

Nourishing Connections: Fostering Collaboration on Food Ethics through Art

Katja Juhola
University of Lapland

Clarice Zdanski, PhD
Franklin University, Switzerland

Hugo Peña
Independent Scholar

Teea Kortetmäki, PhD
University of Jyväskylä, Finland

Raisa Foster, PhD
University of the Arts Helsinki & University of Eastern Finland

ABSTRACT

This paper explores collaborative workshops conducted at the International Socially Engaged Art Symposium (ISEAS), concentrating on the convergence of art and science in the realm of food values and ethics. With 20 artists and scientists participating, ISEAS employed arts-based methods to investigate food-related themes within diverse communities. One team, comprising three artists and a food ethics researcher, collaborated with 17 secondary school students in Seinäjoki (Finland). Their three-day event utilised various arts-based methods to address food ethics issues, such as availability, equity, sustainability, norms, and food justice. Integrating scientific and artistic knowledge, the study showcases the effectiveness of conversational art-making, revealing the role of art and science in fostering awareness of ethical dimensions in food production and consumption. The study highlights the potential of conversational art as a potent tool in community projects, as it facilitates dialogue on challenging topics beyond verbal communication. The paper underscores how art and science can collectively engage communities by encouraging transformative thinking and action.

KEYWORDS: Art And Science Collaboration, Art Education, Socially Engaged Art, Art Activism, Food Justice, Participatory Art, Community Art, Food Ethics, Conversational Art

This paper presents socially engaged art workshops centred on food values and ethics. The International Socially Engaged Art Symposium (ISEAS), founded by Finnish artist-researcher Katja Juhola¹, organised a 10-day symposium to address environmental concerns and promote social equality through the collaborative efforts of artists and scientists. With six successful editions organised annually, each bringing together approximately 20 participants, ISEAS fosters a cohesive collective that encourages sharing diverse expertise and collaborative projects within smaller subteams and distinct communities. The 2022 ISEAS edition explicitly focused on food and engaged 97 people in Southern Ostrobothnia, Finland. Four workshops were conducted with people of different ages: primary school students, secondary school students, working-age adults and seniors' book club members. ISEAS has always been an art event that brings together actors from different fields, and the outcomes are explicitly the result of collaboration between multiple actors. The core of Juhola's broader research interests is collaboration between various fields of science and the arts (da Costa, 2008; Scott, 2006).

Food and Environmental Anxiety

The theme for ISEAS 2022 was food, which is crucial for all forms of life. Food production is a complicated process that affects our living conditions, culture, and identity (Lang & Heasman, 2015; Rozin, 1996). Cultural food habits significantly impact human and planetary well-being, and understanding the current situation of food production and consumption is essential in finding solutions and promoting cultural change. The prevalent food values in affluent societies have normalized environmentally detrimental dietary patterns, portraying them as usual and associating, for example, meat consumption with being necessary, normal, natural, and friendly (Piazza et al., 2015). In affluent societies, food has become an increasing source of both pleasure and anxiety (Coveney, 2000), not least due to the rising social media-based presence of diverse and conflicting norms and expectations about how people should eat and look. Simultaneously, the possibility of people achieving adequate nutrition is highly unequal worldwide. Even in wealthy societies, food insecurity—first world hunger—has become a current phenomenon (Riches & Silvasti, 2014). The distribution of wealth is highly unjust in food supply chains, leaving farmers to struggle with profitability whilst multinational corporations become more powerful (Lang & Heasman, 2015). Increasing talk about responsible

1 Juhola, a doctoral student at the Finnish University of Lapland Faculty of Art and Design, has focused her research on ISEAS <https://iseasfinland.com/> since its inception in 2017, continuously developing it in subsequent symposiums.

consumption and ethical food purchasing is partly misleading, since the responsible shopping basket is often the privilege of well-off people in a position to freely decide (Kortetmäki, 2019). The current issues with sustainability and injustice present structural problems that are so complex that they are nobody's fault, making them much harder to understand and address (Kortetmäki, 2019).

Growing food is one of the main reasons for climate change (White & Yeates, 2018) and can thus create environmental anxiety. Panu Pihkala (2017) sees environmental anxiety as a broad phenomenon not limited to a specific age group or cultural status. Pihkala maintains that climate anxiety can appear as a desire to deny the problem or as a general feeling of inferiority. Still, most people cannot influence the issue and just try to live with it (Pihkala, 2017). The present climate and political conditions have left many people feeling shaken, with little or no faith in the future. Young people suffer from eco-anxiety and a feeling of powerlessness to influence their future (Pihkala, 2017). Indeed, food is linked to both pandemics and mental health problems. The language of art may provide another way to access research results and find new keys to understanding compared. Our research findings indicate the significant importance of providing youth with an opportunity to engage in discussions about complex issues regarding the future in the company of their peers, as well as with scholars and specialists.

Emancipatory Potential of Art Education and Activism

Work in ISEAS can be compared to art activism as well as critical-activist research, which aims to create a movement to displace old ways of thinking and thus allow the birth of a new kind of activity; the collective seeks what is possible in terms of what emerges when our taxonomic certainties are deliberately shaken (Rolling, 2013). Gregory Sholette (2022) argues that the early 21st century has been an extraordinary period for art activism, with movements from *Occupy* to *Black Lives Matter* drawing on adherents' artistic skills. In his view, the last time art activism was as vital in protest culture was in the 1960s and '70s. Demos (2017) states: "In this regard, contemporary visual culture at its best can play a critical role in raising awareness of the impact, showing the environmental abuse and human cost, of fossil fuel's everyday operations, mediating and encouraging a rebellious activist culture" (p. 56.). In an era of environmental concern, surrounded by pandemics, wars, and a flood of information, it is clear that these issues need to be addressed. Everyone does it in their way, but each way also has its consequences, of which people must be aware (Pihkala, 2017). By becoming ethically aware and considerate, community members

can empower others to address ongoing issues of environmental degradation and injustice, including food inequalities and the ecological challenges associated with current food production and consumption practices. Anniina Suominen (2016) sees opportunities in art education to influence environmental concerns with a participatory, empowering, and activist-oriented pedagogical attitude that challenges individuals and communities to rethink familiar principles, functions, and practices. Suominen claims that art education is most meaningful when it aims at the growth of the individual and society. This thinking is in line with art activism. When we want to change the current situation, art can guide us. Suominen continues that the foundation of art education must be ethics, justice and thinking based on radical democracy.

According to Mira Kallio-Tavin (2020), one of the goals of art education is to develop ethical and critical judgement by bringing students into dialogue with the world and its challenging questions about the relationship between human and non-human animals. Karen Hutzler and Ryan Shin (2022) state that when facing global issues and divisions, art educators must reflect on established views beyond local or regional contexts. From their point of view, despite debates on the impacts of globalization, the global world remains a relevant educational concern. Educating students well means preparing them economically, socially, critically, and culturally for a globalised world. The nurturing of this kind of new ecological citizenship, necessary for cultural transformations, also requires diversifying those modes of communication that are considered legitimate ways to express one's concerns and values in society (e.g. Latta, 2007). Socially engaged art can promote food-related communication and self-expression diversification, thereby contributing to the broader task of building more inclusive communities. Pablo Helguera (2011) suggests that a successful description of socially engaged art is *emancipation*, which means that its participants willingly engage in a dialogue from which they glean critical and experiential richness. To feel enriched after an event, they may even demand ownership of the experience or the ability to repeat it with others.

Conversational Art and EcoJustice in Socially Engaged Practice: Theoretical Foundations and Application in Food-Related Projects

ISEAS's leading theory is conversational art in socially engaged art practice. Suzi Gablik (1995) and Grant Kester (2004) both theorized using conversation in the making of art. Kester argues that conversation is not only verbal but can also be methods, such as action painting,

dance, or improvisation, as occurred with the project the ISEAS (2022) Secondary School Team created around the theme of food. In a conversation with Carolyn Merchant, Gablik (1995) discussed the intersection of science, art, and the ecological revolution, highlighting how our civilization's dominance over nature may lead to collapse and reorganisation, ultimately creating order from chaos.

According to Juha Varto (2017), artistic research is based on creativity and involves the search for new forms. Artistic research is rooted in sensory experiences and the world around us. As Teemu Mäki (2017) notes, it can offer knowledge that cannot be easily verbalised or placed within a literary context. Artistic methods can provide an alternative to verbal conversations, enabling participants to access hidden places and under-utilised faculties. The ISEAS event with Seinäjoki Secondary School students on the theme of food provided the soil for a versatile examination from personal, social, and ecological justice perspectives. EcoJustice education is grounded in a set of theories and pedagogical practices (Foster & Martusewicz, 2019; see also Martusewicz et al., 2014), based on the understanding that humans are deeply dependent on the living network of all diverse and complex systems of more-than-human life. EcoJustice education is based on critically analysing unsustainable values, attitudes, and ways of living in (post-)industrial societies. It aims to revitalise natural and cultural commonalities and conceive of a more responsible relationship with Earth (Foster et al., 2019).

Socially Engaged Art

Socially engaged art is a form of art where the process of creation unfolds within and among communities. It goes beyond merely producing objects, as the artist aims to address or improve social conditions. Creativity is harnessed within a social context to effect socio-political change or provide educational opportunities (Helguera, 2011; Thompson, 2015). Socially engaged art, and more specifically conversational art, activated within the context of EcoJustice could enable people to think about and work out the complex nature of food, the dysfunctionality of the current food production and consumption systems, and trying to eat *right*. Foster (2022) highlights the potential of socially engaged art to facilitate encounters with otherness and promote acceptance of diversity. In the ISEAS 2022 interventions, the collaboration between art and science on food ethics provided a platform for students to engage in activist art and raise their voices on the issue.

Nato Thompson (2015) describes socially engaged art as offering physical engagement spaces over time, creating “prolonged encounters of difference and affinity that transpire in the world and between people” (p. 145). These engagements between people through art are an essential way of creating new conversations. It is meaningful to understand conversation’s power and value in socially engaged art forms. By using playful practice, it is possible to create a new kind of creative pedagogy that considers the surrounding natural world and our lives equally, where art can be used to visualise otherwise invisible life-sustaining networks. Art-science activism and pedagogy can build new communities and open new corridors (Flynn & Reed, 2019). In ISEAS, a collaboration between artists and scientists, youth were allowed to discuss and implement their ideas in an environment where scientific knowledge meets the freedom of art.

A Case Study Using Arts-Based Research to Explore How Conversational Art Can Develop Greater Awareness and Understanding of Current Global Food Issues and Encourage Communication

The underlying methodology in the Seinäjoki Secondary School case study was arts-based research (ABR). ABR produces research material with the help of art. Patricia Leavy (2019) states that art has the potential to be immediate and lasting. With that, she means that art can grab our attention and change our view of life. It has the potential to affect our intellectual consciousness as well as our emotions. Researchers engaging in art use art as a way of knowing. The methodology can also be used to analyse tacit information. Art—especially conversational art (bodily movement or chaos painting as described in this case study)—can go deeper into our feelings than verbal conversations. In the 21st century, artistic research and ABR have become widely established and accepted in academia (e.g. Barone & Eisner, 2012; Leavy, 2015, 2019; McNiff, 1998). Jaana Erkkilä (2017) states that each artist has their area of strength which can be on a theoretical level or seen in, for example, the use of colours whilst painting. When talking about the task of art, artist-art researcher Teemu Mäki (2017) emphasises *all* the arts, not just the visual arts. This methodological choice was part of a broader study that Juhola has carried out in creating ISEAS and having organised four interventions with the same theme of food, while ISEAS has been held six times since 2017 with various themes and many kinds of interventions.

ISEAS promotes an equitable exchange of expertise between science and art. Over the years, ISEAS has facilitated discussions on

environmental issues and themes of equality within 17 communities, involving several hundred individuals. The significance of ISEAS extends beyond its international nature and cross-cultural exchange of ideas; an immersive and intensive mode of operation characterises the symposium. Previous studies have highlighted the fruitful synergy between art and science, which has the potential to inspire novel modes of thinking (Juhola, 2018, 2019, 2020a, 2020b, 2021; Juhola & Moldovan, 2020; Juhola et al., 2020; Juhola et al., 2022; Raatikainen et al., 2020). Participation in ISEAS offers a comprehensive experience that fosters the emergence of shared understanding. Through modest communal living, participating artists, food professionals, and food researchers share time and space with other ISEAS artists and scientists, creating opportunities for dinner table conversations that facilitate the exchange of ideas and perspectives. The symposium provides diverse activities encouraging social interaction, including sauna baths, nature walks, joint conversations, yoga mornings and late-night dancing (Figures 1 and 2).



Figure 1. *Morning Joint Exercise, Which Is Voluntary for All ISEAS Participants (Image: Fabio Cito, 2022)*



Figure 2. *One of the Daily Dinner Table Discussions. Food Researcher Anu Hopia Presents her Research Area (Image: Fabio Cito, 2022)*

The ISEAS structure follows these methodological steps: collaborative planning between art and science to integrate ABR methods in socially engaged art, participatory work, reflection, and artistic analysis. This approach is exemplified by the artworks created by ISEAS artists, which are based on socially engaged projects, such as those conducted with secondary school students. ABR is a methodology that can be used by researchers without artistic studies. Still, in the ISEAS Secondary School subteam, three out of four members were professional artists, who analyzed their experiences with the ISEAS project and created artworks at the Lapua Art Museum based on these experiences.

In 2022, the collaborative nature of the workshops fostered a deeper understanding of the complex social, cultural, and environmental factors contributing to the food theme. The artistic results of the ISEAS art workshops with the students were exhibited at the Lapua Art Museum in the autumn of 2023 until the end of January 2024. The symposium documentation, including video and photo documentation, recordings of discussions, produced artworks and exhibitions, and various forms of participant reflections, constitutes a rich body of research data. All participants signed written release forms granting permission to use their research, including photos and videos. Participants understood that the works of art would be exhibited in the art museum and that articles would be written about the event. The vibrant environment of ISEAS, resembling a camp-like setting, provides a platform for artists and natural scientists to come together to cultivate innovative approaches.

Studying Food Ethics with the Help of Art and Science among Seinäjoki Secondary School Students

This paper focuses on one of the interventions during the 10 days of ISEAS 2022. More specifically, it examines the collaborative work between the art-science ISEAS subteam and 17 secondary school students over three days in August 2022 in Seinäjoki, Finland. Three days of workshops were conducted by an international, multidisciplinary team composed of members whose work and philosophies matched the aims of ISEAS 2022. Before going to the school, the team spent several days designing activities that suited their fields of expertise. Hours of brainstorming and reformulating ideas resulted in a unified, cohesive approach that could also embrace unpredictability.

These workshops were intertwined with other artists and researchers associated with the ISEAS collective, emphasising the interconnectedness within the broader framework of ISEAS itself. The three-day workshop at Seinäjoki Secondary School, addressing food values and ethics, utilised diverse arts-based methods (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Leavy, 2015, 2018; McNiff, 1998; Suominen et al., 2017). Led by a team of artists and researchers, including Finnish multidisciplinary artist and researcher Raisa Foster, Finnish food system researcher Teea Kortetmäki, Chilean dancer and choreographer Hugo Peña, and American artist and art educator Clarice Zdanski, the intervention incorporated body awareness tasks, movement practices, visual arts and philosophical research. Exploring food-related values and ethics (Rawlinson & Ward, 2017) involved discussions, writing, movement, performance, painting and drawing.

Research Process

The first workshop started in the gym, with a “Silent Circle” (Figure 3) and icebreaker and movement exercises led by Foster and Peña. The table and tablecloths were then brought out to the centre of the gym, and the group moved freely around them using movements and gestures from previous exercises (Figure 4). They also engaged in drawing and colouring activities led by Zdanski to express their thoughts and feelings. The movement-based practice continued with the food ethics researcher reading passages from her research on food justice aloud in Finnish.



Figure 3. *Day 1 of the Workshops as Foster and Peña Start the Introductions, With Students, Art Teachers and ISEAS Team Members Participating in the Exercise (Image: Fabio Cito, 2022)*



Figure 4. *Day 1 of the Workshops: Dance Sequence With Tables, Chairs and Tablecloths (Image: Fabio Cito, 2022)*

For the second day's work, the students were divided into smaller groups to go through the station circuit. Each station was rotated every 20 to 30 minutes, with separate gyms for Foster and Peña to conduct movement and contact exercises. Foster asked the young people to express norms and expectations they personally encounter about food

on Post-it notes, revealing demands and expectations arising from family values, social, political, identity, health, and appearance-related concerns.



Figure 5. ISEAS Exhibition at the Lapua Art Museum, *Our Shared Food*. The Image Includes Foster's Video Installation *Because We Are Told To* and Zdanski's *I Am What I Eat – Chaos of Emotions* (Image: Anna-Kaarina Perko, 2023)

The students' notes highlighted the various requirements young people must navigate with regard to eating-related norms found on social media or from family members (Figure 5). Examples included: "Don't eat before going to bed," "Avoid saturated fats," "Don't snack," "What was the food at school like?" "Take more food," "Soft drinks ruin your teeth," "Do not talk with food in your mouth," "Why don't you eat bread anymore?" and "Taste everything." After the writing session, the group improvised a performance vignette where one student stood in place with an expressionless face and other students affixed the Post-it notes onto their bodies and read the sentences aloud. These Post-it notes illustrate the complexity of how people perceive and think about food and the various (also conflicting) demands that young people must navigate.



Figure 6. ISEAS Exhibition at the Lapua Art Museum, *Our Shared Food*. The Picture Includes Peña's Two Artworks: Video Installation *Empatia* and *My Commitments* (Images: Hugo Peña, 2022)

In Peña's workshop, students were prompted to create original graphic content on topics such as food, exclusion and inclusion, using their bodies as a means of expression. One exercise involved writing letters to marginalised individuals, embodying the words through movement, and capturing expressions on mobile phones (Figure 6). The goal was to encourage connections beyond familiar circles, while fostering imagination and empathy. Students were not given prior information about particular cases of injustices but, rather, called to think about the case they address by themselves. Despite varied responses, the exercise effectively stimulated imagination, emotions, and reflections on privilege, emphasising the need for students to contribute to addressing inequality. The workshop provided a unique opportunity to raise awareness and instil a sense of restlessness for positive change. Kortetmäki utilised a circle to distinguish food-related privilege/disadvantage and asked students to draw inclusion and exclusion to stimulate contemplation and make the justice concept more relatable to students (Figure 7). The task successfully elicited diverse responses, and Kortetmäki saw it as a way to make marginalised individuals more visible, countering the invisibility often linked to injustice. Students did not receive prior information about food in/justices, as Kortetmäki wanted to see what kinds of cases students came up with themselves, but when the drawings were briefly discussed in each group, Kortetmäki provided some concrete information about existing injustices regarding, for example, unequal access to food.

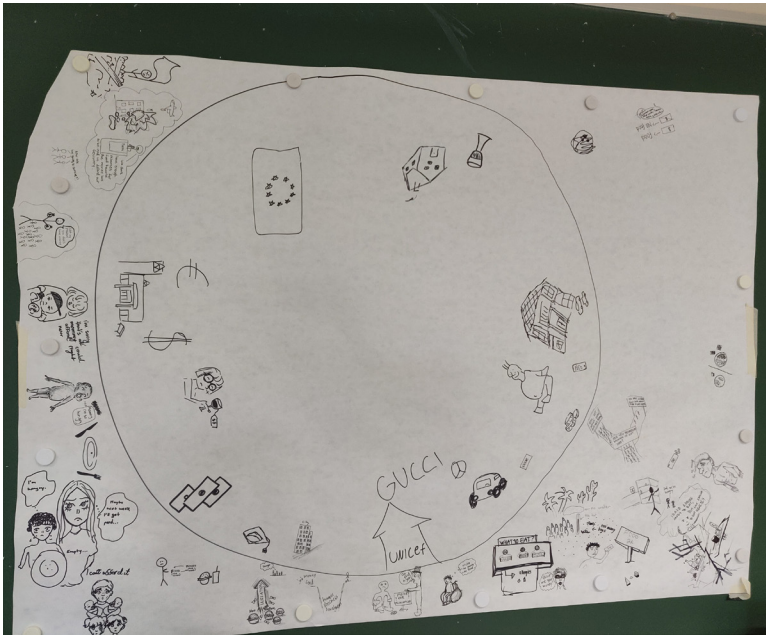


Figure 7. *In the Picture, Students and Kortetmäki Are Drawing Ideas About Factors That Create Inclusion and Exclusion in the World (Image: Tuula Muhonen, 2022)*

Zdanski's Chaos Painting Workshop drew inspiration from mid-20th-century action painting, emphasising the act of creation over the final product. The workshop aimed to capture the chaotic emotions related to nourishment and respecting bodies, humans, creatures, and the environment using various art materials. Students covered tablecloths chaotically on both sides, enriching the complexity of the images reflecting their thoughts and feelings. The seemingly haphazard images are especially gripping when illuminated, which allows the intricate details in the layers upon layers of drawing and painting done on both sides of the translucent non-woven fabric to be revealed, thus confronting viewers with deep-rooted emotional issues associated with food justice on a global scale (Figure 8).



Figure 8. *Students Involved in Chaos Painting*
(Image: Fabio Cito, 2022)

The final ISEAS workshop featured filmed performances, a highlight integrated into the *Our Shared Food* exhibition at the Lapua Art Museum. One performance involved an inclusion/exclusion game symbolising social inequality, where participants formed a circle, leaving a few outside. Filmed from above with a drone (Figure 9), it provided a unique perspective. The workshop concluded with all participants forming a circle, observing silence, and expressing their emotions in one word, adding a reflective and poignant conclusion to the event.



Figure 9. *On the Final Day, Foster Leads Students in a Game of Inclusion/Exclusion, Where Those Who Form the Circle Must Keep the Others out* (Image: Fabio Cito, 2022)



Figure 10. *From the Our Shared Food Exhibition at the Lapua Art Museum, Two Students From Seinäjoki Secondary School Participated in the Opening and the Panel Discussion for the Finlandia Fair Food Games Video Artwork. Foster Subsequently Recorded a Sports Commentary-Like Narrative About Global Competition Related to Food Justice (Image: Anna-Kaarina Perko, 2023)*

Integrating Art and Science for Food Ethics: Insights and Recommendations from ISEAS 2022

The workshop focused on food-related values, beliefs, and ethical matters, including food justice—a vital aspect of environmental justice and sustainability movements that seek to ensure equitable access to nutritious food for all whilst advocating for fair conditions in food production and trade. After the event, Juhola solicited feedback from the participating students and teachers. The feedback was mainly positive and underscored the significance of the theme and the results achieved. One participant shared:

I chose this red paper to write down my feelings because it often reflected my emotional state during the project: anger, guilt, bitterness, and sadness. I experienced these emotions when discussing inequality, the world's grievances, food-related ideals, and rules. During the project, these feelings were released in the Chaos painting section and writing Post-it notes. (Anonymous participant, 2022)

Another participant commented:

The experience was good and positive in every way. And I don't regret joining the project. The project was very versatile, and a lot of different types of things were done in it. Some were pleasant, and others were not. The whole thing left positive feelings. (Anonymous participant, 2022)

The exhibition at the Lapua Art Museum showcased the artistic analysis by ISEAS artists of their socially engaged experiences with secondary school students (Figure 10). Foster and Peña further developed video works from the material of their workshops, whilst Zdanski highlighted the paintings created by the students as they were and included a small model of an installation on the theme of inclusion/exclusion that had figured in the brainstorming process. Both approaches are correct and equally valuable in socially engaged art exhibitions. The exhibition, organised a year after the workshops in the same area, also continued the reflections of the young participants. Two students who attended the opening also participated in a panel discussion, emphasizing the new and meaningful role of art in conveying information.

In the ISEAS 2022 interventions, art and science collaborated on the theme of food ethics, highlighting the importance of inclusion and exclusion in our current state of living conditions. Our work with Seinäjoki Secondary School students led to recommendations for organizing socially engaged art projects. To address our research question "How can conversational art be used as a tool to develop a greater awareness and understanding of current global food issues and to encourage communication on them?" This study affirmed and illuminated that art professionals from various fields collaborate with natural scientists to foster discussion and inspire action in addressing environmental concerns. The strength of art lies in its ability to surprise. The creative process involves embracing chaos and acceptance at each stage. Innovation requires exploring new territories and adopting novel approaches.

As a result, we suggest the following elements in your ABR approach:

1. Explain the concept in advance, highlighting the value of art and the unexpected.
2. Embrace improvisation and be willing to adjust plans as needed.
3. Include various artistic disciplines:
 - Use bodily movement, choreography and performance art for ice-breaking activities.
 - Integrate performance art with scientific material to make it engaging.
 - Employ visual arts to create environments, set scenes and give form to ideas.
4. Use diverse ARB methods for expressing emotions and thoughts.
5. Foster conversations.
6. Respect all participants.
7. Collaborate with authors and teachers.
8. Document activities and gather feedback on interventions.

Conclusion

ISEAS in August 2022 invited artists and researchers to collaborate on the theme of food, promoting interaction and exchange. The participants, organised into groups, engaged in arts-based activities and dialogues that address the connections of food to environmental issues, climate change, and social justice. This article focused on one of the teams, three artists and a food ethics researcher, who collaborated with 17 secondary school students from Seinäjoki. Their three-day event applied various artistic methods to explore questions of exclusion and inclusion within the context of food justice. Through this collaboration, students expressed their views on challenging topics that may be difficult to express verbally.

Creating a socially engaged art-science event embraces the is related to its possibility for it to grow larger than itself. As Lea Kantonen and Raisa Karttunen (2021) state, the process of socially engaged art or artistic work generally cannot be predicted. Goals and expectations can be set for artistic work, but the final result or effects cannot be known or determined. When actors from various art fields and people from different cultures and disciplines are brought together, something new will inevitably turn out, and this has been the case with ISEAS since its inception. ISEAS activities are intensive and short-term, and even though ISEAS teams spend a great deal of time together planning their

interventions within local communities, improvisation always plays a key role in the actual performance of these interventions. Improvisation allows finding something new and unexpected (Levine, 2013). With ISEAS, the unexpected is expected.

This case highlights the potential of art to act as a collaborative framework between artists, researchers and communities and advocates its inclusion in school curricula. The dynamic nature of art allows new perspectives to emerge, and non-verbal expressions such as movement and colour can effectively convey complex concepts. Activist art fundamentally seeks to bring about change by expanding our ways of thinking and improving our understanding of our relationship with nature. More research is needed on making cooperation between art and science part of everyone's curriculum.

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