



## Artikkeli II

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DEALING WITH COMPLEXITY  
– Pupils’ representations of place  
in the era of Arctic urbanization



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## Introduction

This chapter is presenting a study based on an international art-based action research<sup>1</sup> project entitled *Creative Connections* (2012–2014)<sup>2</sup>, that aimed to explore and develop ways of increasing understanding of European identity and citizenship through art among children and young people in primary and upper secondary school. As one part of the research, we focus in this chapter on the question of living in the Arctic in both urban and rural settings. We discuss the pedagogical uses of contemporary art by analyzing blog posts with artwork made by children and young people from two upper secondary schools in Northern Finland in comparison with their European peers. According to the approach of action research, we participated in *Creative Connections* –project in many roles – Hiltunen, as the national coordinator (Finland), supervisor of the art education students conducting research for thesis and for doctoral study in the project, and constructing the theoretical framework for the artwork database. Manninen was researcher in the field constructing the artwork database, and co-operating with the teachers. The study presented in this chapter is one part of ongoing research for the dissertation by Manninen. We ask whether the Arctic rural and urban divide is represented in pupils' work. The purpose of our research question was to draw attention to the changes that penetrate and transform the Arctic and investigate whether those changes are visible in pupils' representations of their daily lives and living environments.

## The Artwork Database – collaborative activities and dialogue

The context for our study, the collaborative research project *Creative Connections*, involved six universities and 25 schools in six European countries. The aim of the research project was to explore the themes of identity and citizenship through contemporary artwork and art projects and provide an active inter-country dialogue among pupils of primary and secondary schools, aged 7–18. Researchers and visual art educators from the partner universities located in the UK, Ireland, the Czech Republic, Spain, Portugal, and Finland collabo-

rated with elementary teachers, art teachers, and civil education teachers to explore ways of increasing transnational understanding in European young people and children<sup>3</sup>. The partner countries worked together through digital media by sharing blogs between classes in the different countries. The project also involved experimenting with the use of online translation software to help pupils to communicate in their own languages. (“Creative Connections”, 2014; Hiltunen & Manninen, 2015; Manninen, 2015; Richardson, 2014).

The use of contemporary art was in the core of the *Creative Connections* –project. An Artwork Database was created to introduce contemporary art for schools.<sup>4</sup> The artwork examples in the database offered various approaches to art with the themes of personal, local and national identity and “European connectedness” from different perspectives. Students from the six partner countries created their own artworks based on the examples and categories in the artwork database guiding to the topic and different contemporary artistic working methods. Through the images and text produced, students communicated with one another via blogs on the website. (Hiltunen & Manninen, 2015.)

The aim in selecting examples of artwork was to cover the large range of contemporary art from the different materials and techniques. The educational purpose was to introduce the different approaches and ways of working, which artists use today. Besides self-expression and visual reporting, the database presents community art, place-specific, socially engaged art and environmental art as an artistic and art pedagogical strategy (Coutts & Jokela, 2008; Hiltunen, 2010; Adams, 2002; Kester, 2004; Kwon 2002; Lacy, 1995; Neperud, 1995). The database was intended to be used for exploring the different approaches to learning demonstrated by the different roles of art. The database was divided into five categories: *Art as Cultural Self-Expression*, *Art as Cultural Interpretation*, *Art as Cultural Reporter*, *Art as Cultural guide*, and *Art as Cultural Activism*. (Hiltunen & Manninen, 2015; Manninen & Hiltunen, 2014.)

In this chapter, we explore the use of the contemporary artwork database as it appeared or was mentioned in the pupils’ works in blog postings. Blogs have become an essential part of internet publication especially emphasizing the notion that anyone can have a voice. We explored the different representations

Artist's strategy	Private... ...public	Private... ...public	Private... ...public	Private... ...public	Private... ...public
The role of Art	Dimension A <i>Art as Cultural Self-Expression</i>	Dimension B <i>Art as Cultural Interpretation</i>	Dimension C <i>Art as Cultural Reporter</i>	Dimension D <i>Art as Cultural Guide</i>	Dimension A <i>Art as Cultural Activism</i>
Example Artworks, Finland	 <p><i>H. Kurusvaara, 2006, Untill the Third and Forth generation</i></p>		 <p><i>J. Heikkilä, 2004, Mirja by the river</i></p>	 <p><i>R. Hiltunen, 2008-2010, Reshuffle</i></p>	
		 <p><i>O. Peski, 2012, Eatu, eadai, eana (Stream, mother, ground).</i></p>			 <p><i>L. &amp; P. Kanto, 2004, The favorite place of Maringa Sara (part of the series Favorite Place)</i></p>

*Figure 1. The roles of art. The five categories as foundation for the artwork database with Finnish examples<sup>5</sup>.*

of rural or urban. Our hypothesis was that, embedded in a large array of cultures, contemporary art challenges establish orthodoxies and reflects on the transition of cultures thus providing a focus for exploring social issues.

### **Connecting rural and urban schools**

One important factor in choosing the participating schools for the research project was based on the idea of connecting rural and urban schools. This premise promotes discussion of the interesting point that, in the current context, the notion of urban and rural seems to be changing rapidly in the Arctic. In this chapter, we ask whether this change is visible in pupils' art works and blogs and if so, how? The focus is on experiences from two schools in Northern Finland and on examining and reflecting upon them, together with three other European schools, while the total number of the participating schools in the project were 25.

The Arctic fringe of Finland, Norway, Sweden and Iceland, as well as parts of Alaska and western Russia, may be characterized as rural regions with

urban and rural-urban enclaves. Accessibility and interaction are keywords in this connection, while the notion of urban fringe areas is also central (see Rasmussen, 2011, p. 28). Rapid changes in livelihood and utilization of natural resources cause challenges. Therefore cultural and eco-social questions relating to Northern and Arctic regions, as well as sustainability, are very relevant from the viewpoint of art education.



*Figure 2. Our research environments of Utsjoki, Rovaniemi, and the City of Oulu (Nordic countries map by Jniemenmaa, 2014, edited by Manninen 2016).*

Two of the schools that took part in the ‘urban’ category of project are located in Oulu, which is the fifth largest city in the country with a population of 200,000. *Koskela Primary School* is a large multinational primary school in the city environment. *Oulun Suomalaisen Yhteiskoulun lukio (OSYK)* is an upper secondary school specializing in a broad range of arts, visual arts, drama and media. It has over 40 teachers and c. 600 students, who are participating yearly in national and international projects with many European partners.

The rural schools participating in this study are *Utsjokisuu Primary School* and *Sami Upper Secondary School*, which are located in an area that borders the European Union (Finland) and Norway. Utsjoki is the only municipality in Finland where the native Sámi people are in the majority. Of its 1,200 plus residents, more than half are Sámi. In Finland, the definition of a Sámi is laid down in the Act of the Sámi Parliament and is mainly based on the Sámi language<sup>8</sup>. The Sámi are considered to have the Sámi identity which is defined most often by their language (Valkonen, 2009). For this study, we collaborated with students who live in the Utsjoki village centre, which has a population of c. 600. Eight of the participating pupils were from second and third grade (8–9 years-olds) and 11 were upper secondary school students (16–18 years-olds), all from Sámi speaking classes. The pupils also have common teaching every week with Sirma, a Sámi primary school in Norway.

The co-existence of indigenous cultures with the different ways of life of other Northern nationalities is common in the Northern and Arctic region (Guttorm, 2012). This multi-national and cultural milieu creates opportunities but also socio-cultural challenges that are difficult to access and investigate. The situation also acquires political dimensions in the changing Arctic region. (Rasmussen, 2011.) Our interest was to investigate reflections of the changes in the pupils' work in comparison to the work of their urban and Southern peers. We began by defining the concepts of arctic, urban and rural. These concepts are all connected to the concept of *place*, which is also central in contemporary art and art education (Jokela & Hiltunen, 2014).

### **Living in the Arctic**

Depending on the definition utilized, the Arctic covers between 14–20 per cent of the Earth's surface. We will use the word Arctic as it is used in the Arctic Council and the term "The North" is synonymous with it. ("Arctic Boundaries", 2015; Kullerud, 2009, pp. 234–235.) From our perspective the Northern and Arctic environments are not only approached as geographic and physical environments concepts, but also as spaces and places of symbolic community



created through art and culture (Grace, 2001). Aesthetics has gradually grown to be part of everyday lives and also influence Northern and Arctic being (Naukkarinen, 2012). The emphasis on defining the Arctic is related strongly to different political and economic development interests, which often do not share the same spatiality and temporality. We must continue to improve our understanding of the social transformations that are underway. It is important to recognize the cultural repercussions of climate change and how it impacts on ways of live and identities. Conflicts and struggles between legitimate and dominant ways of understanding the Arctic emerge and are mediated via social representations, not only in local or regional contexts but increasingly on a global scale. Today's world is more depended on the North than ever (Funston, 2009; Hattingh, 2009; Kullerud, 2009; Rasmussen, 2011). How could art and art education contribute to this progress?

Discussions concerning the economies of the North make the traditional livelihoods, emerging industries and present material cultures of the Arctic part of global norms of exchange, making them visual, debatable and highly political. Scientific research and contemporary art are part of this same process. Contemporary art, as well as local and indigenous knowledge and artistic research, are reflecting an attempted definition of place and the North. Thus contemporary art education could be used more in schools to describe, illustrate and produce knowledge on how to perceive, approach and live in the region.

### **Defining Urban and Rural**

The boundary between urban and rural areas is not always clear. In this study we are using the geographical information-based area classification system created by the Finnish Environment Institute and the Department of Geography of the University of Oulu in cooperation with the Ministry of Employment and the Economy, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and Statistics Finland. This Urban-rural classification framework has been designed to be flexible, which makes it possible to identify an intermediate zone between urban and rural that can be examined as a separate entity. The classification



can be achieved by, for instance, by combining two classes, the peri-urban area and rural areas close to urban areas. (Helminen, 2014):

1. Inner urban area: a compact and densely built area with continuous development.
2. Outer urban area: a dense urban area extending from the boundary of the inner urban area to the outer edge of the continuous built area.
3. Peri-urban area: a part of the intermediate zone between urban and rural, which is directly linked to an urban area.

Each of these agglomerations has a core urban area, which is then divided into an inner and outer urban area. Surrounding the core urban area is a peri-urban area. (Helminen, 2014.) The City of Oulu satisfies the premises for urban areas, where the population centers are agglomerations with more than 15,000 residents<sup>9</sup>.

The classification for rural areas is as follows:

1. Local centers in rural areas: Population centers located outside urban areas.
2. Rural areas close to urban areas: Areas with a rural character that are functionally connected and close to urban areas.
3. Rural heartland areas: Rural areas with intensive land use, a relatively dense population and a diverse economic structure at the local level.
4. Sparsely populated rural areas: Sparsely populated areas with dispersed small settlements located at a distance from each other. Most of the land areas are forested. (Helminen, 2014.)

The Utsjoki municipality area is 5,370 square kilometers in size with a population density of 0.24 inhabitants in square kilometer<sup>10</sup>. According to Rasmussen

(2011, p. 29), rural societies are often stereotyped in terms of their strong adherence to farming, fishing, and hunting, and marked with a high regard for their longstanding traditions. In our study, we explored the notions of rural and urban. We were interested in whether these notions are visible and even contrasted with the common perception that the rural perspective may be bleak and without significant options for choice and individual behavior. On the other hand, rural areas may be contrasted with urban areas often typified by alleged impersonal bureaucracy, rationalized specialization, and mechanization. At the same time, urban areas are also characterized by individuals involved in different social networks, with the option to choose between different jobs and the ability to enjoy a greater variety of cultural opportunities. (Rasmussen 2011, p. 29.)

By following the presented classification, the five schools in our sample group were identified to be located in inner urban areas and rural areas close to urban areas with the arctic region presenting the sparsely populated rural area (see the Figure 2).

The School, level, country, quad blog	Participating pupils and their age	City/ Town (inhabitants), location	Urban - rural classification
<b>Escola de Aver-o-Mar, Portugal, QB 3</b>	21 pupils, 14 yrs	Aver-o-Mar (8700), 2 km north of the city of Póvoa de Varzim (c.63 000)	<b>Rural</b> area close to urban area / Peri-urban area
<b>Larkin Community College, Ireland, QB 2</b>	24 + 28 pupils, 12–14 yrs	Dublin (c. 530 000), inner city part	Inner <b>urban</b> area
Oulun suomalaisen yhteiskoulun lukio ( <b>OSYK</b> ), Upper secondary school, <b>Finland, QB 3</b>	7 students, 17–18 yrs	Oulu (c. 190 000), city center	Inner <b>urban</b> area
<b>Utsjoen Saamelaislukio, Sámi upper secondary, Finland, QB 2</b>	11 students, 16–17 yrs	<b>Utsjoki</b> municipality(c.1200) village center (c.600)	Sparsely populated <b>rural</b> area /Local center in rural area
<b>Zs Palachova, Middle school, Czech Republic, QB 2</b>	Several groups, 12–16 yrs	Usti nad Labem (c.100 000)	Inner <b>urban</b> area

*Figure 3. Rural-urban classification of the schools.*

## Data and methods – picturing the surroundings

We started the analysis with the posts from two quad blogs<sup>11</sup> which included the two Finnish upper secondary schools (urban and rural). They consist of photos of pupils' work and working processes and varying amounts of information written to accompany the image. The analysis proceeded through phases of categorizing, reading, classifying and describing, to close reading and deeper analysis (Rose, 2012). This aimed at a hermeneutic cycle of data interpretation by changing the perspective between entity and details (Gadamer, 2004; Kozinets, 2015, p. 205). The focus on the pupils' representations of urban and rural environments narrowed the closer analysis to the posts in which pupils presented their living surroundings. This left us with 44 posts from five schools (see Figure 2). The posts were divided into five groups according to technique and thus visual resemblance in order to compare their contents and means of expression (see Hall, 1997, p. 236). The Groups were: Videos (3 posts), Collages (15 posts), Photos (7 posts), Drawings & paintings (16 posts) and Socially engaged art (3 posts) (see Figure 4: *The levels of representations of the home place or area in the pupils' work*).

Each post and image was examined more closely for details and deeper meanings using a tabular description (title, author, date, visual information, written information in the image, visual means, captions, notes). Writing down the content of the pupils' works was a guide to closer interpretation of the images. This made it possible to count frequencies aiming at the hermeneutic process of starting with individual pieces of data to build gradually a broader understanding of the phenomenon (Kozinets, 2015, p. 206; Rose, 2012). Close reading and categorization of the data resonated with the categories created for the artwork database and thus found their connections to the approaches in contemporary art practices (see Figure 1: *The roles of art* and Figure 4: *the levels of representations of place in pupils' work*).











As researchers we must be aware of our cultural background when searching for representations in the images (Gadamer, 1997, pp. 472–473). Our position in Northern Finland and visits to Finnish schools during the project made us more sensitive to the cultural meanings that Finnish pupils

present in their work. Yet we are not from a Sámi background and needed to refer a Sámi–Finnish dictionary to understand all the information. We look at the cultural representations in the pupils’ work from outside the community and build our interpretation on our existing cultural knowledge. The texts accompanying the posted images played a key role especially in understanding meanings in the pupils’ works from other countries (Hall, 1997, p. 228).

### Contemporary art approaches and representations of place

With the data analysis, we found a variation of individual, communal and cultural representations of pupils’ surroundings (see Figure 4). As Jokela states: “Community and environment cannot be separated from each other when discussing the places of our everyday lives. [...] The foundation of the life-world is the network of places, where we operate as actors.” (2008, p. 165).

*Figure 4. The levels of representations of the home place or area in the pupils’ work with examples.*

Place	1) Experienced, personal	2) Represented, collective	3) Documented	4) Cultural	5) Issues
<b>Techniques</b>	Drawing, photo	Collage	Video	Painting, drawing	Socially-engaged Art
<b>Urban</b>	 <i>Larkin, IR</i>	 <i>Larkin, IR</i>	 <i>Larkin, IR</i>	 <i>OSYK, FI</i>	 <i>Zs Palachova, CZ</i>
<b>Rural</b>	 <i>Utsjoki, FI</i>	 <i>Utsjoki, FI</i>	 <i>Utsjoki, FI</i>	 <i>Aver-o-Mar, PT</i>	 <i>Utsjoki, FI</i>
<b>The role of Art</b>	<b>Self-expression</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>	<b>Reporter</b>	<b>Guide</b>	<b>Activist</b>

The levels of representations of the home place or area found in the pupils' works are: 1) Experienced/personal place, 2) represented place, 3) documented place, 4) cultural/ historical place and 5) conflicted/problematic place. These representations cover the different dimensions of individual to collective, from personal views to cultural representations and those shared by the community. We experience our environment as perceived and personally meaningful emotional content, as social and functional content, and one that evokes cultural significance. Thus, we understand our environment as experiences that we create with our own actions and perceptions. (Berleant, 1997; Jokela, 2008; Jokela & Hiltunen, 2014; Ingold, 2003).

The different approaches in making artwork produced different representations of place and pupils' relationship to it. The levels of representations resulting from the analysis can be reflected in the matrix of roles of contemporary art (Figure 1: *the roles of art*). The connections, discussed more closely in the following examples, indicate that the contemporary art approaches introduced in the project through the Artwork database have succeeded in inspiring variation in producing representations of a place. According to Relph (1976), we perceive the environment as places; it becomes concrete in places. In the human world of experiences, the places are overlapping, parallel and nested. Emotional ties to and memories of places create the local identity of a person.

### **1. Experienced place – My place, My home**

The Utsjoki students presented their important places or childhood places with drawings and photographs. The Czech pupils processed the photos they took from the neighborhood into line drawings and put them together as a coloring book of their favorite places (see the Figure 5). What is visible in the images is the children's and youth's perspective on places and their importance through action (sandbox, slide, stairs, fishing, swimming). The drawings show more personal relation to the place, the memories, and meanings.



## 2. Collective and communal place – Postcards from my area

In the collages, most of imagery was taken from the internet and therefore repeats the general representations of the area. Pupils selected the images for their collages, what they wanted to show and what was relevant to them. The Larkin school from Ireland and Sámi upper secondary pupils specifically picture their surroundings by photo-collages. With a quick overview the urban surroundings are dominated by the built environment and important buildings, and the rural students have chosen images of natural landscape, river, fishing, and snowmobiling. The ways of telling these visual stories were similar with the photos and text.

Four of the Irish pupils' collages used identical images: church, convent, their school and the swimming pool (example in Figure 6). The similarity indicates either strong guidance from the teacher or the close interaction between these pupils.

The Utsjoki students' collages (example in Figure 6) are connected by images of the river and salmon fishing (boats, fish, salmon dams). This is understandable because the village is located at the Teno river, the largest and most productive natural state salmon river in Northern Europe ("Teno-info", 2005).

Figure 5. Example page from the Coloring book from our town (Zs Palachova) & Our home place (Utsjoki).

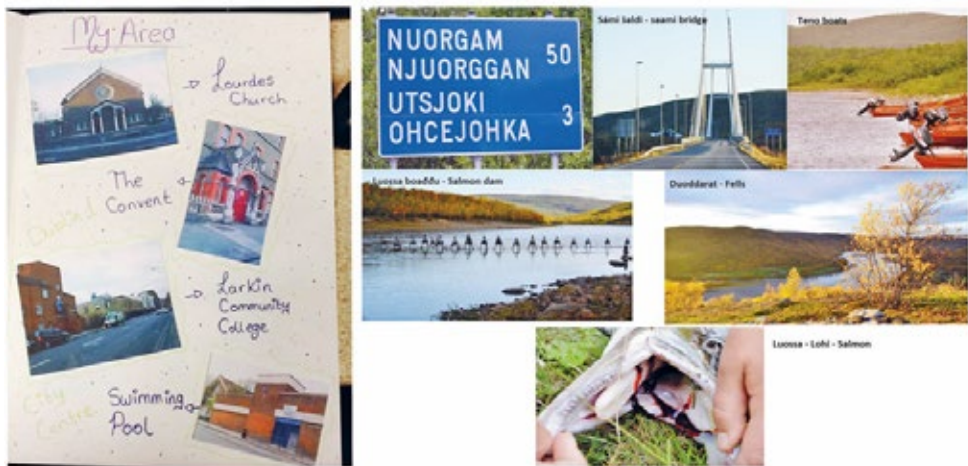


Figure 6. My area D1 (Larkin) & Ohcejohka (Utsjoki).

Besides reindeer herding, fishing has a major role there in the local culture and livelihood. There are also indications to the several languages and cultures in the area – photos of road signs with village names in Finnish and Sámi, Finnish, Sámi and Norwegian flags, and indications to the placement of the village on the Finnish–Norwegian border.

The collages also included stereotypes: Irish music, dance and beer, Sámi reindeers, northern lights and kota, which is a traditional Sámi hut. As one of the Sámi students wrote in her post:

*I made a new postcard by using pictures from the old postcards. I used pictures what aren't stereotypes of Utsjoki/sámland, but they are on display in local people lives almost daily. (In Post: 4. Poastagoarta Ohcejogas. 4.4. Utsjoki.)*

The student wants to point out that even though the images might appear stereotypic, they are part of the way of life in the village.

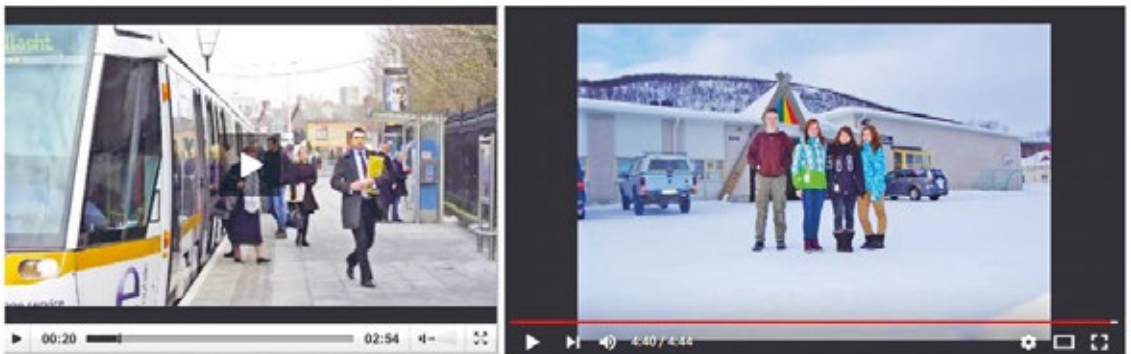


### 3. Documented place – This is where we are!

The videos capture the actual environment and the authors chose what to show and tell for viewers. Two of the videos were made by students in Utsjoki, where they presented their school. One of the videos was compiled using photographs, information in subtitles and traditional Sámi singing (*joik*<sup>12</sup>) as music. The photos show the position of Utsjoki in the Northernmost corner of Europe, classrooms, swimming hall, library and snowy school yard. The other video is a tour of the school building with three boys guiding, one in Sami, one in English, and one in Finnish. This version is more humorous and also includes music made by the students themselves. The third video comes from Dublin and is made by researcher Tony Murphy. The video shows the city views, traffic and crowds around the school, the school building, and the pupils working in the art lesson.

The students from Utsjoki emphasized what facilities are available to them in one building, from a kindergarten to a swimming hall. The Irish video shows the researcher's view, as objectively presenting the surroundings and class. The post also includes a group photo of the pupils in the end. This led the other pupils watching the video to a misunderstanding of the author, who was actually the researcher visiting the class.

*Figure 7. Documented places: Video presentations (Larkin & one of the two from Utsjoki).*



#### 4. Cultural and Historical place – painting and drawing signs

In some of the drawings and paintings, the pupils used more metaphors, symbols, and signs to present their area instead of an actual landscape. These often have cultural and historical meanings connected to their place and symbolic or significant features of the local or national culture related to the environment. These works were also separate from the personal representations of places in drawings of the first category.



*Figure 8. Cultural places: Untitled (Aver-o-Mar) & a postcard from Utsjoki (Utsjoki).*

The Portuguese pupils connected the artwork examples with the cultural and environmental features of their community. The characteristics of their place become part of the story “who we are”. This is explained in a text accompanying a drawing (the Figure 8: Untitled):

*What are the human figures, in a typical landscape of Póvoa de Varzim, the beach. Are arranged in order to convey the people's Union, their interaction with the sea and the predominant economic activity in this region, fishing. This work aims to make known the area of Póvoa de Varzim to all the people who see it. (Post: untitled. 14.5. Aver-o-Mar.)*

### **5. Dealing with local issues through socially-engaged art**

Socially-engaged practice in the arts is an evolving area that uses community participation, reciprocal organizational relationships, and collaboration in public contexts to promote civic dialogue and investigate pressing issues of our time.

In socially-engaged art projects, the pupils were dealing with conflicts or issues in their area, approaching the issues and making them visible through art. The pupils of Zs Palachova made sculptures of the outcasts and documented them with photos. Teacher reported on their project (related to the figure 9: Homeless):

*“Strange” people live in every city across Europe. We talked about those from our town. Some of them are mentally ill, some of them are just “crazy” – they wanted to be different. Some of them are very poor and maybe therefore they are doing “sad things” (prostitution, drinking alcohol, taking drugs). But they belong to our society too, they belong to our town...-. We created the figures from different materials and then we placed them on their “special places” in the street. (In Post: teacher, Zs Palachova.)*

The students of the Sámi upper secondary school had an assignment to plan community art or environmental artwork. One of the two works presented in the blog shows a design for a large painting on the road with the flags of Sámi and Finland side by side. The other plan is an activity for school children to solve a giant puzzle by searching for pieces and forming “an environmental art picture of Sámi” with the aim of reinforcing Sámi identity (Figure 9).

The differences between these socially-engaged art projects show the issues in these rural and urban areas. Whereas in the Czech city the teacher wanted the pupils to understand the strange people on the streets and see them as part of their community, the student works in Utsjoki point out the multicultural dimension of their municipality and the struggle to preserve the cultural heritage and identity.



Figure 9. Homeless (Zs Palachova) & Plan for community art (Utsjoki).

### Urban – Rural –is there a difference?

When analysing the pupils work, It needed to be clear what the urban and rural stereotypes were for us. We expected the rural schools to struggle with poor access to internet and media devices, poverty and their images to reflect innocence, traditional culture, fishing and agricultural elements. We thought that the urban schools would have more up to date media devices and picture busy, crowded, populated, superficial environment and lifestyle.

In the selection of techniques and media, there was no gap between urban and rural. The rural students produced videos and used digital photo editing tools, while urban students chose traditional drawing and painting and vice versa. From the difference in the number of postings or comments, we cannot confidently indicate differences in internet access. Instead the differences lied in the role of teachers and their control over blogging, as in some schools the teacher handled the documentation and posting to the blog due to available technology or security issues. However, this didn't indicate a division

between urban and rural. All the schools also made bold use of contemporary approaches to art making.

In the *Creative Connections* project, we proposed that the pupils and students would apply different contemporary art strategies introduced in the art work database (see Figure 2) and act like as contemporary artist' researchers. In the Utsjoki and Oulu schools, the process of using the artwork database was a good example of contemporary art's ability to promote a reflexive, dialogical space. The variation in representations shows the complexity of rural and urban definitions.

The differences between works by urban and rural pupils come from the environment itself. It is natural that urban pupils depict city views and rural pupils the countryside, because that is what is around them. With a closer look there were also few urban students representations of quiet rural landscape. In one art project from urban Oulu, the student painted a depiction of the melancholic, empty countryside: an old man sitting in front of a small wooden house next to a harvested field in late autumn. In her caption, she points out the depopulation of rural areas. At the same time the representations of rural environments by students at Utsjoki were not empty and sad, but full of activities: they were places for fishing, swimming, playing and snowmobiling. The contrast between the old man giving up and the active young man riding a

*Figure 10. Students representations of the rural area: Couldn't anybody love him (Oulu) – Here I am, I and my beloved sled (Utsjoki).*



snowmobile pictures the contrast between the assumption of the rural area (and also one representation of it given in the media) and its reality (Figure 10).

While the urban surroundings were defined in pupils' works by district, buildings, streets and monuments, the home place for Sámi students was not only the house, but many square kilometers around, where the forests and river shores were full of places with functions, memories and meanings. Pupils' works from the rural areas depict traditions, culture and the beauty of the surroundings. The relation of the urban pupils to their environment did not show the same attachment in our interpretation of the data. They lacked the sense of community and pride in the roots and culture found in the rural pupils' representations. The pupils of OSYK, an urban Finnish upper secondary, could choose their art project topic. None of them felt a need to present the uniqueness of their home city for the others. This need to tell about "us and our way of life" connected the rural pupils from the communities of Utsjoki and Aver-o-Mar.

## Conclusions

The complexity of defining the urban or rural appears in our study in the multiple natures of local identity. One clear indication was the fact that the Czech school from Usti nad Labem was enrolled in the *Creative Connections* project as a rural school by the Czech research team, but was categorized as urban in our study according to the urban-rural classification, with the population density of 1,000 inhabitants per square kilometer. Also, the history of the town and pupils' representations were linked to the urban environment. The students' sense of being rural or urban is not simple. The works show the rural students' connections to bigger cities and urban phenomena through friends, relatives and popular culture. The urban pupils' works, for their part, include representations of rural areas as experienced and important places or as quiet and imagined empty opposites of their surroundings.

The pupils' work shows that with the teachers' guidance and artwork database examples the students have used art for expressing personal

experiences, reporting communal values, regarding their history and traditions and to address local cultural issues. This shows the potential of contemporary art practices to address various phenomena in school work and the encouragement of the collected artwork database for the different approaches. As shown in the students' work, the artistic process can make visible personal and communal values and meanings (connected to places). Processing the values and meanings is a key factor in coping with changes in life. The access to often hidden values and meanings to address contemporary phenomena is the contribution of art education. (Jokela, Hiltunen & Härkönen, 2015b). It can be seen in the way students works showed the invisible functions and meanings of the places in this research project. Our findings also highlight the possibilities and challenges involved in sharing the artwork examples and student's own visual works with peers in international group blogs. Digitalization can bring the art education and international co-operation of schools in remote areas into an equal position and provide fruitful interaction with others.

The representations of places in the pupils' works in our study showed how complex the idea of urban and rural is in the North. Complexity is shown in the Sámi students' work as pictures of everyday life with strong connection to traditions, nature and community mixed with phenomena of global popular culture and hi-tech. While the Arctic might be thought as the deserted periphery, the young people from the area show they are living in the contemporary society with their everyday life and environment full of activities. What distinguishes them from their urban peers and connects with the rural ones is the sense of belonging to the local community, culture and environment and the strong need to have their voices heard and stories told in the global arena to get their existence and way of life generally known. As eager as the young people from the rural areas in our sampling group appeared to be in presenting their life and area, equally there is a need for an updated and more versatile view on the Arctic (Funston, 2009; Hattingh, 2009; Kullerud, 2009; Rasmussen, 2011). As curator Julie Decker (2012, p. 7) states in her forewords



in *True North. Contemporary art of the circumpolar North* exhibition catalogue when talking the artist' researchers:

*Their North is not the romantic North of that belonged to former generations. It is the next North. Their North is connected, pivotal, and conflicted, both rarefied and ubiquitous.*

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> For a definition of arts-based action research, see Jokela, T., Hiltunen, M. & Härkönen, E. (2015a).
- <sup>2</sup> The Creative Connections was a three-year collaborative research project involving six partner universities and many schools that began in 2012 and ended in 2014. It was funded with support from the European Commission under the Comenius scheme.
- <sup>3</sup> The action research involved 27 researchers, 45 teachers and 1,080 pupils ("Creative Connections", 2014).
- <sup>4</sup> With the given guidelines, the national teams each proposed about 20 artworks for the database. The Finnish team coordinated the creation of the database and made the final selection of 74 works from almost 120. The aim was to have a balanced selection of topics and different media and nationalities presented. After the selection, the artists were approached for permission to use their work; some refused, so the final version of the database currently has 64 artworks. (Hiltunen & Manninen, 2015).
- <sup>5</sup> Artwork examples: 1. H. Kurunsaari: Until the Third and the Fourth Generation  
4. O. Pieski: Eatnu, eadni, eana, 5. J. Heikkilä: Mirja by the river, 7. R. Hiltunen: Reshuffle, 10. L. & P. Kantonen: Maringa Saran lempipaikka.
- <sup>6</sup> Urbanization as a global trend is shaping human life also in the Arctic. The Current trend of concentration in urban settings has become common for both indigenous and non-indigenous groups. (Rasmussen, 2011, p. 22–24).
- <sup>7</sup> There are 260 pupils, of whom 48 are immigrants, with 13 different nationalities, 14 languages, and 28 teachers.
- <sup>8</sup> According to the definition, a Sámi is a person who considers him- or herself a Sámi, provided that this person has learnt Sámi as his or her first language or has at least one parent or grandparent whose first language is Sámi. ("Sámi in Finland", 2014).
- <sup>9</sup> Minimum size threshold 5,000 inhabitants for urban area. ("Urban-rural typology", 2016).

<sup>10</sup> A population density threshold of an urban area is 300 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>. (“Urban-rural typology”, 2016).

<sup>11</sup> Quad blog as a term refers to the number four, which is the number of schools/ classes participating in one quad blog.

<sup>12</sup> Joik (or Yoik) is a unique form of cultural expression for the Sámi people and can be understood as a metaphor for Sámi traditional culture itself. Joik is a traditional form of song of the Sámi people of the Nordic countries. In English the word is often used to refer to all types of traditional Sámi singing. As an art form, each joik is meant to reflect or evoke a person, animal, or place. The yoik both reflects and helps to reinforce the Sami cultural values of community and cooperation. (Burke, 2016).

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