

### Food related: an artistic approach towards knowledge sharing

Klaveren, Rosanne van

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

#### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Klaveren, R. v. (2015). Food related: an artistic approach towards knowledge sharing. *EthnoScripts: Zeitschrift für aktuelle ethnologische Studien*, 17(1), 138-158. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:gbv:18-8-8082>

#### Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY-SA Lizenz (Namensnennung-Weitergabe unter gleichen Bedingungen) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den CC-Lizenzen finden Sie hier: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/deed.de>

#### Terms of use:

This document is made available under a CC BY-SA Licence (Attribution-ShareAlike). For more information see: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>

# EthnoScripts

ZEITSCHRIFT FÜR AKTUELLE  
ETHNOLOGISCHE STUDIEN

## Anthropology and Art

Jahrgang 17 Heft 1 | 2015

Rosanne van Klaveren  
FOOD RELATED: An Artistic Approach Towards Knowledge  
Sharing  
Ethnoscripts 2015 17 (1): 138-158  
eISSN 2199-7942

### Abstract

Artistic participatory practices can establish connections between people(s) that are valuable for the sharing of knowledge. In this article, I explain from my research practice how an artistic approach can stimulate, structure and enrich knowledge sharing. During my doctoral research at KU Leuven in Belgium, a prototype of an expressive space was designed to collect, map and exchange facts and experiences related to Arctic food culture: the Food Related platform. Decisions that I made and strategies that I used during this project are reviewed while focusing on two topics: 1) food as a subject and stimulus for sharing, 2) the use of creative questionnaires and cultural probes as a method to include imagination. Empirical findings give insight in my experiences and approaches as an artist, which I believe can be inspirational for knowledge sharing projects beyond the field of art.

### Herausgeber:

Universität Hamburg  
Institut für Ethnologie  
Edmund-Siemers-Allee 1 (West)  
D-20146 Hamburg  
Tel.: 040 42838 4182  
E-Mail: lfE@uni-hamburg.de  
<http://www.ethnologie.uni-hamburg.de>

eISSN: 2199-7942



Dieses Werk ist lizenziert unter einer Creative Commons Licence 4.0  
International: Namensnennung - Weitergabe unter gleichen Bedingungen.

## FOOD RELATED: An Artistic Approach Towards Knowledge Sharing

Rosanne van Klaveren



[www.FOODRELATED.org](http://www.FOODRELATED.org)

By Rosanne van Klaveren

### Introduction

In recent years, a renewed focus on knowledge sharing has been emerging within the circumpolar regions. Scientists from various fields increasingly aim to include local knowledge in their research, and are often asked to communicate results in return. Also within the communities, many elders hope their knowledge will cross the generation gap. For example, during a plenary roundtable session, held at the 17th Inuit Studies Conference, held in Val-d'Or (Canada) in October 2010, an Inuk elder in the audience asked for the development of new media products in order to transfer knowledge and to reconnect the youth of his community to their cultural identity. In a similar way, pondering about possibilities to connect different Arctic peoples or cultures on the Internet was expressed during conversations that I participated in during travels in Greenland and the Canadian Arctic. It is these kinds of open requests and speculations that motivated me to start the *Food Related* project, and encouraged me to continue developing an online platform for combining and communicating knowledge.

Knowledge exists of insight in certain situations or practices that take place in history, present or future. Knowledge, as a qualitative unmaterialistic commodity, can take many forms. For example, thoughts, concerns, habits, memories, viewpoints, experiences and stories can all contain knowledge. As the sharing of knowledge can lead to a transfer of knowledge or to the creation of new points of view, the main purpose of the platform is to present an expressive space for this sharing to occur. But, the interplay between indigenous knowledge and Euro-western science strategies is one of the auspicious challenges in contemporary (social) sciences. Many research methods have a strong tendency to exclude truths that contrast the Euro-western research paradigm, such as the animistic worldview (Chilisa 2012). Indigenous knowledge is simply too spiritual, too sensitive, too local, too tacit, too sensory, too implicit, too flexible, or too relational to fit in their approach. Nevertheless, combinations of traditional and scientific knowledge can lead to deeper understanding of the research topic.<sup>1</sup> However, conceptual models or frameworks enabling combinations of and links between different ways of viewing the world are absent in most cases. According to Bagele Chilisa (2012) and other patrons of indigenous research methodologies, we need to recognize that “integrating indigenous perspectives in dominant research paradigms may not be the most effective strategy to legitimize the histories, worldviews, ways of knowing, and experiences of the colonized and historically oppressed” (p. 39). Altogether, we can conclude that combining different kinds of knowledge comes with pitfalls and challenges.

In my art practice, in which I have conceptualized and developed various kinds of expressive spaces for more than ten years, I have experimented in combining diversified and sometimes opposed viewpoints and experiences in both online and offline projects.<sup>2</sup> In such expressive spaces, people could creatively and imaginatively share thoughts and experiences. For example, poetry, bird observations, personal experiences and concerns, news items, children’s drawings and fictional writings were all combined on the *Vogelvlucht* website, a project commissioned by CBK-Utrecht in 2005 and 2006 in the Netherlands. Less burdened by limitations of knowledge systems or worldviews, these spaces enable different kinds of knowledge to merge. Rather triggered than discouraged by the difficulties described above, I therefore consider artists to have valuable tools at their disposal to overcome these difficulties. As the social power of art lies in the possibility to create

---

1 For example, in environmental research there is a growing interest in traditional ecological knowledge (TEK), which is considered a valuable resource to increase our understanding of current environmental changes and their impacts (Hunnington et al. 2004).

2 For example, the Braintec project. This project won the ISOC-Award for Internet and the Arts in 2001 and was nominated for the International Media Art Price in 2002. An overview of early work can be found at <http://www.rosannevanklaveren.nl>

an expressive space in which the rules and regulations of social reality are reshaped, as both Bourriaud and Rancière state (Trienekens 2010), artists should be able to bypass at least some of the burdens of colonial knowledge structures through creativity and artistry.

Realizing these possibilities of an artistic approach, I accepted the challenge to design possible interplays between the different kinds of knowledge in building an expressive space for the Arctic peoples: the *Food Related* platform. Although this project functioned as one of the case studies within my doctoral research, it has originated out of my own intentions and without external funding. In this article, I like to disclose some experiences and design steps that make visible how this platform came into existence. After some basic information and description of the functionality of the platform, I will focus on my decision to choose food and food culture as its theme. This decision is partly grounded in theoretical arguments. Then, focusing on my artistic approach during fieldwork, I will review the use of creative questionnaires and the cultural probes method. Through stimulating engagement and the imagination, this design method is known for its possibilities to include knowledge that is otherwise difficult to grasp in words (Gaver et al. 1998, 2004).

From all these intentions, theoretical findings and fieldwork experiences, I initiated a prototype of an online platform that can be viewed online at [www.foodrelated.org](http://www.foodrelated.org). This prototype has been used sporadically during fieldwork, but announcements of its existence were deliberately not made. This is because, as described further in more detail, the conditions surrounding the platform were not beneficial. Further developments turned too time-consuming and technically challenging to be handled by one single human being. But more important, the fact that the project lacks firm roots within the Arctic proved a serious weakness during fieldwork. However, as proof of concept the platform is an interesting case to illustrate how an artistic approach can enable or stimulate the collecting, sharing, and combining of different kinds of knowledge.

### FOOD RELATED: an expressive space for sharing knowledge of Arctic food culture

On the *Food Related* platform, one can find recipes, news items, drawings, video messages, old myths, thoughts, personal concerns, research outcomes, facts and fiction; all related to Arctic food and food culture. For example, in a video recording from Kugluktuk, Nunavut (Canadian Arctic), Tracy Evyagotailak says that she likes eating sweet root and caribou. She expresses her appreciation for the cooked substance of the caribou hoof, saying:

*“My favorite is the caribou. They kinda taste like deer, they say, but I don’t know how that tastes like. We eat the brain, the tongue and the jaw meat. When you eat the feet part, I am not sure exactly what it is called, but when you cook it in very high temperature - is it the tendons or the ligaments or something? It is the cartilage. That is what we eat. It’s very yummy!”*

In contrast to this personal message, one can also find impersonal entries. For example, a news item reports about the export of Yamal reindeer meat towards Qatar:

*“When rival energy producers Russia and Qatar talk business, it’s no longer only about natural gas – they’re talking reindeer meat, which Russia has promised to export and butcher according to Muslim dietary law. (...) Yamal’s governor Dmitry Kolbylin had the state-owned Yamal Reindeer Company arrange for ritual Islamic slaughter and the trial production of 1,000 cans of halal reindeer meat.”*

These and many other entries form a various collection that can be explored on the website. Although the prototype of the *Food Related* platform is fully functional, it should be considered artistic research. As such, most entries are made by the artist in order to experiment and to visualize its possibilities. The design of the website has three modes to access the collected and shared contributions: a *Geographic View* shows entries in relation to their geographic location, a *Foodgroup View* shows entries in relation to their ingredients or food items, and a *Historic View* shows all collected entries in order of publication.

*Illustration 1* shows four screenshots taken from the *Geographic View*. An image of the area within the Arctic Circle rotates and zooms in when an encircled area is clicked upon. Within this selected and enlarged area, colored dots function as buttons to open related entries that are available in three languages. For artistic reasons, the 66° latitude was chosen as the outline, unintentionally excluding certain areas from this mapping. Although this circular solution is an attractive feature that was appreciated by most participants, exclusion cannot be the message of this project. Therefore, in case future versions of the platform will be built, another geographic solution needs to be designed. Nonetheless, people from more southern areas can always contribute on the current platform in other mappings, for example in the *Foodgroup View*.

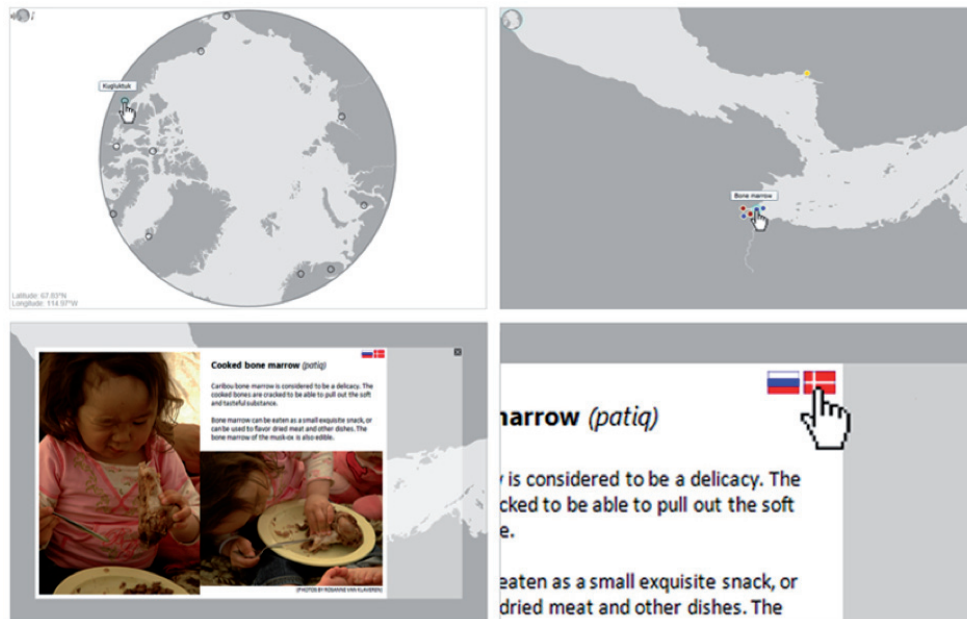


Illustration 1: Geographic view of the Food Related platform, 2012;  
by Rosanne van Klaveren

In the *Foodgroup View*, entries are mapped by their ingredients and categorized under sea mammals, birds and eggs, land mammals, fishes and other sea products, hoofed animals, bread and pastry, fruits and vegetables, drinks, or snacks. Individual food items enlarge when clicked upon, after which the related entries become visible as colored, clickable dots similar to the *Geographic View*. A paper-prototype of the food groups and their connected food items was discussed during the 17th Inuit Studies Conference and led to some small but important adaptations. For example, while focusing on the inclusion of specific characterizations of Arctic food culture, I was advised to visualize sea mammals and land animals as distinct groups because it has been a taboo for many Inuit to mix (products of) these animals. The Inuit from Greenland clearly divided animals by ocean and land, a division that can also be observed in the rules that forbid sewing caribou skin on ocean ice in Canada (Petersen 2010:296). As the third and final view mode, the *Historic View* gives a graphic overview of the whole collection in order of publication, which makes it easier to find a particular entry, or to view only the recently added entries.<sup>3</sup>

When users of the platform want to contribute through the sharing of thoughts, habits, recipes, concerns, or any specifics related to Arctic food and food culture, they follow an easy step-by-step process that guides them in the making of a new entry. In one of these steps they can mark which geographic location and food item(s) this entry concerns, which will decide where their entry can be found by other users.

<sup>3</sup> Future versions can, of course, include more view modes.

In order to bring the different Arctic peoples together for the act of sharing knowledge, the participants should be able to understand each other's contributions. The use of automatic translation software is therefore an important aspect of the technological realization of the platform, as it immediately translates all collected recipes, anecdotes, opinions, news items, and other written content of newly made entries. The prototype of the platform is, unfortunately, only using English, Russian and Danish<sup>4</sup> on a structural base because automatic translation software for indigenous languages does not exist. As people throughout the whole circumpolar north were forbidden to speak their indigenous languages during colonial times (Freeman 2000), it feels wrong to present only these three languages on the platform. And besides being a strong tool of communication, language is also a signifier of culture and identity, just as food. Hence, inclusion of Arctic indigenous languages is a prerequisite for future versions of the platform. If enough funding can be found for translation purposes, it is technically not difficult to include several indigenous languages (for example, Kalaallisut [West-Greenlandic], Northern Sami and Inuktitut).<sup>5</sup> The inclusion of these languages can thoroughly change the look and feel of the platform and can make the switch towards a meeting place from the Arctic peoples.

I worked on the *Food Related* project between 2009 and 2012. Following a *research through design* approach, as outlined by Zimmerman et al. (2007), the iterative design process of creating and testing possible content and architectural solutions eventually led to the current version of the prototype. Sketches and earlier versions of the platform are shown and discussed

---

4 Most Arctic people who regularly make use of the Internet master one of these 'big languages'. Danish is chosen as a third 'big language' because many Greenlanders do not master English. Also many Sami from Norway and Sweden found it easier to read Danish instead of English. Computer languages, in which the platform is programmed, are also used. The practice of these languages is purposely left out of this paper in order to avoid more fragmentation.

5 Language is used on the Food Related platform in two ways: for information and guidance concerning the use of the platform (static language use), and within the entries made by the users of the platform (dynamic language use). All static language use can be outsourced if future budgets allow. For example all words and texts used to guide participants in exploring the content of the platform and during the process of making new entries, including the descriptions of the view modes, the food items, the locations, the step-by-step guidance during the editing and re-editing of entries, and all possible error messages, can be translated. It is more difficult to translate the language of the entries, because this content is created dynamically by participants who want to be able to change their contributions at any time. However, participants can be asked to translate their (and others') entries manually in their own language, even to correct language mistakes from the automatic translations.



in Arctic Canada and in the Tromsø region. As much as possible<sup>6</sup>, members of the target group – the Arctic peoples – were invited to participate in this design process through the cultural probes method (to be discussed further in this article), expert meetings and a workshop.

In an early stage of the project I visited Kugluktuk, a small hamlet in the northwest of Nunavut in Canada, to observe and discuss functionalities of food in the Inuit culture. Although I am not an anthropologist, and do not intend to become one either, I believe it is just as important for artists not only to learn about their topics from theory but from lived experience as well. In addition to that, both approaches can lead to artistic inspiration. Hence, I visited this Arctic community while the project was still in the conceptual stage and discussed my intentions with several community members.



Illustration 2: Eating caribou head in Kugluktuk, Nunavut (Canada) 2009; photo by Rosanne van Klaveren

When the first sketches of the platform were ready to be shared, I presented them at the 17th Inuit Studies Conference and made small creative questionnaires for the other participants to gather and discuss feedback. Later on, after a second iteration of the design process, I presented the project at the 7th International Congress of Arctic Social Sciences. Again, given feedback influenced further improvements. During a private holiday in Ittoqqortoormiit, a small community in the northeast of Greenland, I presented creative questionnaires to the local school to explore views upon Arctic food

6 It would have been better if more workshops were organized and more cultural probes packages were spread, but due to high travel costs and a limited amount of research time, this was impossible.

from the younger generation. In a later stage of the project, during an artist in residence working period of two and a half months in Kilpisjärvi, I have been working on and with the cultural probes method. As this location is not far from Tromsø, I organized a workshop there to present and discuss the platform. Every time, the participants' opinions, experiences and worldviews were valued beyond inspiration. For example, a connection with Facebook for sharing entries and an easier login process was desired during a workshop in Tromsø, which was immediately integrated in the platform. Eventually, the input given by participants had the power to put the project on hold when discussions about ownership underlined a strong need for indigenous partners.

### Features of food, fortitudes of the platform

During my explorative stay in Kugluktuk, I witnessed several aspects of the local food culture. A local hunter demonstrated to me how he skillfully slaughtered a frozen caribou while explaining the use of each body part. I was invited to participate in various activities: I went fishing on the frozen Coronation Gulf, I ate caribou head (*see Illustration 2*) and witnessed part of its preparation, and I joined a picnic on the ice during which a variety of local foods was shared. To the big surprise of the whole community, Governor General Michaëlle Jean visited town to express her interest in the local culture, including the food culture. One day earlier, she visited Rankin Inlet and ate the heart of the seal – a gesture that was widely debated in the media and appreciated by many people in Kugluktuk. The Governor's words were later published on the Food Related platform in a news item: "The heart is a delicacy. It is the best you can offer to your guest. It is the best that is offered to the elders. So, do you say no to that? You engage and at the same time you are learning about a way of life, a civilization, a tradition."

Also some of the information that was shared to me by the locals found their way on the platform, resulting in entries about bone marrow, dried caribou meat and arctic ground squirrel. *Illustration 3* gives an example of how this local knowledge is published on the platform. However, the aim of my visit to Kugluktuk was not to gather content for the website, but to find inspiration for the design of the platform and to become more familiar with the topic of Arctic food. As people were enthusiastic about my ideas, I continued considering the food theme from a theoretic approach.

In its broadest sense, food is strongly connected to the core of life itself, and food culture reflects many aspects of livelihood. Seals, for example, are more than nourishment for the people of Isertoq, the Isertormeeq, in the East of Greenland. Besides their main resource for food, seals and sealing also remain deeply embedded in the culture of today: "... they are critical in the maintenance of cultural values and identity. To eat seal meat is to be

an Isertormeeq” (Hovelsrud-Broda 2000:159). Not only the consumption of food, but also the way it is gathered or hunted, prepared, shared and consumed, has a meaning. “Food and cuisine are a quite central component of the sense of collective belonging,” notes Fischler (1988:280). Referring to Calvo (1982), he explains how among minority cultures certain features of cuisine are sometimes retained after the loss of the original language. Not only in representations but also in sensed experiences, individuals within a given group are bonded by collective practices, which include food practices (Fischler 1988). The reason why food satisfies more than physiological needs alone lies in the myriad of sociocultural, political, economic, and philosophical factors that influence the foods we choose, when we eat, how we eat, and why we eat the way we do (Germov 1999). If we add geographical, environmental and spiritual factors, the amount of aspects that influence our food and food cultures ranges even further.



Illustration 3: Example of an entry made in Kugluktuk; photo by Rosanne van Klaveren

It is this myriad of possible connections and relations that make the food subject suit so well for an expressive space like the *Food Related* platform. As many aspects of Arctic cultures and livelihoods are directly related to food, more diverse contributions, and links between contributions, are possible. The present prototype shows indeed how various the content of entries can be. For example, the joy of making Akutaq (Alaskan Eskimo ice cream made with caribou meat, seal fat and berries) can be linked to an entry about extremely high food prices, or to an entry containing concerns about mercury levels in marine animals, and to contributed Sami recipes with berries. From all the related factors in the possible connections, the physiological aspects

of the food subject also stimulated some philosophical thoughts about the media use of the platform. When we are spending time online, we are less focused on our body. A feeling of mentally being there, while the body is more or less neglected, is often experienced in virtual environments (Munt 2001). Experiencing body and mind separately, as in Cartesian dualism, is perhaps a Euro-western pitfall that should be avoided when working with indigenous peoples. Thus, the focus on food on the *Food Related* platform might sustain the physical connection to the body during virtual contact, and be meaningful in that aspect too.

Besides its connection to all those aspects of human life, food is powerful in establishing or strengthening connections between people. Food has the proverbial ability to break the ice during conversations and can literally bring people together. In all human cultures food is used to build and maintain social relationships, notes Joanne Ikeda (1999). Referring to Rozin (1996), she explains how food is an extremely valuable social instrument because it promotes social interaction (Ikeda 1999:151). The social act of eating together even has its own term: commensality. Claude Fischler defines commensality as one of the most striking manifestations of human society (Fischler 2011:529). Drawing on Georg Simmel's analysis of the shared meal (Simmel 1910), he describes the sociological power of commensality as being magic, because it turns "the exclusive selfishness of eating into a habit of being gathered together such as is seldom attainable on occasions of a higher and intellectual order", into a collective, social experience (Fischler 2011:541). Indeed, thoughts and emotions are shared easier and less restrained during the shared activity of consuming food, whether it is among friends, family, business partners, or even complete strangers.

If food, as a topic or subject, can also create comfort and stimulate communication in virtual environments, it is probably an ideal feature to stimulate openness too. Openness is a favorable condition for participatory practices, as it is inviting and gives space for people to fit in (Huybrechts 2013). For projects like *Food Related* it is even more important to create as much openness as possible, because the target group might not only contain different opinions, but different worldviews as well. Among the people I was aiming at, I explicitly did not wish to exclude the non-natives. In times of globalization it is more relevant than ever for minority groups to be understood by the majority. For example in relation to the European import ban on seal products, prejudice is on the vanguard of globalized rules and regulations that disadvantage the Arctic peoples (Lynge 1992). If openness can contribute in more understanding of Arctic food cultures, prejudice against the Arctic peoples can decline. During the period that I worked on the *Food Related* project, I therefore tried to be as open as possible. Food as a feature helped me in doing so, for it can be approached from many angles or interests, is a need that all people share, and is not judging in itself.

Through my visit to Kugluktuk and through confirmation from literature, implementation of the food subject became a well-considered foundation of the platform that fortifies many aspects and aimed functionalities. The purpose of this feature stretches beyond the function of a theme or a topic; it is handled as a linking element and a principle of dynamic agglutination, in the way Bourriaud described the notion of relational arts (Bourriaud 2002).

### Creative questionnaires and cultural probes as a method to explore possibilities and concerns

During further conceptualization and development of the *Food Related* platform, I worked with creative questionnaires and cultural probes as an artistic approach for including knowledge and feedback from participants. Cultural probes (sometimes referred to as design probes) are small creative tasks, sometimes used singular but mostly used as a set or a so-called probe kit. As a qualitative research method it follows the artistic approach, which is characterized by being irrational and uncontrolled, with a focus on inspiration (Gaver 1999). Probe kits contain ludic tasks and assignments, often combined with a diary or notebook to gather and explain outcomes, and are usually given or sent by mail to the participants to work with at home. Cultural probes outshine for openness to various ways of expression. Through the creativity of both the initiator(s) and the participants, cultural probes give space to dreams, subjective thoughts and uncertainties. They can open up the design space, instead of narrowing it down (Gaver 2004), and therefore are a match for including different kinds of knowledge.

In spring 2010 I visited Ittoqqortoormiit (Scoresbysund), in the north-east of Greenland, for a short holiday. This gave me a good opportunity to test the probe method, as I had never worked with it before. Because I was particularly interested in food experiences from the local youth, and because I imagined it easier to approach them in the limited time frame, I made small booklets as creative questionnaires to be used in classrooms. These probe-booklets contained as little text as possible and often suggested drawing or other creative responses as possible ways to answer questions. For example, children could draw their favorite food on an empty plate. And, a set of 14 handmade stickers of yellow smiley faces with a licking tongue and 14 green faces that expressed disgust could be used to show taste and dislike on a collage of local animals in an Arctic environment (*Illustration 4*).

Nine school children aged 10 and 11 worked with these booklets under the guidance of their teacher. This brought me three valuable insights, which were important for the project. First of all, I experienced that it was not easy to find good conditions for these booklets to be used in class. Due to the eruption of the Eyjafjallajökull volcano, which disturbed most air traffic in and around Iceland, I arrived in Greenland with a delay of four days. The

teacher whom I was advised to approach was no longer in town and instead I encountered a hostile response. This was based upon the fact that too many outsiders want the school children to participate in their projects, and I could only appreciate the teacher's response to protect the children under her care. Showing her the booklets anyway broke the ice and made her offer the golden mean: she would allow her class to work with the booklets without my presence.



Illustration 4: Creative questionnaire p. 6-7 filled in by Signe P. Kunak, Ittoqqortoormiit (Greenland) 2010; photo by Rosanne van Klaveren

Hence, I learned that finding good conditions surrounding the participation is perhaps more difficult within Arctic communities than in most Western-European societies. This is probably obvious knowledge for anthropologists, but this was a new experience for me as an artist. Secondly, I noticed that the creative approach of the booklets can motivate participation. When I picked up the booklets after a short weeks' time, the same teacher enthusiastically explained the joy she and her pupils experienced from it. If I would be able to come back another time, the teacher told me, we could prepare a collaborative working moment around the Arctic food theme as a guest-lesson. Unfortunately, I had not enough financial resources to do so. Remembering her previous attitude, I realized that the creativity of these booklets most probably broke the proverbial ice (maybe in a similar way as food and commensality can). Looking back at the great amount of time it had cost me to design and make the booklets, I considered it worth the effort. And thirdly, I experienced the bidirectional connection of working with the probe-booklets to be like an exchange of gifts. At home I had made something for them, namely the booklets, and now they made something for me in return. After viewing the nice drawings, funny remarks and sometimes even rebellious responses in the returned booklets, I felt big sympathy for these children despite the fact that we did not meet in person. I therefore have to agree with Gaver et al.

(2004) that probes enable artists or designers to feel connected to the people they designed them for.

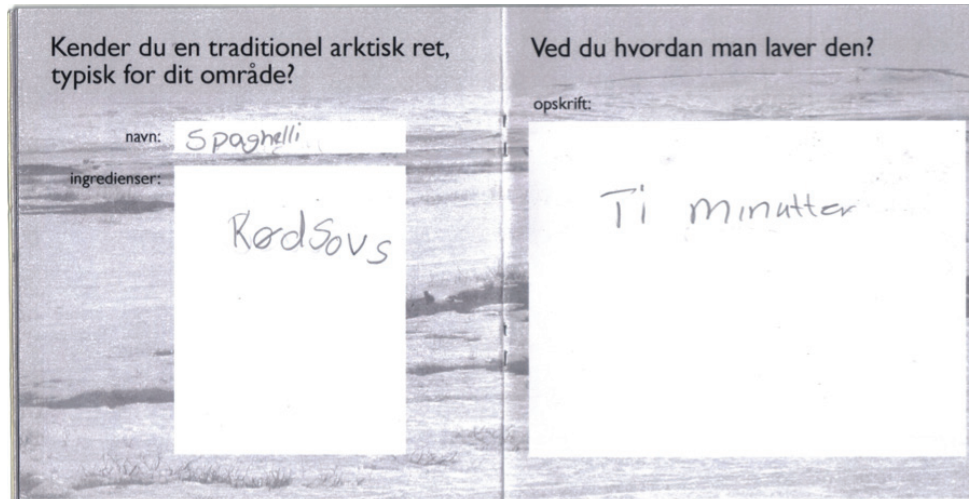


Illustration 5: Creative questionnaire p. 10-11 filled in by Emilie Madsen, Ittoqqortoormiit (Greenland) 2010; photo by Rosanne van Klaveren

Although the cultural probes method is not aiming for analytical outcomes or seeking scientific validity (Lee 2013), the returned booklets contained information that I found notable. For example, some children claimed that they never eat vegetables. Spaghetti has been drawn and written remarkably often as favorite food or as most common food. In response to the question if she could name a traditional food from this region, Emilie Madsen (11 years old) mentioned spaghetti. The recipe she wrote for making it, which is displayed as *Illustration 5*, is endearingly simple: “Ingredients: red sauce. Preparation: ten minutes.” In one of her drawings, she also added potatoes to it.

Motivated by my experiences in Ittoqqortoormiit, I was eager to continue working with the cultural probes method. This time I wanted to design a package of probes, instead of only one booklet. In the autumn of 2011, during a working period within the artist in residence program of the Finnish Bio Art Society in Kilpisjärvi in the north of Finland, I finished my first cultural probes kits (see *Illustration 6*). Ten boxes containing ten explorative tasks, including a booklet for diary purposes and writing down responses, were ready to be worked with. One task reflected on futuristic food, the so-called ‘Predict-your-future’ probe, asking for wishes for the future of Arctic food. This probe came with a small booklet that explained how Winston Churchill during the interwar period predicted that in fifty years hence we should be able to escape the absurdity of growing a whole chicken in order to eat only the breast or wing, by growing these parts separately under a suitable medium. The illustrated booklet continues explaining that it is today possible to produce meat tissue in laboratories for about one million dollar per 250 gram. After some images of food designed for the future, the question is asked how

the participant thinks reindeer meat will be like, fifty years hence. What will be the color, taste, smell, production and consequences? The suggestion is given to draw, write, photograph or print how life will be like with this food of the future. This probe also came with a small plastic petri dish filled with an unfamiliar substance to stimulate the imagination.



Illustration 6: Making Cultural Probes in Kilpisjärvi (Finland) 2011;  
photo by Rosanne van Klaveren

Another probe informed about the connection between food and identity through an allegory with flag placements, including three little white flags that could be colored and used to claim certain food. There was a probe that consisted of a little box with freshly picked berries with the question to write or draw what comes to mind when eating this. And the box contained a set of handmade playing cards with recipes, requesting to add more cards to the deck. To name them all; there was also a probe to label oneself, a probe to design view modes for the online platform, a probe to write a message in a bottle, a probe to leave comments, a probe to frame one's most important outcome, and a probe containing Arctic candies as a thank-you gift. The purpose of the probes and the overall *Food Related* project was explained in a booklet that came with the probes. This booklet also gave space for a daily description of food intake and experiences, and for sharing additional thoughts. Altogether, it became a varied and colorful combination of things and thoughts to explore, with many possibilities for sharing opinions, experiences and concerns.



With the help of some local people, I organized a *Food Related* workshop at *Small Projects* in Tromsø to discuss the project and the platform being designed (*Illustration 7*). At the end of this workshop I introduced the probe kits. People appreciated the creative approach and were impressed by the time and effort I put into it. Looking at the probes was naturally followed by using them, although people also felt restricted to ‘use’ a whole probe kit for working with just one or two tasks. Afterwards, three probe kits have been taken home to work with. Two other kits were used later in the same region. As I made ten kits in total, half of them were not used at all. This illustrates that it has been difficult to find favorable conditions, like in Ittoqqortoormiit.



Illustration 7: Workshop at Small Projects, Tromsø (Norway) 2011;  
photo by Rosanne van Klaveren

To give an idea of the outcomes, I like to share this response written by a Sami woman to the earlier described ‘Predict-your-future’ probe:

*“I think it will be like now. The Sami reindeer-meat traditions have not changed that much, compared with the time my parents was young. The biggest difference is the vegetables that they did not have very often (only potatoes). Today, reindeer meat is served with different kind of vegetables, sauces and maybe the dishes will be influenced by people from other parts of the world – mixed food traditions. My brother in law is from Phillipines, and he make the most wonderful reindeermeat dishes in a ‘Philliphine-way’. Really exciting!”*

This probe-outcome mentions the practice of mixing food traditions, which I find inspiring. For example, a future extension of the platform could focus on this mixing of food traditions and other relational aspects. Since I had not thought about that option before, I consider this response valuable. It illustrates how the cultural probes method can lead to unexpected, inspirational results.

Through its openness to creative and imaginative responses, cultural probes allow more uncertainty than most other research methods. This uncertainty enables both richness and risks. Liesbeth Huybrechts analyzed how generative participatory projects involve risks and uncertainties that may lead to unexpected and unintended results (2014:268). She characterized participatory projects as ‘risky trade-offs’ that take place between makers and participants. These projects are defined as “socio-material assemblies where the partaking elements, being people and objects, mutually define and shape each other” (Huybrechts 2014:275). In order to allow uncertainty to enable richness and risks, one should not aim at unambiguous, easy-to-handle results. Gaver et al. (2004) criticize the analyzing of probe results and express their worries about the way researchers appropriate the probes into a “scientific” approach. They deliberately refused to analyze the results of their probing because “the Probes embodied an approach to design that recognizes and embraces the notion that knowledge has limits” (Gaver et al. 2004:53). It is better to handle results with uncertainty and ambiguity too, as in this lays the value of the method. Although it possibly remains unclear to others how the results of the probes influenced the working process of the *Food Related* project, I can acknowledge that its influence has been strong. Responses turned useful for the optimization and evaluation of the current build of the platform. But more than the richness, it was the enabled risks that turned the strongest as this caused a complete reconsideration of the project.

The fact that the project lacks firm roots within the Arctic was considered a serious weakness of the project and for some this was even reason not to participate. For example, one of the probe kits that was handed over to a Sami woman by her partner, returned unused because I was not Sami myself. Her refusal to work with it was intensified by her message saying that she became sick of initiatives of southerners who wanted her collaboration just for the fact that she is Sami. Multiple attempts to find people prepared to participate resulted in similar refusals. Obviously, I first felt disappointed when it turned almost impossible to find participants for my neatly prepared probes. Then I realized that in these refusals lay a strong message that I could not ignore; they all pointed towards the ownership conditions. Also during the workshop in Tromsø, which preceded working with the probes, ownership was questioned and debated the strongest. Instead of hearing only encouraging responses from peers or from indigenous people who are used

to collaborate with non-indigenous people, for example during conferences, I now heard different voices. The risk of refusal, enabled by the intention to include participants in the design process, made this possible. After overcoming my initial disappointment, I could only agree with the critique: this project needs firm roots within Arctic soil. If I would launch the platform to a greater audience than just some individuals at workshops or conferences, it would fail because of its current conditions. Besides my non-indigenous background, it simply does not make sense if one individual is trying to run the whole thing alone. If I would try it anyway, I would risk burning up all its potentials and burn out myself. Hence, I decided to round up my work for *Food Related*. This, I believe, was the strongest follow-up possible for the time being. In building one final version of the online platform, as a fully functional prototype, I could do justice to most of the constructive feedback I received. Future times, for example after finishing my PhD, might enable me to restart and rebuild the project with an Arctic team, under fundamentally different conditions while using different technological solutions. Then, as a team, we might consider following up this potent piece of advice too, that was given to me in response of the probes: to implement the platform in an educational or social program across the Arctic.

## Conclusion

Some empirical experiences related to my artistic approach and working methods were discussed in this article, as examples of how artistic participatory practices can influence knowledge sharing. As a media artist, I searched for new ways of bringing people together through the shared use of (new) media for more than a decade. I often use media in my art to stimulate engagement and debate, in which the communicative aspects of media are usually paramount. When accepting the challenge of combining different kinds of knowledge, including indigenous knowledge, I therefore designed an online platform as a space for expression: the *Food Related* platform. This expressive space aimed to build proverbial bridges between the different Arctic peoples for the purpose of knowledge sharing: a bridge to overcome physical distances through virtual contact; a bridge to tackle language problems through the use of automatic translation software; a bridge to stimulate discussion and exchange of experiences; and a bridge to strengthen dignity and self-respect through positive cultural display and attention for contemporary issues of minorities within a globalized world. The visual appearance of the online platform aimed to motivate exploration and contribution. Navigation through different view modes allows viewers to browse through the collected content while following their interest.

With the *Food Related* project as the research case, I focused on two topics that were essential in the realization of an expressive space for knowledge

sharing: food as a subject and stimulus for sharing, and the use of cultural probes as a method for participation. First, general aspects of food and commensality were discussed from empirical findings and literature study. Food proved to be a strong entrance and stimulant for engagement during a short period of fieldwork in Kugluktuk, Canada. Confirmed by theory (Hovelsrud-Broda 2000, Fischler 1988, 2011, Germov 1999, Munt 2001, Ikeda 1999), a focus on food and food culture can bypass constraining aspects of intellectuality in order to open up the project towards different kinds of knowledge. Secondly, the use of the cultural probes method is reviewed. Departing from Gaver et al.'s experiences (1999, 2004), creative questionnaires and cultural probes packages were designed and put into practice. The creativity and artistry of this research method encouraged subjective and imaginative engagement. Thus, in working with cultural probes also lies a possibility to share and collect knowledge beyond intellectuality and constraining worldviews. Although it has been difficult to motivate people for participation, the artistry of the probes method could break the proverbial ice, for example when probe-booklets or creative questionnaires were used in Ittoqqortoormiit.

The presented findings gave possible answers to the question how an artistic approach can support the combining and communicating of knowledge. The openness within the approach enabled ambiguity and allowed contradictory contributions. The discussed artistic approaches and design solutions made it easier to combine discordant or conflicting elements. They are an example of possible frameworks to unite 'intimate' and scientific knowledge. However, in working on the *Food Related* project also aggravating circumstances occurred. For example, the implementation of automatic translation software aimed at cross-continental communication, but also implicated power imbalance through the use of 'colonial' languages. Both the critique and the potentials that were acquired in working with the probes, uncovered the need to collaborate and continue working with a team. It is mainly ownership issues, brought up by some of the participants, which made me decide to postpone developing the platform beyond the current conceptual stage. Although I strongly believe in the possibilities and potentiality of the platform, which is backed up by enthusiastic and encouraging responses of peers and some participants, other participants convinced me that it would be better to put the project on hold until ownership can be transferred to (a partnership within) the Arctic regions. Putting the project on hold, for a yet undetermined time, was without doubt the most difficult decision to make. But in taking the contributions of the participants seriously, and in following them up where possible, I believe this was also the best thing to do.

Although I am still convinced that it is nowadays, unfortunately, almost impossible to overcome all power imbalance in knowledge sharing projects like *Food Related*, I believe that creativity and artistry can be beneficial in finding equal grounds. I found some backup for this idea in David Gauntlett's

‘Making is Connecting’ (2011), in which he explains how acts of creativity usually involve a social dimension that connects us with other people. New plans and ideas can arise if we think imaginatively together, during the act of making things, which gives us resilience and the creative capacity to deal with significant challenges (Gauntlett 2011:20).

The outlined experiences aimed to present how an artistic approach can be valuable for projects that wish to include ‘intimate’ knowledge. They showed, however, only examples from one specific case study. More examples deriving from manifold cases are needed before distinguished statements or conclusions can be made. Nevertheless, I hope that my approach can be inspirational to others, including those beyond the fields of art, for giving attention to artistry in order to enrich knowledge sharing practices.

## References

- Bourriaud, Nicolas  
2002 *Relational Aesthetics*. Dijon: Les presses du réel.
- Calvo, Manuel  
1982 Migration et Alimentation. *Social Science Information* 21(3):383-446.
- Chilisa, Bagele  
2012 *Indigenous Research Methodologies*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.
- Fischler, Claude  
1988 Food, self and identity. *Social Science Information* 27:275–292.
- Fischler, Claude  
2011 Commensality, Society and Culture. *Social Science Information* 50(3-4):528–548.
- Freeman, Milton  
2000 *Endangered Peoples of the Arctic: Struggles to Survive and Thrive*. Westport, CT, and London: Greenwood Press.
- Gauntlett, David  
2011 *Making is Connecting, The social meaning of creativity, from DIY and knitting to YouTube and Web 2.0*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gaver, William (Bill), with Tony Dunne and Elena Pacenti  
1999 Design: Cultural probes. *Interactions* 6(1):21-29.

- Gaver, William (Bill), with Andrew Boucher, Sara Pennington and Brendan Walker  
2004 Cultural Probes and the Value of Uncertainty. *Interactions* 11(5):53-56.
- Germov, John, with Lauren Williams  
1999 *A Sociology of Food and Nutrition: The Social Appetite*. Victoria (AU): Oxford University Press.
- Hovelsrud-Broda, Grete  
2000 The Isertormeeq of East Greenland. *In Endangered Peoples of the Arctic: Struggles to Survive and Thrive*. Milton Freeman, ed. Pp. 151-156. Westport, CT, and London: Greenwood Press.
- Huybrechts, Liesbeth, with Katrien Dreessen and Selina Schepers  
2013 The role of openness in participatory design research. Paper presented at *Crafting the Future, the 10th European Academy of Design Conference*, Gothenburg, April 17-19.
- Huybrechts, Liesbeth  
2014 *Participation is Risky: Approaches to Joint Creative Processes*. Amsterdam: Valiz.
- Ikeda, Joanne  
1999 Culture, Food, and Nutrition in Increasingly Culturally Diverse Societies. *In A Sociology of Food and Nutrition: The Social Appetite*. John Germov and Lauren Williams, eds. Pp. 149-168. Victoria (AU): Oxford University Press.
- Lee, Jung-Joo  
2013 Method-making as a Method of Designing. Paper presented at *Experiments in Design Research, the 5th Nordic Design Research Conference*, Copenhagen, June 9-12.
- Lynge, Finn  
1992 *Arctic Wars, Animal Rights, Endangered Peoples*. Hanover: University Press of New England.
- Munt, Sally  
2001 *Technospaces: Inside the New Media*. Continuum: London.
- Petersen, Hans Christian  
2010 *Local Knowledge, Living Resources and Natural Assets in Greenland*. Montreal: International Polar Institute Press.
- Rozin, Paul  
1996 Sociocultural Influences on Human Food Selection. *In Why We Eat What We Eat: The Psychology of Eating*. Elizabeth Capaldi, ed. Pp. 233-263. Washington DC: American Psychological Association.
- Simmel, Georg  
1997 [1910] The Sociology of the Meal. *In Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings*. David Frisby and Mike Featherstone, eds. Pp. 130-136. London: Sage.

Trienekens, Sandra, with Dirk Willem Postma

2010 Verbinden door te ontwrichten. Theme issue, "Community Art",  
Boekman 82:22-29.

Zimmerman, John, with Jodi Forlizzi and Shelley Evenson

2007 Research through design as a method for interaction design re-  
search in HCI. *In* Proceedings of the Conference on Human Factors in  
Computing Systems. Pp. 493-502. New York, NY: ACM Press.

---

Rosanne van Klaveren is a media artist, researcher and teacher working on artistic participatory practices since 1999. She studied Autonomous Art at the HKA (Netherlands), Photography at Post-St.Joost (Netherlands), Cultural Studies at the University of Leuven (Graduated Magna Cum Laude, Belgium) and Circumpolar Studies at the University of the Arctic (Norway). Rosanne is working on her practice based PhD in media art, studied at the University of Leuven. With her PhD she researches the possibilities of artistry, creativity and new media to create a temporary feeling of togetherness during participatory practices to stimulate the sharing of (different kinds of) knowledge. She teaches about participatory practices, digital storytelling and research practices at LUCA School of Arts (Belgium), where she is a member of the Social Spaces Research Group. Rosanne is also a member of the Regional Group on Circumpolar Cultures Research Group (Netherlands) and has been a research fellow within the ADAPT-r program (Marie Curie) at the Estonian Art Academy in 2014.