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My Place: Building Young People's Future Using Art-based Action in the North

Aki Lintumäki

South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences and University of Lapland, Finland

In this chapter, I discuss an art-based action research process with young people in the Arctic and Eastern Finland. The aim of the study is to develop an art-based model for young people to express their thoughts and feelings about climate change and promote their social inclusion in the future. The study produced a video artwork titled *Minun paikkani – Mu báiki – My Place* (2022) which presents young people's feelings about their favorite places and thoughts on climate change. Twenty-two young people participated in the video production. The video artwork included photos, videos, and texts received from young people.



Figure 1. *Minun paikkani – Mu báiki – My Place* video artwork presents young people's feelings about their favorite places and thoughts on climate change. Photograph: Aki Lintumäki, 2022.

Minun paikkani – Mu báiki – My Place video artwork was published at the Aurora future event in Levi Fell, Finland, on 18 November 2022. Aurora was produced by the Finnish Broadcasting Company YLE and Visit Levi (Figure 1). The event's themes were equality and climate change. The production of the video artwork was made possible by the *Arcta Fast* project led by the University of Lapland. *Arcta Fast* produced several different artworks for the Aurora Future event. Other partners in the project were the University of Applied Sciences of Lapland and the Vocational College of Lapland. According to Jokela and Riikonen (2023), the *Arcta Fast* project used art-based methods to develop education in the creative industries in the North and cooperation between cultural events in the Lapland region.

At the Aurora Future event, the *Arcta Fast* project presented ten short films from *The Stories for Climate Justice* (2021) project. This opportunity arose from the Arctic Sustainable Arts and Design (ASAD) network. The project aimed to promote young indigenous people's filmmaking skills and offer participants the opportunity to tell stories about climate change from their own perspective. These short films were made in collaboration between the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) Department of Theatre and Film, the Native Movement, and the Anchorage Museum. From an artistic point of view, the video artwork *My Place - Mu báiki - My Place* and *the Stories for Climate Justice* project films had many similarities.

The research team of the *Minun paikkani – Mu báiki – My Place* process included the University of Lapland's doctoral researchers and artists Aki Lintumäki and Korinna Korsström-Magga (2023). They facilitated this study. The research process was also a sub-study of Lintumäki's dissertation at the University of Lapland. *Minun paikkani – Mu báiki – My Place* video artwork was a starting point for the larger research project called *On the front line of the Climate Crisis*, which started in September 2022 and will last until the end of 2025. The project is carried out in Lapland, Eastern Finland, and the Tampere region. It is coordinated by the Youth Research and Development Centre Juvenia of South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences and the University of Lapland. The research team's task is to develop young people's climate citizenship and climate activism through art-based methods and co-research. The project is funded by the Kone Foundation.

Climate change is causing uncomfortable feelings and even anxiety among young people worldwide. According to an extensive international survey by Hickman et al. (2021), 59% of respondents aged 16-25 were very concerned about climate change, and more than 45% of young people said negative emotions affect their ability to function in everyday life, and 83% said they believe that humankind has failed to take care of the

planet. From a northern perspective, this is a critical issue as the Arctic is warming nearly four times faster than the global average (AMAP 2021; Rantanen et al., 2022).

In this chapter, I link the negative climate feelings experienced by young people to the promotion of youth inclusion in the North. According to Stephen (2018), climate change threatens Arctic residents' and indigenous peoples' traditional lifestyles, languages, and cultures. From this perspective, young people in the Arctic are especially vulnerable to climate change because they are just starting to build their future. This issue is particularly concerning for young indigenous people whose way of life is under threat from climate change.

According to a study on inclusion by the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, young people feel that their lives are meaningful if they are given the opportunity to grow up in an environment where they are listened to as equal members of the community (Isola et al., 2017). Leiviskä (2021) states that strengthening young people's experience of inclusion reinforces their growth as active citizens. The Sámi Youth Council (2021) emphasize inclusion in their climate declaration as promoting inclusion allows young people to adapt. According to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (1992), promoting adaptation aims to reduce global vulnerability to climate change. Fur-



Figure 2. *Minun paikkani – Mu báiki – My Place* video artwork was inspired by Arctic art. Photograph: Aki Lintumäki, 2022.

ther, according to Pretty (2011), the local and ecological knowledge of residents and young people must be considered, which will also increase their resilience to climate change.

In the first part of this chapter, I introduce the study's theoretical background and main concepts. In the second part, I explain the research method, which is an art-based action research. In the third part, I present the organization of the research. In the fourth part, I describe the practical implementation of the research and analyze the artistic process. In the fifth part, I deepen my analysis of the young people's thoughts and feelings generated by the artistic process. There are similarities between the thoughts and feelings of the young people who participated in *the My Place - Mu báiki - My Place* video art process and the short films of *the Stories for Climate Justice* project. In my analysis, I reflect on these together. In the final part, I present the main conclusions of the study.

Theoretical Background and Main Concepts

This study is based on the concept of young people's inclusion and how to promote it. According to Leemann and Hämäläinen, inclusion is a changing, dynamic process that prevents poverty and exclusion. Inclusion enables participation in society, provides opportunities and empowerment, and promotes the development of individual skills and abilities. Inclusion is a personal and emotional experience, providing a sense of belonging to a community and society. Inclusion is about influencing your own affairs and is achieved through participation. (Leemann & Hämäläinen 2016.)

Art-based research has been broadly used to promote inclusion (Hiltunen 2009; Hiltunen et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2020; Manninen 2021; Nunn 2022). These studies discuss how to improve the inclusion of different individuals, groups of people, and communities in society through art-based methods. Participation in art-based activities has been shown to have holistic positive health impacts (Lehikoinen 2021; Secker et al., 2007). According to Piispa and Pihkala (2020), negative feelings toward climate change can be mitigated through active participation. Nairn (2019) emphasizes that community-based and active participation can promote hope among young people and motivate them to participate in social action in the future. A sense of active involvement may increase young people's hope for the future.

Participatory action research-based participatory photography methods have been widely used around the world to study the everyday lives of communities and individuals, explains Palibroda et al. (2009). The most famous of these is the Photovoice method developed by Wang and Burris (1997), in which participants are asked to produce

research data by taking photographs. According to Nykiforuk et al. (2011), Photovoice helps the researcher understand the community and can be applied to meet the needs of the community as it allows for the expression of the participant's opinions and can socially empower individuals and the community. For example, Oregon's Public Health Institute (2011) has carried out similar practical art projects. The Photovoice method has influenced the development of our artistic work used in this chapter.

The world is always seen and described from a place, as Karjalainen (2006) explains. Therefore, we brought the idea of a place-based approach to artistic work. This chapter defines the concept of place from the perspective of humanistic geography, where the place is not considered an objective fact, but a phenomenon constructed from human experiences and interpretations (Haarni et al., 1997). Massey specifies (2008) that a place is constructed by economic, political, and social relations, all of which include power. According to Knuuttila (2006), a place is a dialogical concept that is lived, told, and experienced.

In our study, we encouraged young people to take photographs and tell stories about everyday places that were important to them. According to Lippard (1996), who has studied the relationship between art and place, one of the functions of art is to activate the consciousness of place. The approach is analogous to placemaking, where citizens are involved in planning the environment through creative methods, explains Roberts (2023). The method strengthens the relationship between people and place. Thus, this method could promote the inclusion of young people in our study.

The artistic philosophy behind this study was inspired by the concept of Arctic art, developed within the Arctic Sustainable Arts and Design (ASAD) network (Jokela 2021; Jokela & Coutts 2018) (Figure 2). Arctic art refers to contemporary art that deals with themes of sustainability and the North. Arctic art reflects and renews cultural heritage. It presents northern knowledge and facilitates the creation of connections between the past, present, and future. (Huhmarniemi & Jokela 2020; Jokela 2021.)

Jokela et al. (2021) have highlighted the connection between Arctic art and the concept of a New Genre Public Art developed by American community artist Suzanne Lacy (see also, Jokela 2021). New Genre Public Art refers to socially engaged artworks produced in public spaces. It combines different art forms and allows the public to participate in the artistic process. Lacy clarifies that this art form resists the idea that public art is simply installations or sculptures. (Lacy 1996.) New Genre Public Art and Arctic art can also take a stand on social issues and aim to stimulate social debate (Jokela 2021 et al.,) and therefore, artistic approaches suited well as the background artistic philosophy of the *My Place - Mu báiki - My Place* art and research process because they promote inclusion.

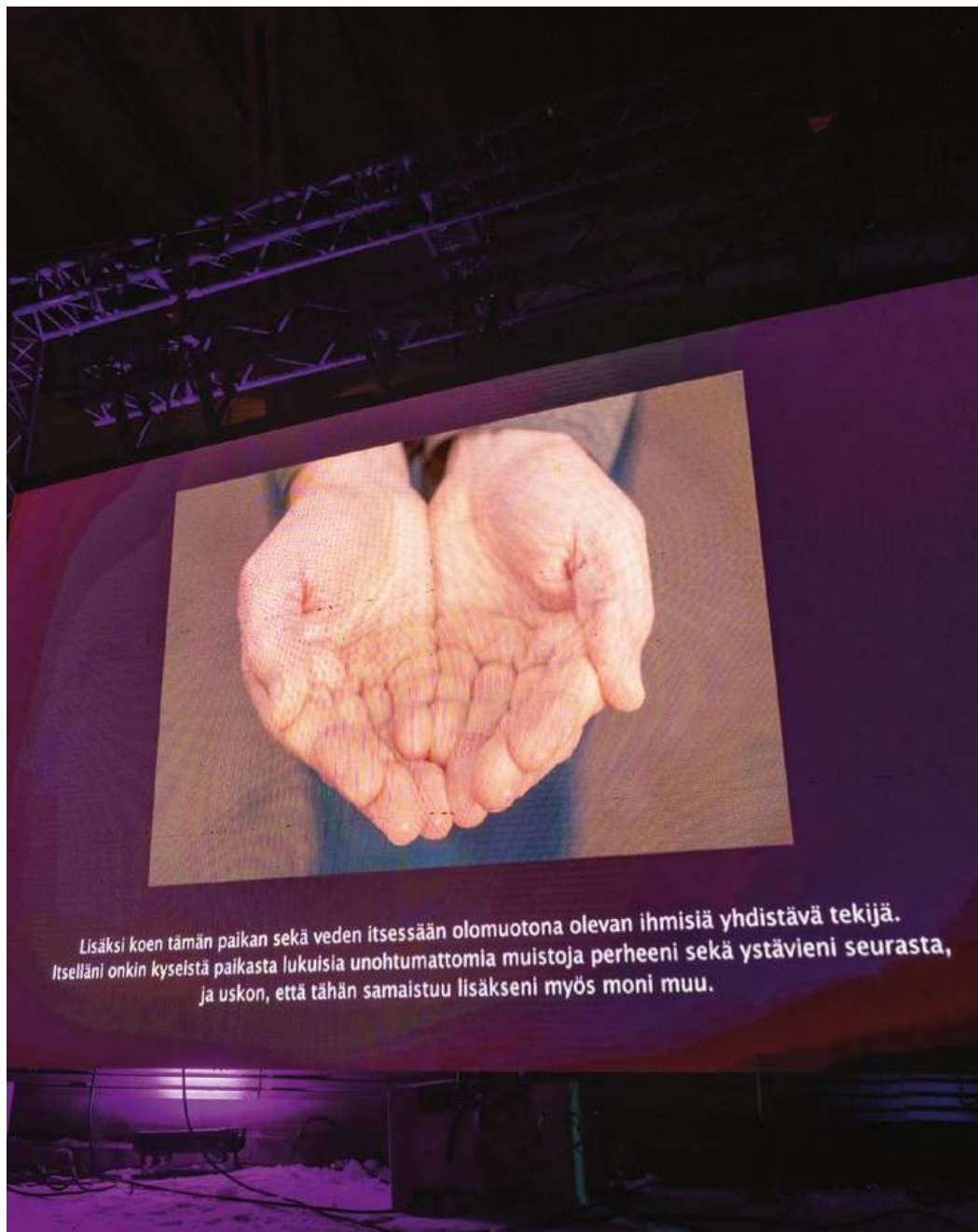


Figure 3. The aim of the artistic process was to promote the voice of young people.
Photograph: Aki Lintumäki, 2022.

Method

This study followed an art-based action research model. The method has its roots in international art-based research and action research, and it has been created in response to the sociocultural and sustainable development needs of the North (Hiltunen 2009; Jokela 2019; Jokela & Huhmarniemi 2018). According to Jokela (2021), art-based action research focuses on change within the community where the research is conducted.

Many researchers emphasize the unique way in which art-based research creates knowledge of bodily sensations, individual and social experiences, and tacit knowledge-based phenomena (such as Barone & Eisner 2011; Finley 2008; Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2018; Kallio 2008; Leavy 2019). Leavy (2020) even suggests that art-based research is its own paradigm alongside qualitative and quantitative research because it takes the role of promoting change and political activism. Finley (2008) agrees and defines arts-based research as a space where the epistemological views of artists and social scientists meet and form a new research practice. These perspectives resonate well with the concept of Arctic art.

Our research followed the process of art-based action research, which Jokela and Huhmarniemi describe as a cyclical development process. The first cycle involves organizing the research and exploring the phenomenon under study. In the second cycle, the artistic work begins. The third cycle involves making art and collecting research data. In the fourth cycle, the process is analyzed, and the results are used to propose a new model. In art-based action research, it is important to evaluate the activity after the cycle and clarify the research's aim. (Jokela 2021; Jokela & Huhmarniemi 2018, 2020.) Järvinen and Järvinen (2004) explain that the most valuable output of action research is not the research report but the useful operating model or the change in the operating community produced during the research. Furthermore, Jokela and Huhmarniemi (2020) emphasize that artistic outputs have an important intrinsic value in the research process.

According to Jokela (2021), art-based action research intertwines research and practice and emphasizes the social dimensions of research work. The method of action in art-based action research is art, and the aim of the research is community and social development (Jokela et al., 2015). In addition, the method includes the idea of co-research that many action researchers emphasize in their work (Jokela et al., 2015; Kindon et al., 2007; Pain et al., 2007; Pyyry 2012; Whyte 1991). In co-research, the research participants are experts in their own lives and environments (Kulmala et al., 2023). Pyyry (2012) clarifies that, especially in research on young people, participatory research methods increase the inclusion of the participants.



Figure 4. The video artwork was set up on a four-meter-wide LED screen, which captured the audience's attention. Photograph: Aki Lintumäki, 2022.

Co-research can foster a deep connection between researchers and young people involved in the research process. This positively promotes the artistic research process. Jokela et al. (2015) describe how artist-researchers act as facilitators, coordinators, inspirers, and encouragers in the process. According to Salo (2007), a researcher's voice is a social construct that echoes the thoughts of research participants and other researchers (Figure 3). For us as artists and researchers, the co-research approach was very important. We believed that it was the best way to support young people to express their thoughts and feelings about climate change. In our artistic research process, multiple voices merge and produce new interpretations of reality.

Organisation of the Study

Our research team conducted the main data collection in autumn 2023 in Finnish and Norwegian Lapland and Eastern Finland. Korinna Korsström-Magga contacted young people in Lapland, and Aki Lintumäki contacted them in Eastern Finland. We coordinated and facilitated the process partly live and remotely. The footage collected from young people consisted of photos, videos, texts, and recordings. After this, we started to



Figure 5. Young people had a deep understanding of their favorite places. Photograph: Aki Lintumäki, 2022.

dramatize the video artwork. Kanerva Kivistö and Sara Teperi, Master's students in art education at the University of Lapland, participated in the dramatization. The students were involved in the artistic process as part of the *Arcta Fast* project. The video artwork was edited and sound designed by Inka Holck, videographer and photographer from the *Arcta Fast* project. The video artwork was set up by Lappia's media students under the supervision of their teacher, media professionals and assisted by Lintumäki (Figure 4).

The video artwork was launched for the second time in Kuopio on 22 February 2023 as part of the Ingmanedu Vocational College for Culture Studies *Lempipaikka (Favourite Place)* photography exhibition. *Minun paikkani – Mu báiki – My Place* (2022) video artwork included photos and texts by first-year photography students. At the end of the exhibition opening, Lintumäki conducted a reflective discussion with the students. In addition, he conducted a reflective discussion on 13 April 2023 with young people from Culture House Kajo and their mentors who participated in the study.

The primary research data for this study is a video artwork. All the footage we received from young people has been included in the artwork. Photographs taken by the researchers and field notes during the artistic research process, as well as reflective discussions with young people, support the interpretation of the primary research data.

This study followed the analysis principles of art-based action research, which according to Jokela & Huhmarniemi, are carried out in two stages. During the process, when it can be improved, and at the end of the process, when it is evaluated in relation to the success of the research task if the results of the analysis are presented artistically, the artwork can be evaluated together with the participants. During this process, attention must be paid to issues such as how successful the artistic output was and how the artistic process fostered a sense of empowerment for the people who took part in the research. (Jokela 2019; Jokela & Huhmarniemi 2018.)

Practical Implementation of the Study and Analysis of the Art Process

Our research team started this study in early September 2022. In the first meeting, we planned the timetable for the process and identified collaborators. During this brainstorming session, we decided that our artistic practice would concentrate on conveying the voice of young people, utilizing a participatory action research approach. By young people's voice, I mean the thoughts and feelings of the participants. Manzo and Brightbill emphasize that in participatory action research, every individual has the right to

have their voice heard, which must be respected by all participants in the research. Furthermore, the approach encourages participants to use their voices to implement social change. (Manzo & Brightbill 2007.) We were aware that the Aurora future event would be attended by many politicians, researchers, activists, journalists, and climate experts, so it was clear that the voice of young people needed to be heard in this context.

In the next meeting, we decided our artistic production would be a video artwork. This art form can be considered polyphonic because it can include different forms of media. Video art allowed us to convey the voices of young people in a diverse way. After this, we formulated the following three questions for young people: “What is your favorite place that you want to save in the future?”, “Why is this place important to you?”, “What should be done to save this place so that you can experience it in the same way in the future?” The questions were deliberately open to make it easier for participants to deal with climate change. Their artistic task was to take photos and videos and tell short stories about their favorite places using these questions.

We wanted young people to link their artistic work to a place that was important to them. This approach emphasizes a phenomenological environmental aesthetic. According to Forss (2007), it focuses on the interaction between the observer and the environment and the meaning of the interaction between human identity and place. We trusted that young people had a deep understanding of their environment that would help them express their thoughts and feelings about a major global phenomenon through a concrete place. Most of the participants agreed with us on this solution. One participant commented: “The place builds a dialogue with the subject, making it easier to deal with. Also, as a viewer, it makes it easier for me to deal with the subject when I can explore it through different places”. According to Adams (2002), art is the making of meanings that can encourage a personal emotional relationship with a place (Figure 5).

The next step was the facilitation, which we carried out partly remotely and partly in live situations. We ended up with this solution due to schedule limitations and long distances between locations. Hybrid work has become familiar for many of us and so we did not hesitate to get started. A diverse and multi-channel approach promotes young people’s inclusion (Lintumäki et al., 2022). Young people gave positive feedback on the facilitation of the process: “It’s great to be able to participate remotely!” commented one of our participants. Another participant commented, “Participation was made easy, and that’s why I took part.”

Korsström-Magga contacted high schools, vocational schools, and individual young people in Lapland. She received audiovisual footage from nine young people. For my

part, I contacted Ingmanedu Vocational College for Culture Studies in Kuopio, where first-year photography students participated in the study. I also inspired young people from Culture House Kajo in Mikkeli to get involved in the process. I collected footage from thirteen young people. Participants were motivated to take part in the study because they were told that their stories, videos, and photos would be presented at the large Aurora future event. One of the young people commented: “It’s great to have the opportunity to show my skills in front of such a big audience.” Jokela and Huhmarniemi (2018; 2020) emphasize that art-based action research has an empowering influence. This comment confirmed their point of view.

After the facilitation, we started to dramatize the video artwork. We wanted to present the young people’s voices as authentically as possible, so we included all the footage in the video. It was important to use audiovisual expression to convey the young people’s voices. Kanerva Kivistö and Sara Teperi wanted to participate in the dramatization because their Master’s thesis dealt with young people’s feelings about climate change. Kilpi and Numminen (2018) define contemporary dramaturgy as a shared space in which the structure of an artwork is created through negotiation. There is an analogy between this definition, our dramaturgical work, and art-based action research. They all combine a polyphonic interpretation of reality. Inka Holck’s editing and sound design emphasized the polyphonic element of the video artwork.

The video artwork was set up on a four-meter-wide LED screen near Levi Summit the day before the Aurora Future event started. I participated in the installation. The artwork was displayed for one day and was positioned so that all guests attending the event could see it. *Minun paikkani – Mu báiki – My Place* video artwork was grounded on a place-based approach, but it cannot be defined by Lippard’s (1997) concept of place-specific art, where the artwork is created in the place from where it derives its inspirations. This approach emphasizes the immediate experience of place through art. A more relevant concept to define this video artwork is Kwon’s (2002) concept of site-specific art, which refers to art that takes over a specific public space for a specific period.

From the notes I made during the event and the conversations I had with the audience, I conclude that a large site-specific artwork captured their attention. The event visitors described the video artwork as “interesting” and “touching.” It was seen as a good method for young people to express their thoughts and feelings about climate change. The video artwork was also seen as an excellent way to promote the inclusion of young people. Young people’s voices were listened to and respected. The reflective interviews I conducted at the end of the artistic process made it clear that young people also felt the same way. One of



Figure 6 and 7. Young people living in the Arctic were concerned about the impact of climate change on their culture and traditions.
Photograph: Aki Lintumäki, 2022.

them commented: “It was a surprise for me that all my pictures and stories were published. I really appreciated it, and that’s why I feel I have been heard and my opinions respected.” This comment confirmed that we had made appropriate solutions in the dramatization.

Analysis of Young People’s Thoughts and Feelings

My analysis demonstrated that the young people felt great love and appreciation for their favorite places. For them, these places symbolize safety, and losing it threatens their sense of security. Sepänmaa (2006) describes such places as places of the heart that can be upsetting to lose. This is how one of the participants expresses her feelings in the video artwork: “When I am alone, I experience this place as a haven from the emotional storm.” All the young people were worried about losing their favorite places. Most of them were very concerned about climate change. One of the participants in the video artwork commented: “Global warming may change the species diversity and our forests in the future.”

Some young people underlined the value of participation. In fact, they had very little interest in the climate challenge. One of them commented in an interview: “If I can influence something through my own actions, then I definitely want to participate.” Another participant commented: “It is important to be able to act, and it is important to be able to speak!” For them, the process was more important than the topic. One young person wanted to be involved in the study just to explain how the place became important to her: “Everyday places are important. They become important to me through interaction with others. I feel that I can impact things when I can talk about these places.” This comment has connections with the concepts of place-based education and placemaking, which many art educators and researchers have highlighted in their work (for example, Adams 2002; Gruenewald 2003; Jokela 1996, 1997, 2016; Jokela & Hiltunen 2014). The concepts emphasize an existential-phenomenological perspective focusing on place-based empowering experiences produced by community-based action (Jokela & Hiltunen 2014). The community-based experiences of places were repeated in the stories in the video artwork. One participant described the issue: “It’s not the place that matters to me, it’s the people there.”

Human attachment to a place is formed through living, through which the place becomes part of the person. Perceptions of present places are constructed partly through memories of past places, as Haarni et al. (1997) explain. Based on the findings of this study, it seems that the young people living in the Arctic experienced their favorite places in a different way than young people living in Eastern Finland. Participants living in Eastern Finland described their favorite places from an individual perspective. Their fa-



Figure 8. Photograph from the short film *My Someday*, written and directed by Shak'shaani Éesh (Konrad Frank). Photograph: Shak'shaani Éesh/Konrad Frank, 2021.

favorite places were urban public spaces or familiar street corners, local beaches or nature spots, and their own home or yard. One participant described his favorite place: “I like empty streets more than congested places or natural landscapes.”

In comparison, young people in the Arctic who participated in this study saw their favorite places through the lenses of their own culture and traditions. These included reindeer herding, hunting, and berry picking. Young people also wanted to preserve the traditions they had learned from previous generations. One young person from the North described the topic: “The summer marking of reindeer is the highlight of the year for every child in a reindeer family. In the future, there should be clean nature where reindeer can live so that future children can experience this feeling.” These young people were more concerned about the impact of climate change on nature than young people

living in Eastern Finland. In addition, young people from the Arctic strongly associate climate change with the loss of their culture and traditions. One participant commented on the video artwork: “It will be very sad to see how wildlife disappears because of climate change.” Another participant expressed his concern in this way: “In the future, I hope that I can feed my own reindeer. The biggest threat to this is the impact of climate change.” According to Soini and Birkeland (2014), preserving cultural heritage is fundamental to a sustainable living environment. The young people that participated in this project reflect this point of view (Figure 6 and 7).

There is an analogy between the thoughts and feelings presented above and those of the young people involved in *the Stories for Climate Justice* project (Figure 8). Young people in Alaska have also reflected on their own favorite places through their own culture and traditions. In the short film called *When we eat, we heal*, the author describes the topic: “To come to these places is sovereignty, to practice my traditions is practicing sovereignty. When I am here, I am one with the universe. When I am here, I know how I am.” In another short film called *St. Paul Island Alaska Climate Change*, the author describes it in this way: “We are the protectors of our culture. We are the protectors of the fur seals. We are the protectors of this land.” A third example of how to deal with this topic can be found in the film *Where the Caribou Roam*: “We learned to follow and live in harmony with the food we ate. I hear their hearts beating like our drums. We are the caribou.” According to Stephen (2018), nature and nature-based culture are the basis of traditional cultural lifestyles in the Arctic. This perspective is visible in the thoughts of young people in the Arctic region. They have a broad understanding of the places that are important to them. Barr (2009) clarifies that climate change threatens both physical and cultural heritage sites and the cultural roots of Arctic communities.

From the *Minun paikkani – Mu báiki – My Place* video artwork and *the Stories for Climate Justice* project films, it is evident that young people in the Arctic are aware of this issue. Therefore, I interpret that they felt a strong need to express themselves. I conclude from my analysis that artistic processes such as *My Place – Mu báiki – My Place* are needed to give young people a greater voice in social and global issues, especially in the Arctic region.

Conclusion

This study demonstrated that an art-based action research process such as *My Place – Mu báiki – My Place* can promote the expression of young people’s thoughts and feelings on climate change issues. During the study, we developed an art-based model that en-

courages young people to express themselves through audiovisual expression. The central element of the model is a site-specific video artwork.

We linked artistic work to young people's favorite places. This place-based approach helped the participants to address a broader phenomenon, which in this study was climate change. We facilitated the artistic work partly remotely and partly live, which made it easier for young people to participate in the process. Participants were motivated to take part in the study because they were told that their stories, videos, and photos would be presented at the large Aurora future event. We included all the footage we received from young people in a video artwork, which they saw as a method of visibly ensuring that their opinions were listened to and respected. The audience at the Aurora Future event found that the video artwork was a good method of expressing young people's thoughts and feelings about climate change. It was also seen as a positive way to promote the inclusion of young people. The goal of the project was to empower young people. This study demonstrates that we achieved our goal, which is reflected in the feedback from young people.

The young people felt great love and appreciation for their favorite places. For them, these places symbolize safety, and losing it threatens their sense of security. Most of the young people were very concerned about climate change. While some of the young people underlined the value of participation. They were more interested in talking about their favorite places and the community experiences relating to these places. Based on this study, young people living in the Arctic have a broad understanding of the places important to them. These young people experienced their favorite places through the lens of their own culture and traditions. Young people also wanted to preserve the traditions they had learned from previous generations. In comparison, young people living in Eastern Finland described their favorite places from an individual perspective. Young people from the Arctic strongly associate climate change with the loss of their culture and traditions. This thinking united the young people involved in the *My Place - Mu báiki* - *My Place* video artwork and the *Stories for Climate Justice* project. These young people had a strong need to express themselves.

In conclusion, when we encourage young people to express their opinions on climate change through empowering art-based action, we may support their development into active citizens. This action could promote young people's social inclusion and sustainable development in the Arctic area. Furthermore, it could be a way for young people to build a brighter possible future for themselves in the North. Additional research with larger group of participants could deepen our understanding of the elements related to the promotion of young people's inclusion in the North.

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