



Article IV

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*A detail of the installation of the Something old, new, borrowed and blue I
made together with Tanya Krawtsov. In our piece we examined the familiar
and unfamiliar cultural landscape of Komi. Image: Elina Härkönen, 2018.*

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Cultural Sustainability in Art-Based Interdisciplinary Dialogue

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Abstract

This article introduces an international and interdisciplinary summer school, 'Living in the Landscape' (LiLa) in 2018. LiLa's practices focused on creating dialogue among art education, anthropology and nature science and developing culturally sustainable methods for investigating cultural heritage in the Komi Republic of Russia. The article's research interest is how dialogue and cultural heritage appear in the artistic processes, artworks and final exhibition of the summer school. These are examined through art-based action research in order to develop international, multidisciplinary and culturally sustainable art education. The four-field model utilised in the research highlights the multidimensional role of dialogue in both individual and collaborative artistic endeavours.

Keywords

cultural sustainability, cultural heritage, dialogue, art education, interdisciplinarity

Introduction

In this article, we introduce an international and interdisciplinary summer school, 'Living in the Landscape' (LiLa), that took place in the Komi Republic, Russia, in 2018. The summer school was a collaboration between four Nordic Universities (the University of Lapland Finland (UoL), Syktyvkar State University Russia, Uppsala University Sweden and the Arctic University of Norway) and was funded by the Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Education. LiLa was a continuation of a longer development of the Arctic Sustainable Art and Design international network (UARctic 2019) and also a collaboration between the University of Lapland and Syktyvkar State University (Hiltunen & Zemtsova 2014).

Interdisciplinarity with art-based approaches was utilised in LiLa to identify and develop the most appropriate methods through which culturally sensitive investigation could be combined with the potentially regenerative qualities of research, art and education (Jokela & Coutts 2018). The students of art education, fine arts, social and cultural anthropology and nature sciences came together to study local cultural heritage and work with rural communities to learn how lives

are lived in the Komi landscapes. The developed methods focused on creating encounters and dialogue between traditional forms of culture and contemporary practices and how these could be presented through art. The school took place over two periods of a week long each. The first period in May consisted of pre-assignments, a fieldwork week in the remote district of Onega, lectures introducing practices of different disciplines and a small pop-up exhibition in Syktyvkar. Over the summer, the students and staff worked on their artistic productions individually or in different groups. During the second period in September, the participants came back together to build the final exhibition in the Komi National Library and the Syktyvkar State University gallery and to release the new publication *Living in the Komi Landscape* (Jokela et al. 2018).

We both work as lecturers in art education at the University of Lapland, and our role in LiLa was to conduct research for the school as doctoral students. In this article, our research interest focuses on the artistic processes, final artworks and exhibitions that resulted from the interdisciplinary activities during the summer school. We evaluate them from the perspective of developing international, multidisciplinary and culturally sustainable art education, and we ask what kind of dimensions the dialogue had in processing cultural heritage through art. Due to our own backgrounds, we look at these especially from an art education point of view. This perspective highlights the importance of processes and dialogue during the individual and interactive artistic practices.

Our research orientation falls into the field of art-based education research (ABER), and the method we have used is art-based action research (ABAR). ABAR aims to develop practices in collaboration with the participating actors and sees the role of art not only as a means for positive change but also as a method for critical reflection (Jokela et al. 2015). In ABAR, the action processes are studied through cycles of planning, implementing, evaluating and redefining action. Our study is part of this broader evaluation of the LiLa activities. In ABAR, the researcher is an equal participant in the researched action, and hence, we have taken part in all the LiLa practices and artistic endeavours.

A four-field model of cultural heritage and dialogue

Our theoretical framework is built on cultural sustainability (Fairclough 2009; Soini 2013), interdisciplinarity (Hollmén 2015; Jokela & Coutts 2018) and dialogue (Buber 2002; Kester 2004). In our key concepts cultural sustainability is the most central. Yet, in the light of LiLa's goals, interdisciplinarity is required, and even interdisciplinary interactions cannot be realised without dialogue. Dialogue is crucial to achieve constructive culturally sustainable endeavours. Dialogue here is considered to mean both verbal communication and interaction taking place in silence (Buber 2002). Culture and cultural heritage are at the core of cultural sustainability and LiLa's aims. In their broad meaning, they encompass all human activities, particularly everyday lifestyles (Soini 2013). In LiLa, heritage was considered in the active tense, consisting of contemporary people-based issues, such as quality of life, place-based issues and landscape, social responsibilities and rights, and how people can adapt to change (Fairclough 2009).

Figure 1 introduces a four-field model we have constructed for our key concepts. It categorises the produced artworks and other visual presentations according to the appearance of cultural heritage and dialogue in them.

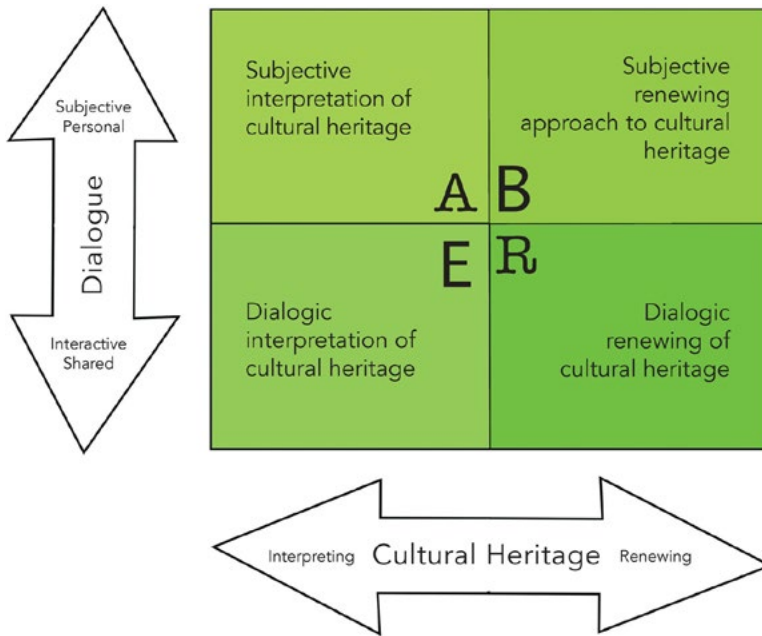


Figure 1
The four-field model of cultural heritage and dialogue. Illustration: Author

The four-field model has two variables: dialogue on the vertical axis and relationship to cultural heritage on the horizontal axis. With A, B, E, R we refer to the dimensions of art-based educational research in the summer school. The significance of dialogue to the process of creating the artwork grows when moving from top to down. The fields of cultural heritage are divided, from left to right, into interpretation and active renewal. Hence, in A, we look at subjective, individually created works that interpret cultural heritage and, in B, works with actively reproductive relationships to cultural heritage. Although the artworks in A and B are independently created, dialogue appeared in different encounters during the summer school and had some relevance to the formation of the work. In field E, the creation of the artwork is based on a dialogue and collaboration among several actors, and the relationship to cultural heritage involves interpretation. In field R, we look at all the works in a dialogic setting and the renewing relationship of cultural heritage in the final exhibition. As our review of the artworks progresses from field to field, we also evaluate how the interdisciplinarity emerges and materialises in the artworks, their creation processes and the exhibition. Such fields are always interpretative, and the classification can be seen differently, as the borders between the works are not unambiguous and the same work can be viewed from different perspectives. Nevertheless, the modelling helps with analysing the dimensions of dialogue that took place during the summer school.

A: Subjective interpretation of cultural heritage

Those artworks that were individually created and reflected personal experiences of the cultural heritage of Komi form field A. The main focus of field A is on the

role of subjective interpretation of cultural heritage in the artistic processes and final artworks.

It is essential in culturally sustainable education in intercultural settings that there is enough space for everyone to determine their own cultural heritage, cultural values and understanding of who they are in relation to others (Soini 2013). The pre-assignments encouraged the participants to reflect on their personal relationships to cultural heritage and landscapes and ponder their studied disciplines' approach to research. The fieldwork consisted of tasks that allowed subjective reflection on cultural heritage. Figure 2 shows how the use of familiar art mediums and disciplinary methods were used to start the processes.

The knowledge of ecologic aspects and nature is strongly connected with cultural heritage and sustainability. One example of the fieldwork resulting in exhibited work can be seen in Figure 3A. This shows a nature scientist's dioramas of plants and photos of the collecting places, which can be categorised as the cultural landscape. The scientist performed typical nature scientific fieldwork, but the way it is visually presented resonates in a fascinating way with the art-based context of the LiLa summer school.

The working methods of different disciplines, for example, plant collection as data collection in the nature sciences, were used and discussed during the fieldwork. In this way, how different disciplines approached the same researched phenomenon could be observed naturally. Buber (2002) connects observing and



Figure 2

Collage of pictures of the summer school activities in the Komi landscape. A: Nature scientists categorising plants picked from the yard of our accommodation during the fieldwork. B: Artist perceiving landscape through drawing. C: Komi-style tea times gathered people around the table to share experiences and ongoing projects. D: Summer school participants recording and writing down stories of the place – the anthropologists' main method for collecting data. Images: Author.

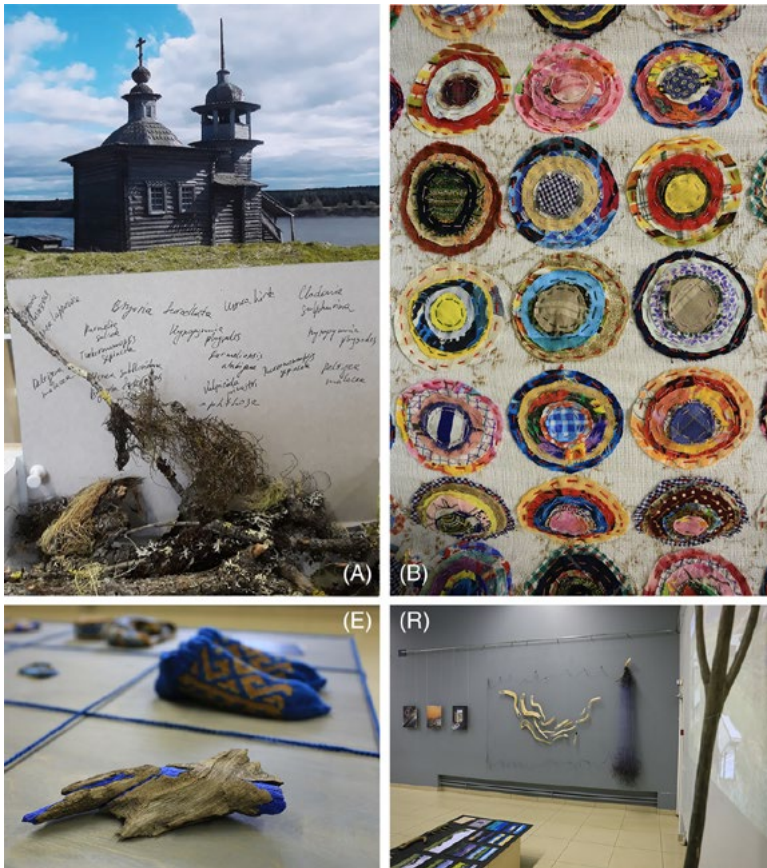


Figure 3

Collage of the artworks based on the ABER four-field. A: Nature and knowledge of ecologic aspects are strongly connected with cultural heritage and sustainability. Following the concepts of field A, this photo shows a nature scientist's diorama of plants and a photo from the collecting place, which can be categorised as cultural landscape. The scientist has carried out typical nature scientific fieldwork, but the way it is visually presented resonates in a fascinating way with the art-based context of the LiLa summer school. B: Local artists' contemporary art (detail) not only interprets but also recreates cultural heritage. E: Dialogic collaboration between two participants produced an installation (detail) consisting of traditional Komi patterned crafts, thread-covered wooden pieces and photos. The multisensory craft-based works helped create new realisations shared by the working partners. R: A view of the exhibition demonstrates the visibility and spatiality of different types of artworks. Use of real and familiar objects as part of art installations offer audience-friendly keys to help interpret the content of works. Images: Author.

listening to the dimensions of a silent dialogue. Listening is about practising ethicalness that provides space for dialogue and encourages self-determination in others (Varto 2007). This is relevant also in culturally sustainable education, where listening to others is listening to yourself at the same time. Our willingness to interact with others in an ethical manner is linked to the direct experience of 'lived' time and place (Kester 2004). One example of this in the artworks is how a student of

social anthropology created an art installation of icons that represented her time in Komi by implementing her discipline's way of looking at cultural icons as a visual representation of a society: 'Even though I'm an anthropologist, not an artist, this experience has inspired me to explore my artistic side as well.'

We see that the artworks that represented the subjective interpretations of cultural heritage had a significant role in transmitting the knowledge of the local cultural heritage. They also brought an important foundation to the exhibition that evoked dialogue about the values and meanings of heritage.

B: Subjective reproductive approach to cultural heritage

When moving from field A to field B, our attention moves to the artworks that, in addition to interpretation, also reimagine aspects of cultural heritage. The prerequisite for a vibrant culture is continuity as well as its ability to regenerate. The preservation, continuity and development of cultural heritage requires sharing, transferring and transmitting skills and values (Soini 2013). Hence, field A forms the basis for B since sustainable reimagination requires awareness and recognition of values related to cultural heritage (Fairclough 2009). Although these artworks are also individually made, their expression aims, as Varto (2007) states, to actively approach the viewers. The artworks are loaded with meanings that reflect the makers' experiences but have recognisable features or are described so that others who share the same world can understand it (Varto 2007). This is an important point of view, especially in regard to reimagining instead of simply repeating interpretations of the cultural heritage.

Figure 3B shows the detail of a local artist's work, who hosted us during the fieldwork. In her work, she has combined different colours and shapes of the old fabrics belonging to the women in her family into contemporary art. Clothes and different kinds of fabrics emblematically embody the everyday living heritage of different cultures, and anyone can relate to them. The colourful fabrics are similar to the traditional Komi dolls displayed in the exhibition although her piece is not intended to comment on the doll work, in which contemporary and traditional presentations of cultural heritage enter into a dialogue.

Another aspect relevant in field B is the issue of change. The aspects of cultural sustainability are very central when economic or ecological issues require changing people's everyday habits towards more sustainable living (Soini 2013). While scientific language is often stiff and limited, art as visual language may be more direct, challenging and fresh (Varto 2007). The activist nature of contemporary art addresses contradictions and problems, and the artworks may act as an important means of mediating such complicated and controversial issues that shake up people's reality (Varto 2007). This was utilised in an environmental work that a student of art education built during the fieldwork. She found a pile of dumped glass bottles along the borders of the village, and by reorganising them to represent a river in the landscape, she gently pointed out the issue of waste in nature. Also, while working with the herbariums (Figure 2A), the nature scientists raised their concerns about the environmental problems in Russia. Based on their observations and species collected during the fieldwork, they did not notice serious signs of disturbances in the natural ecosystem but rather found that unorganised waste management degraded the aesthetic quality of the cultural landscape of Komi.

E: Dialogic interpretation of cultural heritage

In field E, we look at the artworks that were built through dialogue among several actors, and the artistic solutions of the work that were formed in cooperation. Also here, dialogue can be perceived as containing verbal and silent communication, as dialogue based on listening is also central to a connected knowledge (Kester 2004). Creating a holistic understanding of the researched cultural heritage through interdisciplinary approaches is strongly related to the aims of LiLa. Speaking and listening catalyses understanding, mediates exchange and sustains an ongoing process of empathetic identification and critical analysis (Kester 2004). The reflective interdisciplinary processes also served the principles of cultural sustainability in which the actors themselves had to look at their own operating models and motivations in a constant interaction with different ways of looking and understanding. Dialogic projects can enhance solidarity among individuals who already share a set of material and cultural circumstances.

Figure 3E shows detail of an artwork produced by two participants. The artwork was constructed in a way that both of them produced elements independently in accordance to the set goal. The thoughts evoked by the silent work were shared from time to time as they met. Typical with installation art, the discussion of the final form of the work, with its countless options, challenged the artists to enter a dialogue reflecting the process, asking in what way the work articulates and claims the aim and ideas of the long process. Here, the concept of empathetic insight between the two actors was necessary to create a dialogical aesthetic (Kester 2004). The work's creators state: 'This installation is a mixture of a visitor's observations and local knowledge, woven together into a new poetic view of the everyday landscape of Komi.'

Another example is an artwork of letters that was created in dialogic correspondence between three participants. In the letters, they share their experience of the fieldwork. They also wrote one letter to themselves in their own mother tongue. The letters were strong visually, using drawings and embroidery. The letters represented slow dialogue in which waiting for a reply formed an integral part of the work: 'Writing letters is a very tactile form of communication that draws your body into the process.' In the exhibition, the letters formed an installation that invited the audience to come and read.

The pedagogical challenge in an interdisciplinary course dealing with complex systems is to sense emerging relations and undefined connections and to allow them to evolve freely so the course may be structured in a meaningful way (Hollmén 2015). One example of such dialogue is the collaborative work *River*, for which students of art education and anthropology gathered together to form the shape of the river Vym out of 100 photographs taken during the fieldwork. The basic shape was taken from a map, but arranging the photos into the final shape stirred negotiations on how and what to express through the work. Interdisciplinary collaboration does not happen by itself but requires active engagement and the crafting of opportunities in which the students can discover for themselves what the others know, how one's own knowledge can contribute to the task at hand and how these threads of knowledge are woven together to create new thinking (Hollmén 2015). The students stated: 'This collage piece is a representation of the multiplicity of meanings, history and cultural ontology, as this collage is the outcome of an intercultural and cross-disciplinary group coming together, similar to the role played by the original river.'

The interdisciplinarity in the context of LiLa can also be viewed through cultural perspectives where the different discipline-based ways of knowing and doing

collide with others and require intercultural competence and dialogue. According to Shubert & Joubert (2016), a constructive dialogue creates space for negotiating the tensions between 'mutualities' (what we share) and 'individuations' (differences and distinctiveness of each discipline) and can enable newness to emerge from the 'in-betweenness'. The art in LiLa worked as a visual language that made the dialogue clearer and even more sensitive. The local participants investigated their own familiar landscapes through their artistic perception and delivered their insight to the visiting participants. And again, the visiting participants communicated their perspectives to the unfamiliar yet fascinating landscape through their visual expressions. The artistic endeavours showed respect, suggested new insights and sought new beginnings to the ongoing dialogue. The artworks were outcomes of the processes that had been started during the fieldwork, and they were a beginning of a new way of seeing and processing the collaboration.

R: Dialogic reproduction of cultural heritage

In field R, all the artworks from A, B and E are brought into dialogue in the final exhibition. The first pop-up exhibition right after the fieldwork and the final exhibition, which gathered the results of the whole project, are the most obvious efforts of all the participants of the summer school. Building the exhibition required collaboration and dialogue.

As always when hanging an exhibition, with the LiLa exhibitions we looked at the juxtaposition and ensemble of all the works. Visuality, materiality and spatiality are the guiding elements that form the basis of building an exhibition. Simultaneously, the construction of the full picture of the exhibition needs to be monitored. We see the LiLa exhibition as an interdisciplinary entity of the interpretations of cultural heritage where artworks from fields A, B and E are in relation with each other. The multi-layered exhibition (Figure 3R) creates a space for dialogue



Figure 4

Successful juxtapositions of artworks and visual presentations in the exhibition can awaken unexpected interpretations and help renew understanding of cultural heritage as well as act on behalf of sustainable change. Image: Author

between the artists and the audience where new views of cultural heritage can emerge as well.

One artwork invites the audience to come and play the memory game of sauna (Figure 4), based on the Finnish, Russian and Komi languages. The game is based on finding and memorising the similarities and differences between these sauna cultures. As shown in Figure 4, behind the game, there are several different types of artworks, made individually or in collaboration, that either represent the traditional forms or renewed views of cultural heritage. The external differences among the works are obvious. For those of us who experienced the same fieldwork and interpreted the same places and landscapes, the exhibition is like an exciting game of finding similarities in different works – or understanding what is the same but expressed differently, from a different direction or from a different discipline.

Varto (2007) characterises artworks as an opportunity to speak in a dialogue where the viewer can hear the message through different senses. The prerequisite for a true dialogue is in the multi-layered meanings of art. Art is a language that is not chained to the limitations of the spoken word.

Conclusion

In this article, we have discussed the artistic processes, artworks and exhibitions as part of the art-based interdisciplinary practices of LiLa, and our interest was especially in the dimensions of dialogue in the students' artistic processes dealing with the aspects of cultural heritage. The four-field method utilised reveals the multidimensional appearance and role of dialogue that should be considered when developing a culturally sustainable art education.

When the aim is to engage in interdisciplinary collaboration, it is also necessary to leave room for individual endeavours where the relationship to cultural heritage can be examined in peace. Yet, in a collaborative environment, the individual artworks cannot be made in a vacuum, and listening to others inevitably increases not only the understanding of different ways of working but also acts as a mirror to perceive one's own disciplines from a broader perspective.

Conscious or unconscious desire for dialogue guides the renewing artistic approach to cultural heritage. The process is to formulate the desired message into a form that invites the receiver into a reconstructive dialogue. To engage in dialogue in a culturally sustainable and respectful way, the skills of listening and empathy are required here as well. This means the ability to put oneself into the receiver's position. In collaboration, dialogue becomes a key element of working. Speaking, listening, empathy and silence form the rhythm of making. Visuality, materiality and the bodily experience of artistic endeavours make it easier to create a space for dialogue.

The exhibition was both a product of dialogic creation and a new environment in which the artworks, alone and collectively, created new spaces for dialogue. The messages in the artworks can now be received and reinterpreted. When the artworks that examine cultural heritage in different ways are put into the same exhibition, they become multi-layered and allow a dialogue of interpretation and recreation to take place.

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