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## CULTURE SENSITIVE PARTICIPATORY ART AS VISUAL ETHNOGRAPHY IN THE NORTH

### ABSTRACT

*The article discusses how community-based environmental art has used to help Northern and Arctic peoples to communicate their own visual and eco-social environmental culture by analyzing it from the inside. Artistic activity draws its content from the northern places, while combining traditional, non-artistic working methods and Sami indigenous practices with dialogical and relational contemporary art. Often the processes are parallel and overlapping with the methods of visual ethnography.*

*The article presents the premises, processes, and execution of two artistic projects: Kirkkokuusikko memorial (2009) in Lapland, Finland as an example of an artist personal effort, and selected examples of the result of long term collaboratively and multi-disciplinary winter art development (2003-2016) in Northern Scandinavia and Russia. These projects shed light on the interaction between the environmental art practises, visual ethnography and decolonizing effect of community based participatory approaches in the North.*

### KEYWORDS

Northern Places, Cultural Identities, Participatory Art, Environmental Art

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## INTRODUCTION

The environment of the North and Arctic is changing rapidly and cumulative impacts effect the social life, wellbeing and culture of people living in the region. According to a study conducted by the Nordic Council of Ministers (2011) there are certain megatrends going on in the Arctic and the North. Global warming is happening faster in the Arctic than in any other place on earth with profound consequences for local communities. Another important driver is globalization, which is connected with neoliberalist exploitation of natural resources like oil, gas, minerals, forests and ecosystem services by tourism. The consequences will have significant implications for Arctic cultures. There is estimated 4 million people living in the Arctic, including more than 40 indigenous groups and languages. Indigenous people are 10 % of the whole population in the Arctic (AHDR 2007). Globalization leads the process where communities are transformed from rural characteristics in terms of economy, culture and lifestyle, to one which can be characterized as urban. It leads to concentration of the population in larger places. It entails a complex set of processes, not only regarding where people live, but also who they are, and how they live in terms of culture, economic well-being, political organization, communication and the distribution of power, demographic structure and social and cultural relations (Nordic Council of Ministers 2011).

Simultaneously, the youth in the north are sent to have their education in the south or in bigger cities. Arctic young people themselves expect to move from their place of origin to educate themselves and hold a position in the labour market. The educational options determine the settlement choices as the smaller communities lack opportunities for young people to fulfill their dreams (Karlsdóttir & Junsberg 2015). This has led, in many small towns and villages, to an erosion of social structures and has created a series of recognized problems, including ageing of the population, youth unemployment and the disintegration of cultural activities as well as psychosocial problems often related to the loss of cultural identity and weak communication.

Neoliberalism and the post-colonial circumstances in the north highlight objectives for sustainable development. These objectives incorporate current issues such as the survival of Northern and Arctic cultures combined with their inhabitants' self-determination concerning their own culture while securing a social stability for all the communities. Finding solutions to these challenges

requires cultural-sensitive approaches, multi-sensory perception, regional expertise, co-research and communality. The questions are tightly connected to cultural identities, which in turn are often constructed through art and visual culture. By developing methods of participatory, cultural-sensitive and decolonizing community-based environmental art at the Faculty of Art and Design in the University of Lapland, activities that renew and strengthen cultures are formed. This movement is in accord with sustainable development. This has happened in collaboration with university's partner institutions in the North and the Arctic (see ASAD 2017, Uarctic 2017, Jokela & Coutts 2014, Jokela & Coutts 2015).

#### DECOLONIZATION AND PARTICIPATORY ART IN THE NORTH

The blending of indigenous cultures and other lifestyles is rather common in the whole circumpolar area. This multinational and multicultural composition creates elusive sociocultural challenges that are sometimes even politicized in the neo-colonial settings of the north and the Arctic. In recent years, there has been a rising interest on rewriting the forgotten and overlooked cultural history of the region (Lähteenmäki & Pihlaja 2005, Tuominen 2011). Attention has been paid to the role of arts as representation of the North (see Grane 2001, Marsching & Polli 2011). Kuokkanen (2007) discusses the need, significance and objectives of an 'indigenous paradigm' which is a way of decolonizing the indigenous values and cultural practices by 're-centring' the research focus on their own concerns and worldviews. One of the main objectives of such a paradigm includes criticism towards the Western Eurocentric way of thinking. Smith (1999) challenges the traditional Western ways of knowing and researching, and calls for the 'decolonization' of methodologies of indigenous research. Smith's (1999) vision of decolonization is a long-term process, which includes dismantling the power of administrative, cultural, linguistic and psychological colonialism. In addition, the scholars of northern cultures have stressed the need of decolonization among the other multi-ethnic communities, like Lähteenmäki (2005) in mixed Sami-Finnish societies in Central Lapland, Finland, and Corbett (2007) in Nova Scotia coastal fishery communities, in Canada. Many scholars have called on the indigenous knowledge system as a basis of indigenous research in the fields of culture, art and design (Guttorm 2014). According to Aamold (2014), several artists in the Scandinavian North

utilise their multi-ethnic background and environmental knowledge as a basis of their art. Thus, he argues that a mix of indigenous and critical methodologies is required in the research of contemporary art in the North.

These paradigm changes have led to re-evaluating how art is taught in academies and universities and realized in the North, and highlighted the aims of a culturally sensitive approach (Manifold et alii 2015) and the objectives of UNESCO for ecological, social, cultural and economic sustainable development (ASAD 2017). These objectives incorporate current issues such as the survival of regional cultures combined with the inhabitants' self-determination of their own culture while securing the social and economic stability for all communities. In north-related participatory art the question is not only about safeguarding the cultural heritage, but rethinking the nature of art.

#### CONTEMPORARY ART AS A DIALOGUE IN ART-BASED ACTION RESEARCH PROCESS

In his writings on relational art, Bourriaud (2002) sees artistic practice as a process that always entails making connections between people. Contemporary art is marked by contextual, process-based, and dialogical activity instead of technical skills limited to the control of tools and methods of expression. Individual work has been supplemented by communality and engagement. Particularly in community and environmental art, the emphasis is on the situational aspects of art, its links to people's everyday activities, events and places (see Kester 2004, Lacy 1995, Lippard, 1997). Communality means a new method of examining and understanding people's connections, spontaneous networks and common pursuits as a counterforce against extreme individuality and consumption. Communality offers a new perspective from which to examine the connection of contemporary art, indigenous art and craft and decolonization in the North.

When adopting the models of relational contemporary art, community-based environmental art has moved away from the prevailing opinion that art activities convey the same worldwide western cultural values and that the ways to implement art are the same everywhere. Bringing the operating modes of socially active contemporary art into northern contexts and merging them with the aims of sustainability development, culturally sensitive approaches and questions of decolonization, also requires renewal of teaching art in universities. It also aims to develop an artistic research method towards a more participatory direction instead of artistic individuality and merging

methods of art and visual ethnography (see Pink 2001). At the University of Lapland Faculty of Art and Design, this was pursued by a developing method of Art Based Action Research (ABER) by the research group Northern Art, Community, Environment Research (NACER) led by professors Timo Jokela and Mirja Hiltunen (see NACER 2017). The group fosters participatory and engaging collaboration between the various actors of the university's northern network. In the research group's activities, the initial socio-cultural and visual mapping of places and situations using methods of visual ethnography support applying contemporary art into northern multicultural environments in Finland, Sweden, Norway and Russia, often amongst indigenous peoples (Hiltunen 2009, Hiltunen 2010, Jokela *et alii* 2015a, Jokela *et alii* 2015b).

#### CASE ONE: KIRKKOKUUSIKKO MEMORIAL, ART AND LOCAL IDENTITY

As an example of community-based public art in the North I present the premises, processes, and execution of a public art work named *The Story of Kirkkokuusikko*. The work of art was meant to be a memorial to the first church of the region that is said to have existed, in the early 1600s, on a forest high in the hinterland of Kittilä in Lapland in Finland. The church was built in the centre of the fishing and hunting area of Kittilä Forest Sami village. The process sheds light on the interaction between the design of community-based art and methods of visual ethnography to invest the configurations of place, environment, material and social situations (see Pink 2012).

The memorial was connected to stories of the past, but the process itself was highly relative to the present day for the local villagers whose Forest Sami cultural background was forgotten and overlooked. Professor of Cultural History Marja Tuominen (2005) emphasizes northern people's right and obligation to "constantly squeeze from the past those whose dreams were not realized, who fell over the edge of history, whose story was left untold." Local elder Pekka Niva challenged village society to build a memorial and himself remembered its story.

I remember at the end of the 30's, or maybe it was the summer of 1940, when I was with my grandfather, my mother's father that is, and my aunts Mallu and Eevi, picking cloudberries. I remember the duckboards, and my old grandfather saying that this was Kirkkokuusikko (name of the place). Kirkkokuusikko was the core of the story for that

generation; they told it as though it was all true, and they believed it completely. They didn't mention the exact place of the church, though, just that it had been there.

On one hand, the monument can be considered an attempt to strengthen one's identity, and on the other hand a local symbol of belonging to a place, a time, and a community. Having received the commission to help build the memorial, I had to decide if I would follow the story of Lutheran Christianity of the Forest Sami people. I could not be sure whether the tradition was true; the story lacked the time in which the church was supposed to have been built. Many people doubted the whole story. The only thing certain was that local people were happy to tell tales about the existence of the church. The story seems to have been exactly the kind of important factor in regional identity and culture, which, for example, Lacy (1995) and Lippard (1997) demand as starting points for place-specific and community art. Significance of story-telling and traditional knowledge is emphasized in the discussion on method of indigenous art, like Sami applied art, *duodji* (Porsanger & Guttrom 2011). A story that has taken on the nature of a myth can be seen as simultaneously preserving and creating regional culture.

Tuominen (2005) continues:

each story told of the past is a reconstruction, which can never be identical to its target, or fully recapture its authentic meanings... Every historical study is an interpretation, which is restricted by and imbued with the conditions imposed by our current understanding. But finally a historical study is just one of the many forums in which history is interpreted and images of the past conveyed. The arts, many sciences, and journalism all participate in this.

I started working on the design for the memorial by searching the literary and archival sources for evidence of the veracity of the *Kirkkokuusikko* story and discussing with local elders. I wanted to understand the core of the story and to find its meaning for our own era and local villagers. I tried to explain and justify, what or who is remembered by this monument and what kind of visual expression that remembrance should receive in order to resonate with the past, but at the same time to preserve the aspect characteristic of art which creates new current and future meanings. I used method of ethnography to

collect data and evidence for the work of art. I understood the cultural heritage as a performative process which is valued, built, and constantly renewed, in this case by means of art. Although the Kirkkokuusikko monument was to be located in a relatively inaccessible spot in the middle of a forest, I realized that I was creating public art for a Northern location where the participation of the locals was a central role.

#### WHOSE STORY SHOULD BE TOLD?

The documents showed that a church was truly built in Kittilä. It was erected, on the orders of the Swedish king's "policy for Lapland and the Arctic Ocean", sometime between 1607 and 1611. The church remained standing at least until 1620, after which it was evidently destroyed. The sources, therefore, indicated that the local story of a church was based on a historical event and they clarified its date. However, I did not want to design a monument only to the "Northern policy" of the Swedish king. I wanted to know who the users of this church, established on the lands of Kittilä Forest Sami village, were and I tried to extract their story from the documents as subject matter for the monument. I found it very important because many of the villagers pointed out that their ancestors were part of the overlooked Forest Sami community. Familiarisation with the historical documents through meetings and lessons during research with the villagers helped increase understanding of their past and could be seen as part of the decolonizing process.

The Sami village (*siida*) differs from our modern concept of a village. It was more of a management system for natural resources and social relations, and a network of families and households, which had their own usufruct areas. The Sami village, with its almost completely self-sufficient economy, needed a large land area. The village required a sufficient area for deer hunting, beaver streams, fishing grounds, and goose swamps to make a life based on a varied economy and yearly migrations possible. Households lived on the usufruct of the Sami village, in accordance with the yearly hunting cycle, having perhaps two or three dwelling places on their land, though everyone got together in the winter village (Enbuske 2003, Lehtola 1997b).

At that time, at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the first Finnish settlers had already joined the Forest Sami in the Kittilä area. The presumed purpose of the church was also to strengthen settlement in the area, even though it was not yet authorized within the borders of Lapland.



Together with the tax collector and the authorities, the Church created a foothold for the gradual alteration of the Forest Sami way of life. It is noteworthy, however, that just as the Forest Sami embraced the settlers' way of life so the settlers assimilated the ways of life of the Forest Sami. The lifestyle and culture of the Forest Sami did not die away completely, even though their language was lost, to live on only in place names and in terms related to fishing, hunting, and reindeer herding. The eco-social environmental culture of villages is still partly based on this history and differs in many ways from common Finnish culture because of its mixed Forest Sami and Finnish roots.

I wanted to bring the voices of Kittilä's Forest Sami into my work. At the same time, I noticed that the background survey for the monument had taken me into the ethnic, cultural, and political questions present in the ongoing Sami debate connected to Sami identities, rights and privileges in Finland (Lehtola 2012, Valkonen 2009). However, I did not want to raise the *Kirkkokuusikko* artwork directly into the core of Sami debate. Rather, I wanted to bring my work to a level that would resonate with the world view and lifestyle of the Forest Sami when the church came to their land and offered a forum to the villagers of today in order to better understand their own background and environmental culture.

#### THE MEETING OF TWO ERAS

Life in the Forest Sami winter village was a time for being together and strengthening the community. The shamanistic world view gave birth to a narrative tradition that was typical of the native peoples of the northern hemisphere, but also contained local ingredients. These stories recorded the local memories of the world of the Forest Sami, their social system, and the arrival of Finnish settlers and Christianity in the region. At the centre of the stories are the shaman (*noidje*) who defended their communities against other Sami villages or intruders. It is likely that the shaman functioned as "village elders" and leaders of their communities. The roots of the story tradition lie in the mythical past, but the story element that links it to the Kittilä area appeared at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. One storyline rises above the rest. The construction of the church coincides with the presumed lifetime of Päiviö, the leading figure of the Kittilä Forest Sami village. Many stories related to Päiviö have been recorded in the area (Andersson 1914). Päiviö converted to Christianity, perhaps against his will,

and at the same time lost his abilities as a shaman.

The stories about Päiviö crystallize the encounter between two eras and two perceptions of the world. The Sami people were perhaps opposed to the construction of churches, but Päiviö appears to have adopted the new culture and to have considered it a better defence for his village community. Päiviö became a distributor of the new culture, even though he mourned his lost powers. As a preserved spell says:

*In my youth a shaman  
Without a hanging cross  
Without a priestly ribbon  
I knew the spells full well  
And sang the Lappish charms  
(Andersson 1914, 122)*

The core of the story of Kirkkokuusikko lies in this meeting of two eras, two different world views, and two different social systems (a centralized state and the self-governing community of the Forest Sami). The subject matter of the memorial, therefore, is not just the church as a building, but the background of larger ideas, meanings, values, and consequences – the end of one era and the beginning of another in Lapland. I simplified the content of the work so that it would relate to both the coming of the king's church, and the beginning of the gradual disappearance of Päiviö's Sami village. This is now understood as a key story of the historical birth of villages today in the area.

#### FINDING THE VISUAL REFERENCES

Although I emphasized the importance of subject matter in the monument, it should also have a materialisation and form that resonates with the content. I wanted to get a visual idea of what the church may have been like. Of course, examples are available of the size and style of churches of the period. When only a few families lived in Kittilä Sami village at the time, the church was really just a modest sermon room. In terms of style and construction, it would hardly have differed greatly from other buildings in the area, although to the inhabitants of the Lapp village it no doubt seemed grand and representative of power. Several sources provide references to Forest Sami village buildings which differ from well-known nomadic tents. Since the seasonal cycle brought life repeatedly close to the same suitable bodies of water, dwellings developed into timber-founded structures.

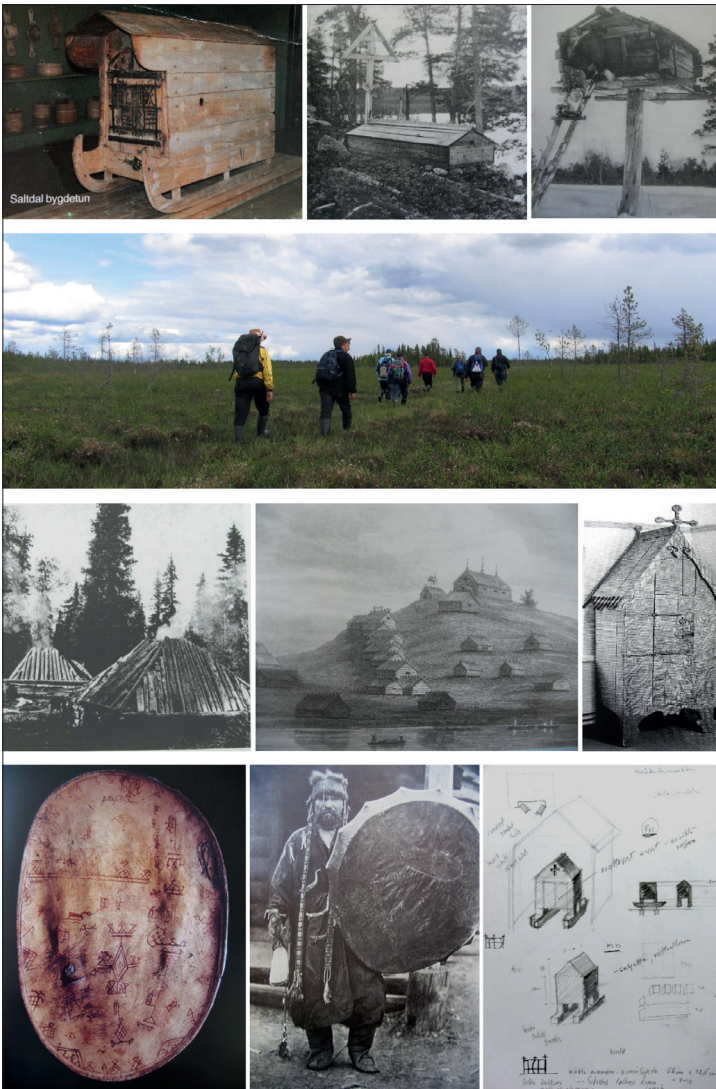


FIGURE 1 - MAPPING THE VISUAL REFERENCES FOR COMMUNITY-BASED ART USING MUSEUMS ARCHIVES, PLACE-SPECIFIC INVESTIGATIONS, NARRATIVES AND SKETCHING. PHOTOS TIMO JOKELA.

Historical sources for the year 1740 provide a description of Forest Sami living in rectangular houses with 4-6 layers of logs (Joonas 2006). Illustrations of log buildings, such as fire shelters, nili platforms, storehouses, ground shelters, etc. have been preserved from Russia and Swedish Lapland, where the lifestyle of the Forest Sami survived longer and could be documented and examined. I assume that the technical solutions and shapes of buildings may well be inferred from these sources.

In addition to buildings, I also looked for other objects that could serve as visual starting points for the monument. Few objects have survived from that period, but especially the later objects in the Sami Museum of Swedish Lapland supply hints about visual idiom.

Images of materials are also available. In the 1660's, Schefferus recorded illustrations of objects and shaman drums of the area. The drumskins preserved not only an understanding of the cosmological nature of the world typical of the period, but also its sources of livelihood. A drum sent to Stockholm by Tuderus, a fiercely evangelical Christian priest, contains references to the arrival of Christianity and its churches, and possibly even a picture of Kirkkokuusikko church. Some visual material on the meeting of the shamanistic world and Christianity in Lapland can be found in the Tanhua 'shaman tomb' dated to 1595-1635: wrought iron crosses, bears' teeth, and other charms are in perfect harmony, telling of the meeting of two cultures and eras.

A survey of the visual material provided a wealth of detail for the design of the work, but the form remained open. I was determined that the material for the work would be massive wood, the original material of the church. I would treat the surface of the work with agents resistant to fire and mould, and I would give it a dark patina, to refer to the past. I would include details that would refer to the Christian faith, but also to the conditions for life in the area, such as deer, fish, and the grain brought by settlers. All these choices were based on the visual data I collected and discussion with locals who took part in the construction and carving the details using their own handicraft skill in woodworking.

#### CREATING THE FORM OF THE MONUMENT

I decided on the structure and form of the monument when I saw, in the Saltdal Museum in Norway, a guard's house on sledge runners, designed to protect cattle from wild animals. I also investigated Sami traditional storehouse on runners as well as wooden construction of Siberian shaman graves. Since the location of the church is uncertain, I decided to build the monument on sledge runners. The monument therefore continues to search for its place and perhaps also its meaning. It can be moved should new studies be conducted. The formal language and building method for a monument on columns, mounted on sledge runners, refers concretely to the construction of a Sami storehouse (nili), to a dwelling, and even to the first buildings of the settlers, but also to the church. I wished, however, that the monument would not point anywhere, but would rather be closed and quiet, though at the same time suggestive. Its nature must be at one with the silent secrecy in the stories told of the area, but it must also provide enough information for people

to discover what it refers to. It is therefore closed, but it can be opened.

The shape of a relics cabinet, inherited from the Middle Ages, with its opening pictured doors, offered an iconostasic solution that would present the double meaning of the monument at once to the viewer. I decided to build the work in such a way that the opening of the double doors would lead on one side to the church and the story of the king, and on the other side to Päiviö and the Sami village of Kittilä.



FIGURE 2 - WORKING WITH COMMUNITY TO BUILD UP A MEMORIAL "THE STORY OF KIRKKOKUUSIKKO". PHOTOS TIMO JOKELA AND MIRJA HILTUNEN.

#### CELEBRATION OF THE MEMORIAL - PARTICIPATION AND DECOLONIZATION

I planned the implementation of the work so that I was able to build it with the help of locals, first in my studio, then dismantle it, transport the parts to the site, and re-erect it at Kirkkokuusikko. The site was located in the middle of a swamp, several kilometers from the nearest road, so that transport alone required the assistance of local reindeer herders. I planned the transport, assembly, and opening of the work as a performative and communal event where about one hundred local people participated in the Kirkkokuusikko forest. After the bishop blessed the monument, I told the large audience about its background and dual meaning.

I hoped that the Kirkkokuusikko artwork would generate debate about what and who is remembered or forgotten, what is worth remembering, and who can remember the history of Lapland. According to Professor of Cultural History Tuominen (2010) northern cultural history is needed to dissolve the mental and social structures that

for centuries have defined the periphery and the center, the object and the subject, what is worth remembering and what deserves only oblivion. Personally, I think community-based environmental art faces similar tasks and opportunities, as methods of decolonization call by Smith (1999) and Kuokkanen (2007).

In the Kirkkokuusikko memorial, I tried to combine contemporary artistic thinking and methods of visual ethnography with traditional construction techniques, the local story tradition and cultural historical study. I brought forward local content and meanings that are easily forgotten in the geographical and mental triangle of the nearby Suurikuusikko European biggest gold mine, the Porsche winter testing track, and the growing Levi skiing-resort. At the same time, I brought forward the heritage of the Forest Sami, already half-forgotten in the Kittilä region, which in turn affects the current and politicized debate on Sami identity and rights in the area.

#### CASE TWO: WINTER ART

The second example of combination of community based work in Northern environment and visual ethnography discusses how snow, ice and winter have been used in Northern village communities in an educational contest. Examples are based on collaboration with Art and Design higher education institutions in Northern Scandinavia and Russia coordinated by the Faculty of Art and Design at the University of Lapland, Finland. In the beginning of the millennium I introduced the concept of winter art to describe changes in artistic features and phenomena related to winter aesthetics and culture. "One manifestation of this change is the brisk increase in winter festivals, winter theaters, snow and ice sculpting events and snow architecture. At their best, these phenomena can be called winter art" (Jokela 2003, 7).

Northern forms of culture and cultural identities have emerged and grown in close relationship with nature and harsh winter conditions. Snow covers the landscape in northern Scandinavia eight months a year, and the snowy landscape still has an important role to play in the cultural and economic life and wellbeing in the rapidly changing North and Arctic. The need for a sustainable and culturally sensitive relationship to winter was identified in multidisciplinary collaboration with the university's northern network. Many teachers and researchers have stated that for example Sami young people learn best by doing practical work in natural surroundings outside the school building (Keskitalo, 2010).

In northern cultures that are skilled in making use of nature's resources, people typically work continuously surrounded by nature. At the same time, they develop a way to observe and understand the yearly cycle of nature. In winter, the different states or phases of water, such as snow, frost and ice, create a distinct character for the environment and for the people moving about and working in it; northern cultures have adapted to this. Dozens of different terms are used to describe the different states of snow and ice, most of which are multisensory and illustrate the relationship of activity to winter. This is precisely the tacit everyday knowledge of the North that is unique to the world and has also been the basis for developing winter art.

Nature and winter define more than just the material framework of life. Old northern religions, beliefs, traditions and relationships with the environment have characteristics that distinguish them from the traditions of western and southern Europe. The undercurrent of the rich mythology of the northern peoples has been a shamanistic perception of the world. For example, the storytelling heritage of Finnish Lapland has been enriched by a rich mixture of Sami and Finnish culture, in which winter plays a key role.

Education's winter art and community-based approach was initiated by examining the pressures for change within art education stemming from the practices of relational contemporary art. The purpose of selecting community-based environmental art as a method of winter art was to make it easier to deal with regional and local phenomena in addition to tradition. Even today, art in the wintery landscape challenges us to ponder who we are, where we belong, and what our place is in the cycle of the world. Indeed, winter-related activities highlight the identities of the participating individuals and communities.

There are several successful art projects and action research cases done in the course of the years (Hiltunen 2009, Jokela 2007a, Jokela 2007b, Jokela et alii 2015a). One successful example is *ArctiChildren: Cross-border Training Program for Promoting Psychosocial Wellbeing through School Education in the Barents Region*, led by the University of Lapland (2006-2008). In this project, I was responsible for developing winter art activities that support Sami cultural identity and wellbeing in schools using methods of visual ethnography and art-based action research (see Jokela 2008b; Jokela et alii 2015b).

The project took place in multiethnic villages in Jokmok, Sweden, Sevettjärvi, Finland and Lovozero, Rus-

sia – precisely in places where Sami culture meets other nationalities, mixed and merged together in many ways. In the ArctiChildren project, community-specific winter art served as tools to encourage schools, teachers, pupils, parents and villagers to get involved in community-based modes of operation.

The art students, teachers, art educators, artists, researchers school pupils and villagers who work on the project deal with a shared theme related to winter using place-based processes of art and education to encourage intentional and situational learning (Jokela & Hiltunen, 2014). Instead of focusing on subjective experience, reflecting is done on communal experience and phenomenological, cultural, aesthetic and ecological linkages between the community, the environment and winter. The presence of varied interest groups, including indigenous voices and local elders enables dialectic interaction and polyphony during the activities. Such winter art projects start with a sociocultural and visual analysis of the place and community, using methods of visual ethnography and techniques of visual art (Jokela et alii 2006).

#### WINTER ART AS A METHOD OF CULTURALLY SENSITIVE EDUCATION AND DECOLONIZATION

A key question was the preserving of cultural diversity and the intrinsic nature of the visual arts in the North. For example, the traditional Sami culture does not recognize arts as such, or even have art as a concept on its own as western culture has. Visual art, however, has a long tradition in the form of crafts, and many see handicrafts as the embodiment of Sami art and studies on traditional handicrafts as adequate art education. However, by introducing the methods of contemporary arts, Sami artists have now broken the long period of having their culture depicted mainly by outsiders. Contemporary art has empowered artists to communicate their own lifeworld from within their culture. Lehtola (1997a, 23), Professor in Sami Studies, sees art “as a representation, which not only describes the existing identity, but also continuously builds and generates it”.

For the improvement of winter art in a culturally sensitive way, dialogue between contemporary art and Sami indigenous practices is crucial. Thus the development projects were arranged with art education and Sami Craftwork (duodji) education at the Sami University College in Kautokeino, Norway. At the joint workshops, ways of working were created in such a way that contemporary art and traditional forms and principles of Sami



craftworks conjoined and became integrated. The aim of the education project was to develop working practices of contemporary art that respected the starting points and values of the Sami culture in a sustainable way but offered an open space for multiethnic dialogue.



FIGURE 3 - WINTER ART AS COMMUNITY-BASED ART. WORKING WITH SAMI HERITAGE IN VILLAGES OF KAUTOKEINO, NORWAY AND IN JOKKMOKK, SWEDEN. PHOTOS TIMO JOKELA.

Taking place in schoolyards and village centers, at its best, winter art activity helps to look at space from a new perspective, as a space for experiencing the annual cycle of northern nature. It transforms into a center of information and action, a showcase for the school's principles of learning and its community spirit, a meeting place for the school, parents and the whole village community as a forum for symbols that build up cultural identity and democracy. The basis for the winter art activities is the empowering impact of art on communities combined with the promotion of psychosocial wellbeing in a way that respects the northern cultural identity and works for decolonization. The cooperation with the Sami and other multiethnic communities also clarified the relationship between contemporary art, cultural identity and wellbeing. Working outdoors has proven successful, and the methods used can be seen to be in harmony with nature and the environmental relationship of the northern communities (see Hiltunen 2009, Jokela 2008a).

One objective in winter art has been to develop approaches that look for the strengths of inhabitants through community activities and support the preservation and construction of identity. The relationship of northern communities to their own wintry environment has played a key role in this.

Therefore winter art is a natural and convenient way of working in projects with social-oriented goals including the aims of decolonization.

FIGURE 4: WINTER ART COLLABORATION FOR EASTERN FESTIVALS WITH VILLAGERS AND SCHOOL PUPILS IN MULTIETHNIC VILLAGE OF LOVOZERO IN NORTH-WEST RUSSIA. LOVOZERO IN A SMELTING POT OF SAMI, KOMI, NENETS AND RUSSIAN CULTURES WITH A LONG TRADITION ON REINDEER HERDING. PHOTOS TIMO JOKELA.



## CONCLUSION

The aim of this article has been to introduce the background and ideology of the community-based environmental art as decolonization in the North. Current social changes in the North and the Arctic are tightly connected to cultural identities, which in turn are often constructed through art and visual culture. In these two examples, I have used methods which aim to renew and strengthen cultures in harmony with the notion of sustainable development. Examples demonstrate the interaction between artistic activities and research orientation. Creating art does not exclude research, and *vice versa*. Use of the methods of art-based action research and visual ethnography has supported the application of contemporary art into northern multicultural environments, often amongst their indigenous peoples. Visual mapping and analyzing the appearance, livelihoods, traditions and stories of villages, has helped to create art activities that activate people and entire villages. These community-based environmental art projects have also been char-

acterized by bringing together people of different ages and generations, and understanding, conveying and renewing the significance of the history and livelihoods of places through art. This kind of art can be understood as construction of the world, in these cases of the changing North. This kind of art activity is not something that can be taken out of its context, nor classified or formulated, but it is dialogic and ready to recognize the changes. Visual ethnography methods were used to develop the content of the art and art-based action research to foster participation of locals. This combination worked as decolonization process.

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