

Art intermediaries as catalysts for added exchange and sustainability in the Arctic

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This study defines art intermediation as an emerging professional field that facilitates cross-sector collaboration and supports sustainability-driven artistic practices. Art intermediaries – such as agents, managers and art institutions – initiate and enable new modes of working for artists across different sectors. The research was conducted as arts-based action research at Boden Business Park, Sweden, located in a municipality undergoing rapid transformation due to several large-scale green industry developments. Drawing on a pilot adaptation of an artist residency model within this business environment, the study investigates the role of art intermediaries by analysing their practical function in a sustainability-focused collaboration between artists and a company. In this pilot, a public art institution acted as the intermediary organisation, seeking a cross-sector partnership to address sustainability challenges. The research data consists of survey responses and interviews with the artist, the intermediary and a representative of the business park. Also, the artworks exhibited in the residency are presented and discussed. The analysis shows that art intermediaries play a critical role in integrating artists into cross-sector collaborations. By acting as bridge builders, they support artists in navigating expanded professional landscapes and in the meaningful incorporation of artistic work into workplace communities. The findings highlight the essential role of art intermediaries in enabling artistic engagement that goes beyond traditional contexts, fostering innovation and community development through cross-sector synergies. The study calls for further research and development to further decolonise art and strengthen intermediary organisations, particularly in the Arctic context.

Introduction

Arts intermediaries (Brooks, 2003; Sandberg, 2017; Berthoin Antal, 2009, 2012) are potential catalysts for cross-sectoral collaboration that enhances the positive impact of the arts on societal development and sustainability goals. Arts intermediaries – such as agents, curators, coordinators and producers – may represent artists and support them in promoting their skills and contributions across various sectors of society, thereby fostering the arts, the creative sector and the creative economy. These intermediaries can negotiate with businesses and initiate innovative partnerships to pursue shared goals with potential collaborators. Moreover, the role of diverse art institutions

and artist associations as intermediaries calls for examination as they hold significant potential to facilitate and expand opportunities for artists to work in cross-sectoral contexts across society.

The creative economy is often assumed to only thrive in southern urban centres, where the number of creative industry companies increases as entrepreneurs and artists support one another and collaborate with other sectors. However, Petrov (2014) suggested that artists and cultural organisations can also have a positive influence on the economy of the Arctic region. The growth of creative capital could enhance the area's attractiveness, sustainability and innovation capacity. The creative industries could help diversify the Arctic region's economy, which is currently heavily reliant on the export of natural resources. From a sustainability perspective, there is a need to shift toward innovation-driven development and the value added processing of natural resources rather than primarily remaining a source of raw materials. Artists and art intermediaries are an essential part of the creative sector and creative capital.

While creative capital exists in the Arctic, Tennberg (2020), drawing on data from the Regional Council of Lapland (2014), noted that the province of Lapland in Finland has fewer jobs in the creative industries than other regions in Finland. Consequently, Tennberg (2020) argued that there is no significant concentration of creative capital in the province of Lapland. Petrov (2014) also observed that the entire circumpolar Arctic region demonstrates weak entrepreneurial readiness in the creative industries. Furthermore, financial support for the creative industries can be unevenly distributed, with a focus on southern cities, as is the case in Finland (Nokela et al., 2024). This underutilised potential for creative growth calls for a strengthened role for art intermediaries in the Arctic. In this article, we discuss the efforts to support artists' roles in Lapland, a transboundary region in northern Fennoscandia that encompasses parts of both Finland and Sweden.

This study is motivated by the aim of enhancing art intermediaries in the Arctic, sustainability transitions and transformation through art. While the terms 'sustainability transition' and 'sustainability transformation' are often used interchangeably, they represent distinct conceptual approaches within the field of sustainability research and practice. A 'sustainability transition' typically refers to a long-term, multi-level process of systemic change within socio-technical systems – such as energy, food, or mobility systems – driven by technological development and institutional restructuring. Art plays a role in enabling sustainability transitions by fostering creativity and innovation capacity in cross-disciplinary settings (Jokela et al., 2022; Lehtimäki et al., 2024). In contrast, a 'sustainability transformation' denotes a deep, more radical shift that challenges Western social, cultural, political and economic structures, such as capitalism and the view of nature as a resource for human use. Sustainability transformations address the root causes of unsustainability, involve changes in values and worldviews, and imply a fundamental rethinking of the meaning of life and well-being (Meadows, 1999; Siivonen et al., 2024).

Art is seen as one potential lever for sustainability transformations. Especially valued are socially engaged art, pedagogical art projects and decolonial practices that initiate cultural changes through action research (Beer & Huhmarniemi, 2024; Huhmarniemi & Jokela, 2025a; Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2025a). Art institutions operating in the Arctic region are increasingly recognising their role in addressing political environmental issues and questions of sustainability, as well as in serving their local communities by engaging with themes that are relevant and meaningful to them (Beer & Huhmarniemi, 2024; Decker, 2020).

As Jokela and Huhmarniemi (2025b) argued, a sustainable future for the Arctic region requires development and cultural policy directions that respect the fragility of Arctic nature, support ecocultural entanglements in arts, foster the diversity of local cultural expressions and enable communities' self-determined engagement in art and cultural practices. However, tensions are growing due to industrial strategies associated with the green transition which increasingly position Lapland – like many other northern areas of Arctic states – as a site for raw material extraction (such as minerals and biomass extraction) and large-scale wind power production (Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2025b). Such developments risk eroding the foundations of Northern ecocultures, and they have already occurred in many regions. In this article, we focus on exploring artists' and art institutions' roles in this kind of urban Arctic context, particularly through the expanded potential of cross-sectoral exchange.

The Creative Residency for Sustainability, piloted in Boden and reflected upon in this article, was a pilot adaptation of an artist residency model implemented within a non-cultural organisation, aiming to foster cross-sectoral exchange around sustainability (see Figure 1). The residency was an experiment within the Creative Cross-Innovations for Sustainability project, implemented by the Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture (NDPC), with funding provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland (via the funding instrument for the Baltic Sea, Barents and Arctic regions) with project partners being the Academy of Arts in Tromsø, Norway, Länskonsthall Havremagasinet, Sweden, and Business Oulu, Finland. The goals were to support cross-sectoral collaboration, promote sustainability through artistic dialogue and explore the art institution's potential in enabling novel artistic crossovers. The residency took place in Boden, northern Sweden, in 2023 and involved a visual artist, a publicly owned business park and a public art institution acting as an intermediary party for the collaboration. The artist residency aimed to spark dialogue on sustainability in a company context and examined the role of the art intermediary in facilitating the exchange. Art institutions have traditionally focused on organising exhibitions and engaging audiences. However, it remains relatively rare for them to engage in or facilitate cross-sectoral collaborations with the corporate sector that extend beyond the usual scope of exhibition programming. This type of activity represents a clear departure from their conventional roles, offering new opportunities for community engagement.

Boden presents a compelling context for advancing sustainability. The municipality is situated in a subarctic climate zone, which presents both challenges and opportunities for sustainable development, particularly in terms of energy efficiency, circular resource use and climate adaptation. As part of the Swedish Lapland region, in the county of Norrbotten, Boden benefits from access to renewable energy sources, such as hydropower and wind power, which support its ambition to become a hub for green industry and data-driven innovation (Bodenxt, 2024; Näsman, 2023).

The municipality of Boden has approximately 27,000 inhabitants and a long history as a northern military centre known for having one of the largest military garrisons in Sweden. In one of the old military buildings, an oat storage area was part of the garrison until 1971. However, since 2010, the building has served as a contemporary art space through an artists' led initiative by the Kilen Art Group to establish a centre for contemporary art there. Today, the art hall Havremagasinet is the regional art gallery, with a regional mission and funding from the municipality of Boden, Norrbotten region and the Swedish Art Council. It is relatively uncommon for a municipality with

such a small number of inhabitants as Boden to have a regional art gallery of such impressive size – Havremagasinet has 3,600 square meters of space featuring high-quality contemporary art exhibitions.

This study examines the Creative Residency for Sustainability pilot activity, where Havremagasinet served as the intermediary between the collaboration of the Boden Business Park and visual artist Pilar de Burgos. We analyse the functions and relevance of an art institution acting as an intermediary in cross-sectoral collaborations, considering the perceived needs for such intermediary work, the importance of building partnerships between artists and organisations outside the cultural sector and the kinds of artistic and learning outcomes that can be achieved when intermediaries operate professionally. In addition, we consider how the evolving roles of art and art intermediaries intersect with broader themes of innovation, sustainability transitions and sustainability transformations in the Arctic.

The residency was part of the Creative Cross-Innovation for Sustainability project led by the NDPC. The first author served as the project manager and was responsible for the process framework and design, supporting the implementation of actions in the role of project manager and providing strategic backing to the intermediary party, Havremagasinet, throughout the process. The second author of the article has contributed to contextualising and discussing the project in the Arctic context.

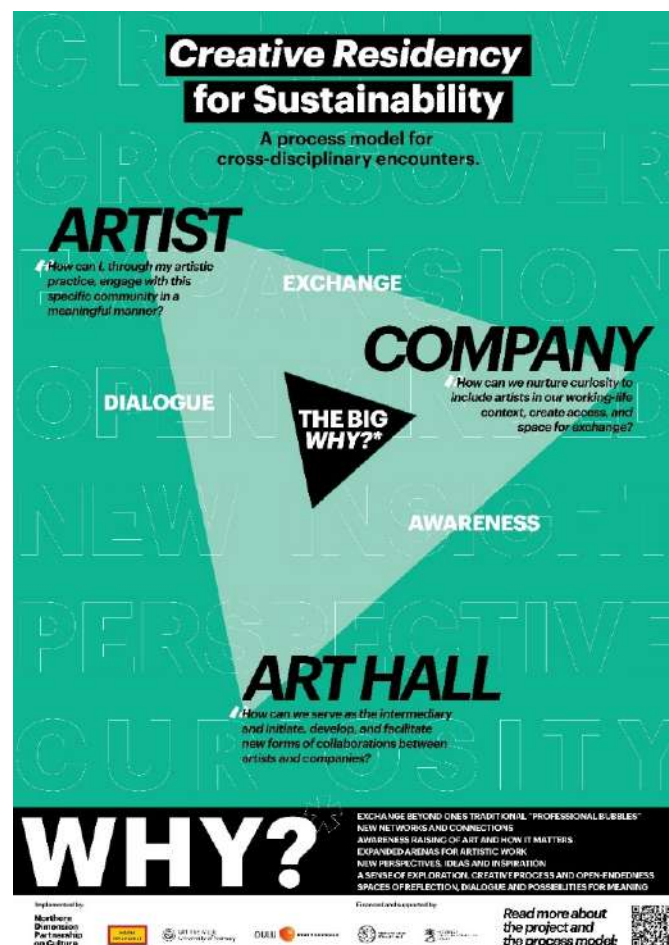


Figure 1. The Creative Residency for Sustainability poster. NDPC, 2023.

The literature and key concepts

Artists' work that goes beyond traditional art institutions has increasingly been analysed through the lens of hybridity as purely autonomous artistic motivations become interwoven with the goals and intentions of other collaborators (Abbing, 2002; van Winkel et al., 2012; Karttunen, 2017). This hybrid nature of artistic practice expands the role of the artist and transforms the expectations surrounding art itself. These developments are closely connected to established fields, such as community art and socially engaged art, where artistic practice extends into diverse societal settings with social and sustainability-related aims (Matarasso, 2019; Lin et al., 2023; Vella & Pavlou, 2024). The communities and stakeholders involved in such practices are highly varied, ranging from local neighbourhoods to institutional and cross-sectoral collaborations.

Within this evolving societal context for artists, art intermediaries who support and mediate artistic work play a key role in enabling the societal impact of the arts (Brooks, 2003; Berthoin Antal, 2009, 2012; Sandberg, 2017). They help create the conditions for collaboration, foster mutual understanding between artists and non-artistic sectors and negotiate complex terrains where art meets policy, public administration, diverse industries or civil society.

Art intermediaries serve as a bridge between artists and various stakeholders, including potential clients, organisations and institutions. Traditional art intermediaries include galleries and art dealers who represent artists, promote their work and facilitate sales. Their work plays a key role in translating cultural value into economic capital, which is essential for the sustainability of the arts sector (Campbell et al., 2022). In addition to galleries and dealers, art agents and managers support artists by handling the business aspects of their careers, such as negotiations, contracts, copyrights and marketing. Meanwhile, art consultants typically advise clients, helping them select and acquire artworks. Art curators, too, may be considered intermediaries, particularly when they act as interpreters or facilitators between artistic production and audience engagement.

When artists operate outside traditional art institutions, new kinds of intermediary roles emerge. In such contexts, intermediaries may act as collaborators, facilitators, experts, developers or coordinators for cross-sectoral projects. For example, Sandberg (2017) described how arts-based collaborations between artists and businesses foster innovation by introducing artistic practices into organisational contexts. These partnerships are prepared and facilitated by the intermediaries who act as kind of matchmakers and bridge cultural differences between the sectors.

The literature on this topic includes terms such as 'intermediate organisations' (Berthoin Antal, 2009), 'intermediaries' (Berthoin Antal, 2012), 'mediators', 'process supporters', 'creative brokers', 'agents' and 'producers' (Grzelec & Prata, 2013). While 'intermediaries' refers to individual actors or roles that facilitate collaboration, 'intermediate organisations' describes formal institutions or structures that support such processes. Grzelec and Prata (2013) described the producers of artistic interventions as organisations that specialise in connecting artists and partner organisations for mutual development. These producers support and coach both the artist and the collaborating organisation to ensure that the process is meaningful and beneficial for all involved stakeholders. A key competency of intermediaries lies in their ability to understand the needs of collaborating companies or organisations, recognise ongoing societal changes and grasp the driving forces behind artistic practices (Grzelec & Prata, 2013).

The positive impact of the arts on cross-sectoral collaboration has been studied, with arguments for added learning, organisational development, leadership and innovation skills (Liotas, 2014; Pässilä et al., 2016). These developments mark the emergence of an interdisciplinary field that connects art with working life, institutional innovation and broader societal challenges (Berthoin Antal, 2009, 2012) where intermediaries play a crucial role in facilitating sustainable and meaningful encounters. One notable area where the role of art intermediaries is particularly evident is in the growing field of arts, health and well-being. The arts and health discourse has gained substantial momentum in European arts and culture policies and in research in the 2020s (Fancourt et al., 2023; Jenkins et al., 2025). It is reflected in increased policy attention, targeted funding, changes in arts education curricula and the growing volume of both practice and scholarly work. While many well-being-related art initiatives focus on vulnerable groups (Kárpáti, 2023), a broader shift is also evident: artists are now collaborating with public and private sector organisations across diverse fields.

One key concept in art collaborations with business is artistic intervention, which represents processes in which people, products and/or practices from the art world enter organisations to support or trigger innovation and development (Berthoin Antal, 2009, 2012; Grzelec & Prata, 2013; Pulkki et al., 2016). In these activities, artistic and arts-based collaborations step out from the well-being and empowerment discourse to align with the various development needs of organisations with high functionality. For example, Berthoin Antal (2011) has explained how artistic interventions can help transform organisations when artists, artistic interventions or art products are introduced to various types of organisations, including those in the public and private sectors, across multiple industries. The potential benefits of applying arts in organisations are seen as diverse. Carlucci & Schiuma (2018) showed that business interactions with the arts can be used to enhance value-creation capacity and boost business performance. While ‘artistic interventions’ typically refer to short-term collaborations, the concept of artistic intervention residencies emphasises longer-term engagements, being clearly distinct from traditional artist-in-residence programmes that focus solely on artistic production (Berthoin Antal, 2012). The pilot residency discussed in this study aligns with this artistic intervention residencies category.

This expanding field also reflects a broader phenomenon within the Western professional arts and culture landscape: the growing expectations placed on artists and artistic work to contribute to societal development, innovation and the business sector (Berthoin Antal, 2009, 2012). An increasing number of contemporary artists work outside traditional art institutions, forming collaborations with various communities, organisations and sectors (Abbing, 2002; van Winkel et al., 2012; Karttunen, 2017). Artistic and arts-based collaborations, as well as cross-innovation initiatives, are seen as one of the prominent future directions for the arts. Nonetheless, the role of artists and art intermediaries in the business sector and industry has not developed to the extent that might have been expected, considering the findings of Berthoin Antal (2009, 2012) and Schiuma (2011).

In the Arctic region, art institutions and art education have traditionally operated within the frameworks of Western Euro-American conceptions and traditions of art – frameworks that can be regarded as inherently colonial in nature. The values, aims and meanings of art have often been defined externally, with little regard for the Indigenous or local cultural contexts of the region (Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2025b; Ruotsalainen, 2024). As a result, the cultural forms and artistic

production of Arctic peoples have historically not been recognised or valued as art within dominant institutional definitions (Phillips, 1994, 2021). Art history and its institutions, such as art museums, are shaped by colonial legacies but are now called on to explore how the field can be reimagined in the pursuit of various forms of justice (Flores et al., 2023).

However, in recent decades the focus and discourse surrounding Arctic art have increasingly sought to decolonise both artistic practices and the institutional structures of the art world (Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2021; Phillips, 2021; Ruotsalainen, 2024). These discussions aim to dismantle Western Euro-American modernist frameworks that separate art from everyday life. Current research on Arctic art highlights the diverse fusion of contemporary art and craft practices, as well as content rooted in Northern ecocultural ways of knowing and making. The concept of Arctic art is not defined by ethnicity but rather encompasses both Indigenous and non-Indigenous art (Huhmarniemi & Jokela, 2020a, 2020b; Jokela et al., 2022; Ruotsalainen, 2024). Cross-border collaboration in higher education among Arctic universities, facilitated by the Sustainable Art and Design network within the University of the Arctic, has positioned artists and educators in collaboration with art institutions, memory organisations and local communities to shape more just, inclusive and sustainable Arctic futures (Huhmarniemi & Jokela, 2025b; Jokela & Hiltunen, 2024). However, research on the role and impact of art intermediaries in the Arctic has so far remained limited in both practice and reflection.

Arts-based action research for developing art intermediary practices

This study is rooted in action research (Cohen et al., 2017; Avison et al., 1999). Action research is increasingly applied to future-oriented inquiries that aim to initiate sustainability transformations (Bradbury, 2022), including those facilitated through the arts (Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2018, 2025a; Jokela et al., 2019). Among the various branches of action research, this study employs an arts-based action research (ABAR) approach to explore and develop the role of art intermediaries in cross-sectoral collaborations. As a methodological framework, ABAR is grounded in participatory and practice-based inquiry, integrating artistic processes with cycles of reflection and action (Leavy, 2009; Barone & Eisner, 2012). It is particularly suited to contexts where the aim is not only to understand a phenomenon but also to actively transform practices, roles and organisational structures through iterative engagement.

Action research is a well-established approach for developing professional practices in complex social settings (Kemmis et al., 2014). In this study, the research process is embedded in real-world contexts where an artist, an intermediary and organisational actors collaborate to develop more sustainable and impactful models of artistic practice. Through cycles of planning, action, observation and reflection, the development project aims to enhance the visibility, legitimacy and effectiveness of intermediary roles that support the societal relevance of the arts.

The arts-based dimension of ABAR emphasises the use of artistic methods, practices and ways of knowing as integral to both data generation and knowledge creation (Hiltunen, 2009; Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2018, 2025a). Artistic processes are not only studied but also mobilised as tools of inquiry and transformation, making the arts themselves central to the research methodology. Artistic artefacts, performances and co-creative workshops serve both as outcomes and as reflective materials that deepen the analysis of emerging meanings and values.

The development of intermediary practices in this study took place within the larger Creative Cross-Innovations for Sustainability project. This project enabled situated experimentation with roles, collaboration models and support structures for intermediary actions to facilitate cross-sectoral collaboration between artists and corporate stakeholders. Thus, the research contributes to theory, practice and policy dialogue regarding the changing role of the arts in society, which was thoroughly explored within the same project context in the policy brief ‘Arts & Design-Based Collaboration and Cross-Innovation’ (Kouzmine-Karavaïeff & Petäjäjärvi, 2023).

The research data in this study was collected from all three parties (the artist, intermediary and host company representative) in 2023, after a seven-week residency period, via both an online survey and semi-structured interviews conducted by the first author. The survey addressed the following six key themes and aimed at gathering insights into the pilot residency experience: (1) added value, (2) sustainability, (3) the potential of the residency model, (4) financial aspects, (5) intermediary support and (6) other reflections. Each theme included both seven-point Likert scale items and open-ended questions. The same survey format was used for all three parties. The semi-structured interviews were conducted online and lasted 45 to 60 minutes. The interview structure was based on the survey, giving the possibility to further explore the answers given in the survey. Notably, the artist conducted the survey at the end of the residency with eight company employees, gathering anonymous responses to questions the artist had formulated for collecting feedback. This feedback contributed to the dataset. The research data also included a public presentation by the artist held at Havremagasinet on the 22nd of September 2023, during which she shared their residency experience with the audience. This was followed by a public discussion involving all three parties, focusing on shared reflections of the residency. Transcripts from these events form part of the research material. The research material also includes field notes and observations made by the first author from September 2022, when the preparatory phase of the residency was initiated, until June 2023, the end of residency period. The first author, in collaboration with the project team, analysed the evaluation and produced a summary, which is utilised as part of this study (NDPC, 2023).

The data were analysed paying particular attention to the experience and function of the intermediary role throughout the process, as well as the perceived value of the residency for the different stakeholders. The analysis was supported by the reflexive engagement of the researcher-practitioner (the first author) and the co-author. Knowledge production in this study is dialogical, relational and grounded in the shared experiences of those involved. The three parties whose experiences were analysed in this study – the artist, the intermediary and the representative of the host company – read the article before publication.

The Creative Residency for Sustainability

The Creative Residency for Sustainability is an adaptation of an artist residency, transferred into a non-cultural organisation context. The aim of the residency was to experiment with cross-sectoral exchange on the topic of sustainability and to explore, understand and identify the role and function of the intermediary within the process of an artistic intervention residency.

The seven-week residency period was implemented in Boden, Norrbotten, Sweden, from the 24th of April until the 9th of June 2023. The residency involved the following three parties: firstly, the publicly funded art institution Havremagasinet served as the intermediary, represented by its

director, Mariangela Mendez Prencke, who matched the artist and company that could participate in the residency. Secondly, the public business development organisation Boden Business Park served as the host company for the residency, represented by business developer Stina Matsson. Boden Business Park is a focal point for businesses and entrepreneurs, with a mission to support and further facilitate business development and opportunities in its area while serving as a hub with office spaces for various companies. Thirdly, the resident artist was the professional visual artist Pilar de Burgos, based in Luleå, Sweden, who primarily works in three-dimensional art, including sculpture, installations and performance.

The residency had the following four goals: (1) to support cross-sectoral exchange between the artist and professionals from other sectors, (2) to explore the artistic practice of fostering dialogue on the topic of sustainability in a corporate setting, (3) to identify the role of the intermediary and the potential of the art hall in enabling artistic crossovers and (4) to develop and pilot an art residency model for further implementation and inspiration. Within the Creative Residency for Sustainability, the artist had great freedom to interpret how she would explore and relate to the topic of sustainability during the residency. There was no expectation to produce new artworks; instead, the emphasis was on the process of encounters and the artist's ability to engage in meaningful dialogues with the company's employees. When the residency period began, none of the parties knew what kinds of practical activities would take place, and this open-endedness can be seen as a distinctive quality of this residency format. Another distinctive feature of the format was the absence of expectations for the artist to serve the company in a consultative role – such as contributing to team building or participating in organisational development. The researcher's field notes (from the 11th of November 2022) reflect on these distinctive qualities of the residency set-up: 'How can the residency be embedded into the company in a way that carries no expectations of facilitation, consultation, problem solving or community, socially engaged or participatory arts?' The expectation was high for creating exchange and dialogue, yet this was not bound to happen through participatory methods.

The artistic process within the residency was highly demanding. At the beginning of the residency, the artist went through a period of exploration, seeking possible directions for her work within this new context. This phase of orientation or mapping was followed by a period of decision-making, where the artist considered the potential forms that the work might take (such as workshops or the creation of a new art piece) and whether it should be participatory (engaging employees, visitors and others at Boden Business Park). Through conversations and interactions during coffee breaks and lunches, the artist gained insight into the employees' work, sparking new ideas and possibilities for the artist's residency. The residency host, Stina Mattson, provided generous access to the Boden Business Park community, ensuring that the artist could become actively involved.

The artist gave a presentation about her work, enabling the Business Park community to gain a deeper understanding of her practice and skills. This led to numerous conversations and opportunities where the employees found ways for the artist to contribute to various ongoing projects – yet she also set boundaries regarding how she would not engage in ongoing development processes, defining her role as the residency artist with a focus on art.

Artistic products, skills and knowledge about the arts are uncommon, if not alien, in the organisational realm (Schnugg, 2014). This became evident during the residency and was actively

addressed by the artist through diverse pedagogical actions and approaches. In the interview, de Burgos refers to a space to foster understanding of what creativity is that emerged within the residency, as well as fostering understanding of what creative thinking and creative processes entail. Additionally, many of the activities during the residency related to a pedagogical dimension, providing an opportunity to educate staff about the nature of art. In the interview, de Burgos referred to actions with a pedagogic mission: firstly, in the form of lending books to the employees that could inspire the employees that had shown some interest in artistic approaches and art; secondly, displaying art-related phrases in public spaces within the company (see Figures 2–3); thirdly, underpinning the artworks that she exhibited with clear placards explaining the artworks and her ideas behind them (see Figure 4). For the host company, the residency served as an access point to contemporary art and increased awareness of why art matters.

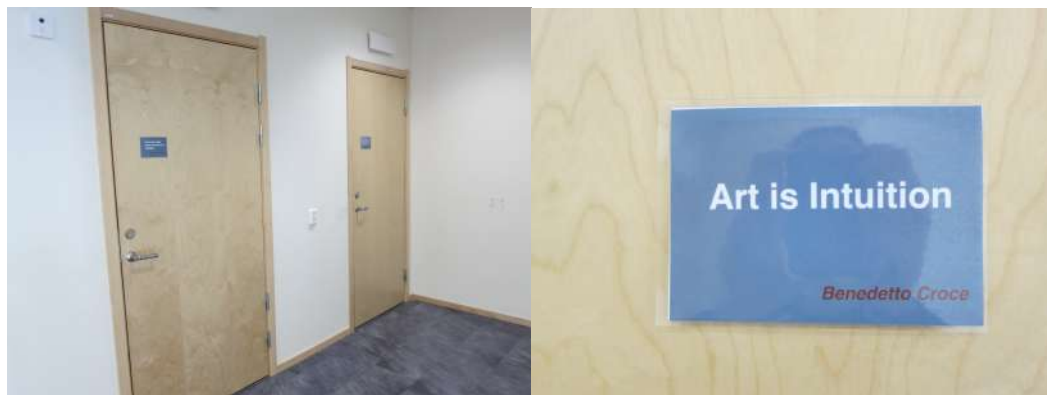


Figure 2. Quotes attached on the residency host company's toilet doors. Photos: Pilar de Burgos, 2023.

Creativity is not exclusively reserved for those practicing one of the traditional forms of art. <i>Joseph Beuys</i>	The artist gives you structure – you can fill it in yourself. <i>Dick Higgins</i>	With art, rebellion has become a profession. <i>Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz.</i>	The only thing of value in the area of art – is something that cannot be explained. <i>Georges Braque</i>
Art creates something which is beyond the order of things, yet its meaning depends on preserving the order of things. <i>Chinese poem from Song era</i>	Art is the attempt to delimit the undefined. Art is the attempt to defined the unlimited. <i>Andrzej Lachowicz</i>	Art shares a similarity with logic, mathematics, and finally with science. But though they try to be useful, art is not useful. Art exists only for itself. <i>Joseph Kosuth</i>	Good art is always made up of two things: first the observation of a fact, and secondly the shape which the human spirit takes on, in view of this fact. <i>John Ruskin</i>

Figure 3. Quotes attached on the residency host company's toilet doors. Photos: Pilar de Burgos, 2023.



Figure 4. Placards displayed in connection with the art installation. Photos: Pilar de Burgos, 2023.

The venue of Boden Business Park inspired the artist to exhibit her artworks. Boden Sustainability Week took place during the residency period, providing a suitable opportunity to exhibit the artwork *Global Warming*, a balloon made from plastic bags hanging from the ceiling (see Figure 5). The artwork was exhibited for one week. The intermediary party, Havremagasinet, provided technical support for the installation of the art pieces, which was also supported by the property manager of the host company.



Figure 5. Pilar de Burgos, *Global Warming*, installation: plastic bags, 2023. Photos: Pilar de Burgos, 2023.

Pilar de Burgos described the intention behind her artistic actions as aiming to raise awareness about art, to offer new perspectives on ecological issues through her artworks and to convey information in a rather explicit manner (see Figure 4). She reflected on the artistic choices and motivations: ‘there could be alternative ways of thinking, and one person can see things in another way.’ The art installation *The Last Drop of Consciousness* was installed at the entrance of the company premises (see Figures 6–7). The explanatory placards (see Figure 4) explaining the artwork were a choice made by the artist that aimed to build the understanding of the artwork in case many of the people encountering the artwork were not familiar with contemporary art.



Figures 6. Pilar de Burgos, *The Last Drop of Consciousness*, installation, 2023. Photo: Pilar de Burgos, 2023.



Figure 7. Pilar de Burgos, *The Last Drop of Consciousness*, installation, 2023. Photo: Pilar de Burgos, 2023.

The residency period was highlighted by the live performance, *Manipulation* (see Figure 8). The artist decided to include the performance as part of the residency, which she said in the interview effectively addressed the many questions she received about what art is, leading to a decision to showcase a live artistic experience. The performance explored themes of manipulation and the cutting of strings alongside concepts of birth, death and rebirth. During the interview, de Burgos stated that she saw the performance as the ideal climax and conclusion to the collaboration. The performance was well received by the audience, sparking emotions and impressions that were stated in the feedback survey filled in by the employees after the residency, for example, ‘the performance that the artist did led me to question my role and responsibility – if I am just a puppet, how much responsibility can I take?’



Figure 8. Pilar de Burgos, *Manipulation*, performance, 2023. Photo: Pilar de Burgos.



Figure 9. Pilar de Burgos, *Manipulation*, performance, 2023. Photo: Pilar de Burgos.

With an open-ended concept where the artist's residency process remained fluid and unpredictable, the outcome – comprising diverse artistic actions, installations and performance, as described above – can be seen as both exceptional and demonstrating strong agency, a quality that is uncommon and challenging to achieve when artists work within organisational settings. In the interview, de Burgos elaborated on the matter of agency as follows:

At the very beginning, they couldn't see my role. So, I think, for me, to show the art pieces gave me a role. It gave me my name, so to say. So, it was more like a need to position myself in this context, otherwise I was more like a ghost.

The tangible results of this residency process indicate that the intermediary function of the art institution may have a key role in supporting artistic agency and providing needed institutional legitimacy, which results in an enhanced sense of artistic agency, leading to an impactful encounter.

Analyses of the functions and relevance of an art institution acting as an intermediary in cross-sectoral collaboration

A key function performed by the art intermediary was to support the implementation of a clear and coherent process structure (provided by the Creative Cross-Innovations for Sustainability project), which all three parties regarded as fundamental. This process structure served as a valuable framework, offering a shared basis for collaboration, clarifying expectations and shaping a common understanding of the purpose of the exchange. This highlights the notion that when

collaboration is open-ended and allows ample space for artistic exploration, a strong need arises for process structures to ensure that all parties share a common understanding. Similar research findings have been made regarding co-designing art interventions in health care institutions (Oinas & Huhmarniemi, 2025). All three parties strongly affirmed the essential role of the intermediary, viewing it as indispensable to the success of the collaboration.

The intermediary role was critical before the residency period with the intermediary serving as the matchmaker, identifying a suitable company host organisation with an artist with relevant skills and capacities. Firstly, the intermediary defined the desired qualities of the host company: holding a significant role and influence within its community, having an acknowledged interest in issues of sustainability, and having the openness and curiosity to step into an exploratory artistic dialogue. The intermediary facilitated the engagement and commitment of the host company. Secondly, the intermediary defined the essential criteria for a preferable artist for the residency: a professional artist from the region (so the local environment provides common ground for both collaborators), prior experience in working under externally defined requirements (such as client relationships or commissioned projects with strict frameworks, demonstrating good social skills) and an interest in sustainability-related themes. Mariangela Mendez Prencke, serving as the intermediary on behalf of the art institution Havremagasinet, stated in the interview about the skills this matchmaking process requires:

it has to be a professional in the field, and they need to have a good network and local knowledge of the context and of artists in order to be able to do the best matchmaking possible. And they must have the capacity to support the company and/or the artist in the cases as needed. I guess they have to be perceived as a trusted partner so the artist and the company feel that it is a serious proposal and they feel they have back up if needed.

The art institution, functioning as an intermediate organisation, contributed to balancing the power dynamics within the collaboration. Rather than the company directly engaging with an individual artist (or a small cultural entity), the involvement of the art institution as a counterpart offered crucial institutional support and legitimacy to the artist, balancing the power structures of the collaboration. This set-up was preferable as it provides the credibility necessary to support the host company's ability to take risks and enable open-ended exploration, as well as empowering the artist to have the agency to navigate a demanding corporate environment.

Of particular significance was the element of community access. Firstly, the intermediary facilitated access to the company, that is, they set up the collaboration introducing the parties to each other. However, another level of access was provided by the host company's host person who facilitated the access of the artist to the community of the company employees. This access was highlighted as a key factor enabling the artist to foster dialogue and exchange with the community and can be seen as an enabler of artistic agency. In the interview, de Burgos reflects on the matter of access to the host organisation community:

Stina took me into their meetings, and that made me able to see the core of what they work with and how they work. She was very good at not letting me feel I was an outsider. It was more like, 'You're our guest. Come, and I will show you what we do.'

In assessing the residency's value and the host company's motivations, the artist in residence offered employees a space for reflection, alternative perspectives and meaningful interruptions to their daily routines, such as the chance to 'stop and think a bit, not just rush through everyday life', as stated in the survey gathering feedback from the employees. This illustrates how art can reframe the pace and mindset of the workplace. The outcomes were related to the encouragement and enthusiasm to challenge established behaviour, experiment with diverse forms of creative collaborations and added interest in art (all the employees who gave feedback on the residency stated that the presence of the artist made them more interested in art). The success of the residency in its aim to foster new dialogues around the topic of sustainability and the overall relevance of the residency was rated highly.

The involvement of the art institution as an intermediary emerged as a valuable finding. An art institution can provide essential support for an artist's work in what may otherwise be a challenging environment to navigate. When examining the relevance of the residency and the motivations behind it, the art institution evaluated the process as being of the highest importance. The motivation for the art institution to facilitate cross-sectorial exchange was related to the need to enforce the role of the institution as a part of the community in Boden. In addition, other motivations related to the priorities of establishing new connections and networks, and taking part in societal change. The residency bridged two diverse organisations together (Havremagasinet and Boden Business Park), which opened up new forms of exchange between the organisations and their individuals. At the end of the residency period, the Boden Business Park employees met at Havremagasinet and Stina Matsson stated that 'we decided to go with the whole team to have our Monday meeting in Havremagasinet to build a bridge between our two organisations.' The primary positive outcome of the collaboration for the art institution was the expansion of the art institution's networks, alongside the enhancement of new skills. As a result of this intervention, many employees of the Business Park began visiting the exhibitions at Havremagasinet, thereby gaining experiences that contributed to their cultural well-being.

For the artist, the residency offered an opportunity to compare the company's working culture with her creative practices, learning from both their similarities and differences. She also gained new perspectives on how the employees viewed art, which shaped her understanding of its role in society. This unusual setting – an artist's residency in a corporate context – deepened her sense of professional identity. Here, 'the mirror' became a meaningful metaphor for what it means to be an artist, reflecting both personal growth and mutual value for the host company community and the artist herself.

Discussion

The pilot residency provides valuable insights into the potential of artistic interventions within companies and highlights the importance of addressing sustainability through cross-sectoral approaches that foster dialogue and exchange. Further questions emerge regarding the opportunities and requirements for art to serve as a catalyst for broadening perspectives and encouraging reflection within spaces and communities where art is not part of everyday life. Such opportunities are relevant across diverse community contexts; nevertheless, company settings entail the particular power to influence these communities more broadly, shaping their approaches and actions either in support of or in resistance to sustainability. Mariangela Mendez Prencke, serving as the intermediary representing the art institution Havremagasinet, elaborated on the

importance of what kind of company would benefit from such an exchange. Mendez Prencke chose to pursue the collaboration opportunity with Boden Business Park – a company holding a significant position in the local community, acting as a focal point for the entire business ecosystem in the area:

we, as the matchmaker, did see the potential in pairing Boden Business Park with an artist because we knew they [the business park] had that need; a need to understand better what is or can be the role of art in society, especially a society in transformation like that of Boden.

This study reveals two essential intermediary functions that support fruitful cross-sectoral collaboration in art. Firstly, the role of the art institution in providing strategic backing and helping to equalise the power balance between the artist and the host company organisation, leading to impactful artistic encounters. Secondly, the role of the host company's key person, who acted as a bridge builder to the business park's community during the residency period, was crucial in facilitating the artist's access to the community. Both these functions provided meaningful support for the artist's work and agency during the residency and should be recognised as enablers of added value and impact. In addition, the matchmaking process carried out by the art institution prior to the residency was recognised as an essential intermediary function, laying the groundwork for a meaningful encounter.

The findings on the added value created by the residency align well with previous research on the effects of artistic interventions in corporate settings. As Berthoin Antal and Strauß (2016) stated in their comparative meta-analysis of case studies categorising the effects of value added, the findings of this study also indicate added value in terms of 'personal level growth and seeing more and differently.' According to Berthoin Antal and Strauß (2016), this is the most frequently mentioned effect of artistic interventions: the increased awareness of present conditions, enhanced reflection and broadened perspectives. These outcomes were likewise recognised during this residency. These added values can be seen as highly relevant in the context of exploring the role of sustainability in corporate settings.

Companies often hold significant economic resources, social influence and decision-making authority, aspects which enable them to shape community priorities, values and practices related to sustainability. The study highlights the opportunity for artistic interventions in organisations to foster critical reflection, broaden perspectives and support transformative processes within communities undergoing change. The results of the study also resonate with what Decker (2020) calls for regarding the role of art institutions in more effectively addressing sustainability-related themes that affect the communities they serve. The artworks presented at Boden Business Park served to raise awareness of sustainability issues, acting as a platform for informal education on sustainability, as also discussed in studies on the educational impact of contemporary art exhibitions (Beer & Huhmarniemi, 2024; Clover et al., 2016).

This study was motivated by the aim of enhancing sustainable development. The pilot residency formed part of the Creative Cross-Innovations for Sustainability project in which the concept of sustainability was linked to the Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. Specifically, the project introduced the residency as a means of advancing SDG 17, Partnerships for the Goals (United Nations, 2015), with an emphasis on cross-sector cooperation. As a result, the pilot residency created a space for dialogue on sustainability themes. The artworks presented

encouraged reflection on the meanings of sustainability – ranging from contemporary views on development to the green transition and the transformation of life values. The works also raised questions concerning the use of fossil fuels, an essential issue for ecological sustainability. However, the impact of the artworks on members of the work community – particularly regarding their attitudes towards green energy, consumerism and life values – was not captured in the research data collected. Moreover, as the study focused on a single seven-week residency period and its immediate aftermath, longer-term transformations in organisational culture or in sustainability-related values and behaviour could not be fully observed within this timeframe.

In Europe, the role of art and culture in facilitating sustainability transitions by fostering creativity and innovation is widely recognised, though it remains a subject of ongoing debate (Culture Action Europe, 2024). The fields of art and design are more frequently called upon to strengthen their commitment to addressing ecological and societal challenges by reimagining their roles (Ciravegna et al., 2022). Artists increasingly facilitate creative participatory activities as means to strengthen innovation capacity. While artists' work that goes beyond traditional art institutions has been increasingly analysed through the lens of hybridity (Abbing, 2002; van Winkel et al., 2012; Karttunen, 2017), in this pilot residency, autonomous artistic motivations became interwoven with the goals and intentions of other collaborators. The diversification of artists' roles does not imply that the exhibition of artworks are regarded as less significant.

Discussion on Arctic art encompasses the work of intergenerational local communities, newcomers to the region and their mutual interactions, coexistence and collaborations (Huhmarniemi & Hiltunen, 2022). This has also been the case in the pilot implementation of the residency: both the artist and the representative of Havremagasinet have settled in Northern Sweden from abroad and are now engaged in contributing to regional cultural vitality and sustainability in Boden. By embracing multicultural perspectives and challenging dominant institutional conventions that have historically defined the value and role of art, the Arctic region holds the potential to become a particularly fertile ground for new forms of innovation. This includes artistic, cultural and cross-sectoral innovations grounded in local knowledge, cultural diversity and alternative worldviews. Furthermore, the hybridity of artwork seems to be natural for many artists in the Arctic who do not typically limit their expressions to just some specific forms of art, and the conception of Arctic art as inseparable from everyday environments and ways of life resonates with broader shifts in the societal role of artists as partners across various fields. Experimentation and development in the Arctic could also be considered potentially meaningful for artists' role elsewhere. The North and the Arctic are considered as a kind of laboratory for new forms and contexts for sustainable art and design (Jokela & Coutts, 2018), a view that is affirmed by the results of this study.

Institutional support from the art world was essential in enabling and strengthening the artist's successful intervention in the company, even though the work itself occurred beyond the art institution's physical and traditional boundaries. In this context, 'the decolonisation of art' refers to working outside the walls of traditional art institutions and instead engaging with other kinds of spaces. In the Arctic region, there are relatively few art galleries and formal art venues. Rather than serving solely as spaces for exhibiting art within their walls, these institutions can take on the intermediary role to explore and support artists' work in non-artistic, everyday environments. One limitation of this study is that publicly funded art institutions in the Arctic are typically located in

urban centres. However, art museums and similar institutions can also have a regional mission to serve surrounding villages and sparsely populated rural areas, extending their reach and impact beyond the cities.

Conclusions

This research examined the role of an art institution as the intermediary facilitating the integration of an artist into a cross-sectoral collaboration in the Arctic. By acting as bridge builders between artists and organisations in other sectors, art intermediaries enable creative exchange to foster dialogue and spaces for reflection. Their role extends beyond institutional art, supporting artists to navigate expanded professional landscapes in the Arctic while ensuring that artistic contributions are meaningfully integrated into broader societal needs. The findings highlight the art intermediary as a critical enabler of artistic engagement that goes beyond the institutional (Western) arts sector, promoting innovation, sustainability and community development through cross-sectoral partnerships. By fostering the potential of novel cross-sectoral synergies, art intermediaries enhance opportunities for artists by reinforcing the role of creative professionals and reinventing the practices involved in tackling contemporary local and regional challenges.

We argue that art intermediaries hold future potential in a form of their specialised expertise that can contribute to sustainability. Their role is emerging as a new professional field, capable of facilitating meaningful cross-sectoral exchange to support the long-term resilience of Arctic societies. Without these intermediating actors, the transformative potential of art within broader societal contexts may remain unrealised or underutilised.

This study employed a qualitative approach, focusing on an in-depth examination of a single pilot adaptation. Although the findings are not widely generalisable, they offer meaningful insights into the role of the intermediary in enabling cross-sectoral exchange and are transferable to comparable initiatives. Further research is needed to better understand the extent to which intermediary functions are transferable and to what degree they depend on the specific individuals involved in the research.

The study underscores the need for further research and development to enhance the recognition and effectiveness of art intermediaries in the Arctic context. Further research could be carried out on the art intermediaries' role in decolonising conceptions of art by shifting the focus from Western ideals to the local and regional values and lived realities of the Arctic.

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Data availability statement

The data generated during the study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Keywords

Art Intermediary, Artistic Interventions, Cross-Sectorial and Cross-Disciplinary Collaborations, Cross-Innovations, Arctic Sustainability, Future

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