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The Art of Art Education Increases in Lapland

Timo Jokela

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In the beginning at the River

This article looks back on the 25 years long path of art education in Lapland University. In the summer of 1994, I was looking at River Ounasjoki at the opening of the Lapland Artists' Association's outdoor exhibition near Rovaniemi where I had art installation of my own. I had just found out that I had been chosen for the position as a Professor in Art education at the University of Lapland, when I was asked about my willingness to participate in the planning of the University's joint multidisciplinary Summer School with the theme of the River. As an environmentally orientated artist and art educator and a fisherman I immediately knew that I had come to work in the right university. The cooperation of Arts, Humanism, Social and Legal Sciences with northern eco-social culture had begun.

The next spring, as a part of summer school we went down River Ounasjoki on a log raft we had made. The concept of

community art did not exist yet those days, but we knew that in addition to the landscape, we had made an impact on the minds of the local people, the deep undercurrents of social environmental culture, with our art project. During the next years, we worked on the mountains and in the wilderness of Lapland and the shores of the Arctic Ocean in Norway, making art and building touring exhibitions using a thematic approach.

At the time, it was already clear to my colleagues and I that traditional studio working, studying of techniques, expression and art history, poorly responded to the changing education, society and contemporary art challenges set for visual art teachers. We realised that the adoption of contemporary art practices required art teacher education to be critically opened up to the surrounding world. We aimed to build a cooperation between art education and the Lapland university's northern environment. At the beginning, thematic summer schools were an ideal tool for this, and particularly the different forms of environmental art were welcomed with interest in the region. Interaction was not created just between individuals, but different organisations and cultural representatives were referred to the state of creative dialogue, as the operations expanded to the entire Northern European region with European Union funding (Jokela, Hiltunen & Härkönen, 2015a). Support for efforts to reform art education was found as the international networks strengthened. Particularly, the support of experts operating in the circles of InSEA, was encouraging from the very beginning.



River Project's participants rafting down the Ounas river. Finland. Photo Timo Jokela.



River Project in spring 1995. Testing the log raft build by students and staff of art education department in collaboration with local villagers. Ounasriver. Finland. Photo Vuokko Oja.

ACE - Project Studies as a Development Tool

The profiling of the Lapland University to the North and the Arctic opened up the opportunity to look at the role of art in building social relations, developing research and artistic cooperation as well as building expertise. In this new context, environmental art became a tool, which we used to develop the working methods of contextual and place-based visual art education based on contemporary art and the encounter of the northern socio-cultural settings (Jokela & Hiltunen 2014).

At the end of the 1990s, the sense of community had become very topical, when art and culture began to be discussed in various contexts. Art became an integral part of sustainable development and general well-being, it was considered as an important economic resource, even as a promoter of health. Discussions of strengthening the civil society and the third sector strongly raised the idea of community-based visual arts education thinking. The idea that an art educator must be able to look at their own position, instead of being a teacher of skills, but also as a cultural worker and a cultural values' reformer, strengthened. We now understood the role of an art educator as the builder of arts' creative space; an enabler, curator, facilitator, producer, arranger, creator of a dialogue-oriented culture.

The expansion of the profession of an art educator opened financing possibilities for field work, both domestically as well as in international forums. Art education demonstrated its ability as the executor of projects funded by the European

Union in the entire Northern region (see Jokela et al. 2015a). The forum for development was created by establishing Art, Community and Environment (ACE) project studies at the beginning of the 2000s in the curriculum reforms at the University of Lapland.

Project Studies as a Pedagogical Form of Contemporary Visual Arts Education

The ACE -project studies of the Master's Degree, where students, art educators, artists and scientists from different fields worked together within the same theme, supported the internal integration of the subject. Projects that operated on project funding often had representatives of arts and cultural institutions, tourism, business and local communities involved, in addition to schools and educational institutions. The involvement of different interest groups enabled dialogue and polyphony during activities, and coached the students for the challenges of a changing working life and society. As a phenomenon-based project pedagogy developer, we were ahead of our time.

ACE -projects became integrated with students' scientific master theses, and later to the dissertations of doctor students. Thus, arts projects received a strong research orientation alongside the functional aspect. Methodological principles and the role of artistic productions as part of research were made clearer. It is always good to remember that research of visual arts education in Finland is relatively new, and it was only developed at the



Preparing the River Lights event - from the myths of light and fire into contemporary art. Straw sculpture made by art students and local school pupils waiting, for burning at nightfall. Kemi River, Rovaniemi. Photo Timo Jokela.



Wintery place making. Working in schoolyard with Sami School children in Jokkmokk, Sweden. *ArctiChildren* project: Cross-border training program for promoting psychosocial well-being through school education in the Barents region: Jokkmokk. Photo Timo Jokela.

same time with the initiation of the University of Lapland's visual arts education research.

Art Teacher as a Researcher - Methodological Orientation Choices

Raising the interaction between art and science to the centre of the University of Lapland's strategy was unique and bold. In this case, it was realised that artistic work and research complement each other in a significant manner. Both working methods are combined by the effort to refine the perception of the world, and express this specified understanding to others. Science and art also belong to a well-structured image of the society and people, and at their best, they are tools for the improvement of society. As art educators, we sought a place for pedagogy as well.

When searching for a methodological basis for art education research, we began to test the combination of participatory action research methods with contemporary artistic activities. The art education staff's own active artistic work created an understanding basis for the development of the method. How each person's own artistic activities had encountered the north, became a tool for many teachers to develop art pedagogy. Productions created by the staff's research projects have also constantly been set for evaluation in several domestic and international exhibitions, and thus, work has been provided significant international peer feedback.

The method we developed was also applicable as a method for students' theses that had been made in the framework of art projects. Instead of researching personal art (artistic research), the subject of the students' Master's theses, who were studying to become art teachers, was the participatory and pedagogical dimension of art. The subject is, therefore, the pedagogical arrangement and learning process based on the interaction of art, which can be developed through participatory action research. Different forms of art are the development forms of interaction and dialogue, which can in turn be developed as contemporary art. To underline this, we began to call the method Art-Based Action Research (ABAR). The method is an action research and the action tool is art. (Jokela et al. 2015a).

By means of ABAR -methods, contextual artistic approaches have been developed within the scope of the University of Lapland's art teacher training, e.g. in formal and informal education, artistic and cultural life, youth work, elderly people, indigenous cultures, as well as the tourism industry. One of the most long-term development projects that was carried out by means of ABAR was the development of winter art with the regional businesses. It still offers an interesting platform for the promotion of contemporary art, research, contextual art education and the interaction of Northern cultures and identities. (Jokela, Härkönen & Yliharju 2014).

Children working in schoolyard with Sami craft-traditions and snow in Jokkmok Sami school, Sweden. *Arctic-Children project*: Cross-border training program for promoting psychosocial well-being through school education in the Barents region. Photo Timo Jokela.



Visual Arts Education as a Faculty Developer

In ABAR, it is also a question of developing the participating organisations' operation culture. The development of ABAR has been a learning process for the art education training program staff and its stakeholders. And the effect does not end here. The art education staff have had a very strong role as the developer of the entire Art and Design Faculty and its stakeholders operations as well as internationalisation. A good example of this a new international Arctic Art & Design Master's Degree program (University of Lapland 2016) where the best of project pedagogy, applied visual arts and service design are combined (Jokela, Coutts, Huhmarniemi & Härkönen 2013). The programme was launched in the autumn of 2015.

To strengthen the northern profile of the university, we established an Arctic Sustainable Arts and Design (ASAD 2016) thematic network under the umbrella of the University of the Arctic in 2010. The network is an extension to the determined development work with northern art education, and it now consists of 26 arts and design educational institutions from 8 different countries. The network's annual symposiums, exhibitions and publications offer art education and applied visual art projects a good international peer review forum, and they have increased the awareness of the entire art faculty as a talent centralisation of Arctic art and design. (Jokela & Coutts 2014; Jokela, Hiltunen, Härkönen 2015b).

The Art of Visual Arts Education

The main challenge of the University of Lapland's 25-year-long path has been to find the artistic and scientific orientation, as well as the synthesis of participatory pedagogy. In the arts, research and development projects led by staff, as well as the activities of master students, personal art expression is not so much emphasised, but instead the interactive operations with other entities communities, learners, artists and researchers. I would like to call the artistic output of this sharing and empowering process the art of visual arts education.

I believe that in this art of visual arts education, something happens which can be described as communally produced constructing of the world, something that neither looks back, nor classifies, but is open to new directions and sensitive to change. However, when created as part of research processes, is also true and responsible. In the art of visual arts education, education and research encounter in contemporary art's open, socially responsible and culturally sensitive mode. During the past 25 years, our northern and Arctic location has offered the development of art education a stimulating learning environment.

The actions of the staff and students have proven that the art of visual arts education has strengthened and matured in its northern cradle. Taking the operations to different sectors of society has brought awareness to the skills and power of visual arts education, and at the same time, has enabled contemporary art's opportunities to be realised and understood.

Creating environmental art for tourism destinations.
Preparation of willow sculpture in the *Land of the Forest Folk*.
Köngäs, Finland. Photo Timo Jokela.



Environmental art based on
folklore tales of the forest in
tourism destination *Land of the Forest Folk*.
Köngäs, Finland. Photo Timo Jokela.



School children, teachers
and local villagers building
an environmental art work at
a walking trail close to muni-
cipality center in Ivalo,
Finland. Photo Korinna
Korsström-Magga.





Place specific art work in a forgotten fishing station at Bodö, Norway. *Trans Barents Highway Symposium of Art* was a month long travelling workshop from Atlantic coast, Norway, through Sweden and Finland into Russia to Murmansk. Photo Timo Jokela.



Winter art as a method for *Salla Myrsky Community Project* in the Salla municipality, Northern Finland. With the help of art education students of University of Lapland, local teachers and other local agencies, the youth of Salla village celebrate local identity and traditions of the region. 2009. Photo Timo Jokela.



Vocational school students, nature tourism companies and art education students and teachers working on place-specific snow and ice buildings at the Arctic Ocean. *Snow and Ice Project* aims at making winter art known in the region and to develop winter art education that is suitable for Finnmark's multicultural societies. Kirkenes, Norway. Photo Timo Jokela.

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Note

Photo page 43. Guardian figure made by art education students at the gate of the tourism destination. *Land of the Forest Folk*. Königs, Finland. Photo: Timo Jokela.