

Art(s) as an Expanding Social Sculpture

Maria Huhmarniemi & Mirja Hiltunen

Biography

Mirja Hiltunen (DA, MEd) is a professor of Art Education in the Faculty of Art and Design, University of Lapland, Finland. She has devised a performative art strategy and has been leading community-based art education projects over twenty years. The place-specificity, performativity and socially engaged art are particular interests to her. She is a Senior Research Fellow for the AMASS (Acting on the Margins: Arts as Social Sculpture) H2020-funded research project. She has presented numerous international research papers and published her work in art education journals, books and art exhibitions.

Maria Huhmarniemi (DA) is an artist-research-teacher in the University of Lapland, Finland, and Senior Research Fellow for the AMASS (Acting on the Margins: Arts as Social Sculpture) H2020-funded research project. Her post-doctoral research focuses on arts-based methods in environmental conflict mediation, creative tourism and transformative education. She has numerous peer reviewed research publications and she participated group and joint exhibitions as an installation artists and artists-researcher.

The thematic number on Art(s) as Social Sculpture in the Research in Arts Education (RAE) journal focuses on socially engaged art practices and research for using arts to overcome societal challenges. We present and discuss a variety of artistic and arts-based studies and innovative arts-based practices. While the RAE welcomes research papers on all arts disciplines (visual arts, music, dance and other performative arts, their theories, practices and education), this number focuses on socio-political contemporary art and artistic interventions in communities, such as care institutions, villages and educational organisations and networks.

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The call for research articles, practise-based reports and visual essays was based on the project *Acting on the Margins: Arts as a social sculpture (AMASS)* in 2020–2023. The project seeks to analyse, synthesise and promote the role of arts in societal challenges. The University of Lapland, located in Lapland in Finland, leads the research consortium. Local, regional and national research and development projects from different parts of Europe are brought into international discussion in the AMASS project and also in this number of the RAE journal.

The overall objective of the AMASS project is to address societal challenges, such as various forms of exclusion and poverty, while promoting resilience and inclusion in European regions through the strengthening arts and cultural policies for vulnerable groups and peripheral communities. International contemporary art and art education includes interest in socially engaged art, that is, forms of artistic practice that aim for social changes in some specific communities, contexts and locations (Lacy, 1996; Lippard, 1997). In Lapland, socially engaged art and community-based art education have been promoted and researched through some previous projects (Hiltunen, 2009; Hiltunen, et al., 2020; Huhmarniemi, 2021; Huhmarniemi et al., 2021), giving background for the development of AMASS.

Melanie Sarantou, Carolina Gutierrez Novoa, Silvia Remotti and Mira Alhonsuo discuss in the article “More patience and creativity” a design research project in which design practitioners and researchers collaborated to develop training guidelines and a toolset for a stakeholder workshop to be implemented by partner organisations of the AMASS project. The authors explore the team dynamics and approaches to design development within digital environments and present guidelines for teams developing and conducting online workshops in digital environments. The article has lots of relevance for developing international arts and research collaborations at the age of travel restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic and ecological awareness of the climate impact of travelling. Practical tools are needed for collaborations in digital environments. The article responds to some aims of the AMASS research to capture the

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avenues and methods that can be employed to build resilient communities, which are also in the margins.

Milosh Raykov and Raphael Vella discuss ethics reviews in socially engaged arts research. They describe issues that researchers may face when applying for ethical clearance for research projects that engage various communities in participatory activities with artists. Raykov and Vella consider how research goals, artistic outcomes, timeframes, levels of participants' involvement and the overall creative processes may become affected by regulatory procedures. They offer some recommendations for ethical review boards in the evaluation of socially engaged arts research plans and designs. While socially engaged arts research is a rapidly growing field of research, the article by Raykov and Vella has practical importance. The article also helps artists-researchers in recognising and considering the ethical issues of the research.

Ásthildur Jónsdóttir introduces artistic activities aimed at promoting greater ecological consciousness through different forms of participation and awareness activities. The participatory artistic activity Walk the Space created a platform for sharing ideas about sustainability in an academic community. The collaboration provided a space for transformative learning and active engagement, offering the potential for social change. This study by Jónsdóttir provides insights into how artistic actions can strengthen community building and ecological consciousness.

Timo Jokela discusses a socially-engaged environmental art titled Kuer's Journey (2018) created in the Art Äkäslompolo art event. His approach followed an art-based action research strategy to create a dialogic space that promotes decolonisation, cultural revitalisation and community resilience. Jokela uses the concept of Arctic art to reflect encounters with Western contemporary art practices, northern ecocultures and ways of knowing. The article by Jokela is strongly related to the aims of the AMASS research, while the AMASS includes aims to investigate the role of regional and international identities and traditions, and their role within the arts and resilient communities, as well as studies on implementing arts in the mediation of cultural

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and social conflicts. Jokela's study took place in the village of Art Äkäslompolo shadowed by an environmental conflict on the plan for an iron ore mine.

The practice-based paper by Marc Herbst has its background in central Europe, which is being transformed by climate change and recent refugee waves. Herbst presents a rich and inspiring documentation of a playground project and states that arts-based learning can provide a playful way for children, refugee and others to flexibly integrate and relate to each other and describes an artistic researcher's development of the Bauspielplatz Kunst Kammer museum. The essay illustrates one direction for arts as inclusive social sculpture in the 2020s.

More and more artists are collaborating with different sectors of society, such as healthcare institutions. In her visual essay, Niina Oinas reflects on her personal experiences of artistic work and entrepreneurship in Finland. She concludes that to consolidate art in the social and healthcare sectors, clearer structures and standardisations for artists' positions are needed so that the artists have better possibilities to create meaningful and impactful arts in care institutions. The visual essay has a relevance for developing policies for arts in the healthcare sector. Structural changes and good practices are needed for arts and cultural services that promote wellbeing and social coherence.

The visual essay by Nina Luostarinen illustrates the arts-based method for adult plays and the interpretation of visual arts to foster participants' relations to the environment. According to Luostarinen, the art activities that she has developed can lead to participants' increased empathy, emotions and activism. The visual essay effectively demonstrates the participatory method and its' playful strength.

The visual essay by Maria Huhmarniemi examines the expansion of the sense of empathy and community through the means of art education and community art. Huhmarniemi reflects educational socially engaged arts in the context of creative tourism and public art. She concludes that arts strive for openness and empathy through bodily, nonverbal or multilingual

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collaborations. Communality also expands into artist collectives, when artists collaborate with other artists, natural materials and other elements of nature.

Angela Saldanha, Raquel Balsa and Célia Ferreira present a visual essay that portrays a communication experience via postcards in the AMASS project under the social distance restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic situation in Portugal. The visual essay presents dynamics and possibilities to overcome the limitations of digital communication in disadvantaged communities and arts-based projects.

We hope readers find this thematic number on Art(s) as Social Sculpture inspiring and useful when further developing and researching socially engaged arts and their policies, methods, ethics and impacts. Further, the AMASS project will continue exploring arts and arts-based approaches to enhance dialogue and foster social inclusion and well-being.

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Lähteet

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