



## ARTICLE

### Rievdan – new genre arctic art education building cultural resilience in a time of global change

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## Rievdan – new genre arctic art education building cultural resilience in a time of global change

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### Abstract

*Rievdan – Muutos*, meaning *change* in Davvi Sámi and Finnish, is an art-based action research (ABAR) project conducted by the University of Lapland in Finland. Beginning in 2025 in Sápmi, the Sámi homeland, it involves collaboration with inhabitants of Vuohčču village in Finland and Kárášjohka town in Norway. The project addresses the challenges of change faced by northern communities due to unilateral policies, environmental exploitation, and the climate crisis. It explores new Arctic Art Education (AAE) strategies that strengthen community resilience and participants' agency.

Guided by the ABAR approach and community-based art education theory, *Rievdan* engages participants in collaborative art and co-research. This article asks: *What initial steps and ethical perspectives should guide co-research in culturally pluriversal northern communities?* The research data include reflections from the first art workshop, diaries, and visual material. The findings emphasise the need for culturally sensitive and ethical research practices. The key outcomes include involving local people as cultural assistants, prioritising listening, using participants' languages in all interactions, considering research venues carefully, and respecting the right to decline participation.

**Keywords:** community-based art education, new genre Arctic art education, cultural resilience, art-based action research, research ethics

## Introduction

Northern environments and communities are facing rapid environmental and societal changes. These changes, which may seem too rapid and beyond the communities' control, affect all northern multicultural communities, particularly Indigenous cultures, and their traditional livelihoods.

In Sápmi, which is the Sámi homeland stretching across the northernmost part of Scandinavia and the Kola Peninsula, the Sámi peoples and the other northern inhabitants encounter changes that alter their daily environments and affect their livelihoods. These changes are often imposed by other nations or people not living in the North and include, for instance, changes caused by mining, forestry, wind and hydropower, railway, new highway and huge powerline projects that irreversibly shape the northern landscape and environment. For people not living in the North, the northern environment may seem as an empty wilderness, but for Sápmi inhabitants, all aspects of nature have distinct meanings, inextricably linked with long histories, memories and tales that form their culture and identity (Ranta, 2023).

In this article, we discuss the recently initiated Rievdan – Muutos (hereafter 'Rievdan') project, the name of which is based on the Dávví Sámi (Northern Sámi) and Finnish words for change, respectively. This two-year Art-Based Action Research (ABAR) project is run by the Department of Art Education at the University of Lapland and funded by the Finnish Kone foundation. Within this project we organise art-based workshops at two locations: in Vuohčču village (in Finnish Vuotso) and in Kárášjohka city (in Norwegian Karasjok). Both locations have large Sámi Indigenous populations, and their cultural background influences the research actions, but research and workshop participants with other cultural backgrounds and newcomers are not excluded.

Our theoretical framework is based on community-based art education (Hiltunen, 2009; Jokela and Hiltunen, 2023) which is closely connected to the theory of place-based education which prioritise experiential, community-based, and contextual and ecological learning to cultivate greater connectivity to local contexts, cultures, and environments (Yemi, Engel and Ben Simon, 2023). In community-based art education the collaboration and joint artmaking open a stage for participants of different cultures and ages to have their voices heard, learn from each other, interpret cultural equality in mutual creative actions and foster communality. Hence, the actions of community-based art education arise from the sociocultural environment. The participants engage with art for individual and community development and share interactions, experiences and thoughts through art-based actions (Hiltunen, 2009). The place-based, ecological and Indigenous traditional knowledge and northern knowledge and skills expressed through art contribute to new perspectives on reality and possibilities for imagining an alternative one (Hiltunen, 2023; Jokela and Hiltunen, 2024a). Korsström-Magga (2025) emphasised that community-based art education participation and co-research offer possibilities for decoloniality, cultural resilience and a pluriverse community.

The Department of Art Education has developed the theory of community-based art education and ABAR method to address northern communities' circumstances, gradually advancing them to form the concept of new genre Arctic Art Education (AAE). AAE provides community-based art education for

northern or Arctic communities and aims to highlight Indigenous cultures' place-specific, eco-cultural northern knowledge from the communities' own perspectives (Jokela and Hiltunen, 2024a, 2024b). AAE fosters decolonial thinking and actions and supports ecocultural identity among communities (Jokela and Huhmarniemi, 2022; Korsström-Magga, 2025). Decoloniality (Quijano, 1992), as a non-Western life perspective, is fundamental for encouraging cultural pluriverse thinking and envisioning a future in which human cultures and nature coexist harmoniously and interdependently (Fitzgerald, 2023; Mignolo, 2011).

Our research interest arose from our many experiences with community-based art education projects in the North. We both have long personal experience of informal and formal art education, and we have a mutual interest in northern communities and close collaboration with local people. Moreover, our personal lives are connected to the North. Korsström-Magga lives in Sápmi, in a small Sámi reindeer herders' village by the Ivalo River, and Hiltunen lives in Rovaniemi within the Arctic Circle, although her other residence is 200km northward, in Kõngäs by the shore of the Ounas River. The natural northern living environment means a great deal to us, and we are both concerned about how the changes due to the climate crisis and new industrial and global trends will affect our personal environments.

A mutual question driving us forward as art educators and researchers is 'Can community-based art education make a difference?' In Rievdan, we are specifically interested in whether our actions can support local people and influence the direction of change. As researchers, artists and art educators, the focus of our research is on local communities' thoughts, reactions, fears and desires in a changing world. As northern residents, we share our daily lives, environment and future fears and hopes with our research participants, which dilutes the traditional power dichotomy between researchers and research participants, and we are personally concerned about propagating local people's voices (Kantonen and Heikkilä, 2010; Kantonen, Karttunen and Elfving, 2021).

An initial feature of community-based art education is the constant close collaboration and sensing of participants' engagement. Cultural sensitivity is a key for collaboration. Willis (2016) defined cultural sensitivity as respectful considerations and cultural awareness of oneself and the research participants. By discussing, for instance, universally experienced questions about life, family and the environment, a collaborative multicultural group may be able to decode cultural differences, experience empathy and construct sustainable cross-cultural relationships (Willis, 2016). Cultural sensitivity is also a bottom-line concept for ethical ABAR research.

The inhabitants of Sápmi have experienced changes over time. The Sámi are a colonised people, and their culture is often considered inferior under the Norwegian, Swedish, Finnish and Russian regimes that govern their everyday lives. Sámi peoples have had to adjust their traditional lifestyles to the national majority and contemporary systems (Kuokkanen, 2020; Lehtola, 2015). The Sápmi population, over time, has become multicultural, and ongoing environmental and societal changes have become increasingly visible, raising concerns about the entire population living within the Arctic Circle. Questions regarding cultural and emotional preparedness to deal with these changes were the driving force behind our research.

Resilience is defined as the capacity to recover from changes imposed by external agencies. Resilience, as a research concept, has been applied to issues such as climatic and environmental changes, focusing on the physical and material aspects of threatened environments' or communities' ability to recover by maintaining or renewing themselves (Ford et al., 2020; Smyntyna, 2016). However, environmental changes, caused by climatic and/or human exploitation of nature, have a direct impact on the cultures of communities that depend on or live close to nature. Indigenous peoples' holistic worldviews involve cultural and spiritual relationships with their environments (Doran, 2024; Korsström-Magga, 2025).

Vuohčču village is the southernmost Sámi village on the Finnish side of Sápmi. In Vuohčču live Sámi reindeer herder families, who settled here when the nomadic herding lifestyle ended at the end of the nineteenth century. Some of the evacuees from the reservoir region moved to Vuohčču during the 1970s. Europe's two largest water reservoirs, Lokka and Porttipahta, were built south of Vuohčču at the end of the 1960s, and Kauhanen (2024) considered their consequences. Six villages including 600 people's homes vanished beneath the reservoirs' surfaces, along with the accompanying agricultural, reindeer herding, fishing and hunting environments (Kauhanen, 2024). In addition, temporary workers from southern Finland have increasingly moved into Vuohčču with their families to work in the mining and tourism industries. The recently moved inhabitants to Vuohčču have gradually become a majority population in the village. The environment of the village has changed over time. The village is now divided by the Finnish south–north national highway and by a canal that was built to link the huge water reservoirs in the 1970s (Vuotso, 2025).

Kárášjohka city is located on the Norwegian side of Sápmi and is recognised as the Sápmi capital city, with around 2,000 inhabitants. The Davvi Sámi and Norwegian languages have equal status, and the Sámi influence is clearly visible in the scenery and citizens' use of language. The city is located on both sides of the Kárášjohka river, just 12 kilometres from the Finnish border. The river has great cultural significance for the inhabitants because fishing has been their traditional livelihood for centuries, but protection of endangered trout has become necessary, changing their connection with the river. The inhabitants' main livelihoods are reindeer herding, hunting, fishing, agriculture and sheep farming. Kárášjohka city has a rich Sámi culture, and the Norwegian Sámi Parliament is located in Kárášjohka (Kárášjoga gielda, 2025).

Rievdan delves into the experiences and thoughts of multicultural northern communities that encounter changes imposed by external agencies, some of which inevitably transform their daily lives. Place-specific northern knowledge and traditions, Sámi Indigenous culture and typical northern way of living close to nature, such as fishing, hunting and berry picking, underpin a strong concept of the Arctic that people, including those living elsewhere, appreciate and want to maintain. AAE projects aim to increase cultural resilience. Art-based work with northern communities, also resulting in exhibitions and visibility in the media, has strengthened the traditional cultural identity of the North (Huhmarniemi and Jokela, 2020; Jokela and Hiltunen, 2023; Jokela et al., 2021).

In this article, we ask: *'How can community-based art education approaches be designed and developed further to support Indigenous and northern communities' cultures?' 'What initial steps and ethical perspectives should be considered in co-research in culturally pluriverse communities in the North?'*

In our article we introduce Rievdan's first steps—meeting with Vuohčču and Kárášjohka communities—which involved the initial work of connecting with the communities, building cooperative networks and paying attention to ethical considerations. First we present the used method and ethical perspectives. Second we reflect and analyse the research material of the first workshops, the process, giving meanings by the participants and joint knowledge creation through art. According to this we answer our research questions in the findings and discussion.

### **Method: following the ABAR cycles**

Our research follows the ABAR strategy to examine Kárášjohka's and Vuohčču's multicultural communities' thoughts and sentiments about the changes they face. ABAR follows the main principles of action research (Heikkinen et al., 2023), but the action itself, which is used to collect research material, is art-based and invites the research participants to participate in creative collaboration. Our research interest is process-based, which is a typical aim for ABAR. The process oriented research action aims to develop practices of community-based art education and seeks to empower the participants' wellbeing, identity and strengthen them as citizens and a community (Jokela and Huhmarniemi, 2025). The action can make hidden local knowledge, culture and traditions visible, which can help to promote community causes (Jokela, 2019). Junka-Aikio (2022) stressed that policymakers' decisions are often made without giving citizens the right to be heard in matters concerning their lives, and the residents of these communities have not been given a real opportunity to influence the exploitation of the environment, which leads to cultural abuse and loss of biodiversity (Junka-Aikio, 2022).

The ABAR strategy is participatory and the action is generating possibilities for different levels of co-research, which is a basic condition for conducting research with Indigenous people or in multicultural Indigenous regions. In these circumstances, an ethical and sensitive research approach is essential (Korsström-Magga, 2025; Kulmala et al., 2023). In all stages of the ABAR strategy the action forms research material and that was the situation in our operations as well. The diverse data, including notes, recordings, videos, photographs, sketches, artworks, blogs and later our exhibitions and other public performances like street art, have as data a reflective feature that helps us to value and develop the process. The visual data is the main source of knowledge that includes information not easy to put in words but is essential and meaningful in the perspectives of developing art education.

All our research data is subsequently analysed reflectively during the action. As a researcher-artist we evaluate the participants' interaction, commitment and the project's functionality and adjust the action according to the mutual aims of the community and our research project. Usually the ABAR-researcher can categorise, theme and group the data according to research material or theory (Jokela and Huhmarniemi, 2025). We made a deeper analysis of the data after the action through art

as well. As part of the analysis and sharing we created an installation based on the collected research audio-visual materials and later in summer 2025, it was exhibited in Valo-gallery, Rovaniemi.

We implemented the planned activities in the first workshop in Kárášjohka that was attended by 25 schoolchildren, with 3 accompanying teachers, and 6 adults that attended an afternoon workshop. The first workshop in Vuohčču was attended by 36 schoolchildren and 4 assisting teachers, with 8 adults attending an afternoon workshop. All children made cards depicting their favourite places, which were recorded on video and photographed. The adult conversations while playing picture-bingo, which involved finding pictures on the table that matched the bingo words, were audio recorded.

Our research team gathered reflection material from the activities and artistic work for analysis. We documented and collected 460 photographs during the art education action in the workshops and audio recorded about 5 hours of discussion. The researcher-art educators' mutual time during the northern tour to the first workshops in Kárášjohka and Vuohčču, included finalising, discussions and evaluation of the workshops. These reflections analysed and developed the community-based art education on the spot. The workshops are firsthand evaluated and publicly presented on the Rievdan public blog. The blog (<https://blogi.eoppimispalvelut.fi/rievdanmuutos>) introduces the project and the workshops and serves as a platform for the participants to share their thoughts and talk about their home regions across the two communities. The aim of the blog is to bring the two communities together and introduce the inhabitants of the two locations to each other. The main language for the blog is English, as Rievdan also wants to reach a larger national audience, but other local languages are visible, with shortened English translations.

In Rievdan, we involve the communities in planning collaborative art-based actions in every stage of the project (Figure 1). We agreed with them how to implement the research cycles of the ABAR strategy and how, for example, to collect data during the activities. A main aim of the project is to maintain an open line with the communities throughout the project and to plan and share the research project collaboratively as far as possible. From the very beginning the idea is to support participants by creating opportunities for them to benefit from community-based art education from their own perspectives. This aligns with the ethical guidelines for research involving the Sámi people in Finland (Heikkilä et al., 2024). Sharing information requires a great deal of collaboration and a sensitive approach to Indigenous culture and other cultures living in the same community (Korsström-Magga, 2019).

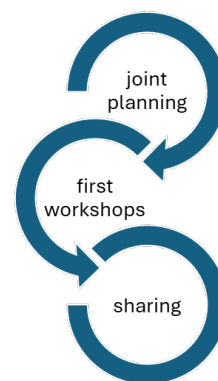


Figure 1: the research cycles of the Rievdan project in spring 2025

In addition to the conventional research consent, ABAR includes permission to publish and show art made by the participants and photographs of participants in actions of the project, we also paid attention to the special communities that are both multicultural and Sámi people. Vuohčču and Kárášjohka differ from each other in size and number of inhabitants, but they both have an active and viable Sámi

Indigenous population and culture. The ethical guidelines for research involving the Sámi people in Finland were established in spring 2024 (Heikkilä et al., 2024) and apply to research in any discipline that concerns the Sámi people, Sámi society and Sámi communities. They also apply to research conducted in Sápmi that has or could potentially have an impact on the Sámi people or Sámi communities. The need for these ethical guidelines arises from the colonial and historically unequal colonial power relations that have shaped Western research practices (Heikkilä et al., 2024). Since Rievdan was being conducted in Sápmi, we followed the guidelines with the research participants in practice, aiming to build trust through openness, co-research and cooperation with local people.

We have both lived in the North for several decades and have a long experience of northern and Sámi culture and widespread social networks. Nevertheless, being accepted in a small community where you are not personally known takes time, and as a researcher, it is challenging to earn trust. To build trust and support our bridges to the community, Rievdan identified a permanent contact person at both locations who could work for the project as a cultural expert. These contact persons guided us during the project's early stages and helped us to locate venues, partners and participants for our first workshops.

The research collaboration required the use of different languages as both, Vuohčču and Kárášjohka, are multicultural and comprise inhabitants with international backgrounds. Thus, the research collaboration required the use of different languages at the locations. Ethically, we take care that the participants should be at least met and able to participate in the research in their native language. Vuohčču's national language is Finnish and Kárášjohka's is Norwegian. However, the first language of almost every Sámi person at both locations is Dávvi Sámi. Even if English is well known by many inhabitants, some, especially older people, do not understand or speak English at all. Our research team understands and speaks Dávvi Sámi to some extent, but it proved difficult to find an acceptable mutual language for both locations. We translated all important notifications, information leaflets and research consent forms into Dávvi Sámi, Finnish and English, with English being the most neutral language used during our mutual planning and collaboration. However, during the workshops, Dávvi Sámi, Finnish and a mix of Scandinavian languages also proved useful. The right to express oneself in one's native language is key to building trust during research and is vital for research involving Sámi people (Heikkilä et al., 2024).

The elements of the ABAR strategy initially involve the communities in every stage of the research. The features of AAE respect the Indigenous identities and multicultural population and seek for ethical cooperation along the research actions. The ontological and epistemological foundations of the ABAR method are connected to participatory and dialogical contemporary art, community-based art education, co-agency, co-researching and Indigenous research. ABAR generates both knowledge and practical competence for change: researched, practice-based knowledge in art education that is also recognisable and relevant beyond the field itself.

### **The first research cycles**

Rievdan began with us planning a structure for the project (Figure 1) and connecting with organisations at both locations. The ABAR strategy includes thorough pre-investigation of the research environment and the community's place specific culture. Our partners on the Finnish side are Mánnu (the Sámi Children's Culture Centre) and the Sámi Youth Council, both of which are connected to the Finnish Sámi Parliament. Our partner on the Norwegian side is Sámi Dáiddaguovddáš (SDG; the Sámi Center for Contemporary Art in Kárášjohka). For the first workshop, we planned an art-based pilot workshop that could serve as a get-together activity and give us, as art educators, information about the regions and opportunities to hear about the participants' thoughts and the things that mattered to them. Involving key and relevant community organisations helps to plan and collaborate with participants in an ethically appropriate manner.

We sent workshop invitations to schools and community associations in the communities, such as pensioners', handicraft and family associations. With the invitations, we included information about the Rievdan art-based research project and research consent forms, all available in Dávvi Sámi, Finnish and English. The consent forms described the research aim of developing community-based art education methods and the project's aim of supporting local multicultural communities that are encountering change. We ensured that participation is voluntary and that they could withdraw their consent at any time without giving a reason.

The first workshops were arranged in May 2025. Our team of art educators were the project members Hiltunen, Korsström-Magga and Ante Jalvela, who is the project research assistant. In addition, two art education students, Virve Pietilä and Kasper Kujansuu, joined us since the University of Lapland's Department of Art Education offers practical field experience for art education students. We travelled the 500km-long trip from Rovaniemi to Kárášjohka in a rented van; five art educators and a load of art materials, papers, cameras, recording equipment, and personal bags. Discussing, planning and brainstorming about the project during the shared time includes meaningful moments that enable new ideas or understandings to grow. This way of working in the field, travelling together to communities and visiting their environments is characteristic of AAE (Jokela, Manninen and Berliner, 2024) where the art educators travel far distances to their pupils (Figure 2).

We planned similar programmes for the schoolchildren at both locations, starting with an icebreaker, a mutual playful game of right and wrong statements about the location, such as 'Kárášjohka is the best place in the world!' Or for the schoolchildren in Vuohčču 'it is possible to meet a bear in the middle of the village'. The line of people illustrated how different or similar the thoughts within one group of people could be while the individuals remained connected to each other by a rubber band. The game also enticed the children to tell us about their places and their environments (Figure 3).

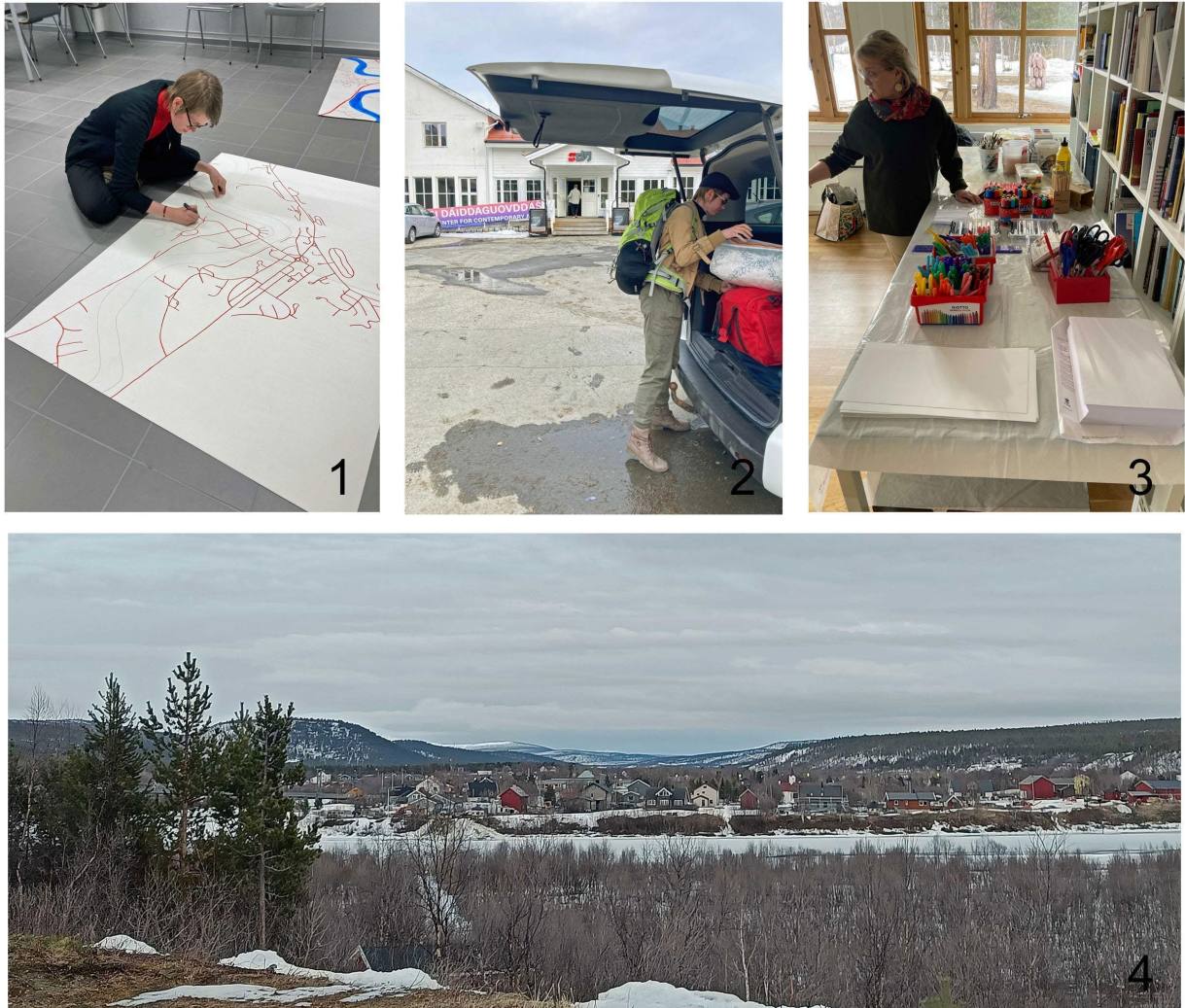


Figure 2: Photos 1 to 3, preparations for the first workshop. Korinna Korsström-Magga (2025). Photo 4, Kárášjohka. Kasper Kujansuu (2025)

After the ice-breaker activity followed creative exploration of the locations. In advance, we had prepared large maps of the two locations (Figure 2). The maps served as platforms in the workshops, and the school-aged participants used them to explain their daily environments to us.

The schoolchildren told us more about the city and offered us more useful information than any tourist could obtain:

‘This is a good spot to fish’.

‘Ooooh, you are not allowed to do that!’

‘I’ll do it anyhow! No one can stop me!’ (discussion of 2 boys, 14–15 years old)

or

‘We go there after school. A couple of years ago, we went to that café, but not anymore!’

‘Why not?’

‘They [the owners] are rude and unfriendly people! We don’t like them!’

‘At the other café, the milkshakes are much cheaper!’ (discussion of girls 14–15 years old)



Figure 3: the ice-breaker game worked well with all participants from the schools. Photo: Mirja Hiltunen, (2025)

The main task for the pupils was to draw and paint postcards of places that were dear to them (Figure 4). The favourite places were mostly outdoors and beyond the map of Kárášjohka city and Vuohčču, in the landscapes of the reindeer herds where the grandparents lived in small old villages, or the families had their roots. The cards also showed hobbies such as soccer, horse riding, fishing, bicycling and swimming. The pupils placed their cards on the relevant spots on the maps or at the edges if their favourite places were outside the city (Figure 4).

At the end of the workshop, the participants were given the opportunity to be video recorded, presenting their cards and their special places. In the videos, they hid their faces behind the cards they had created to make themselves unrecognisable. Since we intended to publish the videos with our research and in exhibitions about the project, it was important to anonymise their identity. Some of the participants did not want to appear or speak on the videos, so we offered them the option of simply showing their cards for the camera, to which they agreed (Figure 5). The right not to join in activities or practices in art-based actions is a fundamental ethical right in both community art and community-based art education theory (Hiltunen, 2009; Kantonen and Heikkilä, 2010; Kantonen, Karttunen, and Elfving, 2021).

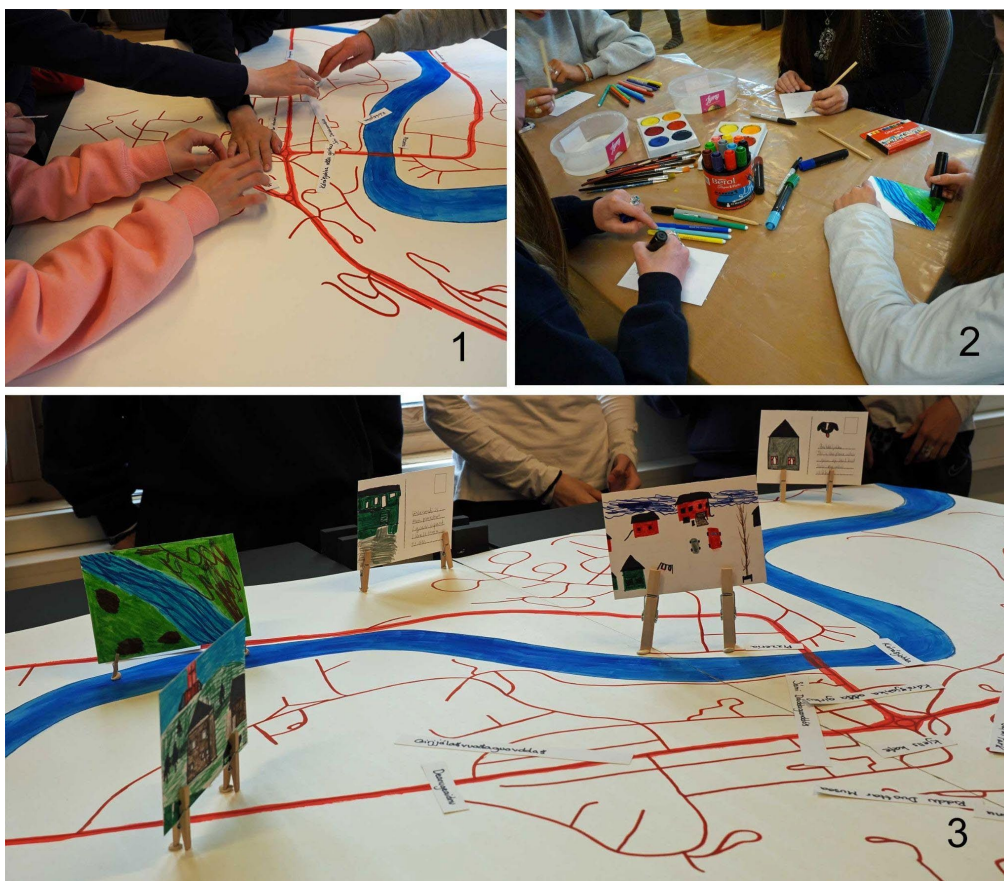


Figure 4: the participants drew cards and placed them on the map of Kárášjohka city. Photo 1 and 3, Mirja Hiltunen, (2025), photo 2 Korinna Korsström-Magga (2025)

At the end of the workshop, we informed the schoolchildren about the Rievdan blog, where they can post their experiences of the workshops and be able to follow the other locations' work. We also gave the participants a picture-bingo game as homework. The assignment would help them decide what positive changes in their lives or favourite places the project could promote—the main topic that we will work on during the next workshops in the autumn.

### Open workshops for the community

At both locations we had an open workshop for participants of all ages. Our cultural assistants had spread information, placed Rievdan-posters on bulletin boards and talked warmly about the project, which had been fruitful. The participants that arrived to these workshops were of working age and pensioners, the oldest was over 90 years old. The creative programme for adults differed but was also aimed at fostering discussion about place-



Figure 5: the video- and audiorecording of the cards in the workshop was not compulsory. Here only the cards were shown for the camera. Photo: Mirja Hiltunen (2025)

based things that mattered. Most adult participants had not received the research consent forms before their arrival and they were unwilling to sign the consent forms on the spot. For the research material gathered in the first workshop, we asked for their oral consent.

In Kárášjohka the participants did not know each other from before but were all interested in art or engaged with cultural work. The discussion about the community's cultural matters was lively. In Vuohčču the participants represented families that had lived in Vuohčču since the end of the nineteenth century or at least for a very long time. They were closely related and enjoyed the time to get together for a cup of coffee and talk about numerous topics, from the weather and reindeer herding to fishing and the local news. No newer Vuohčču inhabitants showed up.



*Figure 6: the adults' inspiration was raised by picture-bingo. Photo: Mirja Hiltunen (2025)*

In Kárášjohka the workshop discussion was facilitated primarily in English and was simultaneously translated into Finnish because one of the participants understood only Dávví Sámi and Finnish. In Vuohčču the mutual language was Finnish. As an inspiration for discussion, we played the picture-bingo game (Figure 6). The participants described their picture choices, which inspired them to share their thoughts about things that mattered to them. The discussion ranged from severe global issues to personal matters and concerns about the main local livelihoods, i.e. the future of reindeer herding and fishing in the northern environment.

One participant was concerned the global need to use northern landscapes for mining and electricity generation will probably bring an end to reindeer herding. The reindeer need to wander free in wide pastures. Another participant deplored the adverse situation regarding the local people's traditional fishing rights. The same rules do not apply to everyone fishing in the same river along the Norwegian

and Finnish borders. The community in Kárášjohka called for means and ideas of activism and getting their voices and ideas heard for decision makers and ways of collaboration.

In Vuohčču the participants had followed the municipalities' renovation of the schoolyard with sadness. They had witnessed old trees that had served their community as important landmarks for centuries been cut down for the sake of a parking area and the schoolyard was layered by black asphalt, without any vegetation. As a community, they honour their traditions and their environment and felt deeply hurt about the rough renovation. The community sees the old trees as guardians, with a connection to their ancestors because the trees have been in the village for over a hundred years. For the Sámi people, the connection between the past, present and future is a cornerstone of the culture (Guttorm, 2011). Presenting meaningful places in Vuohčču felt important to all participants. They were worried that their knowledge of Vuohčču would soon fade and be lost, because many of the newer Vuohčču inhabitants do not necessarily know about the background of the village and place-based meanings. The discussions led to an idea of building installations in the village, regarding people's narrations, old happenings and traditions. Such artwork could also serve the new inhabitants of Vuohčču well. They explained, for instance, that the short-term schoolteachers do not necessarily have eco-cultural and place-specific knowledge about Vuohčču's environments and place-specific culture (Jokela and Hiltunen, 2023).

These statements of both communities gave inspiration and sowed ideas for the following workshop to come in September 2025. In both communities we discussed possibilities to create together public artworks inspired by their thoughts. Public art has possibilities to share their views for wider audiences.

## **Findings**

In our article we have asked: 'How can community-based art education approaches be designed and developed further to support Indigenous and northern communities' cultures?' and 'What initial steps and ethical perspectives should be considered in co-research in culturally pluriverse communities in the North?'

In planning Rievdan we made special efforts to connect with the communities beforehand. Research projects often are short term, and to achieve good collaboration and trust in research, it is important to pay attention to place-specific and cultural sensitivity. The planning and the realisation of the first workshop was a typical act of the ABAR strategy, which is to map the place, design the activities and engage the community through art. The participants' art, and narrations of daily life strengthened our understanding of the community, the place-specific culture and our research aims. We designed the community-based art education approach similarly for both locations. However, in practice the action on the spot differed. In Vuohčču the workshop interested the community. The venue was situated in the centre of the village and they found possibilities in the workshops for communal activism and cultural empowerment. The community of Kárášjohka appeared to be difficult to reach. A reason for this we see in the art-specific venue in Kárášjohka, that may have distinguished on the spot participants with a special interest for art and pulled away others. Our research indicates that when designing the

workshops, we should have paid even more attention to the venues and designed the action in familiar environments for the participants.

Kárášjohka city and Vuohčču are locations different from each other but the inhabitants share similar values and concerns in their daily lives. At both locations the adult participants' concerns about change were similar. The unsecure future of the traditional livelihoods combined with exploitation of their environment was a great sorrow and the feeling of being ignored by policymakers. The schoolchildren's drawings indicate appreciation of outdoor life and hobbies, and also deep rootedness in the regions' Indigenous livelihoods. The favourite places were connected to their homes and time spent with their families. Working with children and adult participants of different ages made the art education action with each workshop group unique. The workshops with children aged 6–11 years were impulsive and lively, when the older school pupils, aged 11–15 years were working, the ambiance was quieter and more serious.

Ethical questions are central to all stages, from the initial planning to the final realisation with the community. The use of a contact person assisting us to get to know the locations and the community appeared to be a useful idea. We have been able to have a smoother approach to the community, despite long distances and rare face-to-face connections with the inhabitants. We put effort in explaining the features of our method and project's aims and also in ensuring a trustful space for participation and research (Kantonen, 2010). The research consent is necessary to allow the project to use and publish visual material of the participants.

Research consent is often perceived as bureaucratic and unpleasant, and signing forms can seem too conclusive and binding, even if they are intended to secure the participants' and researchers' rights. We sent consent forms to the main collaborators a couple of weeks before the first workshops and asked them to distribute them to the schools and community associations. However, our research showed that the best way to ensure that consent forms are signed is face-to-face with the participants. Still, there were participants that did not sign the consent, but gave oral consent for publishing their participation.

Obtaining guardians' consent for children to participate in research is required, but children have the right to refuse to have their work, voices, faces or appearance published or shown without their consent. At all stages of the research, we ensured that the participants could follow and have the right to refuse or collaborate with the research and take part in the art workshops and that the research would not harm them. During the action we developed and found different ways to collect visual research material anonymously. For instance, in the workshop in Kárášjohka, we offered an optional way for the pupils to present the card on the video, where their faces and voices did not show (Figure 5).

We have focused on what initial steps and ethical perspectives should be considered in co-research in culturally pluriverse communities. A basic component of the ethical perspectives we considered was the use of different languages in all our interactions with the collaborators and workshop participants. We offer possibilities to participate in Finnish, Dávví Sámi, Norwegian and English. This appears to be

the right ethical way to approach, however the workshops with discussions required more time and also flexible language skills.

In the Arctic, Indigenous cultures and their traditional knowledge and inherited art have a protected status that must be absolutely respected (Korsström-Magga, 2025). As Jokela and Hiltunen (2024a) have pointed out, our research confirms the notion that a multicultural platform requires cultural sensitivity and special art educational skills. Cultural sensitivity is commonly understood as knowing about and understanding another culture. Our research indicates attention to connecting and hearing the community, which requires good skills in cultural knowing and a sensitive research approach.

## **Discussion**

The Rievdan project is continuing the development of ABAR and AAE with the approach of community-based art education. Our knowledge of these kinds of art education projects, gained from years of fieldwork, was the starting point for this research. We were aware of possible challenges, typical for art-based collaboration with northern communities (Korsström-Magga, 2019) and at the same inspired of collaborating with new communities and people that offered new perspectives and possibilities for development of art education.

Designing community-based art education approaches that support Indigenous and other northern cultures depends on basic, broad cultural knowledge about the communities and regions in which the researchers will work. However, every community is for the art educator a new relationship that needs time and effort knowing better. The task of our local assistant was to inform us about the community's opinions and people's desires about the project and influence more people to participate in the next steps of the project. The assistants informed us of local happenings or tacit cultural knowledge that might be useful to consider when collaborating with the community. In the first stages of our research, these connections produced good results. Laiho et al. (2023) reflect the power structures in research and how the participants and the researchers' understandings and life values can meet on an equal level of co-research (Laiho et al., 2023). We understand this as an open research in a continuous connection and collaboration with the research participants. We see sharing findings, informing and mutual planning as important. We developed ways for the two communities to interact. Encounters were encouraged from the very first meetings by working with maps, cards and picture-bingo, focusing on places that were personally meaningful for them. The participants have the possibility to post them on a mutual blog developed to present the project and share their experiences.

The workshops for the schoolchildren were included in their school day and obligatory. By purpose we avoided talking about severe scenes of change and instead we focused on places, traditions, and activities that are dear to them. The aim of the workshops were to raise awareness of their environment, culture and identity and raise ideas and reasons for sustainability. The discussion in the workshops for the adults turned spontaneously to their worries about current changes, as it is commonly troubling people.

The participants of the workshop in Kárášjohka expressed a feeling of helplessness, since the local people did not agree with the national policymaker's decisions and global needs regarding their home

region. They emphasised the need for the local people to unify in some way, display resistance and foster understanding of their culture. In Vuohčču the game revealed similar matters and concerns as in Kárášjohka—discussions about exploitation of the environment, changing or destroying the landscape, the future of reindeer herding and changes in nature caused by the climate crisis. Their devastation and feeling of helplessness about policymakers neglecting their voices was also the same. Junka-Aikio has studied the authorities' use of land, for instance, in terms of NATO and Finnish militarisation and railway constructions on reindeer pastures. The northernmost region is seen as a “terra nullius”, a no one's land, and the planning and use of Sápmi has increased to be determined without participation of the inhabitants of the region. Junka-Aikio stresses the need for a decolonial approach and deconstruction of the discourse of terra nullius by asking ‘What kind of, and whose futures does the land use enable, and what futures are precluded or closed off?’ (Junka-Aikio, 2024, p.248).

The participants of the workshop in Vuohčču saw possibilities in the Rievdan project. They suggested that the art-based activities could make visible to policymakers the village's and its inhabitants' important issues. For instance, there are several important places in Vuohčču—ancient landmarks that have great meaning for the community. They pondered if art could save their environment and help to avoid future abuse.

Our findings align with the concept of critical pedagogy of place, which explores the foundational links between settler colonialism and the meaning of place—particularly within Global North settings (Seawright, 2014; Tuck et al., 2014). These frameworks seek to highlight how a place is shaped by entrenched systems such as white supremacy and heteropatriarchy. Our focus lies in expanding understanding of cultural histories and shared cultural resources, while also working to dismantle the oppressive power dynamics that have been normalized in these contexts (Seawright, 2014).

As Jokela and Hiltunen (2024b) stressed, ‘Arctic art education supports activism and resilience, equipping communities with knowledge and skills to navigate social and environmental shifts while maintaining their traditions’ (p.24). The authors described the core of AAE's mission as an ecocultural revitalisation to enhance resilience, but they also pointed out that resilience should not be understood as a passive phenomenon of adapting to changes; instead, it should be associated with supportive actions to enhance self-direction (Jokela and Hiltunen, 2024b).

Our art-based action research underlines the importance of cultural sensitivity and research ethics during mutual planning. In both locations the collaboration was conducted according to the theory of community-based art education on the topic of change. We reflected with the participants on what change means for their northern environments, cultures and personal lives. The first art workshops inspired participation from schoolchildren, elderly people and other community members, encouraging them to express their thoughts on the meanings and impacts of change.

## **Conclusion**

As art educators, our interest in the Rievdan project is to create and develop art education approaches that serve multicultural communities living in the Sámi homeland. The aim of these activities is to find collaborative ways to support northern communities' resilience to ongoing environmental changes

through art. Participatory co-research was the initial approach guiding our research activities, and in this article, we reflect on the first two art workshops conducted in Vuohčču and Kárášjohka.

Our findings regarding ethical perspectives confirmed the importance of a sensitive and listening research approach. Attentively hearing participants' wishes and respecting their decisions, whether to share their artworks or to take part in the research at all, proved essential. A methodology that supports well-informed and open collaboration between researchers and participants not only builds trust but also produces more diverse and rich material. More importantly, it advances community-based art education approaches that enhance the possibilities for decoloniality, cultural resilience, and the nurturing of a pluriversal community. Art-Based Action Research (ABAR) offers opportunities to reveal northern knowledge, build shared meanings, and imagine different futures through art.

As Jokela and Hiltunen (2024a) have pointed out, our research confirms that a multicultural platform requires both cultural sensitivity and specialized art educational skills. Cultural sensitivity is commonly understood as the ability to know and understand another culture, yet in the Arctic, Indigenous cultures, traditional knowledge, and inherited art hold a protected status that must be absolutely respected (Korsström-Magga, 2025). Building on the findings of the first research cycle, the following stages will more explicitly highlight the activist nature of art through public art initiatives. We will also broaden the dissemination of our research by presenting the findings across multiple platforms—popular and academic publications, as well as within art world contexts.

In August 2025, participants' reflections and artworks were presented in the project's first joint installation at the Arktikum exhibition in Rovaniemi. Ultimately, the collaboration will culminate in a combined exhibition representing both locations at the Sámi Cultural Centre Sajos in Inari in 2026. The Sámi Cultural Centre, which also houses the Sámi Parliament, offers a meaningful setting for the final exhibition, enabling the project to reach political decision-makers directly. Annually, over 60,000 people visit Sajos—including local residents, tourists, politicians, and other prominent guests—thus providing a significant platform for visibility and influence. The findings of our community-based art education project and the Arctic Art Education (AAE) strategy will offer participants opportunities to make their everyday lives visible and leave a lasting impression on policymakers' minds.

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