

Exploration into Possible Futures 2020, Pt.3 – Age of Change

*Online event summary
of August 12, 2020*

Video recording of the event: <https://youtu.be/Q8OsGL8p28M?t=59>

On 12 August, the third out of three online seminars took place during the "Exploration into Possible Futures 2020" project, focusing on ecology, future, agency, and local perspectives in the complex context of sustainability!

Named "Age of Change", it examined how artistic thinking and practice open new horizons from local to global change that emerges in the circumpolar north. Speakers of the seminar would discuss how sustainable development and resilience appear in artistic, scientific, and social practices.

PROGRAMME

Moderator: Antti Tenetz, Regional Artists, Arts Promotion Centre Finland;

- Introduction to Exploration into Possible Futures, Antti Tenetz, regional artist, Arts Promotion Centre Finland;
- Change for alternative way of seeing – Artistic thinking in process of building possible futures, Jaana Erkkilä-Hill, Doctor of Arts, Vice Rector at the University of the Arts Helsinki (Uniarts Helsinki);
- Arctic view on environmentally engaged art, Maria Huhmarniemi, Doctor in Art, University of Lapland;
- The interrelations of environment, art and wellbeing in a sustainable future, Jetta Huttunen, executive manager in KulttuuriKauppila Art Centre in Ii, Northern Finland.

Now, gathering more than 30 participants from across the Northern Dimension, the seminar was moderated by Antti Tenetz, regional artist and coordinator of the project at Arts Promotion Centre Finland. He again explained the status quo of the project, especially when the originally planned expedition was canceled due to the coronavirus pandemic.

During his introduction, 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.

First to speak was **Jaana Erkkilä-Hill**, Doctor of Arts, Vice Rector at the University of the Arts Helsinki (Uniarts Helsinki). Her topic was alternative ways of seeing the future that also includes artistic thinking. She contemplated on art's purpose and meaning, the way we think about it and through it by using imagination and practice.

Jaana used an example of the Biblical story of three wise men who followed a star to explain the way intuition works. She used it as a metaphor of artist's life, "walking on water, believing in miracles", she said. Part of artistic approach of thinking is also related to stubbornness and defining your own way of life, part of artist's life is thinking sustainably, with continuity, being a critical thinker in the contemporary world.

Artistic thinking is about seeing the invisible and listening to the inaudible, Jaana comments. It cannot be studied in laboratories, and must be experienced along the practice. Jaana suggested that walking can be one way to document and observe the phenomenon. It can serve as an artistic act itself when mixed with performative elements, practice of land art, etc. thus leading to thinking of what art is, and also what future is. Of course, an important element is the purpose, aims, and goals of the walk as an artistic practice.

Walking is usually full with unpredictability, so is artistic thinking and practice, Jaana says. Sometimes it's obstacles, sometimes it's opportunities, sometimes it's change – for the better or worse. Sometimes it's also travelling across identities, not only borders. You can travel as an artist and go nowhere.

However, as Jaana concludes, tourism and travel must find new ways when talking about exploiting possibly every corner of the world. Maybe we can help by being silent and slow, and she mentions Finland as a nation of example.

Next was **Maria Huhmarniemi**, Doctor in Art, University of Lapland, and she spoke about "Age of Change in Ecosystems", and her narrative was contemplating on difficulties and impact on northern ecocultures and identities.

She began with explaining the term "ecoculture" when describing it as the driving force of people in the north when culture, life, everyday activities are very much related and event dependent to nature (her example was Lapland).

Maria continued when revealing that her focus lately has been a sustainable economy apart from other types. It seems difficult to protect nature without studying economy and its processes, investment, alternatives. She also explained why her focus is not on indigenous cultures alone since Maria believes studying ecocultures is also about sharing them since it all alive and in constant change.

During the presentation, Maria introduced listeners in-depth with her previous work and how they are related to change and ecocultures. She noted that creating a discussion about works is crucial, but it not always provides at first or in a way we imagine. In her work, Maria has used elements that can speak to everyone in the north or south, e.g. her berry picking installation or visiting meadows.

Another element that describes sharing in ecocultures and debating ecological sustainability is tourism. Maria also explained it in another work of hers. She believe that the tourism industry is so huge it can create an impact large enough to stop unwelcome economical activity (e.g. mining).

The presentation programme was concluded by **Jetta Huttunen**, executive manager in KulttuuriKauppila Art Centre in Ii, Northern Finland. Its title was “interrelations of environment, art, and wellbeing in a sustainable future”.

She began with introducing KulttuuriKauppila and their local and international projects in the north of Finland. Jetta also introduced listeners with the art biennial being run by the centre and focusing on environmental art. Most of the works are site specific and can be long term. Jetta concluded on contemplating about anthropocene, and how our presence affects nature.

She also indulged into explaining what the concept of environmental art means. In short, it is an art form where its creators are working with nature, when art also emphasizes participation with nature. Whereas participation also makes us more human, it increases our wellbeing and is crucial to understand and take action in crisis. The work of KulttuuriKauppila also focuses on rural cultural production, artists’ employment, exchange of the professionals and practitioners.

The first seminar, Age of Agency, took place on 5 June and reflected on ecological aspects of transient agency in the era of climate change. The second event, "Age of Ecologies", took place on 16 June and examined how ecological, cultural, and resilient change emerges in the circumpolar north.

All the seminars were free of charge, but registration was needed to get a link to the event platform Google Meets. Viewers could join the event from your computer or phone. Video recording was provided to all registered participants.

SPEAKERS

Dr. Jaana Erkkilä-Hill is an artist-researcher who works as the Vice Rector of research and doctoral studies at UNIARTS Helsinki. She also holds professorship in Fine Art at the University of Lapland. Erkkilä-Hill is interested in artistic thinking as a way of alternative, other way of seeing and experiencing the world. As well as conventional research methods she relies on intuition and imagination as source for thinking out of the box and finding new solutions for local and global challenges of contemporary societies.

Maria Huhmarniemi is an artists-teacher-researcher living in Rovaniemi. Her presentation focuses on environmentally engaged art in the North. Maria will discuss the topic in the framework of cultural sustainability, which is seen as a fourth variation of sustainable development or as an aspect integrated into ecological, social and economic approaches. She also ponders the potential of arts and culture to enhance sustainability amid changes in the Arctic and around the globe. ‘Handmade’, agency, and revitalisation are topical themes in the research of art and culture in the Arctic in line with contemporary turn to new materialism and posthumanism.

Jetta Huttunen works as the executive manager in KulttuuriKauppila Art Centre in Ii, Northern Finland. The possible future reveals itself through the activities of Ii especially in the interrelations between environment, art and wellbeing. We wish to create new innovations around artistic and cultural production which gain from the uniqueness of Finnish nature, the hidden potential of rural areas and the global community of artists and art experts.

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.

More information on the project:

<https://www.ndpculture.org/projects-co-financed-by-the-eu/creating-new-practices-of-sustainability-cross-sectorialcreativity-in-the-era-of-climate-change>

<https://www.ndpculture.org/news/environmental-sustainability-exploration-into-possible-futures>

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