

Exploration into Possible Futures 2020, Pt.1 – Age of Agency

*Online event summary
of June 5, 2020*

On 5 June, the first out of three online seminars during the "Exploration into Possible Futures 2020" project, focusing on ecology, future, agency, and local perspectives in the complex context of sustainability, took place on the World Environment Day.

Gathering 30 participants, it was moderated by Antti Tenetz, regional artist and coordinator of the project at Arts Promotion Centre Finland. The event gathered multi-cultural professionals from creative industries, art and cultural studies now residing across the Northern Dimension – Finland, Latvia, Norway, Lapland, Russia, Sweden, even UK.

Antti explained the status quo of the project, especially when the originally planned expedition was cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic. He also set the tone of the seminar by indulging into the collective memory about the first cultural and art representations of northern Europe in cave carvings, e.g. in Alta, Norway.

During his presentation, Antti also emphasized that the CO₂ levels have been above all historical recordings since the 1950s, which is something we need to keep in mind especially when living in the north where changes happen much faster than in the southern hemisphere. However Antti pointed out that, during the pandemic lockdowns, there were factual evidence we can reduce the CO₂ much faster than thought.

He also introduced the listeners with all 4 modules carried out during the project revolving around multiple types of sustainability – social, environmental, economic, and cultural, informing that the next seminar will take place on 16 June.

The next speaker, Stephan Dudeck, DrPhil and anthropologist, working at the European University at Saint Petersburg (Russia), the Arctic Centre of the University of Lapland (Finland), and the Centre of Arctic and Siberian Exploration at the Sociological Institute of the Federal Center of Theoretical and Applied Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences. He has established close collaborations with Siberian indigenous peoples and conducted long-term anthropological fieldwork with Siberian reindeer herding communities.

Stephan was looking back of his research and uncovered his observations when working in Siberia. First, Stephan introduced listeners with his views on the development of anthropology, emphasizing the interest in smaller communities, everything focusing away from capitalistic or western cultures, and growing large because of the colonialism. It is important that anthropologists not only learn the culture, but also absorb it via participation. Stephan also expressed his thoughts on the difficulty to translate non-western cultures, languages, and ways of thinking to those living in western metropolises, without losing anything.

Stephan then continued about his own research, focusing on Russia, particularly, Siberia. Starting already in 1993, he began with western Siberian indigenous people Khanty, then moved up north and even to east. Sadly, this culture of interest was also affected by one of the largest oil deposits in Russia being pumped out and urban environment entering their territory and generating the number of

people tenfold. Now more than a half of Khatys is living in towns, while most of their hunting range and restricting waters for fishing have been reduced.

Stephan then indulged into specifics of the Khaty customs, related to gender, generations, and their taboos. He paid attention to their distancing habits within their community and, the opposite, ways of building relationship between each other, their most precious animals, reindeer and dogs, and their gods. Stephan also touched topics related to hunting, focusing on their idol – the bear, as well as their opinions on animals and their spirituality in general.

By the end, he pointed out 6 principles that Khaty did to inhabit their environment and domesticate the surrounding fauna, but also to deal with present challenges related to urban areas and heavy industrialization:

- acknowledgement of power differences – possibilities to limit each other's agency or to find synergies,
- negotiation – the possibility to find ways of communication and interaction, experiencing each other and recognize the limits of it,
- reciprocity – gift exchange and exchange of social relations based on mutuality,
- recognition of difference – respect for the other, for the other perspective and standpoint,
- mutual adaptation – domestication and self-domestication in a common environment which becomes a common home,
- distancing – finding the right balance between coming close and letting loose, interacting and being silence, seeing and invisibility.

The seminar was continued with an online performance by Meri Nikula, vocal artist, composer and a transformational healer from Finland. She staged a vocal performance of her long-time project related to birches. Afterwards, Meri revealed the work was broadcasted directly from the Finnish wilderness and performed at her granddad's shed.

She commented on her own nomadic habits, starting from Iceland, then following with the Netherlands, Norway, Japan, and contemplated on what it changes in our lives. She emphasized the need to connect to our native habitat, especially, connection with nature, more specifically, the earth as a domain always present in our lives – either in cities or forests.

Meri's work is very visceral, often a sensual experience. Her own voice and body are the core elements of her creations. She has developed a concept called 'Vocal Mosaic' making collages of her voice in layers, using various vocal techniques. Meri calls her genre Global World Music as she is inspired by how voice is used in every culture on the planet and channels voices through various cultures across timelines. Her music is both very new and curiously ancient at the same time.

Last presenter was the visual artist Matti Aikio, who reflects future from standpoint of his own art practice by seeing Sami indigenous people's nature relation and deep-rooted view to ecology and time challenging of nation state system and western economical perspectives.

Matti introduced listeners with his way into the visual culture, including multi-channel installations. The key concept of his work is revolving around the predator politics; something that has occurred

with the Sámi people and their territories when divided among countries, constitutionalized, and urbanized. Matti compared this to a story his elderly relative told about wolves that attack reindeer, but instead of killing all of them, they leave some wounded to die days apart. Sometimes it feels that Sami are always considered an obstacle – to industrialization, tourism, infrastructure, Matti claims.

He also reflected on relationship and policies with nature and home that appears in some of his other work, as well as the colonial history. He believes the latter is not enough discussed in the Nordic lands so are not the questions with nature representation and preservation.

By the end, Matti also pointed out a paradox that indigenous cultures are considered to always been strictly environmental, but then were also blamed for living too modern life with technologies and industrial tools. It is a question where they can find the middle point when moving into homes is not considered treason, mostly by those who don't belong to indigenous cultures at all.

The seminar exceeded its designed time because the discussion, meant only to last for a dozen minutes, became more fruitful.

PROGRAMME of the online seminar:

Moderator: Antti Tenetz, Regional Artist, Arts Promotion Centre Finland

- NEW PRACTICES OF SUSTAINABILITY AND RESILIENCE, Cross-sectorial creativity in the era of climate change – Exploration into Possible Futures, Antti Tenetz, Regional Artist
- Caring Art Practices, Song of the Earth, Meri Nikula, Vocal Artist
- Negotiating with uncertainty – local ways of building social relations with the environment in the North, Stephan Dudeck, DPhil
- Future rooting from critical contemporary, traditional art and indigenous knowledge, Matti Aikio, Visual artist
- Q&A

Speakers:

- Stephan Dudeck, DPhil.

An anthropologist working at the European University at Saint Petersburg (Russia), the Arctic Centre of the University of Lapland (Finland) and the Centre of Arctic and Siberian Exploration at the Sociological Institute of the Federal Center of Theoretical and Applied Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences. He has established close collaborations with Siberian indigenous peoples and conducted long-term anthropological fieldwork with Siberian reindeer herding communities.

- Matti Aikio.

Visual artist who reflects future from stand point of his own art practise by seeing sami indigenous peoples nature relation and deep rooted view to ecology and time challenging of nation state system and western economical perspectives.

- Meri Nikula, Vocal Artist, composer and a transformational healer from Finland.

Meri's work is very visceral, often a sensual experience. Her own voice and body are the core elements of her creations. She has developed a concept called 'Vocal Mosaic' making collages of her voice in layers, using various vocal techniques. She calls her genre Global World Music as she is inspired by how voice is used in every culture on the planet and channels voices through various cultures across timelines. Her music is both very new and curiously ancient at the same time.

PROJECT

Exploration into Possible Futures is a sub-project of Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture, [Creating New Practices of Sustainability – Cross-sectorial creativity in the era of Climate](#)

[Change](#) - project which focuses on examining four pillars of sustainability in relation to local resilience at north.

Project is based on the idea that art and culture can serve as activators for developing social discourse in an eco-social and cultural direction as a response to climate change. In this transition towards more resilient and sustainable thinking, expertise in art and culture can offer numerous development views and actions that significantly support multilateral regional cooperation.

The end result of Exploration into Possible Futures will be joint artistic-scientific output carried out by Arts Promotion Centre Finland in collaboration with independent curating group FridayMilk (Murmansk), Magneetti (Northern Media Culture Organization Rovaniemi), and other partners.

The project is funded by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland and the Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture. Project is implemented by Arts Promotion Centre Finland in close collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Culture of Finland.