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Abstract for the 4th gathering of Art based research conference

Art based research presenting the daily life of Sami reindeer herders

A lot of people have romantic, but false notion about the contemporary life of reindeer herders. Prejudices are often based on outdated knowledge of Lapland, that however are consciously maintained, as it gains the Northern tourism. People like to think about the reindeer herders as a group of "Lapps", in colourful clothings, living in tents in the wilderness. This kind of generalised approach is a result of the gone colonialism in Lapland and sets the sami reindeer herders in an unpropitious position. The northern environment is changing rapidly. The contemporary life sets impacts on nature, economy and the livelihoods in the region. Today the work of the reindeer herders is in a constant development and old herder means are changed to fit into the needs of the modern world. There is a need to inform and update the rest of the world of what the real nature of reindeer herding is today. The livelihood must be taken seriously to be able to compete equivalent in questions of using the land, benefits and political decisions of the area.

The art-based action research method has promoted the art education in the changing multicultural North. The cultural-sensitive art education which uses place-specific and community-based approach has been applied in different northern projects with aims of decolonization. The culture-sensitive methods of art education and the art-based researches, have also improved the visibility and the width of spread information about the projects.

In my dissertation, which is a work-in-progress, the art-based action research method is used to inform and update the rest of the world about the reindeer herders daily life. The research material are snapshots taken by the herders themselves. This approach serves the principles of decolonialism, which is a basis for my research. The photos will gather information about how ancient Sami knowledge and working means are applied to the modern system. The photos will serve as data and as an inspiration source for the research interviews and also for an informative Art exhibition. As an art educator, I will instruct the herders to create contemporary art works about their daily life. The applied visual art serves informatively and aesthetically in the exhibition. Informative art workshops will be organized in the context of the exhibition. The exhibition and the art workshops will in a constructive way communicate and increase the understanding and knowledge of the reindeer herders situation today.

My dissertation is observing the art-based research method as an informant and a means to increase understanding between people. Working with pictures may have a larger educating impact both for people with little knowledge about reindeer herders as also for the herders themselves.

Keywords; Art-based research, applied visual arts, art education, decolonization, reindeer herders