



Figures 1. Greenland is a gateway to encountering Arctic nature, water, snow, and ice. Photos: Timo Jokela, 2024.

## Nuuk as a Gateway to the Arctic of Today

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*We had a conference in rapidly urbanising Nuuk at the foot of Quassussuaq, the large mountain ridge, and the Ukkusissat, the soapstone mountain. The name of the conference was Art, Community, and Identities in the Arctic – Best Practices for Children, Young People, and Families. The four partners in the AAE UArctic project met there and met artists, students, and researchers from Greenland, the Arctic, and other parts of the world.*

The conference was a two-day event on how art can contribute to creating communities and well-being in the Arctic – with special reference to children, young people, and families. The overall goal of the conference was to provide knowledge about art-based initiatives that work to strengthen well-being, democratic participation, social sustainability, and access to rights for all children, young people, and families. The idea is that art can create communities, and communities can create art.

The overall goal of the conference was to link Arctic sociocultural landscapes and ecologies through knowledge that strengthens a shared sense of belonging across the diverse regions, languages, and cultures of the living Arctic.

The conference opened lasting collaborations between artists, practitioners, and researchers to meet the challenges in the Arctic through megatrends such as urbanisation, globalisation, and climate change, which are changing the eco-social and cultural life. Art has proven to be a way to express feelings and understanding of the changes and build socially and culturally sustainable communities by connecting and bridging diverse groups and populations and ensuring freedom of expression and access to

*"It is good with dialogue. We learn together. We should learn from this conference to supplement the centric form of conference, in a lecture hall, with a central speaker and an audience with a more decentralized format, like sitting in a huge circle, walking together, and make exhibitions together as community art."*

– local artist.

cultural activities for all people in the Arctic.

In addition to the congress, we had the first joint AAE seminar for partners to plan the coming cooperation and to share knowledge and art, among partners and local artists. For us, in addition to the conference and the first joint seminar, a significant experience was encountering the rapidly growing and urbanising city of Nuuk. At the same time, we reflected on developing various art-based working methods for starting work in new places with new people. We carried out some experiments. At first, each participant had brought an object from their home country that they believed was related to the Arctic.

Figures 2. Nuuk is a showcase of Arctic urbanisation. Photos: Timo Jokela, 2024.



Through these objects, we introduced ourselves to each other. Then we examined our preconceptions of what we mean by Arctic and Art, what we associate with their intra-action, and which values we emphasise. The dialogue was guided by a 'learning cafe' method using images of different visual manifestations of the phenomena in photographs, advertisements, magazines, artworks, etc., as stimulants for discussion and icebreakers for language barriers.

We carried out art-based tasks on a city walk, during which each participant chose their own observation method and the phenomenon that caught their attention. Based on these tasks, we planned and curated a pop-up exhibition that relates us to the urbanising Arctic. The

Siunissaq partner curated an exhibition of social and sustainability portraits at the venue.

The final part of the conference was a drum dance performed by Josef Joelsen, a book launch for Untold Stories from Fieldwork and a concert by the songwriter and singer Katsi Kleist. Finally, each partner got the art book Eriagisaq. This word translates to 'something one does not want to lose'. It is about the artist Kim Kleist-Eriksen and his artwork.

The seminar and conference followed up on online meetings between partners, including researchers and students, and continued with seminars and workshops online and in Umeå, Karasjok, and Bodö. •

## INFO

The first New genre Arctic art education seminar, workshop and exhibition took place in Nuuk at Ilisimatusarfik – University of Greenland from the 6th to the 9th of May 2023 in connection to congress Art, Community, and Identities in the Arctic – Best Practices for Children, Young People, and Families.

*"We became aware of that through the activities and should elaborate on that, especially in the Arctic, with small communities and local and contextual knowledge."*

– local artist.

**Figures 3.** The congress and integrated art-based workshops brought together participants and AAE themes in discussion.  
Photos: Timo Jokela, 2023.



*"We should stand together in supporting the artists when they express both suffering and the but also joy of living in the Arctic. Art is a gift given to us, and we must all protect the gift. The conference made that visible and open, which I appreciate"*

– local artist.



*"It was good that we addressed the pain that art sometimes may cost the artist, especially when art addresses social challenges in the Arctic. Art dares to express what may be difficult to say openly"*

– local artist.