is about making that pedagogy explicit through arts-based research, aiming to bring about a (r)evolution of thought within communities.
References


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