

Art Interventions as Community Art

The dilemma of continuity in the case of the Enontekiö Art Path

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Biography

Elina Härkönen is a Lecturer in Art Education working at the University of Lapland. She has also coordinated the international Master's programme of Arctic Art and Design and supervised several students' community art projects in small villages in the Finnish Lapland. Her research interest is in cultural sustainability in art educational practices.

Abstract

In this article the principles of cultural sustainability and the role of continuity are discussed in art interventions as a form of community art. The case of art-based action research is the Enontekiö Art Path project that took place in northern Finland 2016-2017. The project was a collaboration initiative between the municipality of Enontekiö and the Department of Art Education, University of Lapland and it aimed to increase access of art for people living outside the municipality centre. During the project, university students organised six art interventions in different villages of Enontekiö. The continuity happened between the workshop through constant evaluation of the

actions and gradually increased also the engagement of the people involved in the project.

Keywords

Cultural sustainability, Art-Based Action Research, Continuity, Community-based art education, art intervention.

Introduction

During the past two years, a group of university students and I, with the people from the municipality of Enontekiö, have travelled a path that has taken the form of one art workshop after another. The path has been filled with encounters, unexpected turn and, most importantly, the joy of making art together and learning from each other. Our two-year path, which began in 2016, refers to the collaboration between the Enontekiö Art Path—the municipality of Enontekiö, Finland—and the Department of Art Education, University of Lapland (UoL), Finland. This pilot phase has consisted of six different community art workshops in different villages of Enontekiö and has focused on testing ways of increasing access to art for the people living outside the center of the municipality. A major contribution to the development of the Art Path has come through the participation of international master's students of the Arctic Art and Design (AAD), who carried out their project studies during the pilot phase.

I have connected this collaboration to my broader research interest, which has recently been on the principles of cultural sustainability (Dessein, Soini, Fairclough, & Horlings, 2015) and Art-Based Action Research (ABAR) (Jokela, 2017; Jokela, Hiltunen, & Härkönen, 2015)—especially the art education practices in Finnish Lapland (Härkönen, Huhmarniemi, & Jokela, 2018; Härkönen, 2018; Härkönen & Vuontisjärvi, 2017). Cultural sustainability and ABAR bring important tools to building culturally sensitive community art approaches aiming at com-

munity empowerment and social change. Cultural sustainability stresses that development should always start with a down-to-top approach that addresses ownership and is built on respect and dialogue (Dessein et al., 2015). It should also address the historical and temporal continuity of the day-to-day culture (Auclair & Fairlough, 2015) to increase the participating communities' engagement and feelings of ownership.

ABAR, on the other hand, functions as a methodological approach that incorporates research, thereby supporting the development of culturally sustainable art activities. It stresses interaction and active participation of communities in all stages of the work and is place-specific, process-oriented and communicative in nature (Jokela, 2017). The action that I have used as data in this research are the art workshops carried out during the Art Path collaboration. I have focused on analyzing all stages of these workshops, from the planning phase to the final artworks. We have together with the students documented the processes, observations and interviews of the participants during the workshops and conducted evaluative discussions.

During the Art Path collaboration, the dilemma of continuity started to take a central role in our own evaluations of their project. Although the path continued for a couple of years, the continuation between the individual art workshops did not seem obvious. The concern was due to their short duration, the workshops would remain only as interventions and lacked real community engagement and the down-to-top approach. In this article, I will examine the roles of continuity in the Art Path collaboration and evaluate them through the principles of cultural sustainability and active, art-based research. My focus is especially on the students and their multiple roles—artists/art educators, researchers, visitors, participators and observers—and their effects throughout the process.

Enontekiö Art Path – Primarily for the Locals

The Enontekiö Art Path started in 2016 as a pilot project. The project itself did not have outside funding, although the AAD master's program was funded by the European Social Fund and the Centre of Economic Development, Transportation and Environment. The collaboration was planned to benefit both parties: The university would introduce different forms of environmental and community art for residents of the municipality, and the municipality would offer project opportunities for the students to gain experience in working with real stakeholders.

One villager had begun an initiative to increase access to art within the municipality. The pilot was based on this initiative, but the way the art workshops were to be organized were negotiated on several different occasions. We met with the key partners a few times to plan and discuss, and in these meetings the versatility of the large municipality became apparent. There were several small mixed Finnish and Sámi village communities—with the number of residents varying approximately from eight to 800 people—and unique landscapes that differed greatly depending on the location. The slogan of the municipality is “We do it together” and the year's calendar is packed with different events that represent the cultural diversity of communities in different ways. Understandably, it was difficult at first to find new ways to increase access to art in such an active municipality.

To initiate the process, it was agreed that the university students would organize an open art workshop and a public meeting in the center of the municipality. It was only after this first experimental “stomping snow” art workshop that the form of the collaboration started to take shape.

After the workshop, the public meeting for the local citizens was arranged to foster collaboration. The students showed a video of the results from the stomping snow art to open the discussion. The video of the footprints stirred excitement in the audience and collaboration



Figure 1: The artwork “Fox was here” is based on an old Finnish folk tale about a fox creating the Northern Lights with a swift flick of its tail. The circles on the ground represented the fox’s footprints before jumping up to the sky. With the help of our contact people, we organized the first workshop in Hetta, the central village of Enontekiö. We had six local participants around Enontekiö and the student group was comprised of students from Finland, China, France and Canada. Symbolically, the first artwork started to also look like the points on a map, like the entire Art Path collaboration. Photos: Huang Liu

ideas started to flow. It was one of the participants who summarized the common wish that later formed the guiding idea of the whole Art Path. She pointed out that the public events were usually always arranged in the center of the municipality and the more remote villages were rarely the places of action. She stressed that the villages had each their own unique cultural and natural materials that could this time determine where and how the workshops would take place. It was her point of view that concretized the working modes and the Art Path took its form moving from one village to another, sparking collaborative discussions that lead to personalized themes that were unique to each community.

The Art Path Travelled

The Art Path evolved with every subsequent workshop, with each session lasting approximately two days. The locals gradually followed the journey through Facebook postings and commented their wishes for where and how the next workshop should take place. Below is a map of the path and a timeline of the workshops with their final artworks.

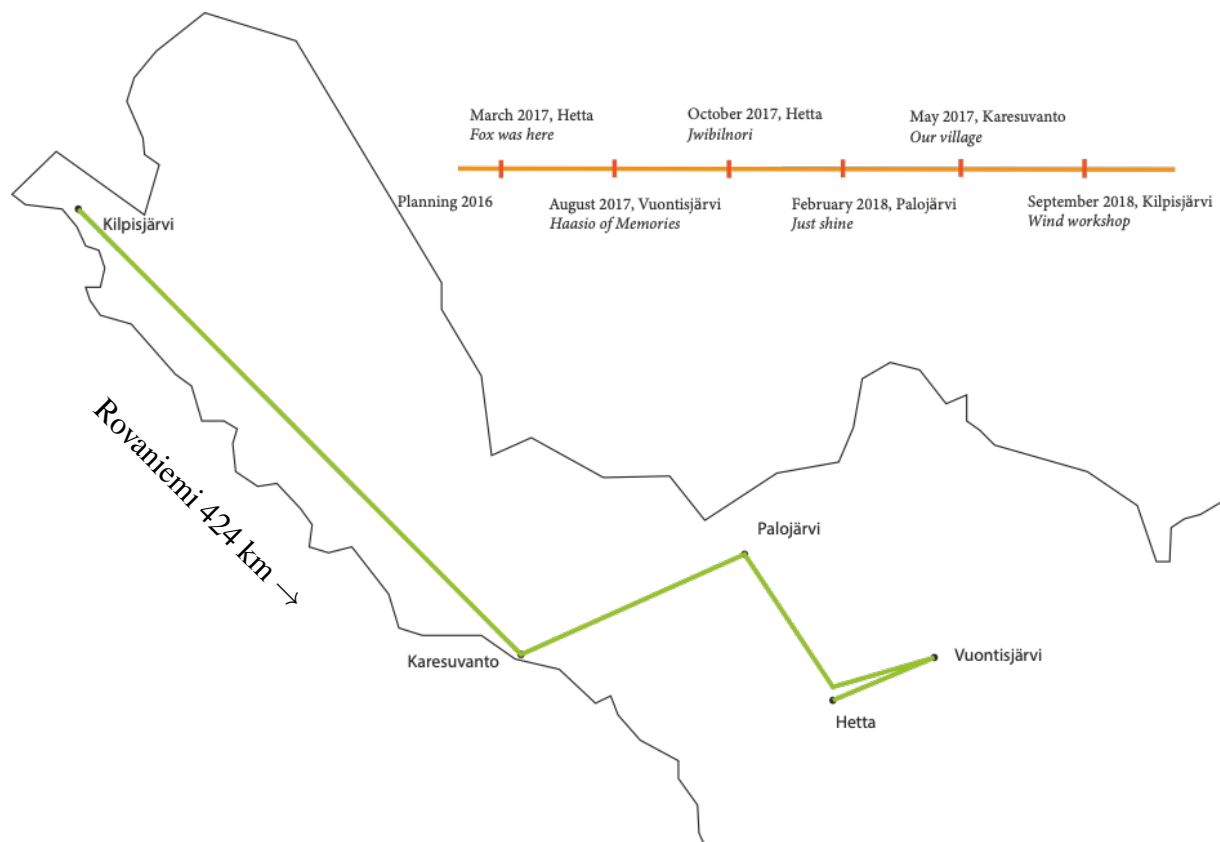


Figure 2: Timeline and the map of the art path and the created artworks

The initial idea was to build the workshops on local stories and traditions. The second workshop in Vuontisjärvi village was based on a long tradition of hay making. The local participants taught us traditional ways of tying and drying hay. The basic form of the artwork was inspired by an old, locally unique, hay drying structure called a *haasio*. The name of the artwork, *Haasio of Memories*, represented the discussions and recollections of the village during the workshop.

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Figure 3: Locals teach us how to tie hay correctly into the Haasio. In the final artwork, Haasio of Memories, every participant left their mark on it. Image Huang Liu

After Vuontisjärvi, the first student group finished their project and a new group of students started theirs. To pass the torch and become familiar with the municipality, we attended the local full moon celebration arranged in Hetta. The first group of students shared the outcomes of the two workshops with their audience through a series of videos, and the new group organized a small *Jwibunori*—a Korean play workshop with fire lanterns based on one student’s own cultural background. This play is traditionally performed during the full moon for good luck and is designed to eradicate the pests from the surrounding fields—a performance which connected



Figure 4: Jwibunori in Hetta. The fire lanterns were built in old tin cans with small fires. When rolling them, fire circles started to form. Image 1 Juho Hiilivirta, Image 2 Huang Liu.

nicely with the local event's theme.

The fourth workshop was organized in the small village of Palojärvi. February of 2018 was very cold and the temperature during the workshop days averaged -33 C° . The timing overall was unfortunate as the Olympic Games, combined with such cold weather, kept people inside and we had very few participants. The sun had recently returned to the northern sky after the polar nights and, because of the time of year, the chosen material was snow and the theme was about sun symbols of different cultures.



Figure 5: Sun symbols from India, Russian Yakutia, Sámi and South Korea. Images: Amisha Mishra and Eutheum Lee

In the final two workshops, the students wanted to ensure greater participation, so they contacted local schools to collaborate in the art making process. In these workshops, the participants' input into the final artwork was greater and began early in the planning process. In Kareusuvanto, the participants wished for a permanent artwork to brighten the dull village scenery. It was agreed that the students would paint their favorite village scenes on wooden disks that would then form a collage. The days were filled with enthusiasm and the artwork situated next to the main road attracted admiration from the those that passed by.

In Kilpisjärvi, our local contact suggested more temporary artworks that would be related to wind. Local school students participated in the workshop, which was based on collecting



Figure 6: 'Meän kylä / Min gilli / Our village' was a collage of children's individual paintings of their villages. Images Amisha Mishra

natural materials and playing with the wind. Tourists and other passers-by also participated. The workshop stirred up conversations about the environmental responsibility when piles of garbage were found in nature.



Figure 7: In Kilpisjärvi the theme was wind and temporary artworks were made from natural materials. Images: Amisha Mishra

Art Interventions and Continuity – Seeking Culturally Sustainable Approaches

To connect the Art Path to a broader theoretical context of continuity, we need to look at the basic principles of cultural sustainability and ABAR. According to Auclair and Fairclough (2015), cultural sustainability acknowledges that culture is fluid and continually reshaped in social con-

structs. Also, globalization has increased the blending of different cultures and has caused fears of cultural standardization (Auclair & Fairclough, 2015). When cultures are changing drastically, protecting cultural features and traditions becomes a necessity. The combined concepts of “sustainable” and “development” indicate that something is both maintained, preserved and renewed. Closer examination leads to questions of ownership: Who decides what is preserved and what is renewed? These questions can be called the “wicked problems” of cultural sustainable development. Dessein et al. (2015) emphasized the need to turn the agency from a top-down to a culture-inclusive approach that involves extensive communication and real participation in decision-making processes. Culturally sensitive approaches acknowledge that there are multiple histories, memory-based perspectives and meanings in a place that connects people to their surroundings (Dessein et al., 2015).

ABAR and community-based art education offer tools for negotiating cultural preservation and renewal. ABAR, as a methodological approach, utilizes research in developing this action. Jokela (2017) points out that the objective is to identify problems and find solutions together with the participating community. Temporal continuation appears in the cyclical progress of research alternating between planning, practical action, reflection and evaluation. Historical continuation is drawn by understanding the community’s history, its environment and approached by the performative nature of art (Jokela, 2017). Philosophical foundations can be connected to John Dewey’s (1997) theories of experience, in which the continuum of actions plays the most essential role in forming habits and cultures. Therefore, the cumulative continuation of actions is also a prerequisite for the continuity of culture (Dewey, 1997). The Art Path workshops followed the principles of ABAR and community-based art education by creating the final artworks through an interactive collaboration between the art students/art educators and the participating community. The workshops were constructed on dialogue and artistic working modes. The historical continuation was guaranteed by shaping the final artworks on the stories

and traditions of the community and the materials found in their village environment.

Comparing the common way of organizing a community art workshops with longer term collaboration, the Art Path workshops had features of art interventions: Stopping briefly in one place, moving to another and working each time with different people and with art forms that were new to most of the participants. On the other hand, the changing of habits usually requires some level of disturbance to make people aware of their actions (Alhonen, 2013). Because of this concept, well-focused art interventions can evoke new perspectives to commonplace actions. Nevertheless, such awakening requires reflection, where causal relations are processed in order to generate constructive change and the reorganization of habits. Change requires historical continuity, as change without any connection to habits is not possible (Kivinen & Ristelä, 2001). Short term intercultural art interventions have the potential to function as these positive disturbances. The actors coming from outside have a better chance to approach the studied social phenomenon with objectivity (Hofvander Trullson & Burnard, 2016). The Art Path international student groups admired and wondered over the various local habits and wanted to learn the histories behind them. Sharing everyday life experiences with someone from another culture may open one's eyes to look at a seemingly commonplace situation in a completely different way.

It is, however, crucial that art activities such as these, where encounters are short and often spontaneous, are examined reflectively. In particular, the insider/outsider positions, when dealing with culturally diverse communities, need to be scrutinized (Hofvander Trullson & Burnard, 2016). Culturally sustainable art education, therefore, should aim for true community engagement that is built on dialogue. Kester (2004) stresses the importance of listening instead of teaching in order to create communication spaces where participants can actively take part and critically evaluate the working process. He points out, though, that a critical approach requires a long discussion process. When working with culturally diverse groups, listening is the key

to overcoming cultural and language barriers in the process of building collaboration (Kester, 2004).

The processes should also be researched to ensure historical continuity and increased awareness that leads to transformation (Heikkinen, Huttunen, Syrjälä & Pesonen, 2012). Community engagement is perceived to have a strong foundation in social justice and the process of empowerment (Snepvangers & Mathewson Mitchell, 2018). To increase cultural sensitivity when acting as outsiders in a community, the AAD project studies (Härkönen & Vuontisjärvi, 2017) are built on different stages of research: Before starting, the students are required to conduct thorough location-based research to understand the history, traditions and social contexts of the destination.

Although the educational interest is in the processes within community art, the value of the final artwork should not be underestimated. It becomes a symbol of joint effort, communality and artistic learning (Hiltunen, 2009). The process can be conceptually and artistically innovative if it brings unexpected groups of people together or develops creative spaces and working methods (Kantonen, 2010). Snepvangers and Mathewson Mitchell (2018) claim that well-designed “encounters” at the beginning of new experiences have particular educational and transformative values. This contains possibilities of working against neoliberal agendas and institutional practices in the visual and performative domains (Snepvangers & Mathewson Mitchell, 2018). In such cases, art interventions as community art projects can create opportunities for unforeseen outcomes that may initiate change.

Art-Based Action Research and the Cycles of Continuity

I have utilized ABAR, both theoretically and methodologically, to analyze the actions during the Art Path collaboration. I have concentrated on the collaboration, negotiations and dialogue between the students, myself and the communities that have created final artworks in each of

the participating villages' sceneries. Hence, the making of art forms a core action. In ABAR, the artworks are seen to generate ideas, feelings and ultimately demonstrates the effective and empowering art-educational process (Jokela, 2017). As a researcher, I have had several different roles in the Art Path: One of the coordinators of the collaboration; a supervisor for my students; an equal participator in the workshops; and an observer.

I have recorded the cycles of action that are central to ABAR. Each cycle usually includes phases of planning, implementation, observation and reflection (Heikkinen et al., 2012). I have utilized this cyclical structure to illustrate the different forms of continuation and the learning processes that take place during the art workshops. To support the study, I have reflected on the cycles through the validation points of action: Historical continuity, reflexivity, dialogue, workability and evocativeness (Heikkinen et al., 2012). The following three figures represent the different cycles of continuation that appeared in the Art Path.

Cycle A represents the actions and development points that happened between each work-



Figure 8: Continuity Cycle A. Putting learning into action. Represents the reflexive process that took place after each workshop. The workability and development points of the action were determined.

shop. After each workshop, the workability of the action was evaluated. We discussed our assumptions and goals and reflected what reactions the work had caused in the participants. This reflecting process led to the development of ideas for the next intervention. The final cycle represents the research phase of the students’

Cycle B is mainly about my role and the local community members’ roles. Due to the intervention type of work, and frequent changing locations and groups of participants, we were the only permanent actors in the process who understood the historical continuity of the collaboration. It also made us responsible for the continuation of the project. The location contacts worked actively in art and other cultural activities for years in the municipality. My understanding of the entity of the Art Path was more related to my student groups. This cycle also includes the roles of the two student groups in relations to each other. Cycle B also represents the follow-up points, where the results of this process were later presented at a public event.



Figure 9: Continuity Cycle B. Passing the torch. The historical continuity and next steps form a core of this figure. Student teams change and my role also gradually changes.

In Cycle C, the collaboration is in its evaluation stage, where the actions, forms and outcomes are assessed and the forms of continuation negotiated.



Figure 10: Continuity Cycle C. The pilot phase is now completed, should we continue? How? The figure represents an evaluative stage of the whole pilot phase of the Art Path collaboration.

The Aspects of Continuity in the Enontekiö Art Path

To assemble the analysis of the data, the three levels of continuity (A, B, C) show multi-layered potentials and development points of the two-year project. *The first continuation cycle (A)* is about the reflexivity and workability of the workshop. At the beginning of the collaboration, I sensed a concern among the active participants that the path would not be able to offer equal possibilities for participation in all areas of the municipality. To some extent, the concern was justified. During the two years of the project, many villages of the municipality had not been visited. This fact was revealed toward the end of the Path: Only after several returns to the municipality did the concept of The Path reach public awareness, and people inquired where we were going next. Friendships started to be built, and some of the earlier participants joined us in the later workshops. The participation in the planning process increased gradually, and the sixth workshop was clearly built on the initiative of a local partner. Of course, similar engagements and active agencies were not reached in these interventions as they would be in

longer-term collaborations. But, when reviewing the main aim of the project that was to increase the access of art, the short-term art interventions were likely an effective way of reaching larger crowd of the municipality and introducing the methods of community art.

In the students' reflections, the biggest setback seemed to be the lack of community participation in the planning phase, which seemed to overshadow the whole experience. Although our priority was in cultural sensitivity and respect for the locals' ownership of their place and culture, the way the workshops came about seemed to be against the principles of cultural sustainability in which the active agency in place-related decision-making is crucial (Dessein et al., 2015) The intervention type of work with ever-changing participants challenged the notion of interactive planning and increased the concern among the students that they had too much influence on the direction of the Art Path. For example, one student reported,

... there were many limitations as the participation of the locals was missing in the planning stage... The most difficult part of the project, was planning the workshop without visiting the place and having enough information about the place. However, our initial idea was not just working with one village, but visiting as many villages as possible, even for small villages where they hardly have any events (student reports 2018).

When examining the continuation between the workshops more closely, it becomes apparent that the communities' active participation in the planning phases actually increased after every workshop. In the first workshop, our contact people had pointed out that, since the art making method was unfamiliar to most people, it would be difficult for them to take part in the planning process. Usually, their input increased during the workshop when the working methods became familiar. The dialogue and interactions (Hiltunen, 2009) worked as building tools in each workshop.

When reflecting on the reactions of the participants, the evocativeness of the art interventions can be predicted. Undeniably, the aesthetic value of the final artworks and the video documentation were well-received and also inspired the other communities to invite the path to their village next. Basically, the same awe experienced after the first stomping snow art appeared at the opening of each artwork. This was especially true when people came to the opening of the children's artwork in the village of Karesuvanto.

I found the second continuation cycle (B) crucial for culturally sustainable work. When both the student groups and workshop participants changed frequently during the collaboration, it was important to have people who participated throughout the entire process to maintain the continuity and help pass on knowledge from the previous workshops. We were fortunate to have a few active volunteers from the municipality to work with us from the beginning to the end. They worked as our contacts, willingly participating in all the workshops by helping us with practical issues and explaining the local traditions and unspoken rules. Through them, the idea of the Art Path was better adopted and rooted within the local culture. After all, the methods used during the Art Path was new to most of the participating communities.

I had an ideal place to observe how the path took its shape. I acted as a supervisor for my students and later as participant and observer when the students took on more responsibility for the project. I could observe how the students gradually started to develop their own methods and shape the path based on the experiences of the previous workshops. The continuous repetition of the similar structured workshop clearly gave them more changes to develop their skills and cultural sensitivity. The process offered them special opportunities to be innovative, learn about the context and culture of places and develop their professionalism in project organization and management. The following is a student response:

Being a part of these four workshops... has developed in me, a sense of attachment to Finnish Lapland, which wouldn't have been formed if I just studied at the

University of Lapland (student reports 2018).

One of the development points that also increased the continuation between the workshops was the organization of the workshop follow-ups. We felt a responsibility to show our respect to the communities that had so openly invited us to work with them. The annually organized events in the municipality provided us with an arena to share the results and get to know new village communities. The first follow-up was to participate in the full moon celebration and present the outcomes of the previous workshops to a wider audience. The second follow-up was when one of the students took responsibility to collect all the documentations into a book and then distribute it to the villages around the municipality. We also had a chance to build the final exhibition in the Nature Center in November of 2018. The initial collection of people from most of the villages, as well as the proud comments of the artworks and the heart-warming feedback of the experiences, assured us that the Art Path had been meaningful to the participants as well.

The third continuity cycle C reflects the whole pilot phase of the Art Path collaboration. It did not follow the route of a typical funded project where the aims and working methods are tightly set before the project begins. Rather, it was based on a mutual agreement to cooperate and develop new ways to increase the access to art. This approach affords larger freedom for the actors to test and develop the working methods and art making processes. Naturally, this kind of setting offers possibilities and invites many ambitions and hopes, both spoken and unspoken. However, if the objectives and roles are not clearly determined and stated, there are risks of misinterpretations and confusions over responsibilities that may lead to a lack of commitment in the long run.

Nevertheless, looking back at the two-year collaboration, my primary feeling is gratitude. What I cherished the most was observing how people with different cultural backgrounds met and how the interesting cultural exchanges took place during the workshops. The students' asset

was their willingness to learn from the local participants and hear about their ways of living. Those of our students with clearly different cultural backgrounds tended to have it “easier”: Local habits were understood by them more quickly. At the same time, the locals became aware that their commonplace habits (Alhonen, 2013) fascinated our visiting students. These interventions probably stirred people to see some of their ways of living in a new light. One of the communities began planning a new community artwork in the place where the first one had been. These interventions were said to be “tonics” for everyday life and they were greeted with joy. For example, one student wrote:

Looking back to what we have achieved during this project, I wonder how all the visits turned out to be successful ones. Many things could have gone wrong in the process but with an open mind, a positive attitude and with a bit of luck we managed to make a couple of artworks, document them and enjoy the warm hospitality of the people in Enontekiö (student reports 2018).

Conclusion

In this article, I have discussed the various supporting elements behind cultural sustainability in the two-year Art Path collaboration. The dilemma of continuity was a multi-layered issue during this process. I call it a dilemma because it includes controversial possibilities from a culturally sustainable perspective. I see the controversies as being located between long-term development and intervention projects. Long-term projects offer greater possibilities for deeper engagement with the participants. Engagement increases ownership and commitment, which in turn increases continuity. In the Art Path collaboration, the sense of ownership for most of the participants was probably reached at a workshop level and only those who walked the whole path felt that the project belonged to them as well. To reach continuity and engagement in such art interventions requires persistent continuation of the work in other ways. The cyclical

processes of work need to be built so that, in addition to the general cycles of planning, implementation, observation and reflection, further follow-ups with the participating community can be organized. Community art, even as art intervention, creates spaces for sharing and generating ideas towards a mutual goal of a final artwork. The art pieces discussed above from the Art Path represents all the constructive intercultural dialogue and shared traditions. This entire process opened up new ways for looking at commonplace habits.

This type of field work in higher education, in which the time and resources were limited, establishes a good ground for professional growth. If we look at this purely from the point of view of education for cultural sustainability, the continuity in interventions serves the intended purpose well. The cyclical processes combined with interventions created possibilities for the students to evaluate the previous actions and a change to put their development ideas into action continually in similar contexts. The crucial stages of action were entering the communities, negotiating the goals, utilizing different forms of community art—including material choices and local stories—and implementing them into practice. To deepen the understanding, it is crucial that the students conduct research throughout the project. A culturally sensitive mindset and openness to learn when encountering a new community creates a valuable space to understand culturally sustainable actions. This project has been a unique opportunity for the students and for me to gain hands-on experience, which simply cannot be learned in a classroom.

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