Andrew Gryf Paterson, Pixelache Helsinki, 24.9.2012.

"Pixelversity 2011-2012: Towards an Eco-geographic Cultural Approach"

Andrew Gryf Paterson, Pixelache Helsinki

Abstract

Media arts and network culture -focused associations have a history of collaborating between different countries around the Baltic Sea, as well as the promotion of do-it-ourselves and peer-learning approaches. The main case example here is Pixelache Helsinki and it's informal educational programme that has been coordinated and facilitated since 2011 by the author. The motivation and description of the programme is introduced, highlighting the open process of development in 2011. Recognizing the growing interest in sustainability and regional exchange among those involved in the programme, the example of environmental NGO work around the Gulf of Finland and eco-geographic thinking is introduced as an inspiration for future activity. The Pixelversity programme of 2012 builds upon the previous year's events and experience, and covers a handful of themes, however the thematic 'Gulf of Finland' is overarching. Activities which supported and funded participant exchange between Finland, NW Russia and Estonia are explained in detail. The challenge in future regional cultural productions and collaborations will be to take into account consideration participants' interests in relation to the environmental commonalities that are shared.

Introduction

Short distances between different cities surrounding the Baltic sea have been busy with trade and cultural exchange for centuries. At different times the cultural, linguistic, economic and political formations of their surrounding nation-states have both eased and made more difficult the process. This article introduces the work of one cultural association from Helsinki, Finland, it's educational programme, and related efforts in cultural exchange around the Baltic Sea, in particular with Latvia. The article argues for a renewed effort for mobility and exchange around the eastern side of the Baltic Sea region, invigorating the concept of Gulf of Finland Community, and introducing the concept of eco-geographic cultural approach.

I write from the perspective of an artist-organiser in the cultural field, who has adopted different approaches from network culture and applied them to temporary collaborative productions in Finland, Estonia, and Latvia. I also am interested in writing narratives about these experiences, and connect them to practice-led cultural research, as well as with cooperative-minded research and pedagogy. Since the beginning of 2011, I have been part-time employed by a Finnish non-profit cultural association Piknik Frequency to facilitate and coordinate an informal outreach and pedagogical programme called 'Pixelversity' as part of Pixelache Helsinki activities. This is the main subject, and case example of this article, and as such I will elaborate Pixelversity programme's background motivations; give a synopsis of the programme in 2011 and 2012; and the growing

orientation towards the Gulf of Finland, hinting at future aspirations and connections.

Pixelache Helsinki

Pixelache Helsinki is a trans-disciplinary platform for developing and presenting experimental art, design, research and activist projects since 2002. However it is also an organised network of people - currently approximately 12-15 association members, 3-4 staff (2-3 part-time & 1 full-time), plus 10-20 regular friends or unaffiliated associates, not all based in Finland. Many participants in this network use Pixelache Helsinki as the main way to present their recent professional practice, research or approach to art, design or technology, for others it is a fun, hobby event to test or experiment with prototypes, while for some lucky handful it is a mix of both.

Although it is honest to write that as members, we have become good friends, collaborators and peers in the development of Pixelache Helsinki; academically one could interpret it as a cluster of several communities of practice, who share concern and passion for what they do, and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly[i]. Included in this regular interaction are processes with each other, with other organizations and institutions, as well as with other publics and communities, in the format of a cultural festival or via other projects/processes.

Early in Pixelache Helsinki's development, a social science paper by Katri Halonen, correctly identified the strong co-relations between open-source ideology, and the influencing thematic and organizational structure of the festival[ii]. However, the interests within this organised network are broad, and not always easy for outsiders to interpret, including "experimental interaction and electronics; grassroots organizing and networks; politics and economics of media/technology; VJ culture and audiovisual performances; media literacy and engaging environmental issues"[iii].

Knowledge Sharing & Pedagogy among Peers

Piknik Frequency/Pixelache Helsinki is part of a regional and international network of similar practitioners, organizers and producers. How do we learn from our peers—labs, organizations, networks, individual practitioners and artistic communities—in the independent media arts and networked cultural scene of Europe?

The qualities that Ned Rossiter claims characterizes networks: "fluid, ephemeral, transitory, innovative, flowing, non-linear, decentralized, value-adding, creative, flexible, open, collaborative, risk-taking, reflexive, informal, individualized, intense, transformative and so on"[iv] are ones which are embraced in the regional cultural space. Rossiter refers to organised networks as "loose affiliations where participants have the freedom to come and go"[v] according to events participation, and are sources of inspiration for peers to get involved. So, to re-iterate the above question: How do we learn from our peers? Most often it is via sharing information about events and ideas remotely

online, aswell as with travel attending gatherings or festivals.

The 'Baltic Interface Net' seminars in Stockholm and Riga in 1998[vi], kick-started discussion about cultural collaboration and network developments in the Baltic Sea region. Although it was the following TEMP event, organised by Geert Lovink in Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki during Autumn 1999, that a self-organized focus emerged for a 'Baltic Sea Network', with aims to create common ground for new media organizations in the region[vii]. This occasion also initiated the Network Interface for Cultural Exchange (NICE) where "real geographical circumstances (North-East part of Europe) were used as the starting point in establishing the network", although it also expressed that "within this virtual network the possibilities of collaboration increases and the concept of geographical and historical territories is not decisive factor of co-operation within the network"[viii]. Members of the network included those from Norway, Estonia, Belarus, Finland, Latvia, Sweden, Iceland, Russia, Lithuania, Denmark and Poland, and in it's early years the NICE emailing list was an important communication channel for media artists and organizations to share announcements of their recent events. NICE also produced content and discussion in real face-to-face meetings, for example, Riga E-Lab/RIXC's Art+Communication Festival in August 2000 dedicated a section of it's programme to the NICE Network[ix]. Further intensified cultural exchange in the region took place based these foundations in the form of the 'Re-Approaching New Media' (RAM) Workshop series initiated by Creative Room of Art and Computing (CRAC) from Stockholm, in collaboration with Olento (Helsinki), RIXC (Riga), Atelier Nord (Olso), E-Media Center (Tallinn) and Vilma (Vilnius) between 2002-2005[x].

It was also around this time, in Spring 2003, that I entered and participated first in the regional media arts networks, attending RIXC's Art+Communication Festival and Pixelache Helsinki Festival from 2003[xi] [xii], onwards, and also participating within several of the RAM workshop-gatherings, in Helsinki (2003) and Riga the following year (2004). A regular feature of the physical gatherings I attended then, and indeed following since, have been workshops and discussion seminars, sharing new skills or introducing new projects or ways of working. These were, and are, most often produced by the organizing cultural association or lab, and led by an invited artist or pedagogue.

To generalize, pedagogical events in festival gatherings usually take the form of workshops over 2-4 days, but can sometimes be presentations or seminars. Operating within a festival context allows the host organization to focus resources and communications for producing these exchanges of experience, skills and methods. For the workshop coordinators, it is possible to benefit from the concentrated support, extra exposure and publicity; as well as subscribe a relatively specialized or enthusiastic group of participants, both local and those who have come for the festival.

To use our case as example, Pixelache Helsinki Festival has featured workshops and skill-sharing as a core part of its programme over the years, with a strong association to the 'Do-It-Yourself' initiative (D.I.Y.), developing more accurately as 'Do-It-Ourselves' or 'Do-It-With-Others'

(D.I.W.O.)[xiii]. This follows a trend towards social and community learning: learning from peers and experience, as well as learning by doing, and doing it together. This approach has especially applied to Pixelache activity in the fields of experimental electronics, open source development, engagements in public space, and most recently, biological arts. To recognize the influence of the D.I.W.O. approach still in the contemporary context, the Camp Pixelache unconference event in 2012 adopted the phrase as the main theme for presentations and participant contributions[xiv].

Different types of participants and pedagogues include specialists or those participating within or knowledgeable of the Pixelache scene(s), such as artists, makers, designers, cultural producers and researchers; but also events organised to include professionals employed in companies or organizations with fringe knowledge who want to learn more. Higher education students are often involved in 'open' workshops, but workshops are occasionally targeted to young people and children. On occasional years, there has also been activity centred around the use of a particular open-source software or hardware. As an example, in 2011 several of the Pixelache Festival workshops were promoted and aimed towards 'professionals', with specialized technical themes such as Bio-electronics, environmental sensor technologies, plus a 'think-tank' on data mapping, in addition to the usual 'open'-type workshop, which in one case, explores voltaic energy cells made from berries. Three of these workshops are led by other labs and collective platforms, while the remaining think-tank was composed by a guest curator[xv].

However, the festival period for Pixelache is no longer the sole framework to learn and share practices. Since 2006, educational events have also taken place at other times outside the Festival week. During 2008 in particular, a 'Pixelache University' theme informed also that year's festival activity and events which stretched over the year[xvi]. Open to the public, the events were also followed by registered but informal 'students' from different backgrounds, many of whom gained a Pixelache 'certificate' for regular attendance. Although the events were thematically unrelated, this experiment indicated that cultural associations can sustain interested individuals in educational activity beyond festival times.

Hence onwards, a programme of educational events called by the portmanteau name 'Pixelversity', was inclusive and adaptive over the whole year. Some events shared and sustained ongoing local practice by members of Piknik Frequency association, while other events benefited from serendipity and specialists visiting Helsinki, or passing through the region.

Pixelversity 2011

Pixelversity, as it took shape in 2011, was composed of proposals and nominations from Pixelache association members, or invited guest pedagogues. The main motivation for creating a year-round educational programme was to support new activity, themes   and participants in the association, and organize learning or sharing experiences for local practitioners at other times in the year from

the annual Festival, and also develop relationships outside of Helsinki In most cases this meant, practically, support to travel and spend time together over various occasions, mostly weekends, but also included several international contributions.   The activity was also consequently promoted as an outreach programme extending beyond Helsinki, regionally; but also a 'learning bridge' between practitioners, cultural and non-profit organisations, interested individuals and larger institutions. The psuedo-formula "Pixelversity = Pixelache + Diversity / University" was adopted on the project webpage to promote the ambitions of the programme, suggesting the diversification of Pixelache Helsinki activities around the year[xvii]. Over the year of 2011, the following events were included in programme[xviii]:

- International keynote lecture co-funded in collaboration with Media Dept. of Aalto University, and related round-circle discussion on Network culture and Education in Pixelache Festival.
- Contribution to the Artists in the Archipalego Network -project 'Kuebiko' in Kemiö, South-west Finland in their opening seminar, aswell as a hackers/makers weekend-workshop.
- A local neighbourhood expedition in Kallio-Kalasatama, Helsinki, exploring changes in urban space and attracting Helsinki-based cultural activists and urban geography students alike.
- A small-scale international unconference event on art and sustainability in the countryside near to Tallinn, Estonia, attracting participants from Helsinki, Tallinn, Riga, and Kaliningrad.
- An academic contribution to the International Cooperative Alliance Conference at Mikkeli University Centre, aswell as a complementary 2-day 'Coop Camp', on informal cooperation in various locations in Tampere, attracting activists, cultural workers and researchers.
- Lectures and a workshop on Open Peer-to-peer Design methods attracting design professionals and researchers from Helsinki, Tampere, Cardiff and Barcelona.
- A Finnish-Estonian maker contribution to the conference/fair 'Megapolis 2026', organised by urban environmental non-profit association Dodo in Helsinki.
- An Estonian-based artist contribution to the computer hacker gathering Alternative Party Festival in Helsinki.

In coordinating and facilitating the Pixelversity programme, discussing regularly with key participants, I gave consideration to relationships between different activities, imagining how they may build up accumulative knowledge and skills towards the future Pixelache Helsinki activity. For example, an emerging interest in Piknik Frequency association has been related to energy use, knowledge-sharing, social-engagement, and towards involvement in 'transition/resilience' themed activities and events. Some of the events mentioned above from 2011, in particular the makers gatherings in Kemiö and Helsinki, aswell as the Art & Sustainability unconference in the Estonian countryside, where important events towards confirming this focus. Considering the Baltic Sea regional scene, these interests have also found inspiration, company and informal collaboration also in RIXC's initiative since 2009 in the Renewable Network[xix].

The topic of sustainability it may be argued, is not just relevant as a subject in our field, but also relates to personal economical sustainability in a period of financial uncertainty, generally, and specifically in cultural funding; And secondly to our practice in our particular locality, in this case in our region of Gulf of Finland, the Baltic Sea region, and North East Europe. Recalling the earlier mentioned Baltic Sea network projects within the cultural / media arts organizations, what are appropriate ways to go ahead in organised networks, as part of the increased interest within our scenes for topics of transition/resilience, renewable art, technologies and sustainability?

To explore these questions further, the next section of this article takes the example of Gulf of Finland and Baltic Sea marine environmental protection networks and perspectives for guidance.

Considering the eco-geographic region model

In early November 2011, I presented Pixelversity 2011's activities at RIXC's Art+Communications Festival Conference in Riga[xx], and with this review, I also introduced the concept of what could be an 'eco-geographic' approach to cultural organizing and production.

This perspective was inspired by conversations from 2007 onwards with marine biologist, artist and activist Richard Thompson Coon, resident of Helsinki. Coon founded and chaired the environmental non-governmental organization (NGO) Gulf of Finland Environment Society SULA, which was active in the 1990's and early 2000's in the Eastern Baltic Sea. Through multi-faceted, trans-cultural and trans-disciplinary environmental agenda and activism and his colleagues regularly gathered people together in educational events. For example, in 1996, natural scientists, musicians, artists and school children from Finland, Russia and Estonia gathered on Suomenlinna, a historical island fortress in Finland, to address the environmental situation of the Gulf of Finland. As written in a report at the time:

> The Gulf's ecosystems are considered to be extremely sensitive. Due to the dominantly estuarine environment, many aquatic species are living at their limits of tolerance. For some years the continuous impact of pollution input from the atmosphere, agriculture, industry and poorly treated municipal waste waters has been overburdening and disrupting the Gulf's natural ability to cleanse itself. Major joint activities and greatly increased exchange of environmental data and information amongst the states surrounding the Gulf are now recognized as prerequisites for stabilizing the ecological decline of this marine body. Efforts are being made to overcome the political difficulties of the past and improve this cooperation[xxi].

'High-level' multi-national and and inter-governmental regional work has been discussed and undertaken with the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Committee, also known as The Helsinki Commission (HELCOM)[xxii] since the mid 1970s, with many constituents and stakeholders.

However, networks and co-operation has also actively taken place via non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the Baltic Sea region. For example, SULA were involved in the mid-to-late 1990's advocating and undertaking practical integrated coastal management field research within trans-national programmes such as the Baltic Floating University, sponsored by HELCOM[xxiii]. The Baltic Floating University has continued in various guises by Russian Hydrometrological State University with the last expedition noted as being in 2009[xxiv]. SULA's Gulf of Finland NGO peers from the same time period, *Д Р У З Ь Я Б А Л Т И К И* (Friends of the Baltic)[xxv] in St. Petersburg/Leningrad Oblast, and *Rakendusökoloogia Keskus* (Centre of Applied Ecology)[xxvi] from Sillamäe, Estonia, are still active in local and regional projects. Recent examples of environmental campaigns from Finland include the Baltic Sea Action Group[xxvii], and the John Nurminen Foundation -supported Puhdas Itämeri (Clean Baltic Sea)[xxviii], as well as the Baltic Sea Ambassadors educational project initiated by Luonto-liito (Nature-league)[xxix] in collaboration with aforementioned NGO Friends of the Baltic, and an environmental youth club from Tallinn called *Rakendusökoloogia Noorte Klubi* (RÖNK / Club for Applied Ecology)[xxx].

Richard Thompson Coon of SULA still, these years later, advocates for the need for continued grassroots, trans-cultural and trans-disciplinary initiatives related to the Baltic Sea region, and Gulf of Finland in particular. Key from his point of view is the need to continue invigorating of the idea of a Gulf of Finland Community. This community, according to Coon, should be understood as including not just humans, but also animals and plants, considering the whole ecosystem. The idea of a community which spreads a geographical territory, based on ecological principles may be called an Eco-geographic community.

As political theorist and peace researcher Arthur Westing defines it, an 'ecogeographic region' is a 'region' which denotes a "geographical area that is unified in an ecological sense, gaining its integrity from this cohesion" ; while, in extension, an 'Ecogeographic region' is "an ecological system, or ecosystem.. a unit made up of living and 'non-living' components of the environment that interact to form a life-support system". For example this may be "seas with their associated drainage basins (watersheds, catchment areas), major rivers with their associated drainage basins, major mountain ranges, major islands or peninsulas, insular aggregations, deserts, tundras, and permanently ice-covered areas"[xxxi].

Hence, an ecogeographic approach would mean, in the case of the Gulf of Finland, not just the ecosystem population around the coast, but also that extending all the way to edge of it's water drainage basin. Westing opens his thesis Comprehensive security for the Baltic: An environmental approach with the question: "[T]o what extent does regional cooperation on environmental protection and nature-resource utilization serve as a confidence- building measure for the purpose of fostering comprehensive
international security?"[xxxii]. In other words, common value and interest.

Returning to the cultural organizational field, as an artist-organiser, I believe in the necessity to develop trans-disciplinary capacities to engage on/in commons issues; that cultural workers (such as those involved in Pixelache Helsinki scene) can contribute to environmental protection and sustainable nature-resource utilization/management; and that active cultural organizations should lead the way with example, especially those with network-building & -facilitation experience.

This approach raises a set of questions and thoughts that are relevant to consider: What will be the effect on cultural organizational work if we do it mostly within our Eco-geographic subregion of Baltic Sea, that is the Gulf of Finland, including portions of Finland, North-West Russia, and Estonia? For example, cultural exchange and co-production between the 3 'capital' cities of Helsinki, Tallinn and St Petersburg, as well as with population centres and regions as broadly circumferential as Lahti, Jyväskylä, Kuopio in Finland; Petrozavodsk, Veliky Novogorod, Pskov, Russia; as well as Narva and Tartu in Estonia.

What have been the challenges in the environmental NGO scene across the region, and how can we learn from their experiences? Were do we—in the trans-disciplinary media arts and cultural scene—find the resources and finances to support it? Do the funding instruments support this from the top-down; can we or will we have to raise grassroots support from from the bottom-up? If so, who would be good partners and collaborators? I argue, in answer to the above questions, it is necessary to include – beyond experimental art, design and technology individuals and organizations – the environmental NGO sector, institutional scientific research, cultural associations and activist groups, schools and educational/participatory science groups, such as the Baltic Sea Ambassadors project that compiles and presents ecological knowledge about the Baltic Sea, and related sustainable practices, in schools around the region[xxxiii].

Pixelversity 2012 Overview

The Pixelversity 2012 themes, as previously, emerged on reflection from what was appreciated among those involved, reflecting upon cross-disciplinary insights gained during the previous year 2011, as well as strategic exploration for the next one or so years ahead, including emerging practices and technologies. Contextual year events such as Helsinki as World Design Capital Helsinki 2012[xxxiv], the mirroring Alternative Design Capital[xxxv] influenced the addition of 'open design' into the programme, while issues of trandisciplinarity and art+science initiatives from the cultural field in environment and ecosystem monitoring had an eye further ahead towards the future Gulf of Finland Year 2014 programme organised by the Finnish Environmental Institute SYKE[xxxvi]. Hence, the Pixelversity 2012 themes were introduced and publicized in Autumn 2011 as "clusters of learning opportunities"[xxxvii]:

- ⚒ 'Trashlab' was a series of monthly lectures and maker-gathering events focused on

experimental art–design–technology practices between hacker and maker cultures, in the context of re/up–cycling and the increased availability of new fabrication tools. Initially proposed by Antti Ahonen (Koelse), Trashlab's objective was to build up a community of people (artists, designers, hackers, makers, re/up–cyclers, activists) who are concerned with material and electronic waste in contemporary society, and tackle this problem with creative and tangential approaches.

⚲ The 'Virtuality, Social Identity & Augmented Reality' online study group focused on the exploration of the interfaces between public–private, personal–social and real–virtual, and was added to the programme late in the year as a proposal by Helsinki–based researcher Owen Kelly. A small group of persons met online bi–monthly, under the name of a 'Virtuality Grand Tour', with a rotating host inviting the others to explore different online tools and virtual spaces for co–experience and knowledge sharing.

⚲ 'Open Design, Crafts and Manufacturing' was included in relation to Helsinki's World Design Captial status in 2012, encouraging emerging workshop activity that overlaps maker–craft and heritage perspectives mobilizing around open design and knowledge sharing. Several workshops took place in collaboration with Interdisciplinary Arts group SERDE from Latvia.

⚲ 'Creative Neighbourhood Skills' related to facilitation, organizational and participatory practices of engaging in one's neighbourhood and the different economies involved. It promoted citizen, volunteer, artistic and activist strategies as well as grassroots community development. Taking both the local and international view, this 'cluster' included project–based events organised by Pixelache members and regional partners.

⚲ 'The Art of Gathering Environmental Data' theme developed in dialogue with Erich Berger, coordinator of the Finnish Bioart Society[xxxviii] relates to ecosystem theory, sensors and environmental monitoring, and citizen/participatory science, in the context of open data: how to support and develop the activities that are already going on in institutions at a more grassroots level. These activities mostly took the form of local seminars and workshops led by various individuals.

⚲ 'Gulf of Finland / Finland + NW Russia + Estonia' was an overarching 'meta' theme during the 2012 programme, and is elaborated below in more detail.

Gulf of Finland / Finland + NW Russia + Estonia

As mentioned earlier, networks and exchanges across the Gulf of Finland are nothing new. In addition to the NICE network and RAM Workshop series noted above in early 2000s, media arts exchange between Helsinki and Tallinn was developed by the Helsinki–based media arts organization m–cult who produced the International Symposium of Electronic Arts (ISEA) between both cities (and on a ferry) in 2004[xxxix]. Several other non–art based organizations, such as environmental association Dodo[xl] and think–tank Demos Helsinki[xli] have also extended their networks and contacts in Tallinn since then. Indeed, Dodo joined Pixelache on a networking visit to Tallinn in October 2007. Often personal and individual connections are sustained over the years, emerging into more

organised frameworks. For example, MIM Project members from Tallinn took part in several Pixelache Festivals (2009, 2010) and in several Pixelversity events (2010, 2011) in collaboration with *Kokeellisen elektroniikan seura* (Association of Experimental Electronics aka Koelse)[xlii], as well as hosting the 'Unconference of Art and Sustainability' event in their countryside home 20km from Tallinn (2011).

In addition to continuing our collaboration with Latvian organizations, namely RIXC and Interdisciplinary art group SERDE[xliii]—who we already shared an interest in multi- and trans-disciplinary practice and research—other partnerships emerged in 2011 around the southern Baltic coastline, including Estonia, NW Russia and Lithuania. Attendance to the InterFormat Symposium in Nida Art Colony[xliv], Curorian Spit, Lithuania from 3-6 May 2011 introduced to Pixelache Helsinki several new regional contacts in Lithuania, Estonia and NW Russia who contributed significantly in cultural and research exchanges over the following year.

An agreement with Plektrum curator Marge Paas to contribute to each other's event programmes, and aim to collaborate more between Helsinki and Tallinn, led to the Pixelversity 2012 programme themes being announced in Tallinn at Plektrum Festival, September 2011, seeking interest and collaboration with Estonia-based people and organizations A group of approximately 8 Pixelache-associated persons joined the Pixelversity launch, giving an opportunity to catch up with friends, as well as follow up new friendships, including with urban research group Linnalabor[xlv], maker-group Error Collective and the aforementioned creative environmental group Applied Ecology Club RÖNK, the latter two whom are sited in Culture Factory Polymer[xlvi].

Furthermore, Lilia Voronkova was the invited guest speaker from Centre for Independent Social Research, St. Petersburg at the Pixelversity "learning and networking" evening at Plektrum Festival. She shared examples of trans-disciplinary practice and research with a focus on public space issues. The title message of Voronkova's lecture—"Exploring Reality Together: Art-(social) science projects"—was a timely reminder of the need to spend time together across regional and disciplinary borders. During my knowledge of Pixelache Helsinki as a internationally-orientated organization since 2003, there had been very little cooperation and collaboration eastwards, and almost no Russian or St. Petersburg-based guests participating in our activities.

Hence, the 'Gulf of Finland / Finland + NW Russia + Estonia' theme was explicitly formed to strengthen and develop new collaborations with Estonian and northwest Russian organizations and individuals, to "explore reality together". Although it was anticipated at first the theme would have it's own events, over the first six month period of the year, it became clear this was not necessary. Almost all events over the year, from the other themes or clusters (excluding those in Latvia) aimed to include NW Russian and/or Estonian exchange. In other-words, a desire to attend each others' spaces, events, various disciplines and interests; working from that position respecting diversity, towards commonalities that are shared.

Lilia Voronkova invited Pixelache Helsinki into a Norden-funded NGO exchange partnership[xlvii] made between the Pixelversity programme and the St. Petersburg-based art-(social) science group of CISR who are interested in transdisciplinary art-social-science practice and research[xlviii]. Their application was based on mutual information exchange and meetings between our organizations, involving several visits between each other and helping with network-building across borders. My initial travel and presentation of Pixelache's Urban projects in CISR's seminar room in St. Petersburg, January 2012, was an opportunity for local practitioners, researchers and activists to see what common-ground we shared. As part of the partnership, CISR also arranged a multi-entry visa invitation for myself as coordinator of Pixelversity, which allowed this first and several other short travels for discussion and networking meetings with other St. Petersburg -based organizations, including Friends of Baltic environmental NGO already mentioned above, hacklab HackSpace SPb[xlix], Cyland media art lab[l], aswell as Moscow-based Audiovisual Academy[li]. In return, St. Petersburg -based researchers and cultural producers connected with CISR travelled as a group to Helsinki in April 2012, presented their activities[lii], and took part in a facilitated meeting with other like-minded Helsinki-based practitioners.

Over the period of the Spring-Autumn 2012, all of these above-mentioned groups from St. Petersburg, Latvia and Estonia were invited to Helsinki to attend various events. Most significant was our Camp Pixelache event in May 2012 when six Tallinn-based and seven Petersburg-based practitioners and/or researchers were invited and supported to attend[liii]. Notably, as an outcome of these Petersburg-Helsinki exchanges, the St. Petersburg branch of the DIY Festival: Marathon of Urban Actions (known in Russian as Дейй Сам)[liv], borrowed Pixelache Helsinki Festival's Camp Pixelache theme of "Do it with others" (D.I.W.O.). Many of the subjects and approaches presented in D.I.Y.—creative urban interventions, guerrilla gardening, participatory public art installations—were similar to those promoted by Pixelache members. Cited as a partner, we (Pixelache) gladly recorded a festival opening greeting for our peers in St. Petersburg. Due to the corresponding schedules, two art-(social) science group researchers from CISR attended our festival in Helsinki and reported back on proceedings on the last day of their festival in St. Petersburg. Two of our international keynote guests of Pixelache Helsinki Festival from Barcelona and London also travelled onwards to St. Petersburg and Tallinn respectively. Likewise, several of the other Pixelversity themes, such as 'Trashlab' and 'Creative Neighbourhood Skills' had support to bring Helsinki- or Finland-based persons across to Tallinn or Petersburg.

A third aspect of 'Finland + NW Russia + Estonian' theme relates to a Kultur Kontakt Nord -funded pilot project called 'Abandoned Mystery', managed by Lithuanian Interdisciplinary Artist Association, with Pixelache Helsinki as one of the Nordic partners, to make an inter/trans-disciplinary expedition programme in Lithuania, Latvia, Finland and Kaliningrad Oblast, NW Russia. Initiated by Kaliningrad-based urban researcher Anna Karpenko, with Germany-based artist Natalia Borissova and artist-educator Mindaugas Gapsevicius, the project proposed to explore the

phenomena of abandoned military sites of the European edges in the Baltic Sea area[lv]. It has—in a small but personal scale—initiated and sustained communications between Helsinki and Kaliningrad-based artists, curators and researchers. While one Helsinki-based artist-curator visited abandoned Westward-looking Soviet defences in Kaliningrad Oblast; a similar Kaliningrad-based artist-curator visited abandoned Eastward-looking WWII Finnish defences in eastern Finland. Less integrated into Baltic cultural exchanges, it was argued by Anna Karpenko in Pixelversity 2011's 'Unconference on Art and Sustainability', that there is much that might be learned in parallel between these two cities—Helsinki and Kaliningrad—on either side of the Eastern Baltic Sea. This is due to their similar sized cities and institutions, in comparison to the nearer but more than five-times larger city of St. Petersburg. At the same time, activists would argue that due to the environmental burden which this megapolis of over 5 million people has on the region, it is absolutely necessary to engage and more.

I argue, considering our friendships, partnerships and collaborations that have built up over the years of Pixelache Helsinki, that from eco-geographic perspective we should be caring to engage and more. Remembering the Gulf of Finland environmental networks and cooperation, what is shared and in common includes the Eastern Baltic sea, its extended hydrosphere and drainage basin on surrounding land areas, and other related environmental factors. In relation to this, social and economical sustainability of practice can also be considered. The challenge in future regional cultural productions and collaborations will be to take these commonalities into account as the basis for collaboration, and discuss how it can work towards strengthening this vision.

Concluding remarks

Pixelache Helsinki, and Pixelversity in 2012, aim to continue our cultural programmes and pedagogy, with local, regional 'organised networks' that share common issues, gathering experience, knowledge and skills related to the themes mentioned above. In Pixelversity, we strive to towards future ambitions of Pixelache members and associates; considering how we can approach the ecogeographic sub-region of the Gulf of Finland, as well as substantial environmental and economical sustainability challenges. This means involving other individuals, associations and organizations from various different work perspectives outside the arts and cultural field is important to achieve this. It may indeed mean developing our own infrastructures to support this activity, and it certainly will benefit from 'Do-It-With-Others' energy and peer-production values, where "people cooperate voluntarily on an equal footing (as peers) in order to reach a common goal"[lvi].

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Biography

Andrew Gryf Paterson is a Scottish artist-organiser, educator, cultural producer, and independent

Andrew Gryf Paterson, Pixelache Helsinki, 24.9.2012.

researcher, based in Helsinki, Finland. His work is socially-orientated across the fields of media/ network/ environmental arts and activism. Creative strengths lie in hybridity, communications, organisationorganization and network arts: the ability to bring together and involve people in creative exploration, develop temporary communities, gather unexpected elements and components, creating new sites for cultural activity and research. He has been involved with Pixelache Helsinki since 2004, and from 2011, is the coordinator and facilitator of it's Pixelversity programme. http://agryfp.info/

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