

Taking a deep dive in the River of Knowledge

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Before joining this project with LiLa I hadn't truly reflected on how rivers impacted my life. My initial thoughts were that rivers provided me with clean water and electricity, a rather superficial perspective. The reality is that rivers influence my life and my society in a much greater way than my initial thought. There are many reasons why my local community thrives, including swimming and taking walks along the riverbanks for enjoyment.

Norway is known for its big and powerful rivers. From the beginning of time Norwegians have relied on rivers for transportation, food, water and energy (Klima- og miljødepartementet, 2015, p. 10). Watermills provided an excellent way to use rivers. These watermills made it possible to process grain in large quantities along with paper, textile and copper production. According to Klima- og miljødepartementet (2015) water driven saws made the timber production much more efficient. In fact, the production and transportation of timber was the most beneficial way to use rivers in the past. In the late 18th century, the technology of hydropower made its way to Norwegian rivers. Today 70% of Norway's water-

courses are affected by hydropower, with 15 of the country's 20 largest waterfalls used for this purpose (Klima- og miljødepartementet, 2015, p. 13). In total Norway has more than 1600 hydroelectric plants (Rosvold, 2024). In 2021 Norway was the biggest producer of hydropower in Europe and ranked seventh globally, according to Rosvold (2024).

A teacher's approach

As a future teacher it is my responsibility to educate the next generation. This LiLa project has provided me with a more nuanced view on rivers and how humans and nature work together. Tim Ingold (1993) presents the term dwelling in his article "The temporality of the landscape", he suggests that humans live with and in their environment and don't just simply use it. This idea has changed my view on rivers from seeing them as "just" resources providing us with electricity to gaining a deeper understand-

*Figures 1 & 2. My local river "Ranelven", Mo i Rana, Norway, has been on my mind throughout the entire project.
Image: Hansen, 2024*





ing of how they have shaped my ancestors life and how they shape mine.

These are important perspectives which I will take into my classroom. This perspective and the UN sustainability goal 4.7 which state that “all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development...” provided the motivation for my artistic project (United Nations). I was strongly inspired by nature itself, the mountains, forest and rivers. To emphasise the educational perspective, I have chosen to make the mountain a woman. This woman represents the teacher in me, and the size represents the significant impact I aspire to have on my students’ everyday life and their development. Almost in the same way as the river

Figure 3. Throughout the project, I have spent a great deal of time by the riverside, taking the time to notice the small details. Pictured is me and Sofie Ruud by Porttipahta reservoir in Finland. Image: Parpala, 2024.

shapes the landscapes, a teacher shapes the minds of the students, and in that way also contributes to shaping the future.

The River of Knowledge

The river in my project symbolises knowledge—something dynamic and ever-changing. With black pen I have written what I was initially thinking about when I heard the word river. Its hard and brutal, and easily accessible. If you take your time on

the other hand, you will soon discover new aspects. Ingold (1993) discusses how your perception of the



Figure 4. Acrylic painting on watercolour paper: The River of Knowledge. Image: Hansen, 2024

landscape is shaped by your approach to it. In Finland I was able to experience and reflect on these perspectives. At one point I took time to dwell in the environment. Sitting by the river, just observing the water flow and the birds fly, I realised that the landscape is not static. It is constantly changing, shaped and formed by the organisms in it, whether by humans, animals or by nature itself. Ingold

(1993) describes this process as the temporality of the landscape; a landscape is constantly changed, based on the activities conducted by the dwellers within it.

One of the experiments we conducted made me realise the complexity of a river. With the help of a net and a microscope, I could suddenly see so much more. I could see small plankton in the microscope. These plankton varied in shape, size and colour. I realised that there is a completely separate world of life in the river, a life I am also a part of, but a world I am marginally aware of. To illustrate this experience, I incorporated a magnifying glass into my work. This magnifying glass makes the viewer approach the artwork in a different way. In the same way that I sat down- and- by the riverbanks, and discovered new things, I invite my viewer to do the same thing with my artwork. By taking a closer look, a lot of tiny blue symbols are revealed. These symbols represent “the forgotten”, the people and communities affected by the modern use of rivers. You can also discover fish and insects which represent species that have become extinct or endangered because of human’s careless use of the river. You can also see the words “teach” and “learn”, highlighting the importance of educating ourselves. After all, how are we going to make a change if we don’t learn from previous generations when teaching the next?

Final reflections

Going into this project rivers were just an ordinary part of my life, so commonplace that I didn’t even think much about them. However, through this project I have gained a lot of knowledge and understanding about rivers in Norway and in Finland; how they have impacted and formed the life of my ancestors and how they continue to shape today’s



Figure 5 & 6. With the help of a net, we collected water to examine under a microscope. Images: Parpala, 2024.

society. I've had the privilege of meeting people from different backgrounds, and we have connected over a united love for nature. I hope in the future when I become a teacher, I will inspire my students the way

these experiences have inspired me. Through art, both by making my own and learning about that of others, I have developed a deeper understanding and appreciation for the relationship between humans and landscape, culture and nature.

Figure 7: Through the microscope, an entirely different world came into view. Image: Parpala, 2024



References

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