ARTSTREAM OF UTSJOKI:

A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE ON CREATIVE COLLABORATION AND ETHICAL CHALLENGES IN COMMUNITY ART

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Abstract

This thesis examines the collaborative dynamics and ethical challenges within an artist-student team during the community art project, ArtStream of Utsjoki. The project aimed to increase access to art and artistic activities in Utsjoki villages. The project was a collaboration between three students from the Arctic Art & Design master program at the University of Lapland and locals of Utsjoki municipality. The aim of this thesis is to illuminate the challenges artists face when working within a community art project where they must combine artistic identities, approaches, visions, and goals within the broader framework of creative collaboration. The perspective is that of less experienced community artists, combining both student and artist viewpoints. This thesis is a case study of the project adopting an art-based research approach. Data includes project materials, researcher-created artworks, and an interview. This study found that the collaboration was shaped by local, institutional, team, and individual level dynamics. These influence six interconnected themes: direction, benefits, motivation, participation, engagement, and boundaries. This study proposes the idea of fairness at the heart of ethical collaboration to ensure more meaningful experience for all involved. This study contributes practical insights for students and practitioners working in participatory art through an open description of events from the perspective of the artist-students.

Keywords: participatory art, community art, creative collaboration, art-based research, ethics, arctic

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1. Introduction

Background

This thesis is based on a community art project called ArtStream of Utsjoki which started in October 2023 and finished in July 2024. The project aimed to create art with three main villages of Utsjoki, celebrating their communities and culture throughout the process. It was a collaboration between three students from the University of Lapland, including me, and the municipality of Utsjoki. It was part of Utsjoki's Eight Seasons Events- project (Kahdeksan Vuodenajan Tapahtumat) that aimed to increase collaboration and cultural activities within the municipality. Throughout the project, meetings, activities and events were arranged and three distinct artistic productions created. In the end, it was a creative collaboration that produced three unique journeys with each village having their own processes and outcomes. From an objective point of view, it was a success. We achieved our goals and received positive feedback from both the community and external parties, with the overall experience also being described as positive by us, the students.

Personally, as an inexperienced community artist, the ArtStream of Utsjoki project was both extremely challenging as well as a rewarding experience. Challenges came from the fact that everything was new to me, so it was a steep learning curve. I also had to face several insecurities along the way such as seeing myself as a person capable of initiating and finishing projects with other people. Therefore, the journey definitely raised my confidence. It also expanded my own artistic abilities as it taught me how diverse skill creativity is. Throughout the project journey I also experienced the joy of sharing the role of an artist and, in a way, letting go of it. The greatest moments were the ones where I was able to be a participant among others, becoming part of the community and assisting in the creation process instead of being in charge of it. Overall, the project brought me out of my shell and made several personal dreams of mine come true.

Previously, I had mostly worked alone in my art studio, so this was my first time collaborating artistically. My personal desire to come out of this artistic solitude was the main reason for me to navigate towards community art. For a long time, I have felt that as an artist,

one either must create art for the general public or for the art world, with little space in between. To simplify, I felt, I either was to make entertainment or high art. Neither felt fulfilling. On the one hand, I would need to adapt my artistic vision quite a bit to meet expectations that often favour more traditional or widely appreciated forms of expression. On the other, the work would stay confined within a bubble, offering little to those outside the art world. In contrast, in community art, I felt that, not only is it a rewarding way to share and practice creativity, but it also builds a bridge between artists and the general public. It closes the gap and introduces equal grounds where artistic values and prioritises is not purely from one or the other but combination of both. Matarasso (2019) describes this well as "the creation of art as a human right, by professional and non-professional artists, cooperating as equals, for purposes and to standards they set together" (p. 51). At the same time, the division between artist and audience becomes blurred as the physical and mental distance between art and participant diminishes as the participant becomes part of the artwork and its meaning-making process (Kantonen, 2005, p. 57). In this way, community art extends creative agency to those outside the art world, enabling them to define and express their own culture and identity through co-creation, regardless of educational background, prior experience, or current skill set (Jokela et al., 2006, 2.2) At its core, it is an artistic collaboration between people to learn from each other's diverse backgrounds and, as a result, generate new ideas and forms (Matarasso, 2019, p. 95). Therefore, community art creates a middle ground where artistic expression is a shared activity that can benefit everyone equally. There is space there to both be an artist connected to the art world and human connected to the wider world and everyday lives inside it. To sum it up simply, for me, community art makes art feel meaningful.

The research topic and aim of this thesis was formed after the project ended. Despite of the overall amazing experience, I had a lingering personal feeling of dissatisfaction and failure coming from within. This thesis is an attempt to reach the source of this feeling, reflect and grow from it. As I started to explore the source of this feeling, I quickly realized it stemmed from the experiences of the inner team in our project, meaning the student team I was part of. ArtStream of Utsjoki, as a project, was part of our studies in the University of Lapland as students from the Arctic Art & Design (AAD) master program. As Coutts (2018) describes it, "AAD is characterized by notions of participation, collaboration and inclusion" (p. 41). It combines the principles of applied visual art (AVA) and service design where projects emerge through discovering and place research where students work together with local

stakeholders in real-life environments (Härkönen & Vuontisjärvi, 2018, p. 26). Coutts (2018) describes the key characteristics of AVA as multidisciplinary practice where artists work together in a team rather than alone in a studio (p. 40). Here, artists strive to integrate art into daily life by engaging communities, groups, and organizations in creative collaboration (Jokela, 2013, pp. 13–17). When combined with the human-centric approach of service design, artists work equally and empathetically with participants embracing their values, needs and perspectives (Härkönen & Vuontisjärvi, 2018, p. 27). Our project was thus grounded on these principles that provided us with our main approaches and methods used throughout the project. Moreover, several past participatory art projects from the University Lapland worked as our inspirations and formed our expectations. As we prepared our project and progressed through it, we were heavily concentrating on our collaboration with the locals making sure to nurture positive, respective and fruitful relationship with them. So much so that we forgot to see the fact that our inner team was also a form of collaboration which would have required at least the same amount of care and attention as the overall project did.

Community art often centres on the participating communities, examining things like social impacts, benefits, ethics, and engagement methods. As collaboration with and empowerment of the community is at the heart of these practices, the focus remains on the participating community and the artist-community interactions rather than the artists themselves. Yet, professional artists frequently work in teams, just like we did, sharing their diverse skills to manage the community art projects that are complex and multilayered. But still, this inner team of artists is rarely the focus of project reports or theoretical frameworks. For instance, Koh (2010) shares an anecdote where another participating artist made a community member feel uncomfortable during a project event and how it affected that community member's involvement negatively making them withdraw. Reflecting on the situation, Koh (2010) discusses his own role, expressing that, as the host (a role he sees as central to community artists) he failed to maintain a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere. He then stresses the artist's responsibility to be culturally sensitive and to manage tensions within the group (Koh, 2010, pp. 195–198). Koh's reflection focuses on his own role in relation to the community in that situation, but it raises a further question: what about the other artist? Why did this situation even happen from their perspective? What kind of relationship they had with Koh and what is their role in the project? Were they a team? Did they understand artist's role differently? These aspects, the internal dynamics, working methods and differing interpretations among artists themselves, often remains unexplored despite their central role

in shaping processes, participants, and outcomes. As Martin (2021) notes, “There is almost no research on how artists from different art disciplines, for example, find a common area of interest and begin collaboration, what they focus on, what tools each uses, where such collaboration leads, and how it expands each one's professional competence” (p. 77).

Collaboration, and teamwork in general, are often portrayed in an overly positive light, especially in educational settings, as they are promoted as ways to learn from others and develop interpersonal skills. However, collaboration is not inherently smooth or beneficial: it brings significant challenges that must be acknowledged. I doubt if any collaboration is without challenges to overcome as it is only human to not always function in an ideal manner. Goals may vary, opinions and worldviews clash, misunderstandings rise, schedules conflict and opportunities differ. Addressing this is crucial for preparing artists and students for real-world collaborative work such as participatory art as well as building better community art experiences for all involved. This thesis is born from my desire to explore these collaboration complexities among artists in community art by analysing our experiences in the ArtStream of Utsjoki project as an artist-student team. My focus in this study is on our inner collaboration dynamics because I personally found it to be the most challenging aspect of the project, and I identified it as the source of my dissatisfaction. As a team of three master students from the University of Lapland we faced numerous hurdles while navigating the community art process. We did not know each other prior to starting our studies, so working for the first time together, both as a team and as community artists, on a large-scale project like ours added an extra layer of challenge to the collaboration. As Martin states (2021), artists in collaborative settings work together but each in their unique frameworks which leads to different directions, setting different incentives and constraints to the project (Martin, 2021 p. 78). Balancing different motivations, goals, life situations, and artistic approaches required constant negotiation and adjustment, impacting the overall process and our underlying impression and memories of the experience after it ended. Acknowledging difficulties and describing them in detail not only enriches our understanding of collaborative practices but also encourages a more realistic and complete view of what it means to work together in community art context.

Utsjoki – Ohcejohka

Figure 1. Overlooking the village of Dálvadas, Utsjoki. Photo by Ines Knaster, 2024.

Utsjoki (Figure 1) is the northernmost municipality in Finland with a population of around 1200 residents, of which approximately half speaks Sámi as their native language (Utsjoki Municipality, n.d.). There are several small villages, but the three main villages are Utsjoki centre village, Karigasniemi, and Nuorgam. As a municipality located at the border between Norway and Finland, it is often described as a meeting place of three cultures: Sámi, Finnish, and Norwegian. Utsjoki is surrounded by nature with the Teno river on one side and huge wilderness on the other. It has a feeling of humans living on the borders of nature and following its rhythm and boundaries. The wilderness, which consists of a natural park as well as reindeer herding regions, separates Utsjoki from the rest of Finland, making it seem distant from the rest of the country. The distances between Utsjoki's own villages are also significant, for instance, the main road from Nuorgam to Karigasniemi is 145 km long.

There are several smaller villages in Utsjoki, but our project focused on the major three: Nuorgam, Karigasniemi, and Utsjoki, each having their own personality and feeling to them. Utsjoki is the central village of the municipality, housing key public services and the village house Giisá, which served as our main meeting place for this part of the project. Our activities focused on Onnelan Törmä, a leisure park by the Teno river, known for hosting local gatherings and cultural events such as the annual Ohcejoga Šearra – Utsjoen Lumo festival. Nuorgam, the smallest and northernmost village in Finland, is known locally as "the

village of the happy people." Our project centred on the village school, a small and warm space with 18 pupils. Teachers from the school hoped to enliven the rather barren schoolyard with something colourful and engaging so that became our goal there. Karigasniemi felt the most distant of the three due to the distance between it and the other two. Our work took place at Sáivu, the village house there, which includes indoor and outdoor spaces for gatherings and is open to visitors during the summer months.

Figure 2. On the shore of Teno river. Photo by Ines Knaster, 2024.

When visiting Utsjoki, it becomes quite clear why the Teno river (Figure 2) plays such an important role to the locals, so much so that it has been referred to as "the stream of life." It is like a line going through Utsjoki, connecting the villages and people. Its presence is everywhere, and together with the fells and forested hills, it creates the beautiful Teno river valley landscape, which is like no other in Finland. In the past, the river has provided an abundance of food and served as a major means of transportation. One local person described it as "the highway of the past." While talking with locals, they often refer to the river simply as "Teno" and one local person stated, "It is not a river, it is Teno!" A current fishing ban in the river has created economical, social and cultural challenges to the municipality. Through numerous conversations with locals during our project, we came to understand that it evokes strong emotions across the community. It is not only a leisure activity for them but an important part of their culture and valuable aspect of the tourism of the area as well.

According to the Municipality of Utsjoki (2023), fishing traditions are especially central to the local Sámi, who have fished in the area for thousands of years. The fishing ban negatively impacts their lives, especially elders, who gain positive mental and physical activity from fishing, and additionally, passing on fishing traditions to younger generations becomes harder with the ongoing ban (Municipality of Utsjoki, 2023, Eight Seasons Events application, unpublished).

Locals shared with us varying visions for the future as everyone had a different view of what should be prioritized and what plans should be made for keeping Utsjoki vital. They also expressed numerous times that they feel like there is not much happening in Utsjoki anymore. They told of past events and activities held together, but how very little is arranged these days. Elder people also expressed that they believed that the youth is not as interested in doing things together anymore because of social media and smartphones. According to the Municipality of Utsjoki (2023), active associations have diminished over the years as people have grown older and withdrawn from activities without younger generations filling the gap. The municipality further reports that collaboration between groups and associations is minimal, as people are accustomed to working independently due to established customs and attitudes. Additionally, Utsjoki's remote location increases these challenges, with significant distances between villages making collaboration difficult. Consequently, local activities and events have decreased. During a Future Forum organized by the municipality in 2023, locals expressed a strong desire for more communal activities and a stronger community spirit (Municipality of Utsjoki, 2023, Eight Seasons Events application, unpublished). Our project emerged from these expressed needs, to support the sustainability of local culture and to provide meaningful activities that vitalize the community and strengthen social ties.

Research overview

This thesis explores the collaboration between artist-students during the ArtStream of Utsjoki project, examining how their interactions shaped the process and outcomes. I aim to illuminate the challenges that arise when artist-students from diverse backgrounds bring varying backgrounds, goals and circumstances to the creative process and how these shape the project. The research questions are:

- How does collaboration between artist-students evolve in a community art project?
- What factors influence artist-students' collaboration in a community art project?
- What ethical concerns emerge from the interactions between collaborating artist-students in community art projects?

In the project, I acted as an artist-facilitator while also navigating the roles of student and novice community artist. The research layer positioned me additionally as a researcher. These perspectives form the primary lenses through which I examine the research questions. As both a contributor and observer, my insights are shaped by my direct involvement in the project. This thesis is a case study which examines the project in retrospect. The primary approach is art-based research (ABR), which integrates artistic practices into both data generation and analysis (Leavy, 2020, p. 21). As Leavy (2020) emphasizes, "the practice of ABR requires us to think and act like both a researcher and an artist" (p. 30). This dual perspective allows me to engage fully as an artist within the research process, providing a natural method of inquiry that aligns with my combined roles. Rather than observing the community art project solely from the outside, I examine it from within, grounding my research in my artistic practice, reflexivity, and subjective interpretation based on my own experiences in the project. This approach enriches the investigation by embracing my lived experience and creative process as essential sources of knowledge.

The material for this research can be divided into two parts. Part one includes data produced during the ArtStream of Utsjoki project. The community art project itself produced various forms of visual data, such as sketches, posters, prototypes, and finished artworks, as well as written data such as notes, diary entries and e-mails. This data functions now like anchor points, through which I can reflect on the project's development in retrospect and re-enter the collaborative journey. The second part consists of data created during the research phase: artworks I will create to visualize both factual events and my own emotional experiences, and a team member interview offering an additional perspective. In addition to these, a reflexive approach will be used to examine how my own experiences and context inform the process and outcomes of this research. (Etherington, 2004, pp. 31–32). Reflexivity is key to being aware of my own emotions, biases, and interactions (Etherington, 2004, pp. 31–32). To achieve this, I will maintain a reflective research diary during the research process,

documenting thoughts, memories, and emotional responses that rise during the research process. This will serve as a tool for self-awareness, allowing me to track how my personal experiences influence my interpretations of the project. By comparing these materials, I aim to identify recurring themes, contradictions, and patterns to build a nuanced understanding of the collaborative process.

Ethical considerations from the project and the research

During the ArtStream of Utsjoki project, consent for documentation, such as photography and video, was obtained from local participants. Written consent was collected from adults and, in the case of minors, from both the children and their guardians. In situations where written consent was impractical, such as open workshops during public events, verbal consent was obtained from all participating adults. If children were present with their parents, verbal consent was collected from both. Otherwise, children were either not filmed or the material was edited to ensure they are not recognizable. Photos were taken for documentation purposes to be shown in exhibitions or academic publications. Members from the artist-student team were the ones with the access to photos and videos which were stored in their shared Google Drive folder. Ownership and copyright of photos and videos belong to the original creator. After the project ended consent from team members was collected to allow use of the documentation material, such as photos and videos, in thesis related work. Additionally, consent to use artworks created during the project by the team members, such as sketches, was also collected. When any such material is shown in this thesis, original creator will be credited.

In our project, the community members inputs and needs were highlighted as much as possible to ensure the outcome would be something beneficial for them. Community members who provided resources, such as space, materials, or tools, were compensated accordingly. Participation was based on an open invitation, with no obligations or commitments; individuals were free to engage as much or as little as they wished, and many participated in only select parts of the process. An exception to this was the involvement of children from the school in the Nuorgam part of the project. Their participation occurred during school hours and was integrated into the school's program, meaning their engagement

was shaped more by the institutional setting than by individual choice. The only participants with formal obligations were those receiving financial compensation, including us the artists-students and the workers from the Eight Seasons Event. However, in retrospect, we could have communicated these distinctions more clearly. The terms of participation and compensation were largely implicit rather than openly discussed in meetings or communications.

For this thesis, consent for research on our collaboration was obtained from the artist-student team involved in the ArtStream of Utsjoki project, who are the primary subjects of this study. The privacy of personal and sensitive data was carefully protected throughout the process and had been only accessible by me. I have aimed to write this thesis in a manner that both respects their contributions but also protects their privacy. Therefore, I have opted to credit them by name when referring to materials created by them and when describing their general roles or neutral actions in the project. More sensitive information, such as personal feelings shared with me, details of conflicts, or other information that would be unnecessary or potentially harmful to disclose, is presented in a way that safeguards individual identities and ensures anonymity. Additionally, as a team member, to respect my own voice, contributions and right to consent, I have chosen to share my own experiences in a more open manner. Moreover, there is a possible bias in my descriptions and interpretations of events that should be made clear.

This dual position as both participant and researcher inherently shapes what I observe, emphasize, and choose to disclose, and therefore must be considered when evaluating the reliability and subjectivity of this study. I have addressed this bias through reflexive writing and by examining my own assumptions and emotional responses throughout the process, always aiming to consider things from multiple angles. In writing, I aimed to write in a manner that makes it clear when something is purely based on my speculations and observations, and to include others voice and perspective as much as I can. Despite these, my dual role involved ethical tensions that are not always fully resolvable due to their complexity, for example, in balancing loyalty to the team with the critical distance expected in research. I acknowledge there is a risk of unintentionally exposing vulnerabilities or influencing the narrative in ways that serve my perspective more than others'. These tensions brought by my dual position have been the most challenging aspects of this research and

required ongoing self-reflection, commitment to objectivity and ethical sensitivity throughout the research process.

AI Use Acknowledgment:

In the writing process of this thesis, I have used OpenAI's ChatGPT as a support tool. It assisted with language editing, paraphrasing, and improving the clarity and coherence of sections based on my original content. I have carefully reviewed all AI-assisted text to ensure it accurately reflects my voice, intentions, and thinking. The AI was not used to generate original research material, interpretations, or analysis. All ideas, reflections, and conclusions are my own.

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter begins by tracing the shift from the myth of the solitary genius to understanding art as inherently social and collaborative. The dominant idea of the lone, exceptional artist has long framed fine arts as elite and detached from everyday life, an influence still visible in how we think about authorship and artistic value. Drawing on collective and participatory theories, this chapter challenges those traditions and emphasizes collaboration as a core element of artistic practice. I focus especially on community art, a form of participatory art central to the ArtStream of Utsjoki project, which values shared authorship, dialogue, and cultural democracy while rejecting top-down models.

The discussion then turns to how participatory art has addressed environmental, social, and cultural issues in Finnish Lapland. The University of Lapland has played a key role in developing educational programs and community collaborations that help express local identity and respond to broader change. However, the Arctic context introduces challenges such as geographic distance, project temporariness, and uneven participation, which raise questions about continuity, ownership, and the artist's role. This chapter outlines key developments and projects in the region while considering structural and ethical concerns. Finally, I discuss how in community art, ethics is not a secondary concern but central to the process. As art becomes more relational, issues of power, responsibility, and care take precedence. The artist becomes a negotiator rather than a sole creator, and ethics is expressed

through inclusive, accountable, and respectful ways of working. Participation is not enough, how participation is structured matters.

From lone genius to collective creation

The idea of art as an individual pursuit is quite new. Prior to the European Enlightenment, “artists were craftspeople, working collectively as a rule, and to think of them as ‘creators’ would have been close to blasphemy” (Fischer & Vassen, 2011, p. xii). As Matarasso (2019) explains, it was during the Enlightenment that the concept of “fine arts” was constructed, separating artistic practices from craft and positioning it as autonomous, intellectual, and aesthetic pursuits of individuals. This distinction marginalized the creative and meaning-making practices of a large portion of society, categorizing them as craft, folk art, or entertainment, and deeming them less valuable (Matarasso, 2019, pp. 131–132). Central to the fine arts tradition is the figure of the lone genius artist, a glorified individual who creates art from within through exceptional talent, a status historically accessible only to those who were wealthy, educated, and male (De Wachter, 2017, p. 6; Matarasso, 2019, p. 133).

This idea of art as the product of the solitary genius persists today, visible in contemporary art where works are often valued based on the reputation of the artist, in film culture where directors are celebrated as the singular creative minds behind a movie, and on social media, where extraordinary (and often fabricated) displays of individual skill attract millions of views and admiration. This creates a division between artists and non-artists, reserving the title of "artist" for those deemed worthy based on their demonstration of skills that others do not possess (Becker, 1982, p. 16–17). For each work seen as art, there is an underlying perception that a mastermind, the "final decision-maker" or "one doing the core activity," must be credited as "the artist" (De Wachter, 2017 p. 6; Becker, 1982, p. 18). This discourages anyone not supposedly deserving the title of an artist to express themselves artistically. However, as Matarasso (2019) argues, “the dominant history of Western art, with its tales of individual genius and narrow standards of taste, is not fact. It is a version of events, and a questionable one at that” (p. 133).

Becker (1982) offers an alternative view, arguing that all artistic work is inherently collaborative, involving a network of people from material production to the perception of the artwork, a collective system he refers to as "art worlds". In his description, the artist is just one part of this long link of actions, skill, power and influence that produces the final work as “art” (pp. 1-4). This perspective, recognizing art as a collaborative social phenomenon, has become more widely accepted in today’s views of art. Fischer & Vassen (2011) argue that the long-held idea of the autonomous individual, particularly the autonomous artist, is breaking down as contemporary theories now emphasize collective identity and creativity. According to them, concepts like the "death of the author," intertextuality, and hybridity reflect this shift, highlighting the growing recognition of art as a collaborative, performative, and socially embedded practice (Fischer & Vassen, 2011, pp. xiii-xiv). This is echoed by Beshty (2015) who states that ”artistic production has become increasingly reflexive about its relation to the social conditions that surround it” (p. 12), highlighting how contemporary artists are more critically aware of the systems and contexts that shape their work. It can be seen how art history has been being re-examined through the lens of previously overlooked influences behind celebrated masters, challenging earlier narratives of autonomous geniuses. For example, it is now widely recognized that significant artists from the past, like Michelangelo, relied on workshop assistants, material suppliers, and patrons who influenced their work, while artists like Rembrandt and Rubens had students and assistants directly involved in the production of their artworks (Bambach, 2017; Wheelock, 2014; Büttner, 2017). Similarly, art movements such as Cubism, once attributed to single figures, have increasingly been understood as born through the exchange of ideas and innovation between multiple artists (De Wachter, 2017, p. 7). Becker (1987) aptly illustrates the reality behind the illusion of solitary geniuses as the creators of art by stating that “situations of art making lie somewhere between the extremes of one person doing everything and every smallest activity being done by a separate person” (p. 10).

This broader understanding of art as collaborative is visible in contemporary practices. While the myth of the lone genius still shapes the way art is consumed and marketed, artist duos and collectives, such as SUPERFLEX, Raqs Media Collective, and the Guerrilla Girls, have made the collaborative nature of their work central, even as they face pressure to present a singular authorship to fit dominant market narratives (De Wachter, 2017, pp. 15–19). Contemporary art has also evolved toward more open collaboration, as seen in participatory art practices such as socially engaged art and community art. While these artforms were once

marginalized, they have gained greater recognition in recent decades and become mainstream, appearing across major institutions, public services, and cultural policy (Matarasso, 2019, p. 21). In participatory practices, artists deliberately abandon their traditional authoritative roles to collaborate with 'non-artists,' challenging the elite model of fine arts and bringing art back into everyday life (Matarasso, 2019, pp. 19–20). These practices highlight the social phenomenon of art, demonstrating how art is created through the collaboration of shared ideas, resources, and skills.

Community art

If we accept Becker's concept of 'art worlds,' where art is created through the linked efforts of individuals, institutions, and conventions, then participatory practices, such as community art, are not new but rather an explicit artistic demonstration of what has always existed, with the key difference that, this time, everyone gets to be an artist. Numerous efforts have been made to trace the history of participatory art and to link it to a specific historical trajectory that explains its origins. Alongside these attempts, a wide range of terms have been introduced to describe the varying approaches to participatory practices, with new ones emerging regularly. Here I will try to make sense of this by going through terms and definitions by some key authors.

Kester (2004) uses the dialogical art or "dialogical aesthetics" to highlight the focus on dialogue, collaboration and social engagement, tracing the history of these art forms back to the avant-garde movement (Kester, 2004, pp. 8–13). Similarly, Bishop (2012) traces the development back to the avant-garde when critiquing these practices, she prefers to label simply as "participatory art" due to their nature of involving many people (Bishop, 2012, pp. 1–3). Likewise, Matarasso (2019) uses "participatory art" as an umbrella term to describe "the creation of art by professional artists and non-professional artists" but connects the history of all participatory art to community art movement in the 1960s (Matarasso, 2019, pp. 19–21 & p. 48). Also, unlike Bishop (2012, pp. 1-2) who includes work where people may function merely as passive or performative elements without direct creative input, Matarasso (2019) requires, in his definition, that everyone involved acts as an artist and therefore he excludes work without active creative agency from participants as merely contemporary art

with aspects of participation (Matarasso, 2019, pp. 49–50 & p. 55). Kwon (2002) connects participatory art to the history of public art, specifically to the trajectory of site-specific public art which emerged in 1960s, seeing it as a continuation of the effort to connect art more deeply to the location and to people who occupy it (Kwon, 2002, pp. 100–117). Lacy (1995) recognizes this historical connection but prefers to see, what she calls ”new genre public art”, in relation to 1960s community, feminist and activist art, similar to Matarasso (2019), where artist sought social change and community engagement (Lacy, 1995, pp. 21–28).

All of these different terms and ways to discuss participatory art emphasize their different directions and aesthetics (Kantonen, 2010, p. 75). It can make the field very confusing and sometimes contradictory when it is not clear which framework is used or referred to. A clear definition is important to uphold ethical principles, distinguish good practice, and avoid misconceptions (Matarasso, 2019, p. 46). These overlapping and sometimes conflicting perspectives ultimately shape how participatory art is understood, practiced, and ethically evaluated. For this thesis, I will use “participatory art” as an umbrella term and “community art” as the specific participatory art practice most fitting to describe ArtStream of Utsjoki. This definition is my interpretation and not something we collectively decided to use to describe the project. I prefer to use it because community art framework is closest to the way I understood and see the project overall. Therefore, in this chapter I will mostly focus on discussing participatory art theories relevant to community art specifically.

Community art, or community-based art, is a distinct participatory practice that fundamentally challenges the traditional notion of the artist as the sole creator by placing emphasis on equal creative collaboration. As a practice, it emerged as a form of political activism in the 1960s and 1970s, when young artists viewed cultural participation as a human right and sought to promote cultural democracy by involving marginalized groups and communities directly in the creation of art (Matarasso, 2019, pp. 21–22). During that time, artists felt the need to step away from their isolated roles to share their tools with the public and began collaborating with everyday people, as community art was believed to make art accessible to broader audiences and communities (Kantonen, 2010, p. 74).
According to Matarasso (2019), principles of cultural democracy are what distinguishes community art from other participatory art forms (Matarasso, 2019, p. 51). Cultural democracy advocates for equal cultural participation, and the right of individuals and

communities to define, practice, and share their cultural traditions, challenging dominant cultural norms, resisting top-down imposition of artistic values, and advocating equitable participation in cultural life (Graves, 2005, pp. 17–18). To follow these principles, professional and non-professional artists must collaborate as equals (Matarasso, 2019, pp. 51–51).

The role of the professional artist shifts from a model of individual authorship to one of collective relationship, where the artist's aim is not self-expression but to bring out the creative potential of a specific site or community (Kester, 2004, p. 24; Lacy, 1995, p. 35). Therefore, artists working in community art must ensure their work reflects and benefits the community, instead of just the artist, while remaining critically aware of their own biases and influence (Koh, 2010, p. 202). Listening, observing, and relationship-building are often listed as central tools of the artists in community art (Kester, 2004, p. 24; Koh, 2010, p. 202). Kuoppala (2010) describes her role as a professional artist in community art, as that of a producer who initiates, designs, negotiates, informs, and enables (pp. 175–181). Thus, the traditional artistic skills associated with the Enlightenment era's notion of genius are less relevant, as community art instead demands strong social and organizational skills from the artist. Because the collaboration and human interaction is at the centre, the process rather than the final product or production, becomes the essence of the artistic practice. This sentiment is shared with many participatory art practices. Kester (2004) describes this as performative process-based approach, in contrast to the traditional object making focus of other artforms, where conversation itself becomes the primary goal (Kester, 2004, pp. 1–10). Similarly, Lacy (1995) states how new genre public art, a term she conjured for art that involves the public in the creation of art, is based on engagement where the relationships created can be the artwork itself listing communication as one of the main building materials (Lacy, 1995, pp. 19–20 & p. 28). She further describes how the artwork can then function as a reflection of relationships and connections created throughout the process (Lacy, 1995, pp. 36–37). In this way, in participatory art, artists replace traditional materials with relationships (Kester, 2004, p. 3).

This turn to the social process has switched the focus from aesthetics to ethics meaning that the beauty of the artistic work is not on the tangible artwork created but on the nature of the collaboration itself (Bishop, 2012, p. 18–19). In other words, the success of participatory art is based on how meaningful and fair the collaboration was which is examined through an ethical lens. This turn to process and ethical considerations is one of the most debated aspects

of participatory art. For instance, Bishop (2012) strongly criticizes the tendency to prioritize ethics over aesthetics, arguing that it shifts the focus from artistic and critical engagement to moral and social goals, often resulting in uncritical validation of participatory processes based on ethical considerations (Bishop, 2012, p. 18–19). Additionally, Bishop questions what process-focused projects offer to secondary audiences who have limited access to the participatory experience, to the process, challenging their artistic and critical relevance (Eschenburg, 2014, p. 176). Even though participatory art remains a debated practice within the art worlds, it has gained wide acceptance as a legitimate artistic approach. Research such as Matarasso's (1997) influential study, which identified fifty social impacts of participation in the arts, has highlighted the societal benefits of participatory practices increasing their relevance and securing their position within cultural funding and policy. I will discuss these benefits and impacts more detail in the next section.

Participatory art in the Arctic

In Finnish Lapland, participatory art has been used to support cultural sustainability amid the region's environmental, economic, and societal challenges (Huhmarniemi & Jokela, 2020; Härkönen, Huhmarniemi & Jokela, 2018). Climate change, exploitation of natural resources and mass tourism threatens the traditional livelihoods of Arctic communities whose way of lives are bound to nature (Huhmarniemi & Jokela, 2020). Globalization shifts livelihoods and culture to urban areas, disrupting identities, well-being, regional development, and social structures of Arctic communities (Huhmarniemi & Jokela, 2020; Härkönen et al., 2018). Participatory art practices promote self-expression, creativity, and empowerment among participants while addressing local environmental or social challenges through collaborative projects (Jokela et al., 2006, 2.2). By working together, artists and community members can strengthen cultural identity, build connections, and inspire collective action to improve their shared environment and well-being (Jokela et al., 2006, 2.2). This collaborative engagement is not just about artistic expression but also about affirming identity and belonging. As Matarasso (2019) states "participatory art reminds us that we are alive and that our lives matter" (p. 28). Similarly, Graves (2005) emphasizes culture itself as "the building blocks of our identity as social beings," describing it as "the practices communities select to express themselves, the glue that binds them together internally, and the displays that represent them

to the world" (p. 15). Therefore, participatory art practices not only help preserve cultural heritage but also strengthen community resilience, supporting the sustainability of Arctic cultures in the face of ongoing environmental and societal changes.

In Finnish Lapland, the University of Lapland in particular has a long and distinguished record of community and environmental art, including long-term action research that supports the sustainable development of the Arctic through place-specific artistic activities (Coutts, 2018, p. 38–39; Härkönen et al., 2018). The Arctic Art & Design (AAD) master's programme equips students with tools for cultural sustainability and community-driven approaches rooted in the local context (Härkönen & Vuontisjärvi, 2018, pp. 26–27). The term "Arctic art/design" refers to artistic practices that "reflect and reform the cultural heritage or create new forms of expression based on Arctic nature, culture and topical discussions" (Huhmarniemi & Jokela, 2020). While it can include any art form, environmental art, participatory art, and handicrafts are often highlighted for their ability to support sustainability, dialogue, and cultural continuity since these forms draw from local traditions, respect the environment, and invite conversation (Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2020; Härkönen et al., 2018). AAD combines applied visual arts (AVA) and service design to respond to community needs in the Arctic (Härkönen & Vuontisjärvi, 2018, p. 26). AVA is grounded in collaboration and socio-cultural contexts, aiming to be useful and embedded in daily life (Coutts, 2013, p. 27; Jokela, 2013, p. 15;). The artist's role is often that of a facilitator, requiring strong interpersonal, motivational, and organisational skills (Coutts, 2013, p. 27), echoing the broader demands of participatory art. Through these approaches, the University of Lapland educates artists who act as both creators and facilitators in support of sustainability, tradition, and local life. The following section discusses past examples that show how long-term relationships, distance, and ethical challenges shape participatory art in Finnish Lapland.

In our case, the university's established reputation likely encouraged locals to engage more openly with us. Many community members seemed already familiar with the format and benefits of community art projects through previous university-led initiatives. For example, the Firefox (2004), a community-based art education project held in Utsjoki, seem to have made a lasting impact. It involved multidisciplinary workshops where people from diverse cultural backgrounds and age groups expressed themselves through art (Hiltunen, 2009, pp. 170–172). As Hiltunen (2009) described, the project's goals were to "extend art into the wider

community, develop individual creativity, raise the quality of artistic achievement, strengthen self-esteem, and foster a shared understanding between people from different cultural backgrounds" (p. 170). The project's legacy lives on in the memories of locals as during our project, community members often mentioned it positively and some even assumed we were Hiltunen's students. We became part of this relationship build by Hiltunen and other collaborative projects by the university through our connection to it as students. Although these individual projects may be temporary and led by different student groups, together they form a long-term institutional presence in the region. Over time, this continuity has allowed the University of Lapland to build trust and develop a deeper understanding of local contexts. As Helguera (2011) argues, participatory art is more likely to succeed when artists engage with a community over an extended period, enabling a more meaningful understanding of participants and their environment (Helguera, 2011, p. 20). Kwon (2002) discusses this through the common notion of "home-team advantage", mirroring how sustained, insider relationships make community-based projects more feasible and responsive to local needs (Kwon, 2002, pp. 133–134). The university cultivates these conditions on an institutional level, which likely contributed to the openness we encountered during our project.

Long distances are a significant characteristic and a challenge in the Arctic where villages are separated from each other, and from any nearby towns or settlements, often by hundreds of kilometres making access to cultural services and activities, such as museums, galleries, workshops and events, limited for local residents. Therefore, increasing the access to art in the Arctic communities has been a major goal for several community art projects in Finnish Lapland. For example, Artpath of Enontekiö, a two-year collaboration between the University of Lapland and the municipality of Enontekiö, aimed to increase access to art in the region by arranging six community workshops held across the municipality (Härkönen, 2019). The initiation for the project came from a local person who voiced a concern that even though activities are often held in the municipality, they are organized at the centre, leaving other villages further away without limited cultural action (Härkönen, 2019, p. 454). However, the same distance that is the motivation for these projects also creates a significant challenge: organising activities from afar can make it hard for meaningful local involvement, especially when the goal is to support community-led processes. For example, in the Artpath of Enontekiö project, students from the University of Lapland raised concerns that planning the workshops remotely, due to the long distance between Enontekiö and Rovaniemi, might have limited local involvement in the planning stage and, in turn, threatened the locals' artistic

agency in the process (Härkönen, 2019, p. 465). To add, one of the students (Mishra Amisha) contemplated in her thesis that the vast distance and remote planning might have been key reasons for one of the workshops having low participation from locals as it was hard to imagine the place without visiting it. There is often neither funding nor practical possibility to travel to the location as frequently as would be ideal. Therefore, the distance often creates a paradox: it is both the reason for the project's necessity and the very thing that complicates its realisation. This became relevant in our case as well, as some team members had to participate remotely for a significant part of the project. This created a power imbalance, as some were able to be on-site while others were not. I will discuss this in more detail in later chapters.

Last project I want to discuss is Environmental Art Path of Skaidijärvi (Skaidijärven Ympäristötaidepolku) in Nuorgam, Utsjoki. A collaboration between University of Lapland and locals of Nuorgam, it aimed to celebrate local culture and history through environmental artworks made from local materials in the hopes of enhancing local image, encourage tourism and support local livelihoods (Kantola, 2007, pp. 6–7). As Kantola (2006) describes, the project followed a model developed in the University of Lapland where planning is based on mapping the identity of a place: it is examined through subjective, objective, textual, sociocultural and visual lens. The artwork is born through these perspectives shaping the final outcome (Kantola, 2006, p. 25). A pilot artwork was finished: a boat made from rocks utilizing local materials (rocks) and symbolizing past transportation means as well as the location near the river and the border (Kantola, 2007, p. 29 & p. 33). As Nuorgam was also part of our project, we visited this artwork during one of our trips to Nuorgam. Almost 20 years later, the boat was still there, though somewhat worn down by years of exposure to the weather and visitors. The locals who guided us to the location did not know the story behind it but recognized the artwork through our description. According to Kantola's (2006) there were plans for additional artworks and to maintain the trail in the future (Kantola, 2006, pp. 33–44 & pp. 51–55), but none of these seem to have come true in the ends. This echoes a broader issue in community arts: how to ensure the sustainability of projects after the initial involvement is over.

Although some impact is immediate, such as the emotions a project evokes, the long-term effects take time to unfold. As Hiltunen (2016) notes, "progress through art in this development work is performative. Progress can be seen as multifaceted... leading to

sustainable livelihoods, new ways of collaborating, new products, and an improved environment" (Hiltunen, 2016, p. 161). Moreover, there are often unseen processes and effects at play in community art, producing outcomes that are difficult to measure, some of which may be both positive and negative, or shift over time (Matarasso, 1997, p. 80). Nevertheless, many projects, like the case of Environmental Art Path of Skaidijärvi, are short-term, dependent on external funding and temporary partnerships. When these end, momentum is often lost, and infrastructure unmaintained leaving some major goals unachieved, like in that case the realization of the art path. Kwon (2002) describes such situations as "invented communities," where participation is sustained only as long as the project framework exists (p. 126). As she explains: "--invented community groups are conceptually and financially dependent on the art project for their operation as well as their reason for being, they have severely limited life spans; their meaning and social relevance are circumscribed by its framework as well" (Kwon, 2002, p. 130).

Similarly, Helguera (2011) argues that many challenges in these projects arise from goals that are disproportionate to the time allocated for their realization (Helguera, 2011, p. 19). In the case of Skaidijärvi, it seems local participation in the project was limited to providing place-specific information and in assisting in the construction of the rock boat (Kantola, 2007, pp. 25-26 & p. 41). This form of engagement risks becoming merely performative, where artists assign tasks to participants without genuinely sharing authorship or decision-making power (Kwon, 2002, p. 118; pp. 139–140). As a result, even if the artwork, such as the rock boat, becomes physically and culturally embedded in the landscape through detailed place mapping, restricted community agency can hinder the development of genuine ownership which can then lead to abandonment of future goals after institutions and artists leave the project. Therefore, good intentions and ambitions are not always enough as the social process of a participatory art is quite complex and fragile.

Ethical collaboration

> Ethics concerns, in Greek, the search for a good "way of being", for wise course of action. -- Ethics is the principle that judges the practice of a subject, be it individual or collective. (Badiou, 1993, p. 26)

Art has transformational power. Rancière (2000) suggests that art can disrupt or alter how things are seen, what is considered possible or legitimate, and how individuals and groups are represented or recognized. Through this intervention, art can influence what is visible and valued in society, potentially shifting perceptions and creating new ways of being or acting (Rancière, 2000, pp. 32–33). Similarly, Kester (2004) argues that art's true power lies not in its physical form or inherent meaning but in its ability to spark communication. The radical potential of art is in the dialogue it promotes (Kester, 2004, p. 90). In this way, art is seen as a social encounter rather than a static thing. As Bourriaud (1998) argues, "art is a state of encounter" (p. 44). This shift toward understanding art as part of social contexts and human interactions redirects attention from the art object to the ethical aspects of its creation, focusing not only on the social interactions it promotes but also on how individuals and communities involved are treated and represented. Beshty (2015) refers to this as an "aesthetics of ethics", where the quality of relationships involved in the creation of art becomes part of the aesthetic experience, influencing both the message conveyed by the artwork and the process through which it is created (Beshty, 2015, p. 18).This perspective points to the importance of fairness, respect, and power dynamics in the art-making process, especially in participatory and community art, where the relationships between the artist and participants are central to the work's meaning and impact. The most beautiful and successful community art is often regarded as one where the social interactions are visible in the final form and where the aesthetics and ethics of interaction are intertwined (Kantonen, 2005, p. 269).

In community art, ethical concerns take special importance due to the central role of participants throughout the creative process as community art ideally involves participants from conception to completion (Kaitavuori, 2021, pp. 354–355 & p. 359), necessitating careful attention to power dynamics, representation, and shared decision-making. Ethical questions in this context extend across the entire artistic process, encompassing the artist's relationships with participants, collaborators, and the broader art world (Kantonen, 2005, p. 63). As Beshty (2015) states, the "aesthetics of ethics" refers to how art materializes its values (Beshty, 2015, p. 18). In other words, ethics are not just about what art claims to stand for, but how it manifests them, from its creation process to its final presentation. The true measure of ethical art lies in its tangible practice, not just its professed ideals. In community art, where the key objective is to foster shared authorship, this means ensuring that participants are not treated as mere subjects but active co-creators with meaningful artistic

agency. Otherwise, artists risk presenting their practice as community-driven while failing to enact authentic collaboration. For instance, Kwon (2002) points to the manner in how participatory projects can start with the artists already having outcomes or themes in mind and just chooses a community to serve this predefined purpose (Kwon, 2002, pp. 120–123). This kind of participation, where the artists or institutions define where and how the community partakes, risks being just performative inclusion where the true power remains with the artists and institutions while framing the project falsely as empowering community-driven work (Kwon, 2002, pp. 123–124). At worst, this ethical washing hides self-serving motives and reinforces traditions they claim to aim to challenge and exploits marginalized communities for personal gain (Kwon, 2002, pp. 123–124 & p. 139).

For community art to truly be equal collaboration, Matarasso (2019) argues that professional artist cannot know the process or outcome in advance, instead they need to be shaped through the collaboration (Matarasso, 2019, p. 52). Similarly, Kester (2004) argues that “well before the enunciative act of art making, the manipulation and occupation of space and material, there must be a period of openness, of non-action, of learning and of listening” (Kester, 2004, p. 107). The idea is that involving the community from the start resists top-down approaches and supports their agency by allowing them to shape the project's goals, processes, and outcomes. Kwon (2002) also emphasizes that collaboration is shaped by complex web of roles, expectations, and negotiations, where the identities of artist, curator, institution, and community are continuously constructed and redefined (Kwon, 2002, p. 141). Artists are required to actively and critically examine their positionality and resist predefined agendas, to allow collaboration to emerge through genuine dialogue rather than imposed agendas. As Matarasso (2019) notes, ”the critical issue, in ethical terms, is how inevitable power inequalities can be acknowledged and negotiated. That is central to the quality of process and product in participatory art” (Matarasso, 2019, p. 108).

The professional artist position in the community art has paradoxical and contradictory dimensions. On one hand, the artist is regarded as equal to the community as everyone involved becomes an artist in the co-creation. On the other hand, the professional artist is often seen as one with greater responsibility. This responsibility is not neutral; it also reinforces the very hierarchies the practice aims to dismantle. Matarasso (2019) defines participatory art as art creation between professional and non-professional artist to highlight the fact that everyone is an equal creator in the process even though they bring different

levels of skills into the project (Matarasso, 2019, p. 49) This distinction also highlights the structural and institutional asymmetries between them. This differentiation helps clarify that, despite shared authorship in theory, the professional artist carries unique responsibilities due to their training, experience, and institutional ties. Matarasso (2019) points out that artists typically possess greater artistic skill, knowledge, and experience, making them more confident and comfortable in art-related contexts. He points out that artists often initiate the project, giving them a deeper understanding of its goals and structure. He adds that, they also serve as the central point of communication, linking all parties involved. Lastly, they are usually the most committed to the project at the outset (Matarasso, 2019, p. 107). This authority naturally mirrors the artist's responsibility within the project. As Kester (2004) observes, participatory artists aim to "challenge the hierarchical isolation of fine art" by redistributing their power (Kester, 2004, p. 126). Yet this power does not disappear. It must be actively negotiated and critically examined throughout the process.

To avoid tokenism, misrepresentation and exploitation, Matarasso (2019) highlights consent as the corner stone of participatory art (Matarasso, 2019, p. 104). To respect participants' autonomy and dignity they should be fully informed about what they are involved in and under what conditions, with clear communication from the artist or institution (Kaitavuori, 2021, p. 367). Participants should also be informed from the beginning if and how the material produced during the project will be presented publicly so that they know how their contributions will be used and handled (Kantonen, 2005, p. 64). Moreover, participants' privacy is essential, especially when sensitive information is involved, and anonymity becomes particularly important when working with vulnerable groups such as children (Kantonen, 2005, pp. 63–64). This concerns both the documentation of events throughout the project as well as possible artworks created by participants, especially if they deal with sensitive and personal topics, that might later be exhibited. Consent helps ensure that people are not forced or manipulated into participation where their input is used without their knowledge and approval. In theory, this seems straightforward, but in practice it can become complicated as social situations can be complex. Critchley (2007) describes "ethical subject" as "a split subject divided between itself and a demand that it cannot meet", referring to how the world is never ideal and your efforts will likely go unnoticed and unrewarded, but it is the effort despite of those that is the ethical act (Critchley, 2007, p. 34). In other words, in community art, ethical conduct is not about perfection in every situation but about seeking the best solution, most responsible and respectful solution, within given circumstances.

3. Research Methodology

The main research objective of this study is to examine the collaboration between artists in a community art project to understand the dynamics and resulting challenges among them to help build better practices for future projects. It is important to note that this research is mainly from the point of view of students, not professional artists. While its findings may offer relevant insights for professional contexts as well, such as the fundamental dynamics of collaboration, power negotiation, and shared authorship in community art, the student perspective introduces distinct nuances, such as influencing institutional factors, newly forming motivations, evolving artistic identities and developing participatory art skills that might be specific to their context. In keeping with Matarasso's (2019) definition of shared authorship, all participants in this project are regarded as equal creative agents and artists. To distinct students from the other participants, I will be referring to us as "artist-students" throughout this study. Where appropriate, the term "team members" may also be employed to emphasize the inner collaborative framework between just us, the artist-students. The research questions are:

- How does collaboration between artist-students evolve in a community art project?
- What factors influence artist-students' collaboration in a community art project?
- What ethical concerns emerge from the interactions between collaborating artist-students in community art projects?

Research Design

This study employed arts-based research (ABR) design, which allows artistic practices to generate, analyse, and communicate knowledge (Leavy, 2020, p. 257). More traditional qualitative methods, such as an interview, were also used to strengthen the data generation and provide perspectives of other artist-students from the project beside myself. A case study was chosen as the most appropriate research strategy since the study focuses on a specific real-life context and aims to examine the phenomenon within it (Yin, 2003, p. 3). Below I will go through a case study as a strategy and ABR as a design to further justify their use in this study.

A Case study

As Yin (2003) describes ” the case study as a research study comprises an all-encompassing method – covering the logic of design, data collection techniques, and specific approaches to data analysis” (p. 14). This research started to form after ArtStream of Utsjoki project had ended and I started to look at everything the project had left behind: the artworks, materials, notes, memories etc. A case study is a research strategy that ”allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events” (Yin, 2003, p. 2). Therefore, a case study strategy felt the most appropriate to examine the project itself and its processes, especially from a retrospective lens.

In the context of case study research, interpreted or analysed data is often referred to as "evidence." The evidence in a case study is based on real-life, often complex, phenomenon and is therefore inherently diverse and imperfect. (Gillham, 2000, p. 12) To summarize Yin (2003), to enhance the credibility of evidence, a case study often employs a methodological approach called data triangulation that uses multiple types of data and perspectives to ensure a more reliable and robust analysis (pp. 97–99). In this research, triangulation is applied through the combination of arts-based methods, qualitative interviews, and diverse data derived from the materials produced during the ArtStream of Utsjoki project, offering a comprehensive understanding of the collaborative dynamics involved.

”The case study researcher, working inductively from what's there in the research setting develops grounded theory: theory that is grounded in the evidence that is turned up” (Gillham, 2000, p. 12). In other words, case study approach allows the data inform and guide the research process. When working with a specific case, for example a project, predefined hypotheses or theories can be constraining and may lead to missed findings. In a case study, where data collection and analysis direct the research, themes, patterns, and insights emerge from the case itself, allowing for more relevant and grounded findings. Thus, in a case study, theory and examining the case at hand function in a form of dialogue (Gillham, 2000, p. 15). This dialogue allows the research to remain flexible when insights come directly from lived experiences, including my own reflections as a participant, rather than be guided by predefined theoretical frameworks.

To summarize, a case study strategy allows me to explore a specific phenomenon, in this case a community art project retrospectively, to develop more deeper understanding of the context where the collaboration and all its particularities happened. This process not only uncovers key findings but also supports my personal learning goals by deepening my understanding of the project's dynamics and my role within it.

Arts-based research

Arts-based research (ABR), as described by Leavy (2020), is a set of methodological tools that use creative arts "during any or all phases of research, including data generation, analysis, interpretation, and representation" (p. 4). As an artist, it is natural to me to make sense of things through artistic practices. Thus, when conducting research, making visual and artistic creations of the data was almost necessary for me to be able to engage with the research data and gain a clearer understanding of the research topic. This way, throughout the research, my artist-self was supporting my researcher-self, which, according to Leavy (2020), are key requirements in ABR (p. 30). ABR allows me to have artistic process itself as central to both the investigation and the communication of my research findings.

Examining the project retrospectively by constructing timelines and creating artworks, allowed me to relive the project's journey through a more objective lens, like I was looking at the project and my participation in it from a distance. Revisiting visual artefacts and artworks left behind from the project, sparked memories and emotions that had previously been forgotten. Leavy (2020) refers to a study that found that "visual art activates many distinct and at times conflicting emotional signals in the brain, which in turn causes deep memories" (p. 14). For example, a sketch drawn by one of the artist-students, vividly reminded me of past interactions between us that I would not have remembered otherwise. Therefore, in this research, artworks and visual materials function like time capsules, unlocking memories and emotions that help access otherwise forgotten knowledge.

As I was making visualisations and artworks, it also helped me to see the project and the dynamics of our collaboration more holistically. According to Holm, Shalström & Zilliacus (2018), artistic images allow us to simultaneously see both the whole and its individual parts, facilitating knowledge synthesis and revealing knowledge that might otherwise remain

unnoticed (p. 313). Similarly, Leavy (2020) states how ABR, harnessing the power of arts, enables access to otherwise inaccessible insights and creates new connections (p. 22). For instance, as I was making a visual timeline, I used different colour to represent tasks we did together and tasks I did alone. Upon reviewing it, I noticed that during certain months, I had mostly worked alone. When I compared this to my subjective timeline, which reflected my emotional state, I saw a direct correlation: these months were also when I felt the most anxious and stressed. Thus, ABR enabled me to visualize our process and uncover new connections that deepened my understanding. Although ArtStream of Utsjoki and its artefacts were not originally intended as research data, revisiting them artistically allowed me to extract valuable insights from a fresh perspective.

As I am researching a project of which I was also a participant in it, it causes me to have a close relationship with my subject manner. Unlike traditional research approaches that highlight the need to distance oneself from the subject matter, ABR allows me to share and acknowledge this relationship (Leavy, 2020, p. 3). This is important because, in this research, my experiences and perspective provide insights that are just as crucial as those of my team members. Barone & Eisner (2012) state that ”one of the aims of each piece of arts-based research is to provide one— but only one of many— accounting(s) of what has occurred” (p. 59). My perspective offers one account of the nature of our collaboration, and while I recognize that it is only one among others, it remains the primary lens through which this research is conducted due to my role as an artist-student during the project and the researcher during this study. Still, I will include the other perspectives involved to enrich the research and deepen the understanding of our collaboration.

In summary, ABR has allowed me to engage with the research in a way that feels natural to me, by combining artistic practice with critical reflection. Operating as an artist and a researcher, through ABR approach, I can subjectively express my personal experiences while maintaining an objective lens as a researcher. All in all, ABR provides me the tools to have a deeper and personally more meaningful research process.

Research paradigm and positionality

Initially, during the project, I struggled to find my research focus due to the overwhelming newness of the experience. Everything felt like a potential research topic, and I was too preoccupied with the project itself to form a clear research aim. It was only after the project ended, when I had some mental distance, that I could pinpoint the core issue I wanted to explore further. This personal revelation, rooted in the disappointments I experienced during the project, allowed me to identify the gap I wanted to address in this research, marking the starting point for a more focused and meaningful inquiry.

As an artist, I function in a chaotic and spontaneous manner. I do not plan what I create but instead trust my subconscious to guide me, with the result always being a surprise. Therefore, the idea of conducting research, which requires a systematic and organized working style with set goals, was strange and intimidating to me. However, later as I reflected on the ArtStream of Utsjoki project, I realized that my approach to community art, which at the time was a completely new art form to me, mirrored my regular artistic working style. Even in a collaborative setting, my tendency for improvisation and spontaneity remained. This turned out to be one of the key reasons it resonated with me: it puts heavy emphasis on process, demanding artists to be flexible. Changing plans, grasping new inspirations, and embracing the uncertainty of the process felt natural and familiar to me. Similarly, with regards to research, I was able to find an approach that felt natural to me through art-based research. As Leavy (2020) states, "arts-based practices are particularly useful for research projects that aim to describe, explore, discover, or unsettle. Furthermore, these research practices are generally attentive to processes" (p. 22). This aligns well with my artistic and research process, where the journey and transformation are as important as the end result.

My research paradigm is rooted in the understanding that knowledge is subjective, experience-based, and context-dependent. Artistic practice here functions as a way of knowing and understanding the world. Knowledge is generated through artistic and subjective reflection and interpretation. Meanings emerge from the lived experiences of team members, the reflective processes of myself as the researcher, and the collaborative nature of the artistic practice throughout the community art project. As a participant in the ArtStream of Utsjoki project, particularly as a member of the artist-student team my research focuses on, I am positioned as a researcher, artist, and participant (artist-student) simultaneously. Initially,

these multiple roles felt chaotic and even contradictory, but over time, I realized how they complement each other. Being a participant provides a close perspective to the project, being a researcher encourages learning, and being an artist strengthens inquiry through creative means. These roles have deepened my exploration, with my insights and experiences offering space for personal growth, both as an artist and a person.

Data collection and analysing method

My research applies a multi-method approach, as defined by the use of different methods to investigate the same issue (Gillham, 2000, p. 13). The data were generated through various forms, an objective visual timeline consisting of project materials, a subjective timeline of monotypes, reflective writings, and an interview with a team member, all addressing the central theme of collaboration within the community art project. Although these methods differ in nature, they each contribute to understanding the shared phenomenon from distinct yet interconnected perspectives. Data used in this study was primary data and it is divided into two categories: retrospective data and newly generated data.

Retrospective data refers here to all materials produced by the ArtStream of Utsjoki project. They were not created with this study's research objectives in mind, as those objectives did not exist at the time. Instead, they are artefacts left behind by the project functioning now like breadcrumbs and anchor points for this research. They offer authentic evidence of past events of the project. These materials are tangible objects such as written texts (e.g. notes, calendar entries, e-mails), all related artworks (e.g. sketches, prototypes, finished artworks) and visual documents (photos and videos). These materials were created by different participants, including myself, throughout the project. The materials used by this study are the ones I have obtained access and consent to use for this research.

Newly generated data refers here to the data produced during the research process. This data was created from processing and interpreting the retrospective data. It includes reflective notes, created visual timelines and artworks representing the project and our collaboration. During the research process I created artworks as a way of examining the project's process and to visualize it to be used as reflective tools. These are referred to as objective and subjective timelines as both of them depict the story but from different point of views: one

from general, one from personal. This part of data also includes an interview conducted with a team member to understand their perspective on the themes that emerged from the data offering an additional layer. This was informal semi-structured interview conducted at the exhibition space where the timeline created earlier functioned like a visual aid. Questions were about the overall experience from their perspective (high and low points, reasons to join etc.) and our teamwork. The interview lasted around one hour. The interview was transcribed and content analysis conducted. Key themes were extracted and arranged chronologically into the phases recognized in the timeline creation process.

4. ArtStream of Utsjoki

In this chapter, I describe, analyse and interpret he ArtStream of Utsjoki project phase by phase, based on my research questions. My aim is to present an honest and detailed account from our perspective as inexperienced community artists. I feel like most project descriptions and reports do not focus on the artist's perspective and therefore here I want to emphasize it. Not because I want to make the impression that community art is about the artist, but because I believe this to be helpful to any artist or person embarking on this journey for the first time. Understanding how things unfolded may help future artists and collaborators prepare for their own community art projects and, hopefully, support more fruitful collaborations.

This chapter combines factual descriptions of events with reflections drawn from my own experience and those of my team members, gathered during the research process. While I present the factual contributions of my team members as they occurred in the project, I have anonymized their personal reflections and other sensitive data to respect their privacy. My own perspective is presented more openly, written in the first person to provide an "open window" into the process. Some of my reflections are explicitly personal, while others are generalized or intentionally merged with the perspectives of others when emphasizing authorship would be unnecessary, unethical or unhelpful. This description is grounded in my research, including the artistic research methods discussed earlier and the interview with a team member.

Introducing the participants

Here is brief introduction of key members listed in the participant map (Figure 3).

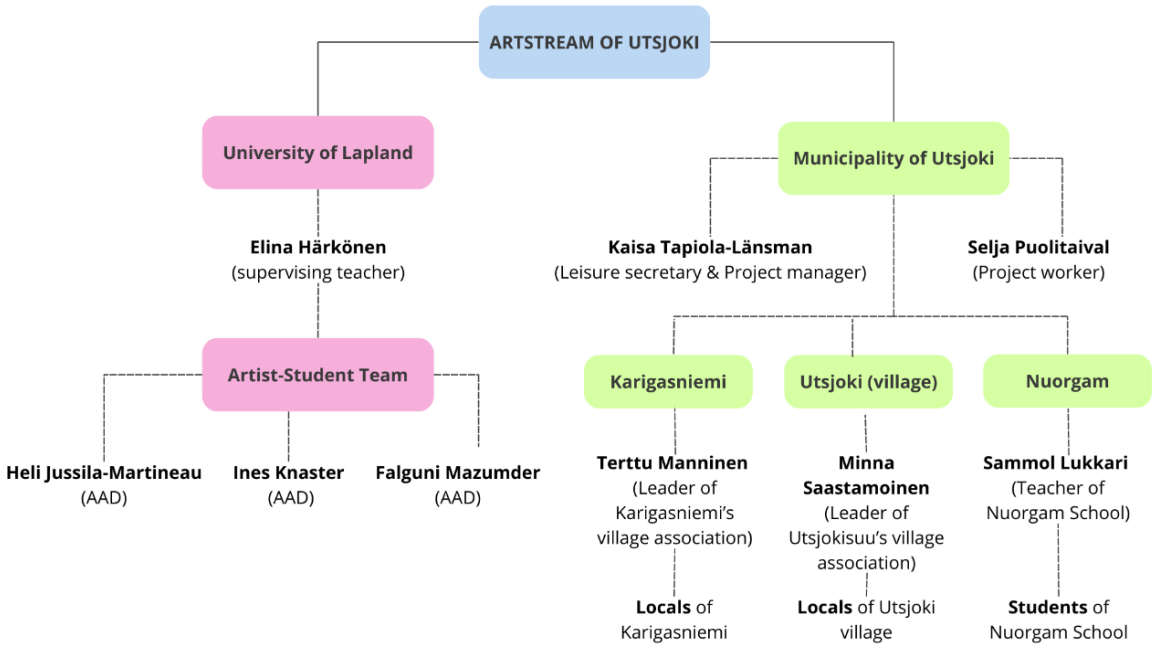

Figure 3. Map of Artstream of Utsjoki key participants by Ines Knaster, 2025.

Artist-Student team (Master Students in Arctic Art & Design): All of us contributed to the general tasks of project such as research, sketching, meetings, facilitating activities etc. Contributions styles varied due to circumstances and personal interests but overall, everyone was involved in the project from start to finish. My main role in the project was to co-ordinate the project: planning trips, meetings, and activities. As I was also living in Utsjoki, I communicated with locals and kept both them and my team members informed as well working as a point of contact between them. Falguni Mazumder's primary responsibilities included ensuring the project's visibility by creating promotional materials, such as posters and social media posts, as well as handling the documentation. She was responsible for photographing project activities and capturing video footage for the video documentation. Heli Jussila-Martineau's primary role was to facilitate workshops and engage with locals, drawing on her social nature and background as an applied visual arts student. She also took

the lead in organizing the local art exhibit at the Utsjoki Lumo Festival, where the three art projects were presented to the public.

Utsjoki municipality: Kaisa Tapiola-Länsman is the Leisure Secretary of Utsjoki municipality and the leader of the “Eight Season Events”- project. Kaisa was our main supervisor and co-ordinator in Utsjoki. Selja Puolitaival is a project worker in the “Eight Season Events”- project who joined the project halfway through it and assisted us with everything. They both worked as our main support in every step from gathering people and resources to arranging places to stay when visiting Utsjoki, as well us participated in most of the meetings and workshops.

Nuorgam school: The school of Nuorgam worked as the main collaborator from Nuorgam village. The idea for the artwork was initiated by one the teachers, who wished for the salmon wood boards to be brought to their school yard. Our main contact person from the school was a teacher Sammol Lukkari. All the children from the school participated in the creation of the Salmon Tales artwork by painting salmons. The school also offered their facilities for our use during the project.

Utsjoki village: The Village Association of Utsjoki and its leader Minna Saastamoinen worked as our main collaborator in Utsjoki village. We arranged meetings in their village house called Giisá which worked as our main gathering place regarding the Utsjoki village project. They assisted in contacting and gathering people from their village. Additionally, several locals attended both the idea and planning meetings as well as participated during the two construction days when the boat benches were built.

Karigasniemi: Terttu Manninen, leader of the village association in Karigasniemi, was our main contact person and co-ordinator from Karigasniemi. She helped gather people, resources and arranged places to stay in Karigasniemi. Village Association also offered their village house Sáivu to be used as a place to gather as well as to create the artworks. People of Karigasniemi participated in all of the phases of project.

Initiation and team formation: taking the leap of faith

September to October 2023

The project emerged from a compulsory Project Management course from our AAD-program requiring students to engage in a collaborative initiative with an external partner. The university offered various established collaborative projects where students could partake, or students could initiate their own, which was the case with ArtStream of Utsjoki. The partnership with Utsjoki began from my personal desire in engaging with Utsjoki through an artistic collaboration. In October 2023, I approached the municipality through an e-mail with the idea of developing a collaborative project. At the time, the municipality was preparing to launch the Eight Seasons Events project, designed to support local cultural activity. The proposal for an art project aligned well with this initiative, especially as the funding body required collaboration with an educational institution. Thus, my proposal was welcomed with enthusiasm. This led to the formalisation of a partnership between the municipality of Utsjoki and the University of Lapland. Following the formal agreement, first Falguni Mazumder and then Heli Jussila-Martineau joined the project forming our inner team.

As students, we all came from different artistic backgrounds. I am a printmaker and a more of a traditional artist. Similarly, Falguni comes from traditional art education, but her interests are in graphic design and documentation. Heli is a performance artist, and a painter, and is studying in an Applied Visual Arts bachelor program simultaneously with AAD. Due to different backgrounds, everyone naturally had their own "dream project" at first and we had had many discussions about each of our goals prior to joining as a team on this one. Additionally, we knew each other as we were part of the same study program. Therefore, there was some level of trust and understanding among us since we were already somewhat acquainted prior to the project but we did not have experience working together on any other context than study related minor assignments.

As the project was still wide open, defined at this point only by its location (Utsjoki), and a commitment to bottom-up collaboration based on AVA and AAD principles, there was plenty of room for individual interests and goals. This was expressed as one of the main reasons to

join this project for at least two of us. Common sentiment from us was also liking the idea of having our “own project” instead of joining one lead by the university. We imagined that, by having our own project, we would both learn more and have more freedom in the direction of the project which appealed to us all. We were encouraged to complete the project within the following spring semester, which imposed certain time and scope limitations making some 'dream projects' difficult to realize within the framework of master's level studies. Personally, my goals and interests aligned well with the Utsjoki project from the beginning, as I was the one initiating it, whereas the others had to compromise some of their original ideas, primarily due to these time and scope constraints. Roles or tasks were not explicitly negotiated at this point, but there was some early discussion on what everyone could do based on their skills and background. There were also some underlying hesitations as not everyone was completely happy about the team size or formation, but these were left unsaid at this point.

When comparing this early phase to the project overall it highlights how we were first individuals inside institutional structures, then a team negotiating direction, and finally collaborators with Utsjoki merging our dreams with theirs. This phase can be described as us starting to come together, carrying our individual dreams, expectations, worries, restrictions and hopes with us. The atmosphere at this early stage was idealistic and optimistic with a hint of caution and worry. Personally, I remember feeling quite stressed as there was this urgency to find suitable project in short amount of time and I was not highly interested in the ones offered by the university which pushed me to initiate my own. Approaching Utsjoki took also quite a lot of courage from me as I felt uncertain about my own skills due to underlying insecurities. Although at this point, we were still not a team, I had shared these hopes and plans of mine with Heli and Falguni early on and they already encouraged me in the background. After the positive response to my e-mail there was huge relief and excitement but also worry of how everything will work out in the end.

Conceptualization: the fantasyland

November to December 2023

After we had come together as a team, we started researching Utsjoki to form a basic understanding of the place: not just as a physical space, but through its cultural and social dimensions (Härkönen & Vuontisjärvi, 2018, p. 29). We also benchmarked other collaborative art projects, which influenced and shaped our goals. These past participatory art projects played a key role in guiding our approach and expectations, with several team members mentioning them as major sources of inspiration. During this phase, we had minimal contact with the municipality of Utsjoki, as their funding application was still being processed, leaving the project still in a somewhat uncertain position. Due to these circumstances, most of the plans at this point were solely from our point of view based on our knowledge and aspirations rather than a collective vision. Therefore, nothing we planned was set in stone yet but worked more like pre-planning before the involvement of locals. We were familiar with the Eight Seasons Events- project's overall plan and goals and used them as a foundation for our planning. Most of our materials from this phase were textual, gathered online or created for presentations. Pictures were either of other projects or internet images of Utsjoki which had this tourist-oriented and promotional feel to them making Utsjoki seem a bit unreal and idealized. This made me see this phase as dreamlike, where everything is still floating in air without being based on reality yet.

There were several worries expressed at this time also. Significant was the worry that locals would not be interested in our project, and we would lack in participation. Therefore, we discussed often of ways to make sure this would not happen such as the importance of placing project goals on local needs and what marketing systems we could use. Our research, inspirations and goals eventually resulted in project plan titled "Art with Utsjoki: Empowering locals by making art together" where we described our goals as follows:

> The main goal of the project is to celebrate Utsjoki, its history and culture, and to create a feeling of community, belonging and empowerment for the locals by making art together. We will collaborate with the municipality of Utsjoki to arrange workshops for the three main villages: Utsjoki, Nuorgam and Karigasniemi. During the workshops we will be creating environmental art pieces together with the local community incorporating their culture and knowledge into the artworks. The workshops will take place in July 2024 during their annual culture week called Utsjoen Lumo – Ohcejohka Šearrá.
>
> - Knaster, Martineau & Mazumder, 2023, unpublished project plan.

During this stage, we started to function as a team for the first time, starting to negotiate roles and dividing tasks. Interests, skills, and individual backgrounds played a central role in the negotiation of roles, which largely remained consistent throughout the project's duration. Two members felt roles emerged organically, aligning with their strengths and initial aspirations. We also experienced our first tensions here as we tried to match schedules and have consensus on leadership. We did not establish a clear and shared understanding of what leadership in our project would look like, who should take the role and if we even needed one. During my research process, I wrote this realization in my reflective journal: ”We never decided together who would 'lead' the project. It kind of just hung in the air. A self-directed, highly motivated group might not need a leader, but we were not such a group.” - Knaster, 2025, research journal.

Concerns about the fair division of labour also emerged, influenced by varying life situations and external commitments of individuals. For example, some team members felt they managed major responsibilities with limited support, while others expressed, they had fewer opportunities to engage due to external commitments. However, we did not openly discuss the issues but instead tried to deal with them individually. Therefore, what we failed at here was not really the fair distribution of labour but clear and honest communication between us. Particularly in December, life circumstances and different priorities made deeper collaboration difficult. Looking back, I feel the project plan was made a bit hastily to meet the course requirements rather than put real time and effort for unified plan. Additionally, lack of local involvement made the planning difficult as we knew nothing would be certain until their involvement which could not start until the funding application got approved. Therefore, I now question whether the plan genuinely reflected all of us, or whether it was simply a product of needing to pass the course on time.

January 2024

In early January we had our first meeting remotely with the Eight Seasons Event’s project manager and the Leisure Secretary of Utsjoki, Kaisa Tapiola-Länsman. This marked a turning point for the project as our partnership became official. Kaisa had already collected preliminary input from locals, which started to now reshape our goals. We began aligning our goals with those of the municipality and its locals, resulting in compromise and redirection.

Having an artistic activity in each village and connecting them somehow to the culture week (Utsjoen Lumo – Ohcejohka Šearrá), remained as the main goal but the approach started to move away from purely artistic to more practical direction. For example, the idea for Nuorgam to use leftover materials from a previous project had been proposed by a local teacher and the idea of building benches or signs was introduced by some locals as well. We also began planning our first visit to Utsjoki which raised a lot of excitement among us.

At the end of January, a sudden opportunity allowed me to move to Utsjoki which was a long-held dream of mine and could not have happened on better time, I thought. This shift altered the geographical composition of our team, as Heli and Falguni remained based in Rovaniemi while I relocated to Utsjoki. All in all, this phase was the beginning of our shift from imagined possibilities toward a more collective, grounded vision but the cracks from tensions caused by lack of direct communication described above had caused some feelings of separation and discomfort among us which the next phase made worse.

Ideation: the start of chaos

This period was reported as the most challenging by the team members more often than others. As one of us described it: “This is the time when the chaos started.” – One the artists-students, 2025, interview.

February 2024

We had our first “open to all” meeting with locals in February promoted through municipality website by Kaisa. It was a remote meeting and not many participated. The people who participated were mostly from Utsjoki village, and thus, could not really say anything for Karigasniemi or Nuorgam. Nevertheless, we presented environmental artworks and participatory art projects we had gathered previously to work as conversation starters. These were not met with a lot of enthusiasm. Instead, the locals suggested more practical projects, such as public sitting areas, bus stops or welcome- signs for tourists, as they felt these to be much needed in the area. So here is where our artistic aspirations met with the local reality.

What mattered to locals was not just arranging some activities to them but to make something useful and lasting along with it. This shift sparked both worries and excitement among us. We all expressed enthusiasm of creating something needful and lasting for the community but there was a concern over our skills matching this type of project that would require more technical skills than just artistic skills. This made us afraid that we would not be able to accomplish a project like this. As we can see, the project began to shift significantly away from being solely grounded in our individual interests and skills.

In addition to our first meeting with locals, which kind of tossed everything back into the air, we quite soon had our first trip to Utsjoki. It was a short trip where we managed to meet with Kaisa and visit some places in Utsjoki. As Nuorgam already had a clear vision for the direction of the project, we saw the materials intended for it, salmon shaped plywood pieces, which were originally created for a previous project and now repurposed for the Nuorgam initiative. We also talked with some locals we met during the trip. Again, the topic of lack of seating areas in the public outdoor spaces was brought up. Therefore, during the trip, the idea of creating benches for each village emerged now as the central concept. Inspired by the place, materials and conversation, some early sketches were also made by us. We also realized that although we had heard the perspectives of handful of locals, they were mostly from the Utsjoki village as we had minimal contact with Nuorgam and Karigasniemi at this point. We also discovered the difference of remote meetings and place research versus being on site and face-to-face. This led us to want to arrange open meetings with each village to have more direct contact with each of them. Here on out, the project split into three sub-projects as each village from now on had its own process and outcomes.

March to April 2024

After the trip in February, our team got separated physically as I stayed in Utsjoki, and they returned to Rovaniemi. This separation meant that we had minimal time spent together in real life during this period. We held weekly online meetings, had a Whatsapp group for messaging, as well as a shared Google Drive folder for materials. This setting complicated our communication and collaborative framework compared to the earlier dynamics. On the positive side, it offered opportunities for me to interact with locals and get to know Utsjoki, as well as providing a place to stay at my home for our team during trips to Utsjoki. Due to

my location, I also started to function as contact point between Utsjoki and my team members. To establish stronger connections with the local communities, Kaisa found a collaborator in each village for the project to encourage people to get involved and participate. These collaborators supported communication and relationship-building with residents and were often the key of bringing people to our meetings. In Nuorgam, this was the local school and its teachers, while in Karigasniemi and Utsjoki, the village associations served as our contacts. I visited Nuorgam and Karigasniemi to familiarize myself with the areas and to discuss our project with these local collaborators. As I was the only one present in Utsjoki, Heli and Falguni had to mostly rely on my reporting and accounts of these meetings and visits.

We held our first on-site meetings with each village separately in late March and early April. To have some ”brand recognition”, we named our project “ArtStream of Utsjoki” as both a homage to Artpath of Enontekiö, a major inspiration for us, and to the Tenoriver which connects the three villages. This name was used across all the marketing materials that Falguni created throughout the project. We used, in the posters and meetings, a simple open question to invite locals into the discussion with us: ”What does your village need?” Since Falguni and Heli were still in Rovaniemi, they attended the meetings online. During the meetings, we introduced our project, presenting the ideas we had gathered so far, along with some sketches (Figure 4) and design drafts we had created up to that point. These were meant as a way to encourage discussion, not to dictate what we should do. Turnout for Karigasniemi and Utsjoki was excellent, most likely due to active local collaborators. However, in Nuorgam, no one beside us, one teacher and Kaisa, participated. In Utsjoki village, out of many ideas shown and suggested during the meeting by everyone involved, the idea of making a bench out of disregarded Tenoriver boat was the most popular one. This idea originated during our first trip as we had seen boats transformed into shelfs around the village and were inspired by them. Falguni later found a similar project from Bali where they had transformed boats into benches. I then drew a sketch of what this might look like from Tenoriver boats. These were presented at the meeting and met with enthusiasm. Everyone at the meeting appeared to be in agreement that it suited the current situation: since fishing with the boats was no longer possible, repurposing them offered a meaningful alternative. The boat benches were also considered a good fit for Onnelan Törmä being next to the river with cultural artefacts present already. Kaisa had brought a retired building master to the meeting as she knew we were worried about our technical skills. The building master noted that

constructing the benches would be relatively easy, especially if parts of the boats themselves were used. Our main concern as outsiders was not to offend anyone as the boat is a cultural object for the locals and, as we had learnt, they all have their own varied personal feelings and attitudes towards how the boat should be treated and what can be made of it. Since no one had made benches out of them before in Utsjoki, we were quite unsure how people would react. But the locals at the meeting were not concerned about this and wanted to go ahead with the design. So, we followed their lead and judgement on this matter. Thus, the goal was set to create benches for Onnelan Törmä using old Tenoriver boats.

Figure 4. Early sketches. Upper row: first two by Heli Jussila Martineau and last by Ines Knaster. Lower row: first two by Ines Knaster and last one by Falguni Mazumder. All from 2024.

In Karigasniemi meeting, several ideas, most by the locals themselves, became popular and most of them required quite a lot of technical expertise. The locals expressed confidence that they can manage these projects as they had done several building projects together in the past including renovating the village house and its outside facilities. First, they expressed a need for a public toilet as there is none in the area and tourist go do their business on people's yard. Although this would have been quite unique and even humorous artistic endeavour, it was quickly halted by the municipality's technical department denying permit for such a thing. Budget for it would have also been a problem. Second popular idea was to build a laavu, a traditional lean-to-shelter, and then hold an open storytelling session in it. The idea was to use mostly ready materials from the village house grounds and other available areas. Laavu was

considered fitting for Karigasniemi due to its strong connection to reindeer herding, as laavu is a traditional shelter used by herders. The location would have been near the village house at the centre of the village offering then much needed recreational place for both locals and tourists. Therefore, at this point, laavu became the goal of Karigasniemi project.

As mentioned earlier, in Nuorgam, there was hardly anyone participating in the meeting beside us. Since the school had already expressed that the material should be the leftover salmon pieces, and the location the school yard, we had the idea of making benches using the leftover salmon pieces. However, in the meeting, there was no one with proper technical skills present. Limited by this current skillset of the collaborative team overall, we felt that it might not be possible to build benches. We considered ready-made-benches ordered from the internet and attaching the salmons on them but soon abandoned this idea. In the end, we had to go with a plan that was possible with just us, which was to make something very similar as the salmon artwork in Utsjoki village. This was something Kaisa had been part of, so she knew it was not difficult to achieve. The school also had wished that the children would paint the salmons, so we agreed to hold a painting workshop at the school. We left the plans still a bit open at this point in case the locals needed more time to discover our project and take interest in it. Falguni also designed a visual letter, for the children to take home, introducing our bench-making idea and inviting support, hoping it might spark interest among their parents or relatives. Thus, Plan A was to create something with the locals using the salmon pieces, provided they got involved, and Plan B was to create a salmon sculpture resembling the one in Utsjoki village if it ended up being just us.

Soon after the meetings with each village, we held the painting workshop with Nuorgam school (Figure 5). Once again, I was the only one participating from our student team. The painting workshop lasted two days. Children had drawn sketches of their designs prior the workshop. They worked as pairs and painted each other's designs on each side of the salmon. This way, it was not too much work for even the youngest children as the salmons were quite big and also everyone would get their design represented as there were not enough salmons otherwise. At the same time, it offered a fun teamwork exercise as each pair had to follow each other's design and communicate to finish it. There was no theme imposed by us but instead the children were allowed to freely express themselves and whatever they wanted.

Figure 5. Salmon painting workshop in Nuorgam school. Photos by Ines Knaster, 2024.

Because the project budget allowed only a limited number of trips to Utsjoki, and given our differing geographical locations and life situations, we had agreed it was more practical for others to join remotely for the early parts, reserving travel funds for moments when physical presence was more essential. This meant that I was the only one present on-site during most meetings and workshops in this phase. It was at these meetings that I personally understood the beauty of community art. It felt like sitting at a table with people and deciding together, based on our available knowledge, skills and resources, what we could make together. The goal was shaped by what is possible to achieve with this group of people. Everyone had something to offer to the discussion whether it was us with our artistic knowledge, locals with their local knowledge, technical observations by the building master or budget limitations remarks by Kaisa. I believe our inexperience placed us on a more equal level with the locals. This process was new to all of us, and without any set guidelines, everything unfolded quite organically. However, these revelations about the nature of community art were not universal in our artist-student team most likely due to our very different participation styles: me experiences things first hand on location and others having to join through a screen. One member, reflecting on the project afterward, expressed that, at this point, they still had the impression that we, as artists, were expected to be the main creators responsible for building these works for the community, and this expectation caused them concern. They had shared these sentiments right after the meetings with locals ended and I tried to explain my revelation and ease their worries. Despite of this, some of their apprehension remained. There was also an uneasiness expressed about the idea of making the locals participate in these activities. It felt almost inappropriate, perhaps even rude, to expect them to make things,

rather than us creating something for them. In other words, there was some level of seeing this still as something “for the locals” instead of “with the locals”.

Additionally, while I found the on-site meetings energizing and motivating due to face-to-face interaction with locals, my teammates found remote participation frustrating and alienating. One team member reflected: “Because of those things, like, beginning in the project, like we are having online meeting or something, it's really hard for me to get motivated.”- One of the artist-students, interview, 2025. Hybrid settings tend to privilege those physically present, often leaving online participants feeling excluded which might partially explain the demotivation expressed by the team member. One artist-student expressed: “In online, there is no participation from me. I was like an invisible person -- it's so irritating!” – One of the artist-students, interview, 2025. When I was away from Utsjoki, staying in Rovaniemi for other study obligations, I also noticed how different things felt then. Over 400 km away, the project seemed less immediate. In addition, the imbalance was also influenced by personal factors. One team member reflected that they initially struggled with taking initiative in the absence of an external authority figure:

> “Obviously, I had to work, and I had plenty of stuff. But it was like, it came to me a bit later that, okay, there is no teacher who is responsible to push us. It's our project. It came to me a lot later. When I think it's after me, I realized that.” – One of the artist-students, interview, 2025.

During this phase, I started to be closer and more connected to Utsjoki than my team members in Rovaniemi. I also became a mediator between them. Additionally, the geographical position also put me in an informal leadership like role due to responsibilities that accumulated on me. This contributed to a sense of unbalanced workload: much of the responsibility shifted to me, while the others, feeling somewhat disconnected and alienated from the project, had less opportunities to even be actively involved. Moreover, we all had limited insight into each other’s activities beyond our shared responsibilities, such as attending meetings. This created lack of understanding of each other’s situations and contributions. This lack of mutual understanding contributed to misaligned expectations, uneven workload distribution, and weakened collaboration within the team. Misunderstandings and tensions arose, exacerbated by physical separation, and these were not adequately addressed. At this stage, our roles and circumstances had shifted significantly

alongside the project goals, yet we did not revisit or revise our plans and roles as a team. As a result, the fragmentation within our team worsened. We were disconnected both physically and mentally, while the connection with the locals grew stronger. On a personal level, I remember feeling very conflicted at this time. I was feeling very excited and inspired by the interactions with locals but could not sense the same from my team members when interacting with them. It is high contrast with the following phases where they finally got to participate on-site with me, and we could mirror the same excitement back and forth bringing a sense peace and balance.

Planning: reconnecting with each other

May 2024

We had our second group trip to Utsjoki during this month. We had planned second meetings with locals of each village, this time with the goal of planning the execution of each village's goal. For Nuorgam, as there was still involvement outside the school, we had decided, together with the school and Kaisa, to go with the plan B: make a sculptor resembling the one in Utsjoki village. Me and Heli created two prototypes (Figure 6) as suggestions for the final shape of the sculpture and showed them at the school so they could decide which one they preferred. Right before our trip, a local association of elderly people suddenly took interest in the project after seeing the completed salmons painted by the school children. They suggested that we could expand the project for a nearby hockey ring in the school grounds that they used for minigolf in the summer. It is barren and dull looking, so they visioned that the children could paint more pieces to decorate it, for example other animals and flowers. Although some of us from the Nuorgam team were open to the idea, most felt this was too late to be incorporated into our schedules and budgets. We had already gathered materials for the salmon sculpture and chosen the prototype model. Therefore, their idea would have been an additional project needing its own time and effort. Although I personally felt enthusiastic and saw potential in expanding the project, I also understood that it was not proper to push others into something they felt unprepared or too exhausted to take on. One of us had already expressed several times that they felt there is already too much work to do and the project was expanding too much. Their reservations were valid, and forcing the issue would have

risked straining the group dynamic and the other projects. Still, I felt disappointed, especially because this was the first- and only-time locals outside the school approached us in Nuorgam. As a compromise, we offered guidance and suggested that the association collaborate directly with the school, allowing their idea to potentially live on without adding pressure to our current project.

Figure 6. Left: The two prototypes. Right: Chosen prototype. Photos by Ines Knaster, 2024.

During the second meeting in Utsjoki village (Figure 7), the building master had prepared plans how we could build the boat benches. His idea was to make three horizontal ones and one vertical. The three boats would be side by side floating towards the vertical one which would wait for them "like a church tower." He named it "Surusaatto," meaning a funeral procession, symbolizing the current situation with the fishing culture. Despite often insisting he was not an artist, he expressed himself with striking creativity here. He also outlined the technical aspects, suggesting we use mainly the boats' original parts, with added structures to elevate and support them. He was the only one with the technical knowledge and a clear vision, so it felt natural to follow his lead from now on. All that was left was to find the boats to finish this vision.

In the Karigasniemi meeting, we had to abandon the laavu project due to budget constraints. New participant with more technical knowledge dismissed the idea of using readily available materials, insisting it should be built from proper ones. This caused a moment of deep disappointment as this was the second idea we had to abandon. We went back to the previous ideas, and this time, one of the project examples we had gathered, peaked locals' interest. It

was an artwork created in Karesuvanto village during the Artpath of Enontekiö project. Locals there had painted pieces of birch that they attached and assembled as a unified artwork called Meidän Kylä/ Min Gilli, presented at the side of a local road. Locals of Karigasniemi had the idea to create a similar artwork but in the shape of a kota, which is also a type of traditional shelter like laavu. This way, the laavu idea was transformed into a more easily achievable version. We planned to hold workshops to invite villagers to participate in the creation of this artwork by painting the pieces of birch. The village association wanted to also hold an event to celebrate the Karigasniemi spirit during the Utsjoen Lumo culture week. Therefore, it was decided that we would hold two painting workshops to make sure we get enough paintings to cover the kota structure: one before the event and one during it. One more idea was brought up by a member of the village association who had collection of photos from activities and projects the community had done together throughout the years. They wished that they could be showcased during the event to celebrate their community spirit. We supported this by offering to create a curated slideshow from the photos. In the end, what began as disappointment evolved into a collaborative and meaningful concept that reflected both the original spirit of the project and the unique identity of Karigasniemi.

Figure 7. Meeting at Giisá, Utsjoki & Painting the benches. Photos by Falguni Mazumder, 2024.

Prior to the second trip, Kaisa had proposed a small additional painting project just for us: she would order benches online for us to paint individually (Figure 7). This allowed each village to still receive a bench, in line with the original idea, while also giving us a chance to create something of our own. We agreed to this, and during the second trip, Heli painted a bench for

Karigasniemi, Falguni for Nuorgam, and I painted one for Utsjoki. These benches felt like personal signatures we left behind in Utsjoki as a trace of our presence.

For Karigasniemi, we had held one additional meeting at the end of May to further plan the event and workshop. During it, participants planned the kota structure more clearly. It was decided that the painted birch pieces needed to be painted both sides and they would hang on the structure from strings so that they could be moved by the wind. Additionally, locals wanted the bench Heli had painted for Karigasniemi to be put inside the structure creating a cohesive artwork where people could sit inside. Together we also brainstormed additional activities for the upcoming event such as a bouncing castle for children and a yard sale. The event was named ”Summerday at Karigasniemi”.

This month marked a clear turning point for us. This month was regarded as the most positive by most team members. Real-life engagement, defined roles, and meaningful interactions with locals brought a sense of unity and purpose that had been absent earlier. One team member reflected that it was during this time they finally began to feel motivated. Prior to this month I had started to feel alone with the project, but this month brought back the sense of a team, and I felt much less burdened with tasks. We started to work in a manner that complemented each other. Each member had their own purpose within the project that aligned with their personal interests and skills and naturally oriented strongly towards them. This created better functioning team as everyone was highly engaged and excited. Communication also improved as face-to-face interaction caused less misunderstandings. Additionally, team members consistently described the meetings with locals as the most motivating and rewarding moments of the project. One reflected: “There were multiple moments when I feared I might give up on the project, but fortunately, when we approached the community in person, my fears gradually subsided.” – One artist-student, interview, 2025. Another echoed this by stating: “The people were absolutely best part of it: meeting them and getting to know a bit of them and their thinking.” – One artist student, interview, 2025

Every meeting we left feeling energized and excited. These interactions not only boosted our group motivation but also reduced stress. Members shared that the skills and contributions of the locals eased the pressure, as they no longer felt the project had to be realized solely by them, thereby lightening the emotional burden of the collaboration. Additionally, the time we spent together in Utsjoki among ourselves strengthened our bond and team spirit. When

comparing this to the period before, it is very clear how important real-life engagement is not just to individuals but to the team as whole.

Implementation: final steps

June 2024

This is the final stage of the project where the artworks and activities finished. After the second trip all of us were motivated and excited but once again the geographical separation caused some communication issues that dampened the mood slightly. It became apparent that we had, and had continuously had throughout the project, different expectations and preferences for what teamwork should be like in practice. Some preferred very close teamwork and others preferred more individual and independent approach. Additionally, our differing academic goals created tension, as those aiming to connect the project with their thesis naturally sought deeper engagement and required space to integrate their personal objectives. This led to pressures to expand or limit one's participation, depending on whether one was pursuing a thesis at this point or not. Additionally, we had disagreement how certain course related tasks tied to the project should be handled. Eventually, we had our third group trip which marked the final execution of Nuorgam and Utsjoki projects and during which we held one of the workshops for Karigasniemi.

For Nuorgam, Kaisa had prepared the materials for the execution meaning the wooden poles we would attach the salmons on. For a while, we discussed whether to paint the poles but ultimately decided that the natural look was more aesthetically pleasing, allowing the salmon pieces to stand out as the only painted elements. The poles used were the same as those typically used for making reindeer fences, and Kaisa had invited a local reindeer herder to assist with the construction, as he was familiar with the technique. The technique,"junttaus", is one where this heavy tool is used by hand to push the poles into the ground. He did most of the work and we instructed the position based on the chosen prototype. Together with the other participants we decided how to arrange the salmons and quite quickly, it was finished (Figure 8). The location was chosen based on the school's wishes and instructions from the technical department who noted which parts of the yard need to be left open for snow

clearing and other important aspects. It was exciting to have finished our first project! We named the artwork ”Salmon Tales”.

Figure 8. Constructing “Salmon Tales”. Photos by Falguni Mazumder, 2024.7

Next was Utsjoki village’s turn. Kaisa and the project worker Selja had acquired the boats for us. We had only gotten permission from the municipality officials for two boats instead on four, so we had to change the plan a bit: there would be only two horizontal boats. The building master expressed disappointment but was willing to work with what we had. The boats were originally handcrafted by Selja’s deceased relative and been unused for decades. Selja expressed happiness that the boats would serve a purpose again after so many years being abandoned. Building the benches took two days (Figure 9). Mostly the building master worked and we, with the other participants, assisted according to his instructions. Originally, we had planned to hold one additional meeting to plan the construction with the boats present, but due to busy schedules were unable to arrange it. Thus, the construction was quite spontaneous on the spot activity based on the original plans and the building master’s vision. This was the project that had caused the most stress for us, so it was amazing to see the benches come true. They were finished on time to serve as seats during the music festival at Utsjoen Lumo- culture week. We did not really name the benches but later I started to call them ”Have a Seat”.

Figure 9. Constructing “Have a Seat”. Photos by Falguni Mazumder, 2024.

We also held the first painting workshop at Karigasniemi (Figure 10). It functioned like a pilot workshop and based on it we improved it for the Summerday at Karigasniemi event in July. It attracted mostly local children while older people just came to look but did not want to paint themselves. Many people still came to chat with us and seemed happy about the art project. This was the first workshop we facilitated together by the three of us. One of us stated that it was one their highlights as seeing the excitement expressed by the children made every effort made feel worth it.

Figure 10. First workshop at Karigasniemi. Photos by Falguni Mazumder, 2024.

During the trip we, the artist-student team, also planned an exhibition at Onnelan Törmä. The original plan of environmental workshops was thought to be held during the Utsjoen Lumo-culture week but as the project turned to more practical orientation this was abandoned and replaced with an idea to hold a celebratory exhibition instead. We chose Onnelan Törmä for its central role in the event, and the exhibition was ultimately held inside a tent during the music festival. We had some disagreements on what should be prioritized at the exhibition and struggled a bit to find a consensus. The disagreement stemmed from our different priorities and understanding of community art. Luckily, middle ground was found.

July 2024

After this trip we were once again separated physically for a short period of time. What was left was to construct the exhibition and hold the Summer Day at Karigasniemi event with the final workshop. For this we had our fourth and final trip to Utsjoki in July. First, we held the Summer Day at Karigasniemi event. The workshop was held on the porch of the village house, right by the entrance, making it more visible than the first one (Figure 11). The new location and the event itself clearly boosted participation across all ages and genders as it was quite busy and popular throughout the event. For both workshops, the three of us had a clear role division: Falguni oversaw documentation, and me and Heli facilitated it. Additionally, all of us took part in the painting activity. For us this felt natural to not just follow from the side but take part in the activity as well. Personally, I have found it to create a more relaxed and communal experience as we are all brought together by the artistic activity over which natural

Figure 11. Workshop during Summerday at Karigasniemi. Photos by Falguni Mazumder, 2024.

conversation can occur. One of the participant's had constructed the frame of kota next to the village house and ready paintings could be hanged straight from it. Heli's bench had also been brought and placed inside it. Additionally, the curated slideshow video we created, highlighting past projects and activities at the village house, was shown on a loop inside the building. Lots of people throughout the day sat and watched it happily reminiscing of all the things they had done together throughout the years and all the people they recognized from the video.

The next morning, we quickly installed our exhibition at Onnelan Törmä in Utsjoki village, as the tent was only available for use right before the start of the music festival. Heli had painted three paintings representing all the villages and hung them inside the tent, and me and Falguni hung photographs representing the overall project. The other two benches, painted by me and Falguni, were also brought and placed inside the tent for the duration of the exhibition to showcase them and offer a seating place for visitors. All in all, the exhibition was a playful composition, and the tent functioned as an additional resting place for visitors of the music festival (Figure 12). The exhibition and music festival marked the end of the project as it functioned like a celebration event for us.

Figure 12. Exhibition at Utsjoen Lumo festival. Photos by Falguni Mazumder, 2024.

Outcomes and the aftermath of the project

Each village had unique story, and our involvement shaped them all differently resulting in three different tangible outcomes (Figure 13). Some had stronger local participation and involvement, some had weaker. Some outcomes reflected our contributions more and others had stronger local handprint.

Figure 13. Top left: “Salmon Tales”, photo by Falguni Mazumder. Bottom left: “Have a Seat”, photo by Ines Knaster. Right: “Min Gilli-Meidä Kylä, Karigasniemi ”, photo by Falguni Mazumder. All from 2024.

For Nuorgam, we had minimal contact with the locals. From our team, I was the only one who connected directly with the children and all schoolteachers on some level, whereas the rest of my team only met them briefly. Although the underlying idea had come from the school, their involvement in the creation ended up being quite minimal. The children designed and painted the salmons and together with teachers they chose the final look based on our prototypes. During the construction, only one teacher was present to assist and give his opinion on the placement of the artwork. While I can only speculate about the reasons for the lack of participation from other locals, I believe it was a combination of the project’s goals, our marketing efforts not effectively reaching the community, and not finding the key

local member to encourage people to join. Despite of this, together with my team members, we concluded that we did not consider the project a failure even though the participation did not reach deeply outside the school environment. Inside the school community we were able to deliver something they had initiated and the involvement from the school was as deep as the context allowed for them. The swimming salmons in the artwork now always remind me of the children in the school as there is one made by each of them.

Karigasniemi was a highlight for many of us due to the strong presence, energy, and openness of the locals. Our early question, “What does your village need?”, clearly resonated with them as one local even came to the first meeting just to respond to this question. Terttu from the local association played a key role in gathering people. Most ideas came from the locals themselves, and they joined in every step, and the process culminated in the Summer Day event. The final kota-shaped structure symbolizes the shared journey: its concept emerged through collective dialogue, it bears the mark of both locals and us, was built with local wood (except the bench), and painted with donated paints. The paintings themselves have varied themes on them as we did not dictate what people should paint. They are just mirrors to each person’s thought at the moment of painting them: one has child’s pet rat pictured with their name included, one is based on clothing style of a local person, one has a story in it told by local as they painted it.

Utsjoki was like a middle ground where the idea came from us but was taken in the hands of one key member, the building master, who led the project going forward with his clear vision. The idea came from us and Kaisa, but the finished version has the handprint of the building master. There is certain hastiness and roughness of the last steps in it as it was built on the spot by the building master and his chainsaw with us helping in moving the boats, giving some opinions and holding things on place as he chewed away. It has our early goals of making benches at the centre and the fishing culture and ban as a theme. As locals are now unable to fish, most of the boats are just laying around unused. I once asked if they row the boats on the river just for fun, but was told it is uncommon. This reminded me of a story I heard in Salla: when tourists started to come to the area and wandered in the nature without any practical purpose, locals, finding this strange, called them “empty walkers” (tyhjänkävelijä). I wonder if rowing boats without practical purpose may be seen similarly, as “empty rowing.” Thus, our boat benches symbolize this: no longer used for fishing, they now

serve a practical purpose on shore, allowing people to sit and look at the river where the boats once belonged.

The most significant challenges highlighted by team members were related to our communication, trust, motivation, and issues regarding fair division of labour. These were also recurring themes emerging from the research process. Although one major issue emerged only after the project had finished. The team had not made any official agreements regarding ownership of materials produced during the project such as photos, videos, presentations and artworks. This lack of official agreement led to confusion after the project had ended over who had the right to use these materials and under what conditions, including questions about crediting original creators and obtaining permission for future use. For example, concerns were raised about the use of individual contributions, such as presentations, photos, and videos, without proper credit or consent. The team had been advised by the supervising teacher to address this issue at the start of the project but despite this, no such agreements were made. When reflecting on the reasons for this, the team members stated, that at the time, they just did not perceive it to be an issue in the future.

Despite some internal challenges our team pulled through and finished the project on a high note with members reporting the project as a positive experience and satisfaction on their collaborative efforts. One described it as: ”I think we did well in succeeding realizing such a large project of three villages at the same time.”- Ones artist-student, unpublished project report, 2024. Similarly, when asked whether they reached their personal goal or a dream within the project, at least two members answered yes, with one describing it as: ”It came differently, but I am satisfied with it.”- One artist-student, interview, 2025. For me, the project was a significant experience where I got to realize some personal dreams but also came to discover the beauty of community art. It also built up my confidence as an artist and a person and made me understand teamwork better. There was also meaningful interaction and relationships created between all of us, including the locals. Especially for the three of us, there will always be a special bond with us born from this shared experience with all its ups and downs.

5. Artistic Process as a Method of Analysis

My research process was heavily artistic and relying on visual representations of the research. As Holm et al. (2018) state, visual methods allow access to nuanced and often overlooked dimensions of knowledge as they challenge conventional thinking, open up alternative perspectives, and support deeper understanding. Importantly, visual tools make it possible to hold both the detail and the whole in view at once, supporting synthesis and insight (Holm, Shalström & Zilliacus, 2018, p. 313). For me it also supported my dual role as an artist and a researcher.

The research moved from general to specific, from objective to subjective, narrowing down the perspective from examining the project's overall process to my personal reflections. Of course, there was flexibility and going back and forth but in general the research process moved from objective to subjective. As Leavy (2020) emphasizes, "research findings are not replicated in their "raw" form for audiences but rather made sense of (through analysis and interpretation) and then represented in a distilled, coherent, carefully crafted format" (p. 30). This is reflected in the way I worked through the data, first organizing it objectively before translating it into more subjective and personal forms of artistic representations.

The analysis of the data combines qualitative and art-based methods. As explained in the methodology chapter, data consist of retrospective raw data arranged into a collage artwork (objective timeline), artworks created by me to express my personal journey in the project (subjective timeline), written reflections made during the research process and transcribed interview with a team member. First, I formed a timeline using the retrospective data described earlier. The reasoning was to represent the process step by step, to see the line of events. This culminated in the creation of artwork, a collage representing the results in a visual form. As a research practice, collages deepen "connections with the work and greater synthesis of links in the data" (Scotti & Chilton, 2014, p. 268). Furthermore, collage allows for the coexistence, juxtaposition, and integration of multiple experiences, on both verbal and visual dimensions (Scotti & Chilton, 2014, p. 361). Collages helped to make sense of the complex project and see " the big picture". It helped me to relive the project from a more objective perspective and make connections and revelations. According to Leavy (2020) it also deepens the "incubation phase", allowing "data to emerge that may otherwise have

remained hidden" (p. 258). Finally, I made the subjective timeline based on my own experiences, feelings and memories from the project. I made small monotypes to represent my journey in the project one month at a time. In the following sections, I will go through this process in more detail.

Objective Timeline

Originally the idea to create a visual timeline was just to help me see the project and order of events in a visual form as I thought it would be easier for me to grasp them that way. Leavy (2020) describes this as a way of making the data more visual, so it is easier to interpret, as the visualization functions like a heuristic device (Leavy, 2020, pp. 257–258). As I started, I realized that the materials produced by the ArtStream of Utsjoki project were valuable pieces of data that stirred up memories and helped me to reconnect with the project in a deeper manner. As Leavy (2020) notes, visual images are powerful and occupy an elevated place in memory: certain selected images often come to represent entire events and are readily available for mental recall (p. 236). Therefore, I wanted to use them also as a tool to help me and my team members to reflect on the project and relive our collaborative journey.

As the process of our collaboration is at the centre of my research, I decided to arrange the retrospective data chronologically to clarify the order of events. First, I gathered all available materials, including notes from my notebooks, sketches, presentations, relevant emails, photos, videos, etc. As Gillham (2000) states, "all evidence is of some use to the case study researcher: nothing is turned away" (p. 20). From there, I mapped the order of events using materials like emails, calendars, assignments, and information from photos to pinpoint the correct sequence. I organized everything by month, starting from September 2023 until July 2024. It became a "chain of evidence" "woven into a narrative account" (Gillham, 2000, p. 20). I identified key phases and events from this timeline, which were then transformed into a visual representation as the objective timeline collage. As Scotti & Chilton (2018) describe, the collage provided me with "a tangible visual method" that helped me to "visualize and conceptualize" my study by bringing together "distinct parts into visual and conceptual unity." Morevoer, during the analysis phase, it became a reflective method and a way to

discover connections between the data (Scotti & Chilton, 2018, p. 371). In other words, the artwork is both a representation of my research and a part of my analysis process.

Original idea for the artwork was to create a visualization of the timeline using the project materials and then three collages to represent each village's journey on separate vertical canvases that would be placed next to each other (Figure 14). This way, the timeline would be visible to showcase the journey overall with each village separate from each other to showcase them individually. I had almost finished the three villages' arrangements but upon looking at them, I felt unsatisfied. Although that way, each village got their deserved individual space, their relationship, the chaotic nature of them running side by side, was missing.

Figure 14: Unfinished objective timeline artwork. First version of material arrangement. Photo by Ines Knaster, 2024.

Therefore, I changed the plan and decided to showcase them as a complete timeline, instead of separating them to timeline and three villages. So, the timeline and collages of each village merged together at this point. For this version, I arranged the materials in chronological order by village which I then placed on top of each other. I used the vertical background boards from the previous version and arranged them on those. This version (Figure 15) also felt too messy as there was not enough space between each village. Although it gave good overall impression, the order of events was too hard to follow. I wanted both outsiders and my team members to be able to easily follow the unravelling process of our project.

Figure 15. Unfinished objective timeline artwork. Second version of material arrangement. Photo by Ines Knaster, 2025.

Finally, I cut the boards horizontally and placed each on top of each other. This way the order of events was visible, and each village was separated to their own timeline. It also shows how the project turned more real as it progressed. At the beginning there is hardly anything as nothing was really happening. Only when the trips and activities started the abundance of photos emerges. On top of the villages runs a general timeline showcasing the nature and people from the project, including team members, as well as pieces of my calendar showcasing which month it was. The beauty of the nature in Utsjoki and the people we met was a significant part of the project for all team members. So, it felt important to include those as well. The nature photos also showcase how the seasons changed, and on a personal level, they bring out major memories and feelings for me. I also tried to include English, Finnish and Sámi in the texts as those were the three languages used during our project.

The final version primarily consists of photographs and screenshots taken from videos with some additional materials such as posters, physical materials from activities and scanned meeting memos/diaries (Figure 16). Most of the photographs depicting activities were created by Falguni Mazumder while most of the landscape and nature photos are mine. The screenshots are sourced from Falguni's videos, and I have also included selected voice transcriptions from those videos to convey the nature of discussions during the activities. The sketches were made by various participants including us. The photographs of children holding the fish figures were taken by the schoolteacher, and the scanned meeting memos are mine, with sensitive information edited out. As we can see, this artwork consists of wide

array of other people's artistic creations. Collage can overlap with appropriation art, where existing materials created by other people are deliberately used for conceptual purposes, raising ethical questions around ownership and originality (Scotti & Chilton, 2018, p. 357). Scotti & Chilton (2018) discuss how appropriation art may fall under fair use when it results in a unique, single work rather than a reproduction, especially if there is no economic gain involved. In ABR, collages are often made for research and educational purposes, not for profit or sale, so fair use typically applies. (Scotti & Chilton, 2018, p. 376). The primary use of this artwork was research so there was no economic gain involved. I considered crediting each piece to the original creator but in the end felt it was unnecessary for the purpose of this work: it was not to highlight individual contribution but to depict the overall collective process. Putting names under each material would have highlighted certain individuals more than others. Additionally, although I had permission to use the materials, I was unsure if everyone wanted their name involved and displayed at the exhibition.

Figure 16. Close-ups of objective timeline, "Tales of three". Photo by Ines Knaster, 2025.

The main audience to whom I was considering when making decisions regarding which materials to include was my team members and myself as a researcher. Although I aimed to also showcase our journey to outsiders in a clear manner, some order of photos hold meaning that only the inner team can read. For example, photos of us driving in a car, a sunset and hills turned to ice placed next to each other immediately reminded my team member of our first trip to Nuorgam, and many additional memories related to that particular journey. In addition, this objective timeline only starts from February excluding the early phases where we were initiating and conceptualizing the project before the official start and involvement of locals. This decision was made because of lack of space in the exhibition room and because the early phases had very limited materials to work with. As a compromise, I collected some important materials, such as assignments we made as a team and relevant pieces of the Art with Utsjoki- project plan we made during December and decided to just show them to team members during the interview part to discuss our early visions instead of including them in the artwork.

While creating this timeline artwork, I aimed to be as objective as possible. This of course is not entirely possible. As an artist we always interpret and present things from our point of view. As Leavy (2020) states, “visual imagery does not represent a window onto the world, but rather a created perspective” (p. 236). This timeline is based mostly on my memories and my decisions on what was the most important thing to include. For example, one team member could not find a certain moment that was important to them when looking at the timeline because I did not include it. I also realized later that some photos only hold meaning to me. For example, a picture of rainboots in water symbolizes something specific only for me as it was a highly personal moment. Even when making the timeline, I was aware of this bias and I realized that a better version would be made together as a team but unfortunately, this was not realistic at this point due to living distances and busy schedules. The finished artwork was exhibited as part of group exhibition at Katve Gallery in Arktikum, where I used it as a discussion aid during the interview (Figure 17).

I have here described the creation process as clearly as possible, but in reality, it was an iterative process of redoing the timeline over and over again. Starting from simple versions to more complicated ones, from digital versions to physical versions. Arranging it on the floor and creating it directly on the wall of my study. This process was as important part of the research as the final piece was, maybe even more important. To sum up, this was a significant

part of my research as it laid out my basic understanding of the project's process, making me remember forgotten aspects and helping me to see things from fresh perspective. It deepened my understanding and became important tool to use throughout the study.

Figure 17. Final objective timeline, "Tales of three", as exhibited at Gallery Katve in Arktikum as part of group exhibition. Video documentary of the project, by Falguni Mazumder, was playing next to it. Photo by Ines Knaster, 2025.

Interview

The interview functioned as an added layer and an important alternative point of view which to compare my personal experiences to. As already mentioned briefly, the interview was conducted at the exhibition space with the objective timeline present as a point of reference and reflection. I had planned to interview both team members but was able to interview only one. Consent, with ensured confidentiality, was gained beforehand. I had prepared questions in advance, but the interview itself was informal and conversational rather than strictly structured. I wanted to keep it conversational so that I could be present as a fellow team member and discuss about my experiences as well to create a moment of collective reminiscing while keeping the focus on the team member and their experience.

My role as a team member had both advantages and disadvantages during the interview. On one hand, it allowed for deeper conversations, as I could relate personally to the experiences,

we discussed encouraging natural back-and-forth exchange. On the other hand, my involvement in the project may have influenced the openness of some opinions, potentially leaving certain thoughts unspoken. During the interview I also asked the participant to interact with the artwork, for example to point to their favourite time period or to moments they felt we worked together the best as a team. The presence of the timeline in general helped to pinpoint what moment of the process they were referring to when describing experience and seemed naturally encourage conversation and memory recall.

The interview was audio-recorded and the parts with interaction with the timeline filmed. The audio was transcribed from both, content analysis conducted on the transcriptions and substantive statements highlighted (Gillham, 2000, p. 71). From the substantive statements, I identified themes, such as motivations, expectations and personal aspirations, and arranged them according to project phases they related to. The phase categorization was based on three criteria: direct references to parts of the timeline artwork, temporal cues in the participant's wording (e.g., “in the beginning”), and my own contextual understanding of the project, for instance, recognizing the timing of specific events they mentioned. Overall, this interview process provided nuanced insight into the shared experience, deepening my understanding of the collaboration through another perspective.

Subjective timeline

This timeline consists of small artworks I created while reflecting on the project from personal point of view. The idea was to create an alternative timeline where I could solely focus on my own experiences as a participant and a team member. Again, the desire to visualize things for easier examination was the primary motivation for this. Through this timeline I could observe my own feelings throughout the project and compare it to the objective timeline and insights gathered from the interview offering a layered narrative.

At first, I planned to make collage artworks as cards, one card for each month, to represent my perspectives. I started this process and made five collage cards representing each month from September 2023 to January 2024 (Figure 18). Behind the card I wrote some personal reflections and key moments.

Figure 18. Collage cards. From left to right: September to January. Photo by Ines Knaster, 2025

But quite soon, I found this method restricting. Although collage offered easy way to combine multiple aspects into one image helping me to conceptualize thoughts, I felt it was restricting as an experienced artist. In the objective timeline this collage method worked as I was rearranging and investigating existing external materials. It was like me piecing together a puzzle. Here, however, I aimed to express something internal and personal. I wanted to work with freedom and immediacy, but cutting and gluing felt clumsy and slow compared to the techniques I am accustomed to. Therefore, I turned to monotype printing, a process deeply familiar to me through my background in printmaking (Figure 19). I felt it offered a more intuitive, natural, and responsive medium for personal expression. In monotype, the image is painted or drawn directly onto a plate, which is then pressed onto paper, by hand or with a press, producing a fast, expressive, and often unpredictable result.

Overall, this artistic phase was intuitive and chaotic. I allowed myself to act more as an artist than a researcher, embracing subjectivity and creative freedom. The final image was not the focus; here, the process mattered more than the outcome. Since I had already created both a timeline and its artistic representation (the objective timeline) earlier, I used them as reference points. I revisited the project month by month, reading through my reflective notes from that phase and looking at the timeline. I again wrote down every memory, thought, and feeling I could recall, now from a deeply personal perspective. Sometimes, an image would already surface during this reflection. For instance, in my notes on September, I wrote: “That feeling when you anticipate jumping into the water from above.” The resulting monotype was

a figure poised over water. More often though, the image would emerge during the act of painting the plate. Staying true to my usual artistic practice, I did not preplan the prints. I simply began spreading paint intuitively, letting the image reveal itself through the movement, almost as if it were being carved out. The process was highly meditative. As with the repetitive arranging during the objective timeline phase, here too, swirling the paint while reminiscing became a way of reliving the project. It brought memories into focus until the image felt ready. And again, through this embodied process, important insights and realizations surfaced which were written down on my journal. Metaphorically, this artistic process as a method of inquiry, felt like twirling emotions and memories onto a surface that, when pressed, captured the layered and messy nature of past lived experience. Memories often feel just like that: a compressed layers of chaotic and fleeting moments and emotions.

Figure 19. Selection of monotypes in chronological order. Scan by Ines Knaster, 2025.

The monotypes had one weakness which I had not thought about prior to starting the process. As is the nature with printmaking in general, monotypes are especially prone to surprises and mishaps after printing as you never know what comes out of the other side of the press. Sometimes the final image would transform drastically from printing and sometimes mishaps would destroy the print during printing process. I realized too late I should have photographed the plates before printing. I mostly did not remake prints that transformed after printing as I felt the process was much more important than concentrating making perfect artworks or representations, especially here where this was done for myself as a researcher rather than meant to be shown to others as a complete work of art. Even the transformed prints still reminded me of the creation process, so they somewhat kept their original intention of working as visual anchor points after the process ended. Although, when comparing the finished prints to those early collage cards I made, I feel the collages are easier to interpret after time has passed. For collages, the final image was the focus of attention and there is layered knowledge there, while the prints were all about the meditative process where the deepest meaning is found in the reflective journal instead of the image. Therefore, they both have their merits. Now I feel that perhaps finishing the cards alongside the monotypes, or combining these methods somehow, would have provided the most comprehensive artistic method.

Summary

To sum up the process, first, the objective timeline was created by organizing retrospective materials chronologically, culminating in the creation of an artwork, accompanied by insights written in my journal. This was followed by the creation of the subjective timeline, during which I revisited each project phase from a personal perspective, again recording thoughts and reflections in the journal. To compare the different types of data, I conducted a content analysis of both the reflective journal and the interview transcript. The objective timeline served as a structural foundation, while the subjective timeline added an emotional and experiential layer. The journal entries from both phases, along with the interview transcript, were analysed for recurring themes. These emerging themes were then organized within a narrative framework by placing them into corresponding phases of the project. This comparative process allowed for a layered interpretation of the collaboration, revealing

overlaps, contrasts, and shifts in experience between the factual, personal, and interpersonal dimensions of the project. In the ArtStream of Utsjoki chapter I presented the synthesis of these data in narrative form, where I describe the project and our experiences within it. Next, I will discuss the key themes and insights that emerged from the artistic process as whole.

6. The Role of Fairness in Creative Collaboration

As a result of my research process described in the previous chapter, influencing factors were identified from each phase of the project (initiation, conceptualization, ideation, planning, implementation and aftermath). These factors were arranged under four categories: local, institutional, team and individual. The following diagram (Figure 20) represents these categories in a layered structure. At the core is individuals, influenced by aspects like personal traits, goals, personality, and skills. As individuals, we were then part of a team, both affected by its dynamics and actively contributing to them in return. The team operates within the institutional frames of the university, influenced by aspects like academic calendars, course requirements, support and guidance. Finally, there is the local factors representing things like the Eight Seasons Events' goals and budget, municipality regulations, environmental and cultural influence and community members direct inputs. The diagram visualizes how each layer brought new influences on our team and individuals within it.

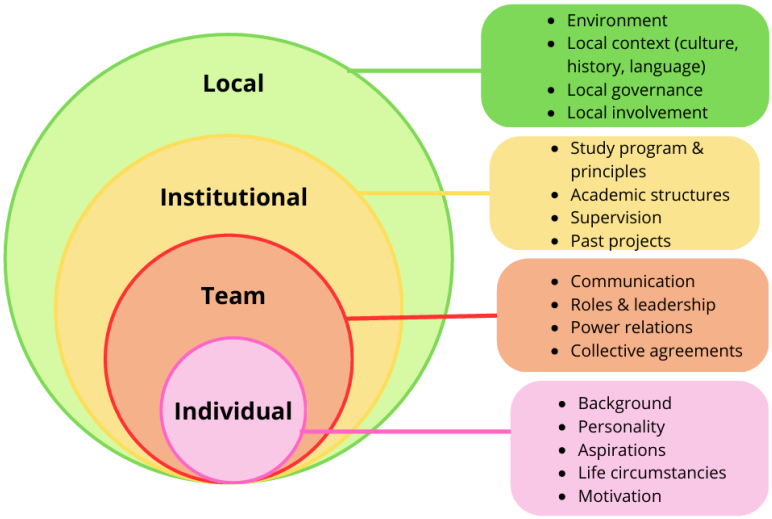

Figure 20. The layers of influencing factors. Diagram by Ines Knaster, 2025.

As I examined how these layered factors influenced our collaboration, I identified six key themes they impacted: direction, benefits, motivation, participation, engagement, and boundaries. Direction shapes the project's approaches and methods, defining its goals and focus and ultimately the outcome. Benefits refers to what everyone gets from the participation which include intangible and tangible benefits such as financial gain, study credits, artistic fulfilment, connections, experience, skills etc. Motivation reflects the individual's inner drives and reasons to engage. It drives the commitment and effort each team member invests in the project and is influenced by perceived benefits and clarity of direction. Motivation is central to the individual. Participation refers to the active involvement of team members in the project's activities shaping how much each person contributes and is able to contribute to the collaborative process. Engagement is the deeper and sustained commitment that high motivation and participation creates. It reflects the level of ownership the process has created.

These five themes form a loop where one influences the other and where they are connected to one another through this cycle. For example, if the project's direction lowers perceived benefits, motivation decreases, reducing participation. Lower participation weakens engagement, which then limits individuals' input on the direction, continuing the cycle. The

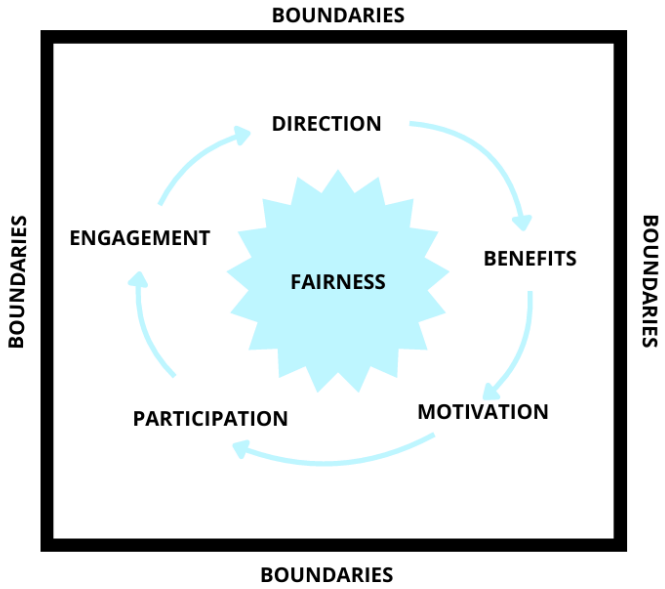

Figure 21. Cycle of collaboration. Diagram by Ines Knaster, 2025.

sixth theme, boundaries, acts as the frames around the project, including external limits like timeframes, policies and budget, as well as individual boundaries such as personal capacity, skills, and emotional resources that shape each member's involvement. They define what is possible and constrain how direction, benefits, motivation, participation, and engagement unfold. The diagram depicts this visually (Figure 21).

Fairness, positioned at the centre, represents the ethical dimensions of the entire process, meaning how individuals are treated within the project. As Stevanovic (2023) argues, shared decision-making is not just about discussing ideas together, it is also about how power is distributed and recognized between people. For the decision to be genuinely collective, everyone needs to be equally involved and equally empowered throughout the process (Stevanovic, 2023, p. 9). This idea is central to community art but through my research I started to question the idea of "equal" collaboration. As Kaitavuori (2021) states, it is impossible to predict everything perfectly and divide power and participation equally, and therefore these cannot be the way we measure ethical collaboration (p. 364). Instead, I started to prefer the idea of fair treatment. Fairness is the just and equitable treatment of individuals, providing what they need or deserve according to their specific circumstances rather than identical treatment for all which "equal" easily implies. For example, fair treatment ensures that each participant is able to determine their boundaries, what they hope to achieve from the project, how they want to contribute and are able to contribute in a manner that motivates them and gives them agency in the project. Ethical considerations are like the guideline to maximize the fairness factor. In the following section, I discuss these influencing factors and their outcomes through moments and revelations that stood out as significant in our collaboration, to further illustrate the conclusions presented in the diagram.

Individual level: personal motives and rewards

As individuals we are influenced by multitude of personal factors influencing us and the collaborative process. These shape our aspirations, values, and expectations, which in turn affect how we engage with a project affecting the direction. Life circumstances put different priorities for each person affecting the overall boundaries. Our experiences in the project and

our inner world of goals and dream determines the level of motivation we bring and how it develops.

According to Pulè & Vella (2021), artists collaborate with communities for personal, institutional, or social reasons. These may include personal ties, organizational commissions, grassroots initiatives, or shared cultural interests (Pulè & Vella, 2021, p. 24). Similarly, research conducted by Johanson and Glow (2019) explored the motivations of professional artists in initiating participatory art projects. They discovered five themes for motivation: developing personal or organizational practice, sharing artistic skills and training, addressing broad social issues, and addressing specific local social conditions (Johanson & Glow, 2019). Based on my observations, as depicted in the diagram, motivation seems to be driven by the benefits one perceives to receive, which are affected by the overall direction of the project. Therefore, as the project's direction shifts, so do the perceived benefits and motivation. For example, in the beginning when we initiated the project, our goals focused on sharing artistic skills as we wanted to increase access to art activities in the area. We imagined contributing through workshops or other artistic interventions. However, when the locals steered the project toward creating something practical, it became more difficult to see our role and find meaningful participation for ourselves. It was not that we held a narrow view of what art or artmaking can be, but rather that, at first, producing something like a bench felt quite distant from printmaking, performance art, and graphic design. Meaning, our connection to our artistic practice weakened, making it more challenging to stay motivated.

In our case, motivation fluctuated particularly when we encountered unfamiliar or challenging aspects of community art practice. Usually, community artists view the shaping of aesthetics through negotiation as a positive aspect, even though the collaborative process often requires them to reassess both their role in the project and their understanding of the emerging artwork (Talvitie, 2021, p. 62). Kantonen & Karttunen (2021) describe how the role of the artist-researcher evolves through communal artistic processes, emphasizing that engaging in such work requires openness to uncertainty, unfamiliar situations, and encounters with otherness (p. 10). I would argue that for inexperienced participatory artists, like most of us were, it is difficult to anticipate or know how the process will feel, how one reacts to it, when initial motivation is grounded mainly in theoretical understanding and personal artistic aspirations. This is supported by Johanson and Glow (2019), who found that for many artists, the most significant motivations emerged only after engaging in participatory art for the first

time which then convinced them to fully “convert” to participatory artists (p. 417). In other words, an artist unfamiliar with participatory practice must first experience its rewarding aspects before being genuinely and sustainably motivated by them. This is evident in ArtStream of Utsjoki, where we entered the project with varying levels of understanding and experience shaping our initial expectations. As the process unfolded, our motivation either strengthened or diminished depending on how personally meaningful and fulfilling we found community art in practice.

For me on a personal level, the challenge was not to keep up my motivation when sharing control over direction with the participating locals but when this happened on team level with the other artist-students. As I contemplated on this, I realized that I saw the benefits of the local level collaboration clearly and they resonated with me deeply but struggled with what team level brought to the table. In other words, it is different to share creative control with other “artists” than “non-artists”. As Koskinen (2021, p. 78) emphasizes, power is always present in relationships: it shapes how people connect, support, or resist each other. When collaborating with other artists, we enter a space where each person has their own artistic vision, expertise, and strong personal investment in the creative process. Sharing power here can feel like a struggle since each artist is used to leading or shaping their own work. Moreover, as we did not have any proper prior experience in working with each other before, we had to learn each other’s working preferences, communication styles and expectations on the go, making it more challenging to form collective vision and approaches. It is like painting together without knowing each other’s preferred tools, techniques, or creative process, leading to misalignments, frustration, and inefficiency until those preferences and rhythms are discovered and negotiated. With locals, the process felt more like handing over your tools and stepping aside, allowing their ideas and needs to guide the work.

Team inside the institutional frames

Koskinen (2021) argues that all collaborative processes are embedded within broader social and institutional frameworks, where participants’ roles and dynamics are shaped by their ties to organizations, networks, and societal structures. These embedded relations influence power

distribution and interaction possibilities at both micro and macro levels (Koskinen, 2021, p. 77). In our case, the project was prompted inside institutional frameworks, from our position as students within the Arctic Art and Design master's program, which emphasizes project-based learning (Härkönen & Vuontisjärvi, 2018, p. 26). Our project was tied to two courses within AAD study program: Project Management (fall semester) and Arctic Art and Design Project (spring semester). The first course dealt with planning the project and second the execution of it. We were also encouraged to connect our master's thesis into the project. Therefore, the reason we started a project was because we were students, and our study program required it, and it aligned with personal academic goals like finding a thesis topic and acquiring study credits. While our initial motives included both artistic aspirations and academic goals, the relevance of each varied individually and shifted throughout the process. At times, when interest in the project's direction waned, the prospect of academic credit may have helped sustain motivation.

Additionally, the academic framework in our project offered support and guidance influencing our direction. For instance, it guided us with the AAD principles of grounding the project in "participants' values, needs and perspectives" (Härkönen & Vuontisjärvi, 2018, p. 27), which lead us to emphasize local context and community input. Furthermore, the university's established presence in northern Finland likely aided in the initial community engagement. I believe, based on my observations, that there was sometimes initial trust placed on us because we were students from the University of Lapland. We benefited from this existing relationship, which supported initial participation. In addition to influencing direction, benefits and motivation, our position as students in the university program placed some boundaries around the project. A study by Hussein (2021) investigated collaboration challenges and enablers in project-based learning from students' perspectives, identifying three root causes of challenges: schedules, priorities, and uncertainty (p. 9). In our case, all of these were present, and I will discuss them next in relation to our project and how they affected our work.

Hussein (2021) discovered that conflicting priorities, such as extracurricular activities, made it difficult for many students to contribute to project tasks when needed (p. 9). In our project, this can be observed as our individual life situations made priorities very different, affecting abilities to participate and be engaged. For example, some had to focus on family obligations, some were balancing jobs alongside the project, and some could purely focus on academic

goals. In addition, although we were from the same study program it did not mean we had the same study goals or structures. For example, two of us aimed to connect the project to our master's thesis, one only considered it, while others juggled demanding course requirements alongside this project. This resulted in those prioritizing the project taking on a larger share of the work, which in turn deepened their motivation, participation, and engagement. However, this imbalance of workload led to a sense of unfairness, which eroded team-level motivation as trust between members weakened. Moreover, when some team members aimed for deeper engagement, such as producing thesis-level work, it often led to a mismatch in preferred participation depth. Either some had to scale down their involvement to align with others' lighter participation, or others felt pressured to take on more than they intended. Again, this depicts the fairness factor: if one cannot participate in a manner they find rewarding and comfortable, their agency is compromised. Their role becomes shaped by others' expectations rather than their own motivation based on the rewards the perceive to get from their participation, which can be disempowering and disengaging.

Both, different life and academic priorities, amplified the second challenge, as discovered by Hussein (2021, p. 9): schedule conflicts. One of the biggest challenges in the project was managing everyone's schedules, especially for those who had lots of external priorities. Moreover, the course requirements influenced the pacing and scope of our project. Although the courses connected to the project were flexible, prioritizing the project and us with minimal imposed supervising, it still meant that to obtain credits, certain requirements had to be met introducing external boundaries such as deadlines. For example, during the initiation phase, a project plan had to be submitted in December to receive credit for the Project Management course in the fall semester. Moreover, some team members were under external pressure to obtain this credit within that timeframe, which created additional urgency and affected the pacing of our work. This resulted in a rushed process, as we had to meet course deadlines with limited time to work together. For example, regarding the project plan, majority of the content came from one person, while others only read and approved the document so it could be submitted on time. This meant that the collective direction did not reflect everyone's vision accurately and once again there was the unbalance of work, both creating sense of unfairness. They also contributed to the third root cause of challenge: uncertainty.

In the study, Hussein (2021) describes the uncertainty factor through three main areas: product uncertainty, process uncertainty, and impact uncertainty—in other words, uncertainty about what the goal of the project is, how it will be achieved, and why it is being pursued (pp. 9–10). The study suggests that a well-defined project helps reduce uncertainty about responsibilities and improves commitment, finding a positive link between clear project organization and effective collaboration when paired with ongoing monitoring and adjustment processes (pp. 13–14). Hussein's (2021) study also identifies adequate early planning as key to creating a common vision, avoiding misunderstandings, and reducing the risk of conflicting schedules and priorities. These would then increase loyalty and commitment during later phases of the project (Hussein, 2021, p. 11). The uncertainty factor relates to the crucial aspect of ethical conduct in community art: informed consent.

As discussed in the theory chapter, informed consent means understanding what you are agreeing to take part in and having the opportunity to step back or renegotiate your involvement at any point. In principle, this should apply to professional artists as well (although full withdrawal from an established collaboration may be ethically questionable). This means artists should also have the opportunity to define their needs, expectations, and boundaries, which should be continuously negotiated as circumstances change. It is important to be transparent and clear so that every participant can make informed decisions (Kaitavuori, 2021, p. 364). The project plan we made hastily with unequal participation made it so that we could not fully have this informed consent as aspects were left uncertain, unclear. For example, we discussed early on about the difficulties in matching our schedules and agreed that everyone should participate in a manner that is realistic for them. However, we did not really discuss what this meant in practice. Can we choose which aspect we take part in? How do we then ensure that everyone contributes in a manner that feels fair for all? Moreover, we never formally defined the nature of our project: was it participatory art or community art? This left each of us to form our own interpretations and assumptions about our roles and approaches.

Kaitavuori's (2020) analysis of participatory art ethics highlights how unclear agreements undermine agency. When we are making decisions, we are exercising our own agency: the ability to choose and the capacity to produce consequences or influence others. (Stevanovic, 2023, p. 9). Moreover, according to Kaitavuori (2020), the risk of ethical violations increases in participatory art when participants lack clear understanding of their roles and commitments

(pp. 355–356). Without structured discussions about boundaries or expectations, our rushed planning process created a gap between assumed and actual consent. Kaitavuori (2020) maintains that clear agreements remain essential even in informal artistic collaborations, noting that while some arrangements take the form of official written contracts, others operate through more flexible, often unspoken social conventions (p. 354). Our failure to establish properly what Kaitavuori (2020) refers to as "contract" (sopimus) meant we had no shared reference for accountability and direction. Stevanovic (2023) warns that without clear agreements on what actions to take, cooperation involving several people across different times and places is likely to fail. It is important not only that decisions facilitate joint action but also that they are recognized as genuinely shared decisions especially as the idea is to secure commitment (Stevanovic, 2023, pp. 7–8).

Additionally, we understood leadership differently and had different preferences for teamwork but did not find a proper solution to ensure everyone would feel comfortable. There was reluctancy to have a leader, to be a leader and misunderstandings whether someone was the leader. It also stems from our different views on our collaboration style. For instance, originally, I envisioned that we would collaborate in a more individualistic style where we work under the same project, supporting each other along the way, but with our own independent focus. Naturally, this kind of collaboration style would have required a leadership role less. But some assumed more collective collaboration from the start seeing us as tightly unified team. In the end, the latter is the manner we ended up collaborating like. My conclusion from my research was not that we necessarily needed a singular leadership role, but that we should have discussed it more deeply. Meaning discussed how decision-making, responsibility, and co-ordination would be handled collectively in the absence of formal leadership. As Juli (2010) states, "without project leadership there is no direction in project management. Leadership is the decisive factor for improving the chances for projects to succeed (p. 5)". Some form of leadership should have been established, whether informal, shared, rotating or something else deemed fitting for our situation, because it provides necessary structure and ensures that decision-making, communication, and accountability are addressed.

All of this uncertainty culminated in our post-project realization that we had never established consent over the ownership rights of the materials we produced, that is, who holds the copyright, how authorship or credit is attributed, and how the materials could be used

beyond the project. We were so focused on gathering consent from local participants that we forgot to establish these among ourselves as well. There was also this naive idea that "of course we can use each other's photos and artwork", as if shared participation automatically implied shared authorship. Only later did the implications of this become clear, especially as the materials began to be used outside the project's immediate context. While using them within the framework of presentations or course assignments felt fair, extending their use, such as incorporating another's work into a thesis or gaining additional credits elsewhere by using them, raised deeper questions of fairness.

The meaning of real-life engagement

The real-life engagements with locals were highlights of the project to all of us. This becomes evident not only through our real-time and retrospective reflections but also when comparing our experiences during the ideation phase: I experienced the project from inside Utsjoki and others mostly from outside due to our differing living situations. Lippard (1997) argues that a landscape is something we observe from the outside, while a place is experienced from within: space becomes place when infused with memory (pp. 7–9). Similarly, Cresswell (2009) states that "space becomes a place when it is used and lived (p. 2)". From a distance there is minimal contact with the multilevel dimensions and tacit knowledge of a place. For me, Utsjoki was not a distant landscape but a place, one that was gradually transforming into *my* place. This resonates with the idea of dwelling, which Cresswell describes as "the way we exist in the world—the way we make the world meaningful, or place-like (p. 3)". As I lived and worked in Utsjoki, I was "dwelling" in it, building meaning through daily life. In contrast, for my team members who were not physically present as much as I was, Utsjoki likely remained more abstract, more of a landscape than a lived place at this point. Similar abstract and landscape like feeling of Utsjoki can be observed from the initiation and conceptualization phases where each of us viewed Utsjoki from distance without yet having any real-life contact to it. For motivation, this means it is more difficult to feel connected and excited about the project. To conclude, such remoteness can lead to a sense of detachment and even alienation from the project as one is unable to connect with the place and the local context.

As my place attachment to Utsjoki increased, I developed a stronger personal bond with the community. Proximity also created a sense of urgency and responsibility. My situation began to resemble what Kwon (2002) describes as the “home team advantage,” where continuous local presence allows the artist to build trust, respond to issues in real time, and integrate the project into the rhythms of everyday life, granting a deeper sense of connection, ownership, and influence over the unfolding collaboration (pp. 133–134). However, this dynamic also created a power imbalance. My “home team advantage” and in-person presence meant I had a jump start in building trust with locals and more accessible communication methods. This allowed me to be more present, responsive, and embedded in the project’s daily flow, ultimately giving me greater influence over its direction than my remotely working team members. Stevanovic (2023) reminds that people tend to naturally focus on those in positions of power, whereas those who hold power often fail to recognize or acknowledge those without it. This can cause that the quiet discontent of participants with less power remains unseen or disregarded (Stevanovic, 2023, p. 9). It is no wonder I felt more excited and motivated during this phase as I had more agency on the project compared to my team members who, in contrast, described that period as demotivating, feeling invisible and lacking sense of responsibility.

I also became a primary point of contact between my team members and locals. Kwon (2002) explains that in such situations, the artist continuously negotiates their loyalty and involvement, taking on a dual role: both as an artist and as a member or representative of the community. This ongoing balancing act can lead to feelings of isolation, as the artist never fully belongs to either side, always remaining somewhat in-between (p. 136). For me, this sometimes made me feel frustrated as I had to balance my excitement with the responsibility and loyalty to my team. From my perspective, their involvement felt minimal at this point, yet I still needed to consider them when making plans and decision. I remember once describing this feeling to them as feeling like a butterfly tied down. My in-person position also meant that that I had extra tasks compared to my team members. On one hand, this made me feel overburdened and over responsible which created a sense of unfairness. The situation also “forced” a form of leadership on me which made me highly uncomfortable. On the other hand, my closeness to the community, my community-member-in-training status, meant I received additional benefits from the project: not only did I share the same experience and compensation as my team members, but I also gained what the community gained through the process as well as extra experience my team members missed. For me, the project gave a

sense of belonging in the community that was valuable to me as a stranger living in Utsjoki and it motivated me in participating deeply. Thus, in a way, there was some balance and fairness there after all, although it was only during this research process where I was able to make this realization.

Others also expressed feelings of being overworked but from different reasons. For them it mostly seemed to stem from the expanding scope of the project which they might have felt was out of their hands at some points. In retrospect, I realize this feeling originates most likely of their lack of agency in the scope compared to mine, caused by the imbalance of power discussed earlier. It also again reveals our communication issues. If we had discussed in depth and recognized these imbalances, a fairer solution might have been found. I do not mean to say that we did not even try, we just were not very successful. For example, as my excitement made me constantly eager to expand the project when opportunities presented themselves, I tried to ensure my team members that they do not have to take part in everything. In truth, I realize now, this not as easy to do as it is to say. When you're officially seen as a team, it can feel awkward or rude to decline participation. Moreover, even when stretched thin by life circumstances, enthusiasm for the project might make it hard to say no. So, whether or not they felt they had a real choice there remains uncertain.

Concluding thoughts

When I started this research, I aimed to just examine the challenges we faced among ourselves and saw ethical issues as an important aspect to address in general. But throughout the research process I started to see ethical concerns and challenges among our teamwork as closely related topics. They are intertwined. As Jonasson & Ingason (2013) describe: “The inability to critically identify, evaluate, and manage ethical factors, as a critical aspect of project management, not only affects project success or failure in the traditional sense; it also undermines the profession and demoralises, weakens, and destabilises societies.(p. 16)” Additionally, they aptly define ethics as “the appropriate pathways to our prosperity” and “the rights that we owe to ourselves and to one another” (p. 7). When people feel respected and treated fairly, they tend to feel more motivated and willing to contribute to any kind of collaboration whether an art project or any type of work environment. In other words, ethical

conduct is not just doing what is right for the sake of it, but it also creates better functioning collaboration for everyone involved. But now I also wonder, does it need to function ideally? After all, that is why it is called “art” and not just “a project”.

Kester (2004) emphasizes the dialogical aspect of art, suggesting that instead of locating uncertainty in the changing form of the artwork itself, we should find it in the communicative process the artwork initiates. This uncertainty, “indeterminateness”, refers to the open-ended, unpredictable nature of dialogue and interaction that participatory art can generate (Kester, 2004). Rather than offering fixed meaning or outcomes, the artwork creates a space where meanings, relationships, and understandings can shift and evolve through communication between participants (Kester, 2004, pp. 89–90). Although Kester (2004) focuses on the artist-community interaction, his idea resonates strongly with the dynamics within our artist-student team in our project as well. Our relationship was significant part of the creative process. In a way, it affected me more deeply than the local level interactions as it provoked me more. As Kester (2004) notes, these interactions challenge existing perceptions by bringing together diverse perspectives, creating new insights (p. 95). The process may also generate tensions, but these can lead to meaningful and creative developments (Kantonen & Karttunen, 2021, p. 34).

Community art, by nature, is the sum of its parts: everyone involved shapes it in one way or another. If we were to map the complete web of influencing factors shaping the project, it would form a complex and multilayered net where even small things can have a major impact on how things evolve. Here, I have tried to outline the key influences that affected our inner team and how we, in turn, influenced the project. Our actions and decisions continuously shaped the project's direction, just as the unfolding circumstances and project context influenced our team. Unlike traditional art forms, which use static and controllable materials, community art engages with the dynamic and ever-shifting elements of human emotions and interactions. This makes community art one of the least predictable artistic practices. Both positive and negative impacts are possible and should be acknowledged as part of the practice (Kantonen & Karttunen, 2021, p. 34). But more than that, it should be appreciated, because tension, when navigated consciously, is often the force that makes transformation possible. As our community art project shows, unpredictability and human dynamics ensure tensions will arise so the artist’s role is to harness it ethically, creating a space where friction fuels

creativity rather than fracturing it. It requires intentional strategies that prioritize inclusion, dialogue, and care.

7. Conclusions

This thesis set out to examine the collaboration dynamics within a community art project, ArtStream of Utsjoki, carried out in Finnish Lapland. The project aimed to increase cultural activities in Utsjoki by arranging artistic activities in the three main villages: Utsjoki, Karigasniemi and Nuorgam. Initiated in October 2023 and finished in July 2024, the project produced three artistic outcomes with related workshops and events. The research focused particularly on the inner workings of the artist-student team and the challenges faced in navigating shared responsibilities, communication, and differing motivations. The aim was to offer a reflective, practice-based understanding of how collaboration functions in community art in the Arctic context, and to contribute knowledge useful to other students and practitioners in similar situations.

The motivation for this thesis came from my personal experiences, gaps in current literature regarding participatory art projects, and a desire to help build better practices for future projects. As I felt personally somewhat dissatisfied with the project after it had ended, I wanted to understand where this feeling originated. I was able to locate this dissatisfaction to the inner collaboration of the artist-student team I was part of. I had imagined this part of the project would function smoothly and enhance the process, not hinder it. There are two main reasons for this assumption. First, collaboration is often idealized, with the benefits emphasized while practical challenges remain unaddressed. Second, participatory art literature focuses heavily on ethics concerning the participant community and the project's social impact, while the professional artists' internal dynamics remain underexamined. Many participatory art projects involve teams of artists. These teams often co-create the project framework while engaging with participants. The focus on the collective and overall process can blur individual contributions, including those of the artists facilitating the work. This is often intentional, given participatory art's origins in challenging the individual artist model.

However, the risk is ignoring the artists' inner collaboration can obscure critical issues of power, labour, and authorship within the team.

This research was conducted using an art-based research (ABR) framework where I used artistic practice to generate, analyse and represent knowledge. The process included creating visualization of the timeline using the materials, such as photos and sketches, from the project itself to create holistic and objective representation of major events. This process helped to relive the project and identify key phases and events and later functioned as a reflective tool. This objective timeline was used as a visual aid during an interview with my team member where I gathered alternative point of view to the process. To examine my own experiences in the project, I created an alternative timeline, using the objective timeline as a reference point, by making monotype prints representing time periods from the project. This was process-focused approach where the art making functioned as meditative way to access my emotions and memories related to the project's journey. Reflective journal was used throughout the study to gather emerging thoughts, themes and patterns. The emerging themes from the overall research were arranged chronologically and a narrative description of events created to better understand how things unfolded. Key influencing themes were extracted and arranged under categories based on context they belonged to depict the layered nature of them. Finally, a diagram showing the cyclical nature of the key themes being affected by the influencing factors was made to represent the overall findings.

The findings suggest that fairness is central to ethical creative collaboration, shaped by layered influences from local, institutional, team, and individual levels. These layers affect six interconnected themes: direction, benefits, motivation, participation, engagement, and boundaries. Direction sets goals and methods; benefits drive motivation, which fuels participation and deeper engagement; boundaries constrain all these factors. At the individual level, personal motives, life situations, and shifting project direction affected motivation and participation. Within the institutional framework of the university, academic requirements, schedules, and course credits influenced our project pace and priorities. This created imbalances in workload and motivation, leading to feelings of unfairness and weakened team trust. Inadequate shared planning caused uncertainty, which hindered true agency and responsibility. Community art by nature demands openness to uncertainty and flexibility from individuals. Early, clear planning and transparency are crucial for reducing uncertainty and

supporting informed consent for all involved. Artists must continuously negotiate their involvement and boundaries to maintain fairness and agency throughout collaboration.

Further research could focus more explicitly on the ethics of intra-team collaboration in community art. Comparative studies across projects could highlight patterns in how artists manage power, labour, and communication internally. Another useful direction would be the development of tools or frameworks that support ethical reflection among artist teams throughout the project life cycle. This study was also small and limited, so research led by professional artists working collaboratively within a participatory art project could further explore these dynamics from within, using the project itself as a site of inquiry.

This was my first time conducting systematic research and at first it was very intimidating endeavour. ABR methods helped in this by making the process more familiar, enjoyable and engaging experience through artistic practice. I came to be aware how highly visual person I am as the need to visualize information was constant impulse throughout the study. It reminded me of how as child in basic education, I found that by drawing out verbal math problems I was able to grasp and solve them better. Similarly here, the act of making art helped explain things to myself and come to conclusions. Conducting the research was also therapeutic experience as examining the sources of my disappointments, understanding their roots and causes and objectively viewing my own role in them helped me heal those feelings. I feel like I learned a lot about myself, about my weaknesses and strengths, and I was able to form clear picture of my current artistic identity and what kind of creative person wish to be in the future. It also surprised me how certain parts of my artistic identity, my spontaneous, chaotic and intuitive working style, followed me through this whole experience, like a shadow or a best friend.

As for the results, the ethical dimensions were the ones that surprised me the most. How deeply the general ethical concerns from community art were present at the inner team level as well. Now it feels obvious but before I think I saw those collaboration levels as very separate things. The art was with the local community and the project was with the fellow students. The vision was to make art *with the locals*, not *with all in involved.* But now I see the artist-level dialogue and relationship equally important for community art, and I wish it would get more explored. I think for artist that level is something deeply intimate as it mirrors someone closer to your own expertise so there is some special vulnerability there.

Participatory art often examines the social impact on communities but there is transformation for the artists as well. It would also offer deeper understanding of aspects like the power relations and artist's role when it is examined through the interplay between the artists who will naturally have varying perspectives on those things while trying to manage them in their unique ways in the community art context. It is like the root level interaction that is crucial component for the evolving collaboration to tell the whole story.

In conclusion, the ArtStream of Utsjoki project was a complex, emotional, and ultimately educational experience. While the artistic outcomes may appear modest, the real value lies in the process, especially in the uncomfortable and difficult parts. The challenges revealed not only gaps in collaboration but also deeper questions about responsibility, support, and what it means to work together. I feel like participatory art literature is often very idealistic and offers a polished view to the practice. Here I wanted to give more raw and honest perspective because I believe it to be more useful for future students and artists starting their projects. We get alerted from other people's mistakes and challenges. When someone tells they almost hit a reindeer on a road, you get alerted and drive more carefully, at least for a while. I hope this thesis will do just that.

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