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Hope in the Landscape

Community, Presence and Multisensory Exploration of a Landscape

Uncertainty describes the time we are living in many ways. This is a time when the climate crisis, the war and other sources of global despair are constantly lurking at the back of our minds. At times, it seems like everything is going in the wrong direction and that the turn to better is never going to happen. How do we keep going amongst all this?

During the LiLa school, questions concerning these themes kept rising in our conversations. One point of view on the theme was hope—the importance of having it and the places from which we can find it. With these themes in mind, I participated in fieldwork week in Umeå and Västerbotten. I wished to find a feeling of hope whilst dwelling in the landscape and in our recently constructed LiLa community.

Images: Saara Lappeteläinen, 2023.

Looking for Sources of Hope

In his book, *The Perception of the Environment*, Ingold (2002) explained how he sees life as a big and active unfolding, creating different forms all in relation to others. He also talked about a theory in which the mind is not restricted to the brain. These thoughts felt somehow comforting to me and made me desire to find a sense of belonging, togetherness and immersion in the things we see as others. It gave me a spark for the thought that experiencing that I am just one stitch in the fabric of life might make me less lonely and more hopeful.

To me, one place to look for hope is to find out what people are trying to do to fix issues and share knowledge with others. The idea of eco-social sophistication (Salonen & Bardy, 2015) was created to answer the



problems of modern society. It questions the way we in a capitalistic system define a good life and includes the pursuit of turning our lifestyle into a less materialistic direction. The aim is to live a more sustainably oriented life and to understand the unbreakable bond between working ecosystems and maintaining human life and social constructions. Also, the capability to visualise a sustainable future and to see the problems in the way we see the hierarchy between humans and nature are among the goals of eco-social sophistication.

Similarities and Differences

We need to understand the information in its context to become knowledge. This capability can be developed by having things shown to us in multisensorial ways (Ingold, 2002).

During the LiLa school and especially the fieldwork week, there were many eye-opening moments of similarities and differences. This led to intriguing conversations. We shared so much information and dived into wonderful, exhilarating conversations time and again. The understanding of the value of sharing thoughts, experiences and knowledge crystallised in my mind during the time we spent together. I realised that it is possible to possess knowledge without even realising it before getting the opportunity to share it with others. This is also when it becomes interesting to get together with people from different backgrounds and share knowledge with each other. It allows us to build bigger pictures with more acknowledged perspectives and gives us an opportunity to better understand our own strengths and weaknesses.

Getting new information about the landscape in which we were roaming made me understand it better. This happened on many levels. For example, the revelations about the similarities in our countries' histories made me feel more connected to the people of the land-

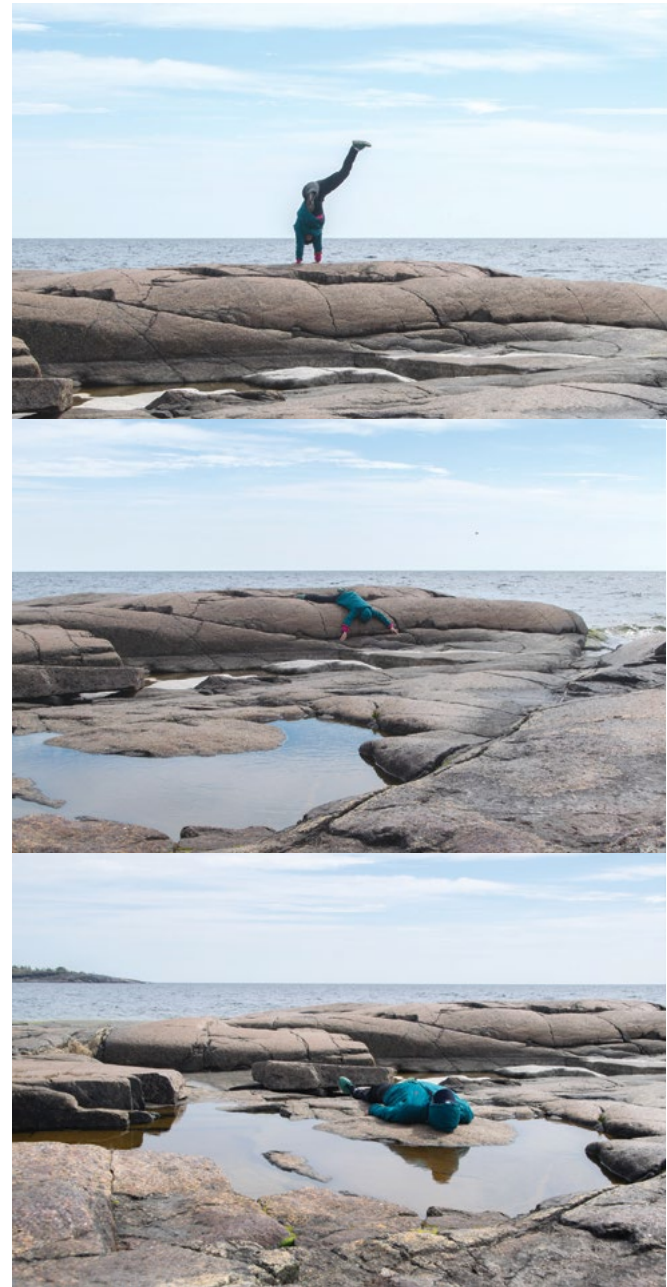


Figure 1: The performative investigations of the landscape were a big part of my artistic process. Images: Annika Kokko, 2023

scape. In a way, this made me feel more connected to all humans by showing that, behind the differences, there are likely more similarities than we expect there to be. The interesting similarities and differences also appeared to me in the nature elements. This made me experience feelings of understanding and peacefulness.

Presence and Multisensory Investigation

“While moving in the world, we scan the world and reveal information” (Ingold, 2002, p. 19).

This unfamiliar group of people quickly turned into a safe environment in which to share and learn. This is something that allowed me to be open and observant towards the landscape and all the little nuances it had to offer us. I began to give all my attention and the power of my senses to explore and learn about the landscape. I experimented with my body. I smelled, looked closely and imagined whilst sharing all this with my fellow explorers. I made notes of the experiences and tried to understand things by drawing, photographing, talking and writing. In an attempt to feel closer to the landscape, I have also tried to dive into the local language and have continued doing so ever since.

Besides my personal artistic work during the school, I contributed to organising two workshops for our community. The other workshop was a communal activity of planting ecologically beneficial plants in the landscape. The goal was to evoke conversation, strengthen the sense of community through communal tasks and allow being active and giving back to nature and the landscape. We also wanted to challenge the ideas people have concern-

ing art and artistic methods.

There are many reasons for our decisions to use art in our investigations and actions. According to Malchiodi (2018), art has a specific way of knowing and communicating. In the following examples, Malchiodi further



*Figure 2: The communal planting workshop.
Image: Annika Kokko, 2023.*

explains the benefits of art. Because of the stimulation of all brain areas, the artistic approach can lead to many creative solutions during problem-solving. Art can also help to reach deep emotional experiences and express them. The bodily aspects of art can also provide an opportunity to involve the knowledge of all the senses in processes (Malchiodi, 2018). There are also benefits to art-based research that resonate with sustainability goals. Examples of these benefits are evocativeness, provocativeness, critical awareness, empathy and the possibility to challenge ideologies and participation (Leavy, 2018).

Hope in Many Places

When describing life, Ingold (2002) said that all beings are centres of awareness and agency. During LiLa, I was happy to notice that I was able to find the feeling of hope in many places. I found it from history, from community and communal activities, from the details found in the landscape and the energy and togetherness felt whilst interacting with nature. I realised that making art and using artistic approaches whilst exploring the landscape forced me to give time to really experience and observe my surroundings, which allowed me to see things more clearly and understand them more deeply. All of this made me feel the awareness and agency in me and in the things I was surrounded by.

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*Figure 3: Sketching the senses in the landscape.
Image: Annika Kokko, 2023.*

