

# Sustainable thoughts

*-on pedagogy and Art in Nature*

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## **Intro**

This article is based on a book that will be published in Swedish autumn 2013. With this book I hope to encourage teachers at kinder gardens, in schools, artist and art teachers in museums, to use Art in Nature in their daily work with people within their own context of educational situations. The context gives you advices on how to plan and make a preparation before you get started. And with many photos taken during workshops combined with the text you get a clear visual idea about what the outcome of a workshop can become. Moreover I present a proposal on didactic matters- like how your methods may be in

relation to school system, political and philosophical issues.

The intention by producing the book is that on a longer term contribute to a sustainable pedagogy for Art in Nature. I would now like to give you a brief from the part of the book, where I make suggestions on a theoretical framework for pedagogy dealing with art in the nature.

## **The Brief**

This brief is presented in the second part of the book and start with the importance of who you are as a pedagogue, leading you in to new questions on how to teach and build your thesis on.

## ***A summary from a theoretical sketch***

All learning are based on earlier experiences that has been brought in to theories about learning but today we have no such ground to stand on when we talk about pedagogy and Land art/Art in Nature. Therefore we have to ask ourselves and pin point what knowledge and experiences we lean towards when we teach about Art in the Nature.

My suggestion is that we need to lean towards knowledge about

1. Outdoor teaching
2. Art and design solutions to form
3. Environmental knowledge

## ***Why outdoor teaching?***

One thing that is very exciting as an artist making art in the nature is that you can never completely govern the outcome of your ideas. The result is often affected by some unforeseen factor when you create art out-doors. There is always an element of surprise and fairly big demands on being adaptable, to be creative and make new decisions. To be able to finish an art

project in nature is certainly a question about interface between the powers of nature and the individual person's will. Being out-doors means something entirely different than being indoors. This is simply the case, and is also when we stage an educational situation in nature. It is not just results that can come to change in the process from thought to product when we are outside. We humans also change to a degree.



To teach out-doors must be adapted to how we humans are and behave in nature.

To find advice and understanding for how we can adapt the teaching to the unique circumstances that creating art out-door offers, we can look to experiences of out-door education. For example Great Britain and Sweden is two countries where it's on the rise within school education, and there is a good supply of experiences to listen and learn from.

To emphasize the difference to a subject which is taught indoors, we can use Mathematics as an example. Maths is also a subject most of us have an experience of from school. Out-doors maths means exploring that which exists in the out-door environment. You see it as a means to solve different mathematical terms, equations and reasoning's. For example, one might measure the scale and size of an area and then explore how a mathematical can describe what one has measured. During an out-door class, you are much more mobile. You move a lot, chat with your class mates and experiment. You absorb quite an amount of information

with your eyes, you smell the scent of the ground and so on, while still trying to solve a mathematical problem through practical means. When you see it in writing you realize it is quite a difference between sitting in school during a maths class and being outside and trying the subject's possibilities.

A learning process out-doors is centered on what you experiences, explores and learn

- Through action
- To experience with all five senses
- Through the body's movements and memory
- Through landscape, the location and environment
- Verbal, visual or written summarization of the experience

We have to lean towards out-door educational experiences on how participators act and learn within an out-door context. In doing so, we will increase our awareness of how to teach out-door. We will find us even more capable in guiding people to become in tune with the situation that we have invited them to take part in.

### ***The intention behind Art in Nature***

Similarly to out-door education, the practical action is important to get an understanding of what Land Art / Art in Nature can amount to. Certainly, we can learn by reading, listening and watching pictures. An experienced art theorist can interoperate and mediate how artists let nature be a part of an aesthetic message. It is interesting to listen to, but how are students and children to understand what it means that nature is a part of an art work in nature? We can guess the meaning of it through theoretical learning, but how are we to relate it to our own lives and experiences? How do we get a more in-depth understanding as to why artists create this specific kind of art? Well, it is only when we, ourselves, try it out in a location we can fully comprehend how

there is a connection between who and what you are, and how you experience that place, the natural materials, the design idea, and the artistic message. It is through the experience of in order to solve a problem (or do what I want), I first need to create a big picture of the situation. I need to understand the connection and context between body, place, mind, will and idea. Just like the out-door educator, we need to learn to search for and structure out impressions and experiences in a holistic perspective. And through the results we get, we also get living proof that some form of dialogue between place and human has taken place. I would like to call that dialogue a creative identification with the surroundings.

### ***What is taught about art?***

We now know that we teach about Art in nature and I always refer to Land Art as contemporary art. I do this because Land Art was developed in close contact with all other contemporary art, especially performance art. This also means that we teach about

- the art form's history and what signifies it
- about under which circumstances the art form lives, that it often is temporary and must be documented to live on

We also teach how one speaks of an art work, and how one interprets art in general. For instance they learn how to talk about visual expressions and art during the dialogue they engage along the workshop both with the educator and members of their group. They learn about imagine interoperation when they present and discuss the completed works, as I see it, this is a dialogue where you refer to visual and artistic expressions continuously

during the whole creative process. Perhaps some disagree with me, but I would say there is a communication about images which is equally important as the actual interpretation. The interest for how this type of communication happens within image and art teaching is fairly recent, and today there is some interesting research about what we call visual culture. However, today there is no didactic material which describes how we communicate knowledge of art during a practical creative process. On the other hand, there is quite a lot of writing about how one conducts image and art analysis in a teaching situation. Pedagogical tools that might be useful even in a situation like this.

We also teach how an artistic message becomes part of a work of art related to matter as the concept "form". We do this by presenting the conditions of a creative process to the participant. And through designing a task in which a practical solution to a problem is centered on how the participant can visualize a message through the use of forms, a place and its materials.

What we teach about form is to develop a sense of how matter becomes form in an out-door environment, in Nature or in a place.



This means we teach construction skills and an idea of how one, for example, can use contrast and nuance both with suggestions of form and with the colors already present in the natural materials we use. We also present an opportunity where the participants can learn about scale and size in relation to an artistic creation of form. However, creating with forms outdoors is often a new experience. The most basic knowledge which everyone comes to know during their first encounter with form based creating is that it's an opportunity to get a sense of scale, size and access to materials. It becomes knowledge as our first ideas of what we want to create often require larger scales and more material access than we first guessed. It is only when the participant is confronted with the problem, and when they only have their body as a means to solve the problem, that they realize how large scales and dimensions are outdoors. A highly positive effect of this experience is that the members of the group truly understand why they need to work as a group. Everyone is needed and everyone's efforts are acknowledged and appreciated.

In conclusion we can determine that we teach solutions to form by:

- using and exploring both the location's possibilities and limitations
- using and exploring the natural materials' aesthetic and practical possibilities
- recreating and testing design from contemporary art projects in the nature
- planning, constructing and finishing a creative idea

We have to lean and educate ourselves in how art historian design their education and we have to stick to some of those pedagogical experiences that educators use in creative processes related to form and design. In doing so we will be able to pin point the importance of dialogue around art and find us even more capable to create a creative atmosphere where we can support our participators even better in their working process.

### ***Environmental issues in this teaching content***

The third area we will have to lean against, outside our own profession as artists and art curators, concerns experiences in educational environmental issues. One argument for this is the fact that almost every artist that works with art in nature implicates philosophical and political messages within their visual expressions related to environmental concept in their art projects.



Environment is a very important matter for most of artist working with art in the nature and this means that all spectators whom come in contact with art in nature also will be confronted with questions about our environment in one way or another. This also means that somehow we have to headlight this as we teach about creating art in nature.

But before presenting a brief on how and in what way we teach about environmental issues, we have to stop and pin point how we look upon the concept “environmental issues”.

This is of course a very wide area with many ideas, both about sustainability itself and which choices need to be done first. However today we can see tendency to integrate willingness to headlight thoughts about sustainability within all educational systems. In my own country (Sweden) “sustainable development” is now a part of every subject in all school systems. This means that related to teachers own subject, they somehow has to implant knowledge and information about sustainability. This is a good thing and will have impact on the future and how coming generations act and plan for their future. But we now see a large criticism against the concept sustainable development from many scientists and activist within environmental professions and we have to stay alert to this debates and criticism. The criticism is concerning the concept “development “combined with sustainability. Scientists like Tim Jackson and Alf Hornborg presents analyses with important questions like: Is it possible to continue thinking and acting with thoughts of economical accumulation and commercial growth parallel with a sustainable planning and acting, -just as the concept sustainable development suggests? Is it possible for us to continue on a sustainable path without “development”?”

However, I suggest that we have to build on those resources we have, there is not much time to start all over again. But, we need to have a critical mind and be aware of what is going on and how rhetoric’s and discourses are being used in order to make changes. If we build upon the concept sustainable development, related to teaching, we have some methods to lean on and I would like to present this to you.

In *Sustainable Development – Teaching from Wholes and Contexts*, author Inger Björnelo describes the concept as having three separate meanings;

- Ethical project; which revolves around creative an understanding for how we promote a sustainable development in the world.
- A cultural construct; which means building bridges between cultures, seeing, understanding and partaking in these cultures.

- The individual’s sustainable development; individual sustainable development means building self-esteem, health and community.

In most schools I have visited and been teaching art in nature the teaching activity has been connected to the Arts subject. But perhaps there are other subjects this kind of teaching could be related to? I suggest that presented pedagogy inspired from Land art/art in nature may be used as a means to teach Sustainable Development.

### ***What do we learn related to the environment?***

Teaching about art in nature also means learning about the environment and our place in it. As we know many artists have an environmentally political message in their works, the participants learn how locations can be used and filled with visual messages of our environment and thoughts about a sustainable future. They learn that art can work for the environment in an indirect way. Through confronting people and experiencing art, people’s interest for an environmentally political message can be kindled. There is much that indicates that we teach about a cultural construct in sustainable development through the use of art in nature.

Another thing we teach is what you can and can’t do in nature. We learn about the right to public access and sometimes of plants and what animals roam at a location.



We learn about the perception of time in relation to environments and nature, of change in seasons and how they alter the aesthetics and atmosphere of a location. The participants learn how locations can be

used and filled with visual messages of our environment and thoughts of a sustainable future.

A very positive effect of trying art in nature through practical experience is that the participants both explore their environment and experience what it is to change it. The changes that are made are an exercise in harmony with a location, but also in the search of contrasts and surprise elements in the aesthetic expressions. To attract attention is an exercise in visual communication and filling your actions with a message.

### ***Sustainability and organizers***

The personal intention in writing a book about how to teach art in nature is to get involved in a strategy for creating a stable platform for art in nature. A platform we can build upon, without having to start all over again, when it comes to involve people in our art projects.



But there are more to come in taking part of a stable and hopefully growing vision as organizers for art in nature. We also have to think of sustainability in our own field of knowledge. How do we pass on our experiences between each other? How do we prepare future generation to become great artists in our own field? In passing on knowledge we somehow crosses methods of guidance, coaching, teaching etc. Even if we do this in an informal way in our networks, we still pass on knowledge in a ways that involves pedagogy in one way or another. If we want to continue working for future opportunities like growing art project, residencies and exhibitions, we also have to ask ourselves why and how we create larger scenes and better network platforms. Then we have to become aware of how didactic matters pay an

important role in passing on knowledge and how we can use pedagogical methods in order to engage people with what we do and strive for by making art in nature.

By making clear statement in the future on how we teach (or make use of a pedagogy) in this professional field of art in nature/Land art, we will gain many new possibilities.

A few of them will be

1. A theoretical platform on pedagogy based on art in nature
2. A stable quality on how to guide and engage participators in projects
3. Clear communication toward other educational areas – cooperation
4. Better quality in analyzing and summarize project

I believe it is of great importance for our own growth, to guide people outside our own networks and let them adopt thoughts and experiences of art in nature. To show them how they might find ways and see new possibilities related to their own knowledge and areas of experiences by integrate art in nature. This is simply how things grow and spreads and I think it is about time to find ways for art in nature to contribute to the world that for the moment faces so many environmental challenges.



*All photographs are made by Marie Gayatri during her own art projects and educational programs*

*For more information: [landartcrossing.com](http://landartcrossing.com)*

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### **Outdoor art projects in Sweden.**

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[www.landartcrossing.com](http://www.landartcrossing.com)

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