



Ca' Foscari
University
of Venice

Master's Degree in Environmental Humanities

Final Thesis

Creative Practices for Environmental Awareness

Supervisor:

Prof. Shaul Bassi

Assistant supervisor:

Prof. Monica Banzato

Graduand:

Misha Pizzati

896314

Academic Year:

2024/2025

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INTRODUCTION

Environmental issues such as climate change have been addressed by scientists and politicians many times, using different media to spread awareness on how much a radical ecological change is needed. But addressing these kinds of problems only from a political/scientific point of view is limiting; as an Environmental Humanities graduate, I have learned that a multidisciplinary approach can be more effective than a unilateral one. That is why art and creative practices are important; they provide a different approach to environmental awareness, outside of the mainstream ones. Because when we talk about a radical change, every attempt to enact it is important and should be considered as such.

Therefore, the main focus of this thesis will be how arts and creative practices can be used to spread environmental awareness and how projects that use these means are created.

The idea for this thesis stems from my personal interest and experiences. In fact, as will be later explained in chapter 1.5, my attitudes towards environmental issues are mostly shaped by a strong environmental education during my childhood and some academic experiences that brought these issues back to the surface in adulthood. As a result of this interest, I enrolled in this master's degree program, for which I am currently writing my final thesis. The main topics I chose, namely crochet and music, particularly in relation to the two projects chosen as models, "Hot as Crochet" and "The ClimateMusic Project," also stem from personal interest and experience. In fact, I first learned about the crochet project through Instagram, then volunteered and became part of the team. As for the ClimateMusic Project, I did my curricular internship with them and the project remained so close to my heart that I could not fail to include it in my thesis, also because it fits in well with the idea of a project for environmental awareness through creative practices, just like crochet.

There are many different ways in which it is possible to spread awareness on climate issues. Many creative people are using art as a medium to convey their messages on environmental problems. Art such as paintings and sculptures are the most common and most used to do that. Moreover, music is starting to become always more present in this scope, we will see as an example of an international initiative "The ClimateMusic Project", a nonprofit organization based in the United States that uses music as a medium. Specifically, as they state in their website: "Combining the talents and expertise of world class scientists, composers, musicians, artists, and tech pros, we enable the creation and staging of science-guided music and visual

experiences to inspire people to engage actively on the issue of climate change” (<https://climatemusic.org/what-we-do/>, 08/06/25).

As a local example, the project of “Hot as Crochet” will be taken into consideration, a small reality based in Padova that through the use of crochet workshops, engages people with the topic of climate change. In fact, the idea of the project is to show people who participate in the workshop how temperature changes through the months and then through the years, particularly in the city of Padova. And to do that, various colors of yarn are used to represent the temperature variations; as an end result, in each monthly workshop a garment will be made that shows these temperature changes. The idea behind the whole project is to organize an exhibition with all these garments at the end of each year and then sell them to raise money for organizations or associations working in the field of environmental preservation.

Following on from this, it was interesting to explore how the founders' educational backgrounds might have influenced their environmental attitudes as it happened to me.

First, however, in order to do this type of research, it was necessary to investigate art as a means of sharing and spreading environmental awareness.

In the first part of chapter 1 of this thesis, I initially explored the current situation in terms of both collective and individual environmental awareness, the effectiveness of communication on environmental issues, and people's exposure to these topics in the media. I also reflected on the tangibility of individual choices for environmental conservation, and the importance of sharing a positive message through unconventional means, such as the arts and creative practices. In the second part, I have explored the benefit of art for human health. In the third and fourth parts, I investigated the branch of environmental art and art-based methods, particularly in environmental education.

In the fifth part, I presented my experience with environmental education, and in the sixth part, I discussed the criticisms and limitations of art-based methods.

The second chapter presents an in-depth analysis of creative practices, followed by two case studies on the two projects considered, one local and one international. Finally, there is an exploration of other projects that use the arts as a method for raising environmental awareness, primarily those that use music and then other art forms.

The third chapter concerns the field research part of the thesis, in which I investigated the research questions I had previously posed, through semi-structured interviews. Namely:

- how do art and creative practices in the three examined projects play a role in the context of environmental awareness?

- what were the factors that contributed to the creation of the projects? Does the environmental education play a role somehow? Or, for example, a previous relationship with nature and the environment?
- what are the cognitive, affective and conative components of environmental awareness of the founders and thus consequently those of the projects?

And then, I've analysed the responses and posed the results.

After the analysis it was clear that arts and creative practices have played a fundamental role both in the lives of the founders and, consequently, in the implementation and success of the projects, and that art is the primary means through which environmental awareness can be raised, so that it can be internalized and rather than remaining merely empty information.

Furthermore, the research shows that, in the case of the selected founders, environmental education did not play a fundamental role in creating adults with pro-environmental values. Instead, the family component, linked to a strong relationship with and in nature, was very important.

The aim of this thesis will be to show how different ways of spreading awareness can actually have an impact on people's behavior, and also to explore the types of creative practices that can be used to raise awareness on environmental problems. In particular, thanks to the research with semi-structured interviews, it was possible to see and understand practical examples of how this can happen, through projects that use art as a means of sharing environmental awareness.

This can be implemented in further research, in order to in the future have a structure where arts and sciences can collaborate as a standard in the context of climate change and environmental issues, and much more.

CHAPTER 1

1.1. Climate change and the individual agency

How can the ecological crisis be narrated? And above all, what tools do the humanities have at their disposal to render the tensions, the singularities, the ethical, historical and social implications of this crisis? (Iovino, 2017, 12).

Nowadays, climate change is having a big worldwide impact, and the situation is not going to improve if nothing is done to mitigate human impact on the environment. In fact, it is no longer the case to discuss whether or not the phenomenon is caused by human activities, because of the quantities of studies that demonstrate that the causes are 99.8 percent anthropogenic (F.O.I.V., 2021), but it is more important to focus on how to deal with climate change and the ecological crisis that comes with it.

What will happen in this century, from emissions to the rise in the Planet's temperature (thus Climate Change), will depend only on the ability of the countries of the world to coordinate themselves by following precise and urgent strategies aimed at drastically reducing emissions and profoundly revising economic systems within a framework of sustainability with respect to the Planet's remaining resources. All humanity everywhere is in fact exposed to the dramatic repercussions of this phenomenon (F.O.I.V., 2021, 1).

Scientists and experts are working hard to improve the situation and to halt this unstoppable negative wave. Contributions come from every branch of science, from geologists studying changes in the Earth, physics investigating on atmospheric particulate and composition, climate scientists monitoring climate changes and therefore making predictions, chemists proposing biodegradable alternatives to various polluting materials, and so on. There is, however, a need to go one step further, one step beyond the traditional scientific method that has been considered so far through the ages the most authoritative and reliable. And this is where the Environmental Humanities come in, offering a transversal approach and a tight collaboration between the various disciplinary sectors, including the humanities, such as sociology, philosophy, anthropology and so much more, even arts. Especially Environmental art, which develops from the Environmental Humanities, that it will be talked about in the next chapters. Some elements that characterize the Environmental Humanities are:

- Problem framing, team building, co-producing knowledge through collaborations, knowledge integration, application of created knowledge in real worlds,
- Enabling mutual learning among researchers from different disciplines and actors from outside academia, and
- Collaborating with scientists from diverse disciplines and non-academic stakeholders from different sectors, including industry, government, and local community in order to integrate knowledge from various scientific disciplines and social bodies and create ownership for problems and solution options. (Kishita et al., 2017)

Moreover, this transversality is depicted by Ecocriticism, an interdisciplinary approach analysing literary contributions with a focus on nature and ecological concerns. Working on the borderline between ecology and literary criticism, ecocriticism in fact represents the application of the scientific paradigm of the ecosystem to literary imagination and related studies. Not only has nature always been mentioned in literature, but indeed environment and ecology concerns are themes that have always been dealt with in the writings through the decades (Iovino, 2017). And the big difference between coming in contact with the disturbing realities of the ecological crisis through literary works rather than through scientific publications and articles lies in the involvement and identification that the former cause, as opposed to the cold judgement and sometimes sense of panic induced by the latter.

Indeed, the discourse “does not only pass through explicitly ecological works, but through any writing that speaks to the imagination and gives voice to the silences (real or provoked) of the reality in which we live” (Iovino, 2017, 16). Precisely, as Iovino (2017) states that the literature (and with it any cultural expression) can play an active role in protecting the environment if it helps us understand that the fate of the planet is our fate, that its stories are our stories. If, on the other hand, it creates a dualism between us and a ‘nature’ that we perceive as alien, then it only accentuates our alienation, hence the crises in which we are trapped. The strength of ecological culture is precisely the strength of interconnections.

And so, as literature gives the possibility to empathize with the world around us, so can the arts, in different ways, but they need to be considered in the discourse. In fact, as Gray and Thomson (2016) say, that a strong affection can motivate pro-environmental attitudes, requiring outdoor education to generate love for places and the environment in learners, thereby transferring a desire to protect them. This kind of empathy and sense of connection with the environment is

something that is not very easy to develop from “quantitative” sciences, but it is easier for it to generate from “qualitative” ones and therefore the arts.

Climate change has now become a topic on everyone’s daily agenda. Not only it is discussed in institutional settings, but it permeates popular culture and online spaces. From school strikes to music festivals, environmental concerns have become part of a broader cultural shift. But how is this presence shown in people’s everyday lives, especially for the younger generations but not only? Mainly through social media.

From TikTok trends to Instagram stories, climate change permeates these platforms’ daily content. On the former, users are offered videos showing how to conduct a zero-waste lifestyle, or how to reduce their carbon footprint. On the latter, influencers showcase aesthetic photos of reusable products or encourage their followers to purchase from small businesses instead of big companies or fast fashion houses. The same goes for YouTube, where before any video there are ads showing eco-conscious brands, documentaries about climate disasters or interviews with different activists.

This picture shows an overwhelming quantity of climate change-related content. The problem is that it does not permeate everybody’s *feed* – which, in social media, is the main page where users can see listed all the contents, images, videos, posts, etc. What seems to be an omnipresent topic in social media is actually highly selective.

According to the selectivity paradigm, people can only pay attention to a potentially finite number of media messages out of the multitude; (...) Selectivity Paradigm suggests that only the messages that individuals select in response to person-specific antecedents have the potential to influence them (...) It is suggested that the dispositions, such as the mood and attitude, of media users predict their inclination to select media, which may bring about the media effect that reciprocally influences media use and the antecedents of media use (...) media effects do not equally hold for all media users and can be enhanced or reduced by dispositional, developmental, and social-context factors. (Wang, 2023, 248).

Being that social media operate through personalization algorithms, a user can only see what he/she has previously interacted with, which makes it difficult for content creators to reach a wide and diverse audience. For environmental issues, individuals that are already concerned and interested about this topic are likely to encounter more climate-related content, while those who have not shown before an interest in such content remain excluded from the daily news on

the latest global climate reports, policy shifts, or simply from the new funded eco-friendly fashion house.

In this sense, the presence of climate-related content in a user's feed is not a reflection of a universal concern, but rather the result of a personalized process of media selection. Social media platforms operationalize these paradigms through advanced algorithms that track user behaviour to offer a seemingly infinite stream of "tailored" content, influencing not only what people see, but how they see it as well. Such personalized feed creates an illusion of an abundance of climate content, masking the reality of this tailored content.

Climate change thus appears omnipresent not because it truly is for everyone, but because digital spaces are designed to echo and amplify individual preferences.

In this perspective, the digital visibility of environmental discourses reflects not only a growing awareness, but also a fragmentation of the latter. The climate change crisis becomes then both a personal and collective issue: it is personalized through social media's algorithms, yet it is shared as a collective problem when looking at the real-world consequences of it. This paradox leads us to raise questions on how informed or manipulated the public can be when the exposure to such themes is related to prior engagement and personalization algorithms.

Despite that, scientific information alone is insufficient for communicating climate change, instead it is potentially increasing public polarization. In fact, climate scientists should learn effective communication strategies and should start collaborating with psychologists and artists for more effective communication (Roosen, Klöckner & Swim, 2018). According to Roosen, Klöckner and Swim (2018) climate communication today has some limits and challenges that it should overcome and in general it:

- lacks the kind of narratives and metaphors that engage people in climate action and relate climate change to their personal lives,
- fails to attract attention and does not result in the (co-)construction of meaning,
- fails to stimulate creative and out-of-the-box thinking,
- fails to create moments of contemplation that are necessary to break out of routine behaviour,
- fails to stimulate communication between people,
- addresses individuals, rather than helping to create a sense of belonging to a larger group of people fighting the problem,
- does not challenge social norms or actively stimulate the redefinition of norms and values,
- lacks the dimension of personal, direct experience of the problem,

- fails to overcome the psycho-emotional barriers to behavioural change,
- does not create emotional responses,
- lacks the dimension of storytelling that makes information stick, and
- simply fails to inspire people (Roosen, Klöckner & Swim, 2018, 3).

A step forward for communication is then needed to overcome these limitations so that environmental awareness can be spread to more people. In fact, “awareness is the first requirement for any form of communication. If people are not listening or not hearing when someone is reaching out to them, then the message is lost. An important and beneficial aspect of art is that when people view it, they naturally become more mindful than at other times” (Roosen, Klöckner & Swim, 2018, 5).

In fact, many people see climate change as an abstract subject that is difficult to link to their daily lives, which can lead to people ignoring it and failing to take appropriate action to address it. Except for those that have had a traumatic personal experience of environmental issues due to climate change, which are in fact more likely to act in favour of mitigation processes (Roosen, Klöckner & Swim, 2018).

The consequences of climate change are numerous, and among the most obvious are floods, drought, famine and pollution, causing a great displacement of people to areas less at risk. But there are many other effects of climate change that are less tangible and obvious but equally worrying. “The prevailing narrative on the effects of climate change at both media and scientific level mainly describes horizons far removed from the verifiability of everyday life: melting of Arctic glaciers, extinction of exotic species, alterations in the composition of the atmosphere, the flow of sea currents” (Bogleux, 2017, 79).

The ICPP reports are the ones that made the public opinion talk about climate change the most, by using the data that were shared. In particular the 2018’s report where it is stated how important it is to cut completely the emissions of Co2 and greenhouse gasses by 2050 in order to maintain the temperature raising around 1,5°C; and if this fails, it would translate into high temperature changes, and catastrophic climate events that will impact everyone worldwide (F.O.I.V., 2021).

Nevertheless, many people keep talking about it, but not everyone believes it, mostly probably because of the lack of direct tangibility that characterizes this phenomenon; and even if people do believe it, often they do not give it any particular importance, as they are not directly affected by it. “In this regard, it is worth remembering that today 97% of scientists recognise the

evidence for global warming, compared to a mere 3% of deniers, overexposed in the media, whose sources of funding were declared ‘dark’ even in an article in *Scientific American*” (Bougleux, 2017, 84).

When it comes to environmental awareness, one can come across mainly two types of popularisers: those who share information and scientific data on the subject, creating more of a general sense of panic for the changes that are taking place and that are unavoidable; and those who share “sustainability” practices to try to mitigate what the data foresee, emphasizing individual actions and almost placing the responsibility for the current situation on the individual.

“The sense of crisis is reinforced if we try to articulate the very legitimate question of how much the subject, the individual, in such a changing context is still free to act, and what meaning his actions and decisions may have. Of course the subject can still individually act, of course he is still free to choose and decide, to put virtuous actions into practice, to change his lifestyle, but the prevailing feeling is that his action remains confined on such a small scale, so limited and absolutely personal, so local and familiar, as to become ephemeral, unrealistic, inert, almost invisible” (Bougleux, 2017, 81).

In fact, there are many ways to have a positive environmental impact, but again even when there is the willingness to take action for environmental conservation, people face the problem of tangibility of the outcomes of their actions. Most of the time they know that what they are doing is right, but cannot verify the outcomes or the benefits of it. In some cases, like for those that operate in the macro-systems of societies, they can have direct power on actions such as state regulations, reduction of industries’ emissions, etc; and they will have some probability to see a slight change through their operational field.

Meanwhile, when the focus is on the individual beings that are not in power positions and consequently do not have the possibilities to act concretely on the system, there are different practices that they can still perform regardless. First and foremost, one can reduce his individual impact through many actions in everyday life, for example by taking ethical life choices, like eating vegan and not contributing to one of the most resource-consuming industries; or by deciding not to buy fast fashion, which is worldwide one of the most environmentally damaging sectors in the world. Or secondly, what can be done is spread awareness and share our own knowledge on the topics of climate change and ethical actions to reach as many people as

possible, that can by themselves reduce their environmental impact. But again, even in these cases, the tangibility is far out of our sight. According to Bougleux (2017), “in order to try to grasp the relationship between the pervasive sense of crisis in the present and the macro notion of climate change, it is necessary to go through space, that is, to translate climate change into everyday, tangible experience” (Bougleux, 2017, 80). In fact, even if it is not possible to see the changes that our actions bring about, doing something is regardless important.

A single individual obviously cannot make a big difference, but when we talk about high numbers of individuals following the same principles, then the difference can be noticed. Especially in terms of sharing a message, such as environmental awareness and conservation. And that is precisely the main theme of this thesis, to try to analyse unconventional methods of sharing this message, particularly artistic methods.

For these very reasons above mentioned, it is essential to use all the available means to raise awareness on the climate change topic, also through the use of different methods, involving both art and in a broader sense creative practices. And this is crucial because everything is connected, and the empathy that arts and creative practices are able to generate, is the one that makes the individual able to go on when no tangibility is possible. The sense of community that these practices can give, is again important to see the number of people that participate, that want to do something and that interact with one another; this gives tangibility of the ethical choices that one can make.

In fact, Iovino (2017) states that “disciplines such as cognitive literary studies, psycho-narratology, and affect studies have shown that the stories we tell and follow are not only necessary to sharpen social awareness, strengthen cooperative attitudes, and stimulate creativity, but also that cognitive and emotional responses are involved in all forms of storytelling” (Iovino, 2017, 17). And this is not only about literature, but it regards arts too.

This thesis argues that even if traditional methods of spreading environmental awareness are useful and should be maintained, alternative methods such as artistic ones have to be integrated in the narrative as well.

1.2. Art as benefit

Arts, in all their forms, have always had a big influence on humans’ life through the centuries. But not as a hobby or a pastime activity, as it has always been interconnected with men’s development. “The art object, both physical and experiential, has to be considered as something

that provides creative experiences for both its creator and audience and implies or provokes an emotional response, rather than a mere utility” (Fancourt & Finn, 2019, 1).

While we all agree on the importance of arts on the intellectual level, their contribution to the improvement of human wellbeing is not always considered. Actually, many studies cover and explore the relationship between arts and health, and how the first can improve the quality of life of people in many ways. To better understand the subject, “the World Health Organization defines health as ‘a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity’, making it deeply embedded in society and culture” (Fancourt & Finn, 2019, 1). It is not just about physical health, freedom from illnesses or anything else, it is a more complex balance of forces acting to improve human wellbeing. And arts are without doubt an important part of it, as one of their strengths is enticing people to better their health; even though other types of activities may still contain several health components (e.g. fitness), the arts know how to combine many of these factors with an inner aesthetic beauty and expressive creativity, creating an intrinsic motivation that goes beyond a simple health concern (Fancourt & Finn, 2019). People are motivated to have artistic experiences regardless of the resulting health benefits, but because they are intellectually attracted by the experiences related to the aforementioned arts. Furthermore, through recent studies it was discovered that the use of arts in favour of human health can be classified through these main categories: prevention and promotion (i.e. music for child development, art activities in communities which improve mental health and interpersonal relations, videogames sensitizing children on tobacco and alcohol risks), and management and treatment (music improving autobiographical memory in Alzheimer’s patients, singing patients improving their lungs condition and their oxygen saturation, dance reducing motor impairment in Huntington’s patients) (Fancourt & Finn, 2019).

And this is just one of the many reasons why the arts have to be considered a useful tool to investigate and spread delicate subjects (as in this case the health topic), such as environmental awareness without any doubt is. In the research community, many experts have started to enrich their studies with the Arts-Based Research method. “The term arts-based research, as applied to social sciences, was first coined in 1993 for an educational conference at Stanford University organized by Elliot Eisner, [...]. He suggested that the arts could provide rich models for social and behavioural science research and, could add to our understanding of classrooms as a performance event” (Wang et al., 2017, 7). At first glance, it may undoubtedly seem like an effective research method, as it can give a deeper and better understanding of the research

object, as art is a participatory and immersive discipline. But, with such a versatile and multidisciplinary method, there is a consistent risk of making the research too vague, shifting the focus from the key points or worse not reaching the intended conclusions. Arts are an articulated field, with a big range of subgroups, and sometimes the variety of artists and art creations can be a too large sample for an unprepared researcher.

Because of this, qualitative researchers have organized their Arts-Based research (ABR) through classification and categorization, in order to be able to order the numerous inputs of the case in question.

Savin-Baden and Major [...] clustered ABR approaches into three main families: arts-based inquiry, arts-informed inquiry, and arts-informing inquiry. Arts-based inquiry is research where the artistic process is used to understand art itself or the art experience by the people who use it; arts-informed inquiry refers to the situation where art is used to represent findings of a study, or to represent a response to a situation studied; arts-informing inquiry is research where art is used to evoke responses from an audience to a situation. (Wang et al., 2017, 9).

More specifically, “Frayling [...] identified three categories: research into art [...]; research through art [...]; and research for art and design” (Wang et al., 2017, 9).

To sum up all the considerations and studies of his colleagues, Wang et al., claims that: “we suggest three core families that form the overall classification framework: research about art, art as research, and art in research. (Wang et al., 2017, 14).

Now that we have ascertained the positive effects of arts on physical and mental health, social relations and in general personal wellbeing of the individual, and that we can classify and consider the gathered data backed by the objective classification of the above mentioned studies, we can narrow the focus on a particular creative artistic practice, usually sorted in the subgroup of crafts, that is going to be thoroughly discussed in this thesis: the crochet.

But why the need to talk about crochet in the field of creative practices? Well, crochet is a perfect example of a domestic craft that brings countless positive outcomes to people’s social interactions, mental health, and improving their self-esteem. As Burns and Van Der Meer state in the results of their survey, “The three most frequent reasons reported for crocheting were: to be creative (82.1%), to relax (78.5%) and for a sense of accomplishment (75.2%). Respondents reported that crochet made them feel calmer (89.5%), happier (82%) and more useful (74.7%)”

(Burns & Van Der Meer, 2021, 149). Thereby, the immediate result of starting a creative craft like crochet is personal achievement and improvement. But more in-depth studies can help us to find out more not so obvious benefits.

In fact, research has proven that crochet and other creative crafts can improve memory, concentration and help with the management of mental illnesses, as the constant use of articulated patterns and diagrams is excellent training for mind and brain. “In terms of the impact of crochet on thinking processes, respondents felt that crochet was good for their memory (74.2%) and improved their concentration (70.6%). Notably, just over half of the respondents reported that crochet helped them forget pain (53.8%) and forget problems (51.9%)” (Burns & Van Der Meer, 2021, 153). This brings crochet from a nice hobby to a really useful exercise, that can be precious for people with degenerative mind illnesses, for people with traumatic past (shell-shocked, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, etc.), and in general for people with chronic pain or anxiety.

But the positive outcomes of the art of crochet do not end here, as it has also a strong social adhesive, creating heterogeneous and close-knit communities. Even though at first glance one could think of crochet as a solitary, almost meditative practice, the sharing of knowledge and the pursuit of common interests bring crocheters to join together in groups of all sorts and dimensions.

Half of all respondents said that they found it easier to talk to other people who crocheted (50%), which had resulted in over one-third of respondents making new friends through crochet (39.2%) and feeling less lonely (31.3%). This suggests that participating in crochet has a positive impact on social connectedness, supporting its use in social prescribing. (Burns & Van Der Meer, 2021, 155).

With that being said, it is clear that crochet is a valid example of creative practice that can bring positive results in everyday life and also in research, making it a good tool for arts-based research, which could bring unexpected but remarkable results. As Wang states, “The act of creating is simultaneously the act of researching. Both components cannot be distinguished from each other.” (Wang et al., 2017, 15).

1.3. Environmental art

Environmental art is a burgeoning subfield of the Environmental Humanities that brings aesthetic concepts and creative practices into dialogue with ecological concerns. But, still, can an artist, artwork, or artistic movement protect species, halt climate change, and save the biosphere? In conjunction with the social and natural sciences—as well as with humanities specializations already covered in this book—it just might (Hubbell & Ryan, 2021, 160).

Again, the interrogation that is being repeated over and over in this thesis is to what extent can art be a mean to create and spread environmental awareness that translates into concrete change and action? And it is not about the quantity of people that receive an ecological message, but the quantity of people that make theirs that message, and act accordingly to it.

Based on Thornes' (2008) text, environmental arts can be categorized in representational and non-representational (or performative). The first encompasses all those works that represent the real environment and not just the imagination of it; the second one consists of all the artists who aim with their work to raise awareness on an environmental issue. Often artistic works can be both representational and performative, where both the real environment and also the message behind it are represented. In the chapter 2.5, an example of this coexistence will be shown when talking about Olafur Eliasson and his work "The Glacier melt series 1999/2019".

According to Hubbell and Ryan (2021), the major questions of environmental art are as follows: what is the role of painting, printmaking, photography, illustration, sculpture, performance, music, installation art, multimedia work, and other creative forms? Can a song inspire progressive action on behalf of nature? Can a sculpture promote public awareness on the vulnerability of ecosystems? Can a photograph instil empathy for animals, plants, fungi, or rivers? Can a painting galvanize a global environmental movement? Can a theatre performance enable a community to grieve the loss of a local wetland?

There are many and different environmental art genres and movements. One of them is ecological art -also called ecoart-, and its features are described by Hubbell and Ryan (2021) as:

- emphasis on ecological relationships;
- dialogue with scientific concepts, principles, and methods;
- engagement with natural elements of water, air, rocks, and soil;
- restoration of degraded habitats;
- commitment to educating the public about ecological issues through art;

- formulation of new possibilities for interspecies ethics, community transformation, urban sustainability, and personal healing (Kagan, 2012, cited in Hubbel & Ryan, 2021, 155).

In fact, environmental art is meant also to be particularly useful when it comes to the engagement with the audience, by making it active and participative. Especially when it comes to relationality, which is one of the ways in which one engages people. In fact, according to Hubbel & Ryan (2021), ecoart inspires social transformation and engenders ecological values, without turning into empty propaganda and freckles politics using some methodologies such as relationality, emotions manipulation and environmental reflection.

Emotions manipulation denotes an artwork's ability to induce empathetic feelings in audiences, resulting in cooperative action on behalf of ecosystems (...) and environmental reflection highlights the appreciator's reflective processes. The term suggests the viewer's questioning of ecological issues and critiquing of the social assumptions underlying such issues (Hubbel & Ryan, 2021, 159).

Art produced with the primary goal of highlighting environmental issues and nature is referred to as environmental art. Environmental art can take many forms, and it can be either permanent or transient. It might draw attention to the qualities of a location that are ingrained in daily life when it is situated in a particular setting, whether they are positive or negative features.

Environmental art is relatively new as an environmental humanities application, and in fact it is not always taken into consideration in academic contexts. For this reason, its interpretation varies, and in fact the interpretative key changes depending on who is talking about it. We have seen some examples of this earlier in this chapter; another example is:

The topic of environmental art education has evolved from environmental description, with an emphasis on realism and the elements of art, to an understanding of how one can depict the environment for specific aims, to a broader definition of environmental education that includes the ecological, built, and social environment (Ulbricht, 1998, 34).

According to Marks et al. (2017), environmental art can draw attention to the environment in imaginative ways that encourage caring and stewardship, in fact artist that wants to do environmental art have the possibility to re-invent ways of seeing environmental issues and interpret innovative methods to make people interested and touched by such themes. Because

people need 'to care about' relevant issues in order to be motivated to take action, and to do that environmental art can help also to generate discussions, reflection, shared activities that are going to influence the environmental awareness of the people involved (Marks et al., 2017).

Marks' et al. (2017) research in fact, shows how environmental art within education can promote discussion and the sharing of ideas. And they demonstrate how creatively portraying the environment through participatory place-based activities can interest an audience through environmental art, to create a feeling of place, improved comprehension of problems, and motivate care. In fact, according to Ulbricht (1998), this type of approach should be taken as a model by teachers in schools; according to the author, activities and images representing the environment or its improvement should be included, and the approach of environmental arts for education should be adapted to the sensibilities of the students.

In any case, environmental art as a practice of environmental humanities needs to be explored further and academics should pay more attention to it, especially when it comes to environmental awareness topics.

1.4. Environmental awareness through Art-based methods and Environmental education

To find literature pertinent to the theme of this thesis has not been easy, mostly because art in academics is a very vast topic and it is difficult to orientate. Moreover, art is primarily used as a tool to analyse a determined phenomenon and as a way to spread awareness is used more in informal contexts. This is because of the fact that environmental art and art-based methods for environmental awareness are used and spread in different contexts and in different extents.

Arts are used every day to spread awareness, taking as an example art expositions or drama representations on the topic of the environment; but even in these cases not many academic studies are done on them, at least not as much as other topics considered more scientific and worth to have a case study on them. And in general, art tends to be divided in categories that can be considered to some degree important in the academic world.

Also, according to Smith (2007), existing literature documents the significance of art in other areas of social change, but little has been written about art that focuses on environmental degradation or the interactions of humans and their environment.

Indeed, it is difficult to find research about creative artistic practices in a broader sense considered as a way to raise awareness. Nor even crochet, but in general crafts and handwork are not really considered by academics as art and as a topic to explore. Moreover, outside

environmental education with children or young students, there is not much literature on the topic of art and creative practices as a tool to spread awareness among adults. This probably because art and creative practices are not considered as authoritative as other sciences or other methods of doing research, especially qualitative ones. But according to Zhongbin (2024), the utilization of art as a mean to evaluate children's environmental attitudes illustrates that their artistic creations can produce insights equivalent to conventional survey techniques.

In fact, art-based methods are really common when the focus are children. Using art as an expression of their thoughts and feelings is common for children, and analysing them is useful for researchers to understand them, more than it would be to interview children as they can get bored or distracted easily. Or even, to not put pressure on them trying to take out something that maybe the researcher is interested in and instead to follow what the children is comfortable to share. Moreover,

Attitudes toward the environment, influence the development of an individual's environmental ethics. In addressing environmental content, it is important to start from the child's experiences, values, and attitudes towards the environment, as environmental values and the value system are primarily dependent on early childhood experiences related to nature, family environmental values, role models, friends, teachers, and also education. Attitudes toward the environment can be defined as long-term positive or negative emotions towards a particular issue, object, or the environment as a whole (Finale, 2025, 148).

Art based methods are a way for children to express what they want, and to let them do it how they want to. For example, according to Piaget (1953), children consider making pictures as a game and take great pleasure in making pictures. Children who actively express themselves via their artwork can be reached through this strategy since it is easier for them to reflect their inner world through pictures than through words (Tümer & Kaya, 2023).

Also when the topic is environmental awareness, children are the right population to do research with, because aiming on the development of a feeling of empathy at a young age is crucial for when they are going to become adults, and act with their choices towards the environment in which they will live. According to Papavasileiou et al. (2021), “the need to encourage children to develop an emotional connection with nature as a prerequisite for being aware of environmental issues and the development of responsibility towards the environment has been

particularly emphasized. The development of the relationship with the environment includes not only knowledge but also emotion” (Papavasileiou et al., 2021, 287). The only knowledge-based approach cannot influence deep-rooted values that motivate the individual to change how to behave, this is where art comes in help. “Art can develop new cognitive patterns, develop feelings of care and interest in others. Students through art can communicate and share their experiences” (Papavasileiou et al., 2021, 288).

One common art-based method is the creative drama method, in fact according to Smith (2007), “Theater in Education (TIE) began as a movement in British public schools in the 1960s. This educative tool uses theatre for instruction in a variety of subjects including the environment, race relations, local history, languages, science and health” (Smith, 2007, 27). For instance, Tümer and Kaya (2023) are using the creative drama method in their research on the topic of environmental awareness. According to them, Preschoolers will benefit from environmental education that is provided within the framework of programs that encourage them to use their senses and grow in empathy. Because of this, they say that the "creative drama" approach is the best teaching strategy for experiential learning. During the preschool years, using theatre as a teaching tool facilitates efficient and long-lasting learning. Children who are able to engage with their surroundings and themselves through theatre activities gain respect for one another and other living things, which they can then carry into other settings, beginning with their immediate surroundings (Tümer & Kaya, 2023). And in their research, Tümer and Kaya (2023), to assess the goal of environmental education through drama activities, are using pictures making, an art-based method. In this case we can see that art is used as both a way to “teach” and a way to learn. Children learn from the drama, and researchers study and learn from the production of pictures made by the children. But the majority of the research is concentrated on the results that the researchers are obtaining from these sessions. As a result, art efficiently helps academics and practitioners in achieving their objectives and serves as an indicator for the results of environmental education programs (Tümer & Kaya, 2023).

Papavasileiou et al., (2021) did a literature review on the topic of Environmental education through arts, by using “the keywords *environmental education*, *environmental awareness* and *fine arts* (...). In addition, several types of art were used as keywords such as *dance*, *theater*, *cinema*, *architecture*, *literature*, etc., in combination with *environmental education* and *environmental awareness*” (Papavasileiou et al., 2021, 288). And the results showed that there are many ways and possibilities to use arts in order to achieve environmental goals. The review

brought works done associating environmental education with: music, creative writing, painting, photography, showing a movie/documentary, theatre, architectural interventions, literature and wall painting. All these forms of using art as a medium to express themselves, to learn and to teach environmental awareness have showed positive results. Especially regarding the auto determination of students to express their emotions and feelings on the topic by using the arts proposed to them. It had two distinct outcomes, the development of creative thinking and the generation of emotions and interest on environmental issues (Papavasileiou et al., 2021).

Another example of art-based methods used with children to learn and develop environmental awareness is Tarr's (2008) work "Enhancing environmental awareness through the arts" done with two early childhood professionals and 28 children in a long day care centre in Sydney. The goal of the project was to introduce Environmental education to the children, not to make them feel guilty or responsible of taking action, but to help them create a connection with nature through the arts. This research demonstrated that teaching young children about the natural world through arts-based pedagogies was beneficial for both the early childhood professionals and the kids they worked with (Tarr, 2008). Thanks to the fact that they "presented concepts about the natural world to the children through songs, stories, verses and visual and dramatic art experiences they created" (Tarr, 2008, 21). The last workshop on Tarr's (2008) research, concerned handwork, which as previously said, is not always considered in the discourse, but it will be more thoroughly analysed later when talking about the art of crocheting. "The workshop looked at how the content of stories could provide the children with opportunities for creativity through handwork or craft, thus enhancing their fine motor and coordination skills" (Tarr, 2008, 24).

Finale's (2025) research regards primary schools and explains how the use of recycled materials for artistic projects is a result of a focus on environment-based class. "Nonetheless, global research highlights the potential of ecological art, and artworks, addressing themes of environmental pollution or created using recycled materials as a transformative educational tool" (Finale, 2025, 148). It follows the ECTA method, which is the study of Environmental Content Through visual Art, "the innovative ECTA approach is a combination of project-based learning with a problem-solving focus on environmental content" (Finale, 2025, 151). This teaching method is based on lessons imprinted on topics regarding waste and various environmental issues, such as pollution or animal's habitat destruction and dealing with them through an interdisciplinary approach. These lessons are not only based on visual arts but also

science, technology, mathematics, etc., as these are able to inform, develop emotions and stimulate artistic thinking into the students. Especially, they will express it through the arts by making creations with waste and recycled materials, and teachers will give them full liberty on how they will do it and with which method and materials (Finale, 2025). “By encouraging self-responsibility and mutual respect, teachers aim to create an engaging, shared experience that supports both foundational knowledge and practical skills” (Finale, 2025, 151). As results, Finale (2025) obtained that, to determine the effect of the ECTA teaching strategy on students' knowledge, attitudes, behaviour toward the environment and environmental consciousness in their artwork, there was the need to compare the data collected and the artwork assessments. When comparing students in the experimental group to those in the control group, statistical analysis of the quantitative data demonstrated that the developed ECTA teaching approach significantly improved their knowledge, helped them to adopt more environmentally friendly attitudes and behaviours, and increased their environmental awareness. The study results show that problem-based teaching with cross-curricular connections, such as the implemented ECTA teaching approach, is suitable for developing environmental awareness and acquiring knowledge about the environment and environmental art (Finale, 2025).

Art is vast and varied, and because of that also in art-based environmental education it is possible to find different methods and approaches and therefore different types of arts. In this case, music is the tool that the university of Oulu in Finland is using to create environmental consciousness in their students.

The aim of this composing project was to provide educators and teachers with concrete tools (in the form of songs) to address thoughts and feelings related to climate concern in different educational contexts. (...) In addition to these, one central goal of this project was to promote children's awareness of the changing northern nature in their daily lives (Sutela, 2023, 419).

The project consisted in making students participate to “Shape of Water” a contemporary circus in which the exhibition consisted in dances, videos and lights effects that talked about the changing state of water in the north part of Finland. And then to take part of a workshop where they had to create a children's song on topics of climate change, after some preparative sessions with some famous Finnish song writers and science/chemistry teachers that could help them. And after 2 months of work the songs were created and performed at a school concert for

everyone to listen (Sutela, 2023). This kind of projects do not mean to force students to change and become environmental conscious beings if they do not want to. But they help to reflect on new topics, seeing them from a different perspective and even creating new evaluations on certain themes. According to Sutela (2023) in fact, during this creative process, the students used their imagination to reflect on the impact of their own actions on a desirable, more sustainable future. For many, this process seemed to create a more complete understanding of their own world relationship. As one student reflected, “This project has not really shaped or raised my awareness of climate change, but it has reinforced the feeling that my own actions can make a difference. It has increased my motivation for climate action” (Sutela, 2023, 422).

Another interesting case regards Liao’s (2024) research, “Protecting the environment through art: the significance of environmental art design in raising awareness about environmental pollution among universities in China”, where the topic of environmental consciousness is perpetrated through the use of environmental art design. Again, it is addressed to students, in this case to Chinese college students. This research aims to close a significant knowledge gap about how integrating art design into the classrooms might contribute to lowering pollution levels and promoting environmental management; this type of learning goes beyond traditional methods and wants to give students not only tools for conscious actions towards the environment but the ability to cope with creative solutions (Liao, 2024). This research comes across the same issue that is discussed at the beginning of this chapter, which is the difficulty in finding existing literature on the topic. In fact, Liao (2024) says:

“The journey to this research endeavour was paved by thoroughly exploring existing literature, which highlighted a notable gap in understanding how environmental themes could be effectively integrated into educational curricula, (...). This gap and the study’s belief in the intrinsic connection between art and nature led to delve deeper into the intersection of environmental awareness, artistic innovation, and educational practices” (Liao, 2024, 26549).

And this resonates perfectly when we talk about creative practices in a broader sense, as they are not really considered in academic studies, outside of theatre and paintings; they have not been taken into consideration, there is not much research on it. Especially when it comes to their usage as a way to spread awareness on the topic of climate change or on the environment in general. In fact, the pedagogic utility of these methods, of these practices is not considered when it comes to environmental consciousness, but it could be very useful. Of course, this kind

of strategies of environmental education are targeted for children or young students, because at that age we are developing and learning new things about the world itself every day, ideas and opinions still have to develop, and it is easier to reach more people that are into the scholastic system. On the other hand, adults are more difficult to reach or at least it is difficult to reach the same amount of people; everyone has their opinions and usually those who are interested in environmental issues, were already interested in it. Considering all of this, spreading the message between adults using other artistic interests that they might have, could be functional and innovative. And considering, besides children in elementary school, middle school and high school students, also university students could be involved in environmental programs with the use of arts in different ways.

1.5. My experience with environmental education for environmental awareness

Considering these last statements of the previous chapter, I think it would be relevant to share my personal experience as an example of how environmental education can play a role in the development of environmental awareness and thus also in the development of related interest in someone's life.

In fact, this thesis idea comes directly from personal experiences, starting from the passion of crochet that brought me to become a volunteer in the project of *Hot as Crochet*, my internship as volunteer at the *ClimateMusic Project*; but also my experience with environmental education during my early years, and then later in University thanks to the contact with the class of Sociology of the Environment and the Territory, when I regained interest in environmental issues, so much that I decided to write my bachelor thesis on the topic of sustainable fashion. And as a result, I made the decision to enrol in the master's degree of Environmental Humanities.

Starting from kindergarten, when I was three years old and until the eighth grade, when I was around thirteen years old, I went to a Waldorf school, that is based on Rudolf Steiner's teaching method and pedagogy. According to Hallam, Egan and Kirkham (2016), Waldorf Steiner schools give a particular importance in the development of artistic skills and free expression, in opposition to other schools that limit children creativity by rewarding mostly works that are standardized like photo-realistic art. In fact, many students from public schools are stuffed with facts, they often have a weak relationship with the world on the most basic level because it does not originate from their experience and emotional lives (De Souza, 2012).

A characteristic of Waldorf Steiner school is the fact that it leaves space to learn through imagination; and to grow and learn how to become an educated person, children need the combined nourishment of head, heart and hands (Hallam, Egan & Kirkham, 2016). According to De Souza, “Waldorf teachers believe that the development of imagination is extremely important since it nurtures our “feeling life” and helps us establish solid relationships with the world” (De Souza, 2012, 52).

During my time in the Waldorf school indeed, I learned and explored many different things connected to the artistic sphere but also to the environmental one. I have learned during the class of “manual work” how to sew, to knit, to create a doll, a sweater and many more; but mostly I have learned how to crochet, which is something that I am very grateful to be able to do with such confidence. Now, thanks to the Waldorf school I can handle any crochet work with full autonomy; I do not need to read any patterns, I just look at the yarn and the stitches and then I can create anything. Being able to imagine something and then actually create it is a skill I developed during my years at Waldorf. This ability, for example, gave me the possibility to enter right away as a volunteer for the project *Hot as Crochet*, and being able to teach and help people with learning the art of crochet.

Moreover, in my Waldorf school we learned how to cook some recipes, how to paint with different methods like acrylics, watercolour or charcoal, following different styles but also with our pure imagination. We learned how to work with the wood, to recognize and follow its veins; how to tend a vegetable garden, plow the soil and plant seeds, and consequently they taught us the importance of the environment that is around us, the importance of respecting and taking care of every being, whether human, non-human or more-than-human.

“The role of the arts in the education of children is another fundamental aspect of the Waldorf experience. Different artistic means can be important teaching and learning tools and boosters for the development of students’ creativity. Besides, to develop the ability to express ourselves through different artistic means and to recreate and/or to appreciate the beauty of the world around us can make our lives much more attractive and pleasant. A further contribution of the Waldorf experience relates to the importance of nurturing in children a sense of interconnectedness, interdependence, and respect for other people and for the natural world” (De Souza, 2012, 61).

The years I have spent in the Waldorf School are now very important to me, and to all the people that I went to school with. And I have noticed it because, even after more or less 15 years that

we are not in that school together anymore, everyone still narrates about that time as something really positive, not only the students but also the professors and the parents of the children. This happens also because:

Steiner's educational proposal radically contrasted, and still contrasts, with mainstream education. It questions the mechanistic, materialistic, and consumerist mentality of modern society and promotes a non-materialistic worldview centered on the inner development of the individual and on the quality of his/her relationships with other people and with the natural environment. It also promotes a balance between the intellectual, physical, emotional, social, spiritual, and aesthetic aspects of human development (De Souza, 2012, 50-51).

After the eighth grade, I started to go to a public high school of languages; during the five years I spent there, I have never been in contact with environmental education of any kind. Sustainability or environmental conservation topics were never mentioned and, with the advance of time and age, I started to become distant from my earlier environmental education and environmental attitudes. This continued until my third year of university, when I decided to take a class in Sociology of the Environment and the Territory, and that was the moment when environmental and ecological topics came back in my life. From that class, I decided to take an interest in sustainable fashion and wrote a paper about it, and it then became the first chapter of the final thesis of my bachelor's degree. While writing that thesis, I discovered many things that I did not know; like the fact that the clothing industry is one of the most polluting and resource consuming worldwide. I discovered for example the immense landfills of clothing, like those in Ghana, and the huge problematics that derive from the production of cotton and the control of its seeds in India. Therefore, after my graduation I decided that I wanted to learn more about environmental issues and solutions, and looked for a master's degree that could fulfil my aspirations. And I found the master's degree in Environmental Humanities, which resonated perfectly with what I would have liked to do. The whole degree was really enriching, both from a human and knowledge perspective.

Thanks to the university of Venice, I have also been able to do an Erasmus in Germany, in Munich, at the Rachel Carson Center, which is the central base for the Environmental Humanities studies in Europe. There I had the possibility to experience a very different approach from the one I experienced in Italy. Starting from the relationship with the professors, the organization of the classes and the freedom that academically was given to students. Moreover, I took a class called "Human and More-than-Human Ecologies", where the professor

for the final exam gave free space to create an artistic production, as long as it resonated with the class topics. In this specific case, I have experienced again something that I had not done in a long time, since when I was at the Waldorf School. Which was having the free space to create with art, in an academic context, while studying and learning about environmental education. In fact, for this exam, I decided to produce a video regarding animals in Munich, and I did a written production investigating the spaces that both humans and non-humans share in the city. While creating this video I really had the incentive to come in contact with what was around me, and to do that in many different settings. For this project I used to just sit in a park, on my balcony, along the river and just observe what was going on around me, and how the spaces were used, occupied and shared.

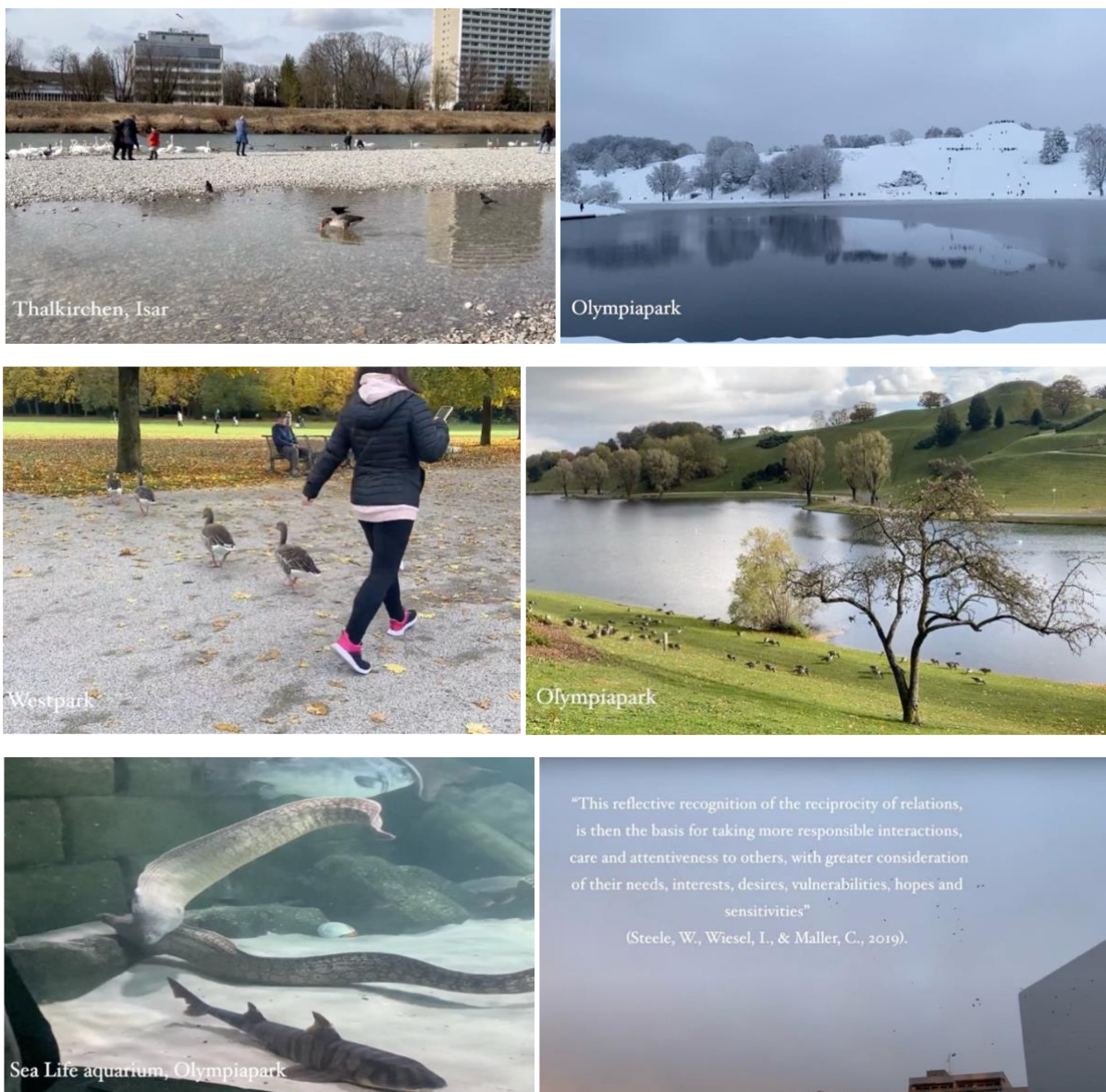


Fig. 1-2-3-4-5-6: Frames of the video “Animals’ spaces in Munich” (Pizzati, 2024).

Pulling the sums together, I believe that all these environmental education experiences have played a key role in terms of developing my current environmental awareness. Beginning with the Waldorf school, that laid the roots for the development of an empathy and attention for the environment, and ending with the environmental education imparted at the university that brought to light what had slipped into the background from the childhood. Therefore, from what I have experienced, environmental education and arts have played a fundamental role in shaping who I am today and how I relate with environmental topics and awareness.

A phrase that resonates a lot with how much environmental awareness is important for environmental conservation, cited in Fig.6, is: “This reflective recognition of the reciprocity of relations, is then the basis for taking more responsible interactions, care and attentiveness to others, with greater consideration of their needs, interests, desire, vulnerabilities, hopes and sensitivities” (Steele, Wiesel & Maller, 2019, 411).

1.6. Critics and limits of art-based methods

Art based methods, as seen in the previous chapters, can be a really effective approach to investigate various phenomena, especially those that cannot be measured with quantitative research. But with many advantages some limits also come along. In fact, as seen before, art based methods can be numerous and the ability to juggle between them and choose which is better for what is something that only good, prepared researchers can do. That is why Wang et al. (2017) decided to categorize them, and also many others tried to do the same, in order to make it easier for everyone to study and do research with them. Despite this, these categories are not universally recognized but instead are often questioned or reinterpreted. And this again happens because of the vastity of the arts and methods that make it difficult framing them in a “box”.

According to Eaves (2014) in fact, with all research approaches, arts-based inquiry should be selected with sensitivity to context and in reflection of the means in which the techniques employed frame or moreover, may impact outcomes. It requires attention, sensitivity and a certain kind of knowledge and experience to work with art-based methods, especially when the population selected is particularly sensitive or fragile.

Another problem that arises, regards the fact that it is difficult to do specific research on art, as there are so many things that can be considered art. So much was written on the topic, there is not a specific categorization or even division that can be followed to do specific research on arts, and this is again because of the vastity of the topic. To be able to research a topic connected

with art, it is necessary to narrow it down. In this thesis in fact, in the beginning it was difficult to find literature that considered art and environmental issues, especially creative practices, as a means to spread environmental awareness. There is no such category as “creative practices”, and not even “crochet”, strictly connected to environmental awareness, even though crochet and creative practices are both art. But with specific key words and time spent researching, many different and unexpected topics came out.

From a more practical perspective, according to Fancourt and Finn (2019) it has been shown that the arts can, in contrast with what one could first think, negatively affect health: for example, misconceptions about epilepsy have been perpetuated by some popular songs, daily listening to loud music is linked to hearing loss, and media portrayal of medicine can contribute to the spread of health-related fears and the formation of unrealistic expectations in patients. Arts are so vast that the possibility to use them in the wrong way is just as big. Moreover, even when arts’ positive effects are assured, there is substantially more evidence in favour of certain types of artistic activities for specific health conditions; for example, there are more studies on music, dance, and visual arts than on other activities such as attending festivals, carnivals, or online and digital arts. This does not necessarily imply that these activities have a greater impact (Fancourt & Finn, 2019).

Again, for the fact that what comprehends art is so wide and not defined, it can be its potential but also its weakness. Nevertheless, in literature, even according to Fancourt & Finn (2019), there is a habit of preferring positive results over negative ones, despite the fact that they are equally useful for the advancement of research.

Again, multidisciplinary collaboration, as suggested from the Environmental Humanities mentioned in the previous chapters, is a way to overcome bias from both qualitative and quantitative methods, including the art-based methods.

CHAPTER 2

2.1. What do we mean when we talk about creative practices? The art of crocheting

Creative practices is a term that wants to include all those artistic practices that in the common language are not included when talking about art. In fact, when usually is talked about art, what most people think of are paintings of every kind, sculptures, installations, music compositions, theatrical performances, etc; for instance, what you can mostly find in museums or theatres. With the terms creative practices in this thesis are considered the artistic practices in a broader sense, in particular to include the art of crocheting but also knitting and all the crafts related. One of the focuses of this thesis will be the art of crocheting, which for decades has been considered a practice for women, especially the elderly and in the recent time it has been brought back and cleared for all ages and genders.

Crochet has a different meaning depending on who you ask to, according to Govil et al., (pp. 368, 2024): Crochet, an ancient yarn craft, offers a diverse range of techniques and designs that require minimal equipment such as yarn, a hook, creativity, and understanding of the craft. Or according to Okeke: Crocheting is a handmade technique of looping yarns with hooked needle to produce patterned fabrics” (Okeke, 2024, 400).

But in general, all agree on the fact that crochet is a technique to create a garment or an artistic item that requires a hook and yarn to be created and the movement that interlocks the loops of yarn one after the other. In fact, the term crochet derives from the French word “crochet” that means hook (Burns & Van Der Meer, 2021).

Crochet is thought to have originated in the early 1800s, when artists sought to create beauty with basic materials like knitting and lacemaking. But “the precise origins of crochet remain a subject of scholarly debate due to the lack of archaeological evidence, as fibres decay naturally over time” (Govil et al., 2024, 369). Early hooks demonstrated the inventiveness of the time by being made of bone, wood, or ivory. Crochet became an economic lifeline during Ireland's Great Famine, with villages being supported by the manufacturing of lace. Crochet's adaptability and artistic development were shown by the evolution of techniques from simple chain stitches to intricate patterns (Govil et al., 2024). Then in the last century crocheting, just like knitting and sewing, were considered woman duties, and at the end of the century mostly elderly where the ones that kept this art going. Nowadays, thanks to social media, these arts have been brought back and shared easily through all ages and genders, thanks to the fact that tutorials and schemes to learn how to do them are easily accessible to everyone. “YouTube and Pinterest have

significantly contributed to its popularity, providing tutorials and inspiration that reach a global audience” (Govil et al., 2024, 369).

Moreover, crochet is a craft that does not require much material to start, in fact just a hook and yarn are needed (Govil et al., 2024); to start create you do not need difficult stitches, with just the basic one you can create whatever you want and it is also really portable, the material can travel easily anywhere with you and not take up much space in the bag. Usually, this kind of crafts are learned and thought informally, from a relative, a friend, a book, a community centre or usually self-thought online (Graber, 2013).

An interesting feature that distinguishes crochet from crafts such as knitting or sewing is the fact that crochet is the only one that can be only made by hand, till now no machine can replicate the art of crocheting. Because of this, crochet is being considered as a sustainable way to create fabric, because it can only be done by hand, so it has not carbon footprint and according to Okeke:

Crocheting is among the most environmentally friendly ways to produce fabric. This is due to the fact that a variety of yarns, including those derived from sustainable materials like bamboo, hemp, and recycled materials, as well as natural fibers like cotton, linen, and wool, can be used for crocheting. And often, when it comes to the sustainability of textiles, researchers focus more on the materials than the manufacturing processes. (Okeke, 2024, 398).

When traditional materials are produced, the textile industry pollutes the environment by releasing wastewater and harmful chemicals into the atmosphere, that is why Okeke’s (2024) research focuses on crochet as an alternative way to produce fabrics, in a slower and more sustainable way than the traditional manufacturing techniques, also by prioritizing quality over quantity. Another important factor that makes crocheting a sustainable alternative to nowadays fashion industries is the fact that every crochet-made garment can be undone and crocheted again, in a different pattern, size or anything; and also, crochet is really versatile in many different ways when it comes to upcycling.

The art of Crochet can also be a way to build communities that share similar values. In fact, according to Levine (2011), crafts such as crochet are a way to connect with people and to create communities that can inspire you.

Garber (2013) says that Craft making are more democratic, culturally speaking, than art, but this definition does not preclude art. They are more democratic because many people are engaged in them, often without extensive training, making “making” accessible to most who

have the inclination. Both online and local crochet and knitting communities (often referred to as "stitch'n bitch") groups, can foster feminist networks and bridge the gap between the public and private spheres (Kelly, 2014). Thanks to this ability to build bridges and create communities of crafts like crochet and knitting, they are a source for activist movements and spaces. For example, as Garber (2013) states, knitters from Europe and USA contributing to Marianne Jørgensen's Pink Tank made over 4,000 knitted squares as part of a protest against the war in Iraq, where the squares made created a covering for a World War II combat tank that was displayed publicly. Knitted by many different people using varied patterns, designs, types of yarn, and shades of pink, Pink Tank helped to convey a sense of the wide breadth of people opposed to the war in Iraq. Thanks to this creative practices where many people that shared similar values came together, made their voice heard using, in this case knitting but the squares could be also made crocheting, as a form of activism.

In general, arts and crafts and the phenomenon of DIY (do it yourself), are itself a form of activism. The need to find alternatives that can be handmade, less impactful and a valid alternative to capitalistic mainstream way of consuming and buying is a statement of activism, of going against the grain (Garber, 2013). "Craft activism speaks to sustainability when the knitter unravels a thrift shop sweater to make a new one or doesn't support a sweatshop and the corporations that put it on our shelves" (Garber, 2013, 56).

2.2. The local case: Hot as Crochet

Knowledge alone is not enough to produce pro-environmental behaviours. But could emotions, participation and being part of a project be?

Hot as crochet is an Italian reality based in Padova, started from an idea of Celeste Correale. This project comes from the passion of the art of crochet and the interest on doing something that could help to spread awareness on the topic of climate change. This is a recently born project; in fact, their first meeting was on the 2nd march of 2024. It consists in a workshop of crochet on a monthly basis where adults and young adults can participate, no matter their knowledge of crocheting; and during the workshop they will learn the basics of crochet and will produce a square of yarn. But what connects it with the topic of climate change? The fact that each month there is a different project that will be created; one month a scarf, the other a bag and the next one a hat and so on. Each project will be composed by a certain number of modules, each module is a square of yarn and each square is realized by one of the participants of the

workshop. The squares will have a different color, and the color will be decided based on the temperature in Padova of the month prior. At the end of each project, it will be put together and it will create a garment that represents the temperature of the month before and so the others, so that they will create a representation of the temperature changes through one year.

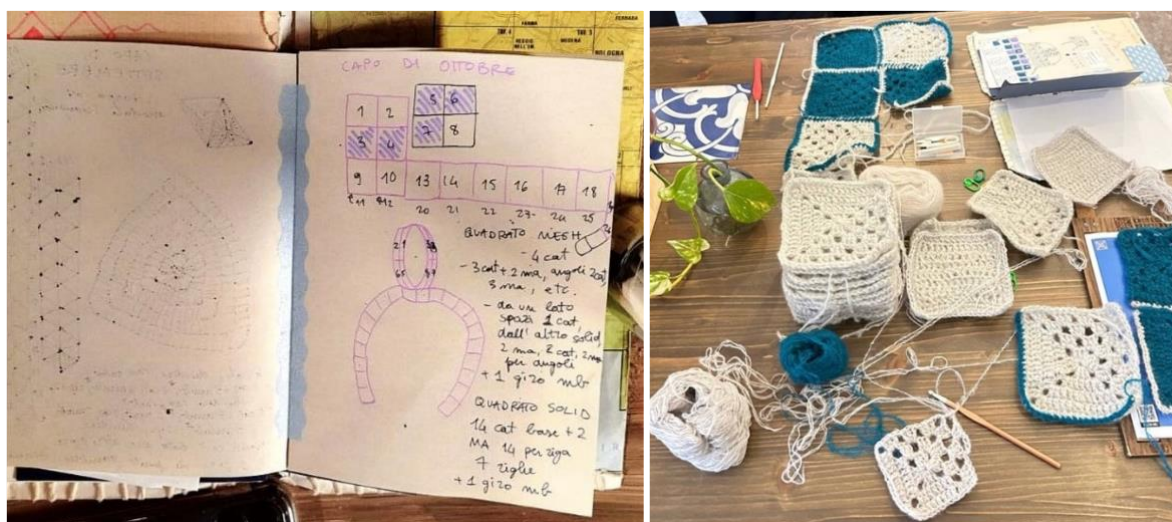


Fig.7 (left), October's project (example of how the project of a garment is made, based on temperature and colors) & Fig. 8 (right), example of squares that are ready and are becoming the final garment.

The project is committed also to making the crochet experience even more sustainable, by using scrap yarn of different types and creating with what is available. Moreover, during the workshops most of the time they organize swap parties and talks on topics about environmental awareness or sustainable practices. Swap parties are events where people exchange their old clothes or those that they do not use anymore (in good conditions), for free, with other clothes that someone else brought; the aim is to promote the circularity of clothes and reduce the need to buy new clothes through the fast fashion industries.

The idea of the project is to carry on for one year long, with a total of twelve meetings and twelve pieces of garments and at the end to do an exhibition, auctioning the garments. With the auction proceeds, donate them to an environmental organization that in this case will be LegAmbiente, to contribute to environmental awareness projects, in particular about the topic of sustainable fashion.



Fig.9-10-11: Three finished garments, and their projects, that were made during the monthly workshops of Hot as Crochet, exposed in May 2025 for the auction.

In addition to that, what do participants experience by participating in this project? The first contact they have with the project is either from social media or through word of mouth. Hot as crochet promotes its events and workshops via the platform of Instagram, and when you open their profile the first phrase you can read is “Tessiamo insieme un futuro più sostenibile” (“Let's weave together a more sustainable future”) which introduces the wishes of the project. The second thing that comes to the eyes when in their profile is the choice of colors that are variable but with a very present background of red, which is a good representation of the temperature changes, and the red represent the rising of temperatures that is one of the concerns of the project. Then, a user that wants to have more information about the project can consult the highlights of Instagram stories pinned on the page and read all the information disposing the scope of the project. For example, is written that the project promotes awareness about climate change through art and creativity. And that they organize crochet workshops to create garments using a color scale that takes into account the daily change in temperatures (<https://www.instagram.com/hotascrochet/>, 08/06/25). After reading the highlights in the stories, a potential participant has all the information on how to participate and will find the next workshop presented in an Instagram post in the feed. After that, the participants just need to confirm their attendance and can then just be present the day of the event to crochet with other enthusiasts or beginners in the art of crochet. What is left for someone after attending the workshop? First, they will have heard about and taken awareness of climate change, particularly with the example of temperatures in the city of Padova (where the project takes place). Then they will have learned at least the basics of crochet; if particularly gifted, they will also have

made and finished a square that will form the garment of the month. Additionally, they will also have been part of a community that, even if for a short time, shared values and practices, and if the experience was positive, they will be able to repeat it with that community.

This project is therefore a good example of creating environmental awareness through the use of creative practices, in this case the crochet.

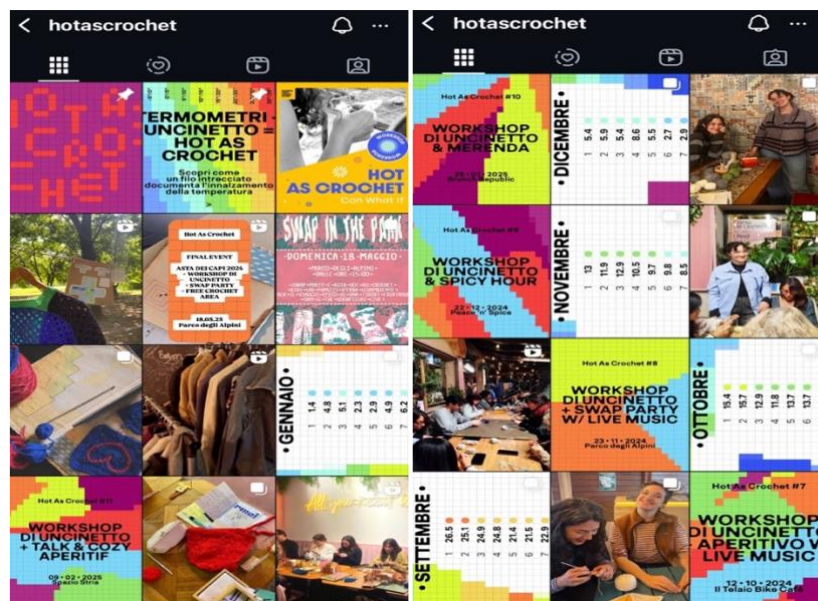


Fig. 12&13: Instagram page of Hot as Crochet on 01/06/25 (@hotascrochet)

It is important to consider that this is a local small project that aims to spread awareness, but it was not meant to be studied or to have research on it. But it could be implemented, by the fact that this type of project is suitable for a more in-depth research on the effective function of it; for example, by doing some qualitative research on it, such as interviews, or also quantitative ones, like questionnaires, to investigate better on the impact of the project for participants and to investigate its strengths and weaknesses.

2.3. The international case: The ClimateMusic Project

Music can contribute to environmental awareness either in places of formal learning or in the context of non-formal learning. A concert at a school is an example of formal learning. Songs in a camp are a form of awareness in an informal context. Informal learning can take place in any social context where music and people coexist. When people delve into the work of the artists they admire, they discover environmental issues. In addition, participating in the experiences and thoughts of others through music is a form of experiential learning. The

meaning and values associated with some art form may differ from the intentions of the creator and from audience to audience, which means that it is difficult to measure and predict the impact (Papavasileiou et al., 2021, 290).

The ClimateMusic Project is a non-profit organization, based in San Francisco and founded by Stephan Crawford, that seeks to take action on climate issues by sharing a message through the power of science and music together. More precisely, according to Dixon et al. (2024), it is a cross-disciplinary collaborative spanning the arts, science, technology, and public policy; it aims to present music informed by climate science as a stimulus and space for listeners to process feelings of anxiety about the future, grief, and guilt about the past and the present and to transform negative feelings into positive actions.

The purpose of ClimateMusic is to deliver information about climate change in an emotionally engaging way. Its goal is to connect communities through music, providing inspiration, a space for reflection, and a supportive environment with opportunities for learning and action. The ClimateMusic Project leverages the universal appreciation of music to communicate scientific information, inviting audiences to engage with the crisis both analytically and emotionally. ClimateMusic utilizes the expectation-based underpinnings of musical expression to promote future-oriented thinking, encouraging listeners not only to imagine but to feel future scenarios, and inviting them to respond accordingly. In this way, listeners become emotionally invested in the continuation of the music and, correspondingly, in the future climate scenarios that shape the music” (Dixon et al, 2024, 266).

The project has a strong foundation in the arts, yet the music composition is influenced by reference data sets related to climate studies, and its didactic goal is to convey elements of the research that support the urgency of the environmental crisis. It collaborates with a wide range of musicians in order to reach people with the kinds of music that best resonate with them, as part of its artistic goal is to captivate its intended audience with expressive music in various genres (Dixon et al., 2024).

The project’s compositions are in fact made with the union of music and climate data that have an impact on the music that is created. A perfect example of this process can be seen in the composition of ‘Audyssey’ by the composer Eduardo Del Signore, where the union of visual images of data and music, generates a work full of intensity and meaning. It shows two possibilities regarding global warming due to carbon dioxide (Co2) levels rising, one in which the mitigation is successful, and one in which nothing is done, and mitigation does not happen.

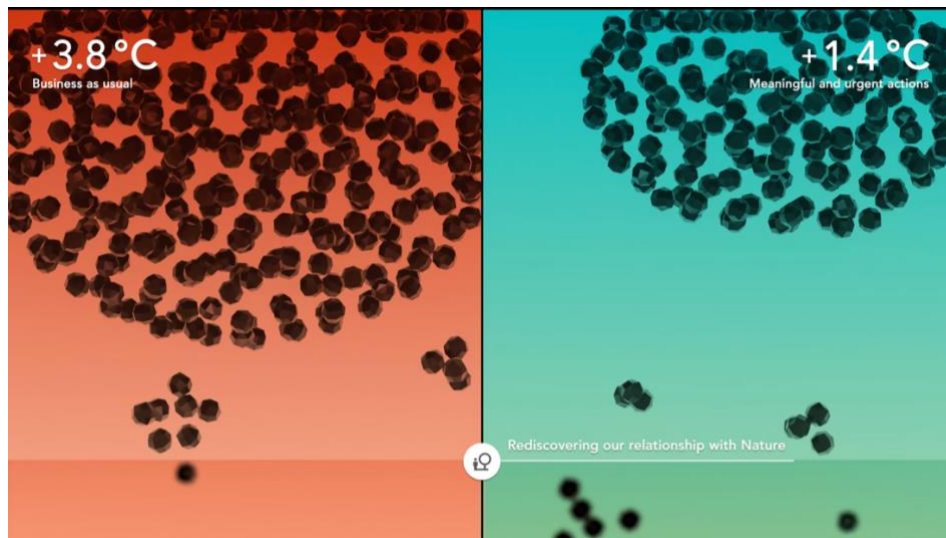


Fig. 14: Frame of the music video “Audyssey” (<https://climatemusic.org/our-music/our-music-audyssey/>)

The fulcrum that enables collaboration between scientists and composers is the story. “The story is the thread that weaves together the key scientific narrative being communicated and is reinforced by peer-reviewed data” (Dixon et al., 2024, 277). A story includes in its whole a written description, data sets from peer-reviewed studies and future climate models. The artists can then access the data in raw and graphical formats, and also as sonifications. In fact, sonification can help scientists find abnormalities that may be harder to pick up on in thousands of spreadsheets of data. Once the story is created, it can be used by any number of collaborating artists, encouraging in-depth studies and reviews of delicate topics.

In more detail, the ClimateMusic Project performers and scientists use three main techniques to reflect the science and data within the music, which are Parameter mapping, Audification and Lyrics/spoken words. When we talk about Parameter mapping, we mean a technique which relates data parameters to the characteristics or elements present in the piece of music. “These music analogs, e.g., characteristics such as tempo or pitch, track changes in the data over time as measured against a reference value” (Dixon et al., 2024, 279).

In order to make the mappings easily discernible by most people, in ClimateMusic compositions there is a maximum number of four distinct mappings, which also ensures that each mapping analog can be distinguished from the others. For example, in “Icarus in flight”, the composer Richard Festinger maps three different parameters: population growth is related to the density

of musical events in the composition, carbon emissions are related to frequency and land-use change with specialized playing techniques.

A more direct and pragmatic technique is the Audification one, which consists of “direct translation of data waveform into sound” (Dixon et al., 2024, 281). It can be more easily thought of as the sonic equivalent of a visual graph. This approach is less employed by ClimateMusic’s composers as it is less versatile than parameter mapping in bringing a deeper meaning in the music for non-scientists. An example of this technique can be seen in “What If We...?”, “where composer Wendy Loomis embeds and contrasts two audifications of sea level rise data representing two possible future scenarios, a “business as usual” scenario and an aggressive mitigation scenario” (Dixon et al., 2024, 281).

Another common technique used in compositions is the Lyrics and Spoken Word one, where a sung or spoken element which includes scientific information is embedded in the music. This option is chosen when Parameter mapping or Audification are not feasible, or when –as in the case of “What If We...”- the author wants to augment the first two (Dixon et al., 2024).

In addition to these three, often ClimateMusic compositions are paired with synchronized visuals, including multiple types of data references.

Music is an art with strong power and possibilities all over the world, and it is effective as a way to spread knowledge and awareness on many different topics such as love, loss, war, social injustice, etc., but according to Dixon et al. (2024) when it comes to climate change it has difficulties to enter and be part of the pop culture, and it faces challenges in carving out its own section in the whole music scene and gaining its own space as a distinct thematic.

Despite these difficulties in finding its own spot as an affirmed medium for spreading awareness in the pop culture, it is undeniable how music can shake the spirits and wake the minds in a powerful and immediate way, as very few means can. “It is harder to deceive someone about the gravity of climate change when, through the medium of music, listeners can hear and feel it clearly for themselves” (Dixon, 2024, 273).

In the end, considering independently the positive outcomes of science and music related campaigns in favour of the climate, it is self-evident how only a combination of the two strategies can ensure to leave behind the negative consequences of an independent approach and how this union can address more efficiently the issues related to climate change and can

make more people involved. That is why a project like The ClimateMusic Project has all the cards to become a model for other awareness projects.

Music is a way to send environmental messages. Music combines art and entertainment. Participants stressed that music elicits emotions, whether they are positive or negative. There must be a balance between the negative and positive messages that the songs convey. Negative messages that contain the concept of threat can lead to action; however, there must be hope for outcomes. Children and adults need to be empowered to make positive changes by developing bonds and love for the natural world. (Papavasileiou et al., 2021).

Both science-inspired and culture-inspired approaches can bring in new audiences in the fight against climate change. With these examples in mind, it is clear that the opportunities for science and art collaborations on climate content will continue to grow as more businesses, art organizations, and governments make addressing climate change a core issue (Dixon, 2024, 274).

2.4. Musical projects working on environmental issues

As seen before, music is an art that has a strong impact and is recognized worldwide as a way to spread awareness through people of different areas, ages and beliefs.

The project “Emotions for Change” starts in 2015 from an idea of Sara Michieletto. It is based in Italy but has interconnections with many countries in Europe and beyond. As they state in the website (<https://www.emotionforchange.org>, 08/06/25), the project features groups of musicians, artists, and scientists who share the desire to communicate their love for the “symphonic” beauty of nature and they aim with the help of music compositions to motivate listeners to develop more ecologically interconnected practices. Venturing through the various compositions of the project, one immediately realizes the strong relationship and closeness with nature and its beings. An example is the composition “Formiche” (“Ants”), which takes you within seconds to feel part of a line of walking ants. Another example, like Michieletto (2024) explains in the article, is how they created the composition “De atomo al centro” (“About the central atom”), by being impressed by the fact that scientists have discovered that chlorophyll and haemoglobin have similar molecule structures, with the central element being magnesium in chlorophyll and iron in haemoglobin, and this brought them to imagine how plant sap and human blood could intertwine. This kind of project can be situated in an area of eco-art, which

is a multispecies art, that according to Hubbell and Ryan (2021) consists in incorporating other species, organisms, and life forms as lively participants in artistic processes where more-than-humans are not degraded as experimental subjects but respected as active contributors and intelligent co-creators.

These are the feelings we try to convey with Emotion for Change: the wonder, the amazement of beauty and the mystical sense of unity that both nature and music can convey. We want to encourage the public to act in an ecological and respectful way, not out of fear of the future, but out of love for nature (Michieletto, n.d.).

The idea at the base of Emotion for Change is similar to the one of the ClimateMusic Project, that is, using music as tool to spread environmental awareness. The second one is more oriented on creating music based on data that represents climate change or similar issues, meanwhile the first concentrates more to create music based on the feeling of nature, on the sensations thus the *emotions* that the environment can convey.

Another interesting project is the one of *Music Declares Emergency* which is a charity based in UK that was founded by a group of musicians, professionals in the music industry and organizations, according to their website (<https://www.musicdeclares.net>, 08/06/25). Its goal is to give musicians and the music business opportunity to use their influence to help mitigate climate change, and it has no political or commercial ties.

According to Hanley (2019), the projects' declarations and statement are as follow:

- “We call on governments and media institutions to tell the truth about the climate and ecological emergency.
- We call on governments to act now to reverse biodiversity loss and reach net zero greenhouse gas emissions by no later than 2030.
- We recognise that the emergency has arisen from global injustices and will work towards systemic change to protect life on Earth.
- We acknowledge the environmental impact of music industry practices and commit to taking urgent action.

We will:

- Jointly support one another, sharing expertise as a collective industry and community.
- Speak up and out about the climate and ecological emergency.

- Work towards making our businesses ecologically sustainable and regenerative” (Hanley, 2019).

The project gained particularly popularity thanks to their merchandising, specifically the t-shirts with the phrase “NO MUSIC ON A DEAD PLANET” printed on it. Famous artists like Billie Eilish and many more, started to wear them to support and share the message and through social media it gained interest from many.



Fig. 15: Billie Eilish attends the 2019 American Music Awards at Microsoft Theater on Nov. 24, 2019 in Los Angeles. (<https://www.billboard.com/music/awards/billie-eilish-amas-outfit-music-declares-emergency-8544788/>)

Unlike the other projects, Music Declares Emergency is based more on an approach focused on using music as a mean of environmental activism. In fact, with the union of musicians, artists, organizations and professionals in the music industry, the project aims to ask the governments to take immediate action to protect the environment and all its beings.

There are a number of cases in which the mission of spreading environmental awareness is carried out not with a single project, but instead with the efforts of an entire career; it is the case of Bernie Krause, whose work throughout his life as a field recorder sums up really well the principles of the other initiatives examined. After years experimenting with electronic music, with sampling and as a recording engineer, he specialized in “committing the world around him to tape” (Fischer, 2020), becoming a pioneer in the field of soundscape ecology. In the ‘60s he founded the *Wild sanctuary*, a real mission dedicated to the diffusion of environmental awareness, by creating an audio archive containing more than 4500 hours of animal sounds.

“After experiencing an epiphany on his first wildlife recording session with headphones, however, Krause traded in an extremely successful career as an audio engineer, synthesizer specialist, and songwriter with renowned duo Beaver & Krause for a calling as a field recordist” (Fischer, 2020).

Through his studies, he realized that recording wildlife sounds as single sources brought only to the “decontextualized single-species model”, which did not reflect reality. Their acoustic habitat is characterized by a rich and dense wall of sound, a togetherness of events, “The Great Animal Orchestra”. Through all of this, every animal has the necessity to be heard by his peers, as the mating process or the survival of the species depends on it; and that is why, through centuries of evolution, every species has claimed its own frequency in the sonic spectrum.

To further define the sources of sound, Krause introduced some important concepts to the soundscape ecology field, in particular while doing academic research on acoustic evolution. According to his theory, there are three main acoustic sources: geophony, or non-biological natural sounds (as rain, wind, etc.); biophony, the signature of all sound producing organisms in a given habitat, and anthropophony, or acoustic signatures generated by human activities.

“What we’re hearing when we’re listening to animal sounds, therefore, is anything but the spur of the moment, but the product of millions of years of adaptation and transformation” (Fischer, 2020).

These new concepts were useful for him and other experts to produce scientific investigations apt to improve the environmental awareness, and were indeed fundamental to better understand how biophony can tell us a lot about the health and biodiversity of places, in situations where other senses could betray us.

A good example of this phenomenon is a 1988 case, in which Krause “gained permission to record at a forest management area called Lincoln Meadow in the Sierra Nevada mountains, both before and after a lumber company had performed so-called selective loggings.” (Fischer, 2020). In the first session, the recording had a dense spectrogram, which outlined a rich habitat. A year later, he came back for the second recording session: “In keeping with what had been promised by the logging company, the place still looked as though it was teeming with life — “I was delighted to see that little seemed to have changed,” as Krause remarked.” (Fischer, 2020). But, as he came back to the studio and looked at the results, he stated: “Gone was the thriving density and diversity of birds. Gone, too, was the overall richness that had been present the year before. The only prominent sounds were the stream and hammering of a Williamson’s sapsucker.” (Fischer, 2020).

With this and other works, Krause has demonstrated and is still demonstrating how human agency affects in negative ways habitats and the harmony between living creatures, and how devotion to a just cause can match with one's passions and lead to a fruitful union. All these studies are helpful to the scientific community, but projects and initiatives like Krause's Wild Sanctuary can really help with the spread of environmental awareness.

In this latter case and in the one that will be dealt with subsequently, the medium used for spreading environmental awareness is the most essential and primal form of music, nature sounds. Their work with sound manipulation connects them to the other projects investigated in this chapter, with the only difference that they do not produce environmental music with instruments, but directly with the sounds recorded into the wild.

The other researcher involved in the area of field recording is Ben Mirin, a young but talented audio enthusiast who is making his way in the academic world promoting innovations for music and sound. He first became known for his work as a "Wildlife DJ", in which he travelled around the world to record animal sounds and later sample them, in order to create music that inspires conservation. Through all these songs, he contributed to the awareness on environmental issues among young people, who probably would not have had a chance to come into contact with it in other ways. As Krause, the meeting of his two passions, music and nature, have led him to become an important figure for Cornell University, where he works with the Center for Conservation Bioacoustics at the Lab of Ornithology.

He also created an online game, BeastBox, with the help of Cornell University, to raise awareness on the biodiversity topic, and has hosted and created multiple shows and documentaries for National Geographic, which brought him to become a National Geographic Explorer shortly thereafter. As a researcher, Mirin based his career on his multidisciplinary and versatility, finding always new and innovative ways to spread the word and to involve more and more people in his mission, always with his young and innovative diffusion methods. On the topic of awareness and the importance of understanding that this mission should be everyone's mission, he states:

As our world faces growing existential challenges like climate change and biodiversity loss, success depends increasingly on the diversity of people and ideas that we bring to the table. If we continue to work across disciplines, we can make conservation more inclusive, foster

creative solutions to environmental problems, and inspire more people to shape the future of life on Earth (Mirin, n.d.).

2.5. Other artistic initiatives for environmental awareness

During the writing of this thesis, I came across many initiatives and projects that used art and creative practices in many different and unconventional ways in order to spread environmental awareness. Below, I will explore some of them.

Alisa Singer is a Chicago based artist and founder and creator of the project *Environmental Graphiti* (<https://www.environmentalgraphiti.org>, 08/06/25). With this project her scope was to find a way to utilize her art to support efforts to raise awareness on climate change because she thinks it is the most important issue confronting our planet. The idea of employing art to give scientific charts and graphs a dramatic effect captivated her, because of the charts' and graphs' naturally beautiful design features. *Environmental Graphiti* is a compilation of modern digital paintings that aim to raise public awareness of climate change science through the medium of art. Each painting is realized following data about climate change. An example is the painting “Record Breaking Heat” where the painting represents the data of a graph that shows the global mean temperature differences from 1850 to 1900 average, in which the huge temperatures raising are evident.

Record Breaking Heat

WHY IS OUR CLIMATE CHANGING?

The Art



The Science

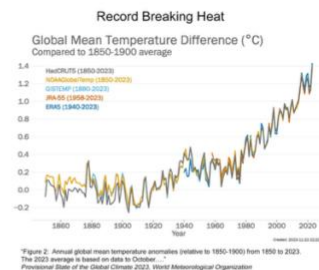


Fig. 16: Screenshot from the *Environmental Graphiti* website, painting “Record Breaking Heat. (<https://www.environmentalgraphiti.org/all-series/temperature-and-co2-for-last-1000-years-azsl9>)

“The art (digital imagery) is provided by Environmental Graphiti to museums, universities, schools, governments and environmental organizations at no charge” (Singer, 2023). This Graphiti paintings are in fact very versatile in different contexts and ways, they can be permanent installations in galleries or museums, displayed as videos and also placed outside of buildings in the streets to attract the attention of people. Moreover, in Singer’s collection there are over 100 pieces, and each of them represents a different issue connected to climate change, and it is interesting because the decision of where and how to display a specific piece is made also considering what issue could be more relevant in a determined place and setting. The meaning and the message of the pictures are different and focused on climate change but can be connected to many different topics such as climate justice, politics, economies, etc. (Singer, 2023).

Another example is the project “Studio of Watershed Sculpture” by Daniel McCormick and Mary O’Brien, who are a duo of artists from the United States. When opening their web site (<https://www.watershedsculpture.com>, 08/06/25) what appears is this phrase “The Environmental Art Practice of Daniel McCormick and Mary O’Brien. A collaborative artist team at the intersection of science and citizen engagement. Our work takes on local conservation issues through an aesthetic lens”. Their innovative sculptures in fact intend to raise awareness on topics such as the rising sea level, stream and habitat restoration, reforestation and carbon footprints. For example, the sculpture “Foraging Island” which according to their website is “a habitat structure at a re-engineered city dump designed to attract invertebrates as a foraging source for the endangered borrowing owl” (<https://www.watershedsculpture.com/landprojects>, 08/06/25).

Foraging Island



Fig. 17: Sculpture “Foraging Island” (Screenshot from the website Studio of Watershed Sculpture), (<https://www.watershedsculpture.com/landprojects>).

This sculpture is a good representation of most of their work, that is characterized by these long and intricate shapes made of wood, which at first glance look like an accumulation of branches but instead conceal deep meaning and importance. In fact, McCormick and O'Brien have been utilizing art to repair and influence a favourable ecological balance in harmed habitats for more than three decades. They address environmental concerns by shifting away from an anthropocentric viewpoint to produce sculptures that interact with natural processes while working in both urban and agricultural watersheds. Their partnerships demonstrate the artists' care for the society and the environment as well as their conviction that art has a duty to accomplish more than merely document changes in society but also do what is possible for environmental conservation.

Meanwhile the Hawaiian artist Sean Yoro (called Hula), is trying to raise awareness on problems afflicting the environment in an equally unconventional way. Hula in fact “likes to paint his evocative murals on precarious surfaces: melting icebergs, the burnt bark of trees and remote waterside walls at the mercy of rising tides, among others. The transient nature of the works, which are destined to naturally disappear shortly after their creation, is used to bring attention to problems afflicting the environment” (Prisco, 2019).

Its latest project indeed, which is titled “Deep seeds” is a set of murals made underwater that are meant to represent the limits and fragilities of both the artist and the art. In fact, the murals are made of big squares of concrete that are submerged, and the artist to reach them needs to dive into the ocean to create them. This challenging method of realization is really impactful both physically for the artist but also for the media, it helps to create interest on people and with that the artist reach another scope. Which is to raise awareness on the topic of coral reefs, who are disappearing and being destroyed due to anthropic actions. Hula’s scope is also to create artificial reefs where fish and marine creatures can thrive, thanks to the installation of the concrete pieces. The artist on his website states that: “The physical and mental challenge proves successful as the figures are completed in the depths and can be left to one day turn into thriving reef sites filled with homes for thousands of different organisms. All materials used, including the pigment sticks, are eco-friendly and safe for marine ecosystems” (<https://www.byhula.com/deepseads>, 08/06/25). And at the end he invites the visitors to take action.



Fig. 18: Screenshot from HULA website, pictures of “Deep Seeds”.

(<https://www.byhula.com/deepseads>)

The Danish/Icelandic Olafur Eliasson is a multifaceted artist, who is dedicated to various social causes in his work but also to climate. Its notoriety is increased since he exposed its installation “The Weather Project” in 2003 at the Tate Modern of London. This work is dedicated to the sun, in fact the setting that creates is to be experiencing a sunset during winter, thanks also to the position of light bulbs that made to come out only colors in the range of yellow and orange.

Eliasson also organized side interventions during the preparation and installation of the exhibition, including a questionnaire submitted to Tate Modern employees, proceedings of a panel discussion concern art communication, weather bulletins, and some essays on weather. Eliasson also organized side interventions during the preparation and installation of the exhibition, including a questionnaire submitted to Tate Modern employees that according to the website (<https://olafureliasson.net/artwork/the-weather-project-2003/>, 08/06/25) included questions such as: ‘Has a weather phenomenon ever changed the course of your life dramatically?’ ‘Do you think tolerance to other individuals is proportional to the weather?’ ‘To what extent are you aware of the weather outside your workplace?’

Another climate-related work created by Eliasson is the series of ‘The glacier melt series 1999/2019’, where he shows the difference between the glacier of Iceland in 1999 and in 2019. The differences that are shown in the pictures are impactful and push the viewer to reflect on how much glaciers that have been there for thousands of years, are now disappearing in large quantities in only twenty years. In fact, Eliasson (2019) states that:

Once a glacier melts, it is gone. Forever. It was only in seeing the difference between then and now – a mere twenty years later – that I came to fully understand what is happening. The photos make the consequences of human actions on the environment vividly real. They make the consequences felt (Eliasson, 2019).



*Fig. 19: Screenshot from website of Glacier Melts, pictures of the “Glacier Melt Series”.
(<https://glacermelt.is>)*

These artworks not only make reflect on glacier melting and climate change, but also on the immense anthropogenic impacts that the environment is being subjected to. In addition, Eliasson narrates about his visit for the commemoration of the death of Okjökull, which is Iceland's first glacier to completely disappear due to human activity. He describes how in the place where it used to be the glacier, a plaque has been placed that asks future generations: “We know what is happening and what needs to be done. Only you know if we did it” (Eliasson, 2019).

Lastly but not less important, another important initiative which concerns creative practices and environmental awareness is the one of The Raging Grannies that is spread around Canada and United States. The Raging Grannies is a group of social and environmental activists that creates short, humorous sketches and songs, which are performed at protests, outside of political leaders' offices/homes, in local tourist spots, at festivals, and anywhere else they see a need to be. With the scope of spreading environmental awareness and pushing for actions from the government. They use another different creative and artistic practice, from the ones we have seen so far, which is the satirical theatrical style, to convey their message. The Raging Grannies are people from all ages, genders and classes, what they have in common is the desire to have an impact on today's society by using music and participation during their non-violent protests and actions, in order to gain public attention and to make changes. As is stated in their official website “raingrannies.org” (<https://raginggrannies.org/philosophy/>, 08/06/25), to be a granny you need: a sense of humour and an ability both to be objective and to compromise when working with others. Willingness to make noise. An open heart to learn something new. No singing ability. Passion. Joy. Delight. No colour sense, obviously. A friendly disposition. Kindness. Scientific curiosity can't hurt. Maybe a sense of history and our place in it. There is so much more to be written on being a granny by those yet to come.

To conclude I would like also to open a little parenthesis on a local artist from the city where I am from, which is Padova. His name is Federico Soffiato and he is a well known artist. in particular for its sculpture titled “Madonna dell'Acqua Lurida” (“Our Lady of the Filthy Water”). As the name suggests, the sculpture represents the holy mother that covers the baby Jesus' nose, as if to prevent him from smelling something unpleasant. The sculpture is usually placed on contexts surrounded by water to denounce the pollution conditions and the quality of the waters of the seas and of the rivers. The first sculpture that was made, was out of wood, wood from a tree trunk felled due to the force of Storm Vaia, that in 2018 due to the strong

winds similar to those of a hurricane has damaged many forests and places in Europe, once again it highlights the consequences of climate change.

As a provocative work, it has sparked controversy, especially among right-wing politicians of the region who have criticized it. But as it is stated in the manifesto in the official website (<https://www.madonnadellacqualurida.org>, 08/06/25):

The sculpture immediately sparked controversies, although it was neither blasphemous nor offensive, as demonstrated by an article by Luisa Pozzar published in the Catholic press. Instead of being offensive or blasphemous, the Madonna of filthy waters is recognized by the Church as the first Madonna against pollution (Soffiato, n.d.).

However, these controversies help in a way to raise awareness on the issue, perhaps even among people who are not directly interested in climate change but who are affected by the religious component. In any case, Soffiato's main aim is to shed light on such an important issue as water quality, as it is a fundamental element that must be protected and cared for.



Fig. 20: Madonna dell'acqua lurida placed under the Specola, Padova (screenshot from the Instagram page @madonnadellacqualurida)

Recently, on May of 2025, Soffiato is releasing a new Madonna, called “Madonna della sana convivenza” (Madonna of Healthy Coexistence). It depicts a Madonna with various animals at her feet, and with her cloak and the gesture of her arms, she seems to be protecting them. According to the artist, this sculpture is inspired by the “Madonna della Misericordia” (Our Lady of Mercy) by Piero della Francesca. Soffiato with this sculpture wants to denounce intensive farming and the terrible environmental impact it has. For this reason, the artist will take the Madonna on a journey to various parts of Europe where intensive farming is present, and at each stop it will be possible to discuss the issue and spread awareness on the environmental debate (<https://madonnadellasanacconvivenza.org>, 08/06/25).



Fig. 21: Madonna della sana convivenza (screenshot from the Instagram page @madonnadellacqualurida)

All these initiatives and projects mentioned above are just a few examples of what exists worldwide for art and creative practices used as a mean to spread awareness. The decision of selecting just some of them is for the thesis's sake, but each of them are fundamental for the scope of raising environmental awareness and engaging always more people to act towards environmental conservation.

CHAPTER 3

3.1. Introduction to the research

In the next chapters I am going to describe the methodology used in order to develop the research part of this thesis. At first, I will explain the research questions and why and how they arise, then I will explain how the population was chosen and then the methods and samples that suited best to answer the selected questions for this kind of thesis. Furthermore, I am going to share the development of the research, and how along the path questions and structures were adapted to this specific case.

In the last chapter, I am going to analyse the interview results.

After many attempts, I have not been able to find any similar research, either regarding the topic nor the methodology. At least not in the languages that I most fluently speak, which are Italian, English and Spanish.

3.2. Research questions

The research part comes from the curiosity to investigate the relationship between environmental education, art and environmental awareness, and how these play a role in the foundation of projects that use creative practices to spread environmental awareness.

As models of projects that are aiming to raise environmental awareness through the use of art and creative practices, I took for the thesis two projects: the *ClimateMusic Project* and *Hot as Crochet*.

These two projects, and how they use art and creative practices to raise environmental awareness, are explained in the chapters before in depth.

During the analysis of the methods and practices of these projects and the literature research, I came across another similar project that has as well been mentioned in the chapters before, that is *Emotion for Change*, and because of its themes I decided to include it in this research.

The research questions, as previously stated, came at first from the interest to investigate more in depth the relation of arts and creative practices to environmental awareness methods, but also to research the roots of these kind of projects. It results relevant to understand how these

projects have been created and how they can make always more people engaged with environmental issues.

The research questions that I will try to investigate are the following:

- how do art and creative practices in the three examined projects play a role in the context of environmental awareness?
- what were the factors that contributed to the creation of the projects? Does the environmental education play a role somehow?
- what are the cognitive, affective and conative components of environmental awareness of the founders and thus consequently those of the projects?

The last question is important for the fact that, by investigating on the environmental awareness of the founders, it could be possible to find interesting insights on what makes someone so interested in environmental matters create a project like they did. By investigating on the beliefs of the founders, it may be possible also to understand what pushes and inspires individuals to take action and be part of such an important matter, as the spreading of environmental awareness is.

In fact, according to Ham, Mrčela and Horvat (2016) environmental awareness is a multidimensional concept, mainly formed by three components that are:

- the cognitive component, that comprises of our opinion of someone or something (regardless of whether we are right or not);
- the affective (emotional) component that consists of our feelings towards someone or something; and
- the conative (sometimes referred to as behavioural or “willingness to act”) component, that represents an intention to act in a certain way.

As pointed out by the authors, we can also consider that the first two components form and direct the third (behavioural) component.

During the analysis of the data, I will consider the three components as a unit, because of the fact that they influence each other and cannot be taken separately, since all of them compose the concept of environmental awareness.

3.3. Participants

I came in contact with the organization of *The ClimateMusic Project* thanks to university agreements, and in 2024 I have held an internship with them. Thanks to that, I have met through

videocalls the founder of the project; after my internship period, he made himself available for an interview to help with the research of the thesis.

The project *Hot As Crochet* was found by me in 2024, at first through the platform of Instagram, and then I proposed to be part of the project, and the founder accepted me right away as part of the team in presence. As in the first case, the founder of this project made herself available in order to help with the research of the thesis.

The selection of participants was made thanks to the fact that the founders, who had a previous contact with me, made themselves available for interviews and in general for further research regarding their projects.

After some research on similar projects that connected arts and creative practices to environmental awareness, also thanks to the suggestions of the founder of The ClimateMusic Project, I encountered another fitting project, that is Emotion for Change. As I saw that it was based in the same region as me and that it treated themes really suitable for this research, I decided to contact the founder through an email and ask if she was willing to take part of the research thesis, and she made herself available to take part of it.

I selected them because they occupy an important role in the foundation of an environmental and art related project, and because of that they are a relevant population in the research.

3.4. Ethical approval

All participants gave informed consent before participation, through a module of consent that was asked them to sign before the interview; in the said module some information about the research was specified. In particular, I have inserted in the module: the research name, which is creative practices for environmental awareness; a brief description of the research and of the methodologies for the study, thus the aim of the research is to investigate arts-based projects for environmental awareness. The research idea comes from the interest to investigate more in depth the relation of arts and creative practices with environmental awareness methods, but also to research the roots of these kind of projects. It results relevant to understand how these projects have been created and how they can make always more people engaged with environmental issues. By signing the module, they agreed and confirmed for example that:

- the objective of the study is research regarding creative methods for environmental awareness;
- each participant is free to seek clarification on the data collection procedure and on any aspect of the study from the research leader;

- the research activity will not pose any danger or risk, temporary or permanent, to the mental and physical well-being of the participants;
- each participant is free to leave the session at any stage of the research;
- refusal to participate or abandonment of participation in the research will not result in any negative consequences for the participant;
- they are of legal age;

And other information were given and requested in order to ensure that both the interviewer and interviewees felt secure.

The respondent were assured that there are no “right” or “wrong” answers in this interview and that if they do not want to answer a questions, they are free not to.

It was also previously explained that the interview consists of 24 questions divided into 6 sections and that the interview will be recorded and later transcribed as text. Any subsequent citation of the interview will be anonymous, and we can provide a printed copy of the interview text to interviewees upon request (Ilyushin & Azbel, 2017).

The Informed Consent form with all the information will be attached at the end of the thesis in the section “Attachments”. Before having them sign the form, I have informed them through emails about the aim and contents of the research in more depth.

To assure anonymity, the respondents will be assigned with a fictional name which will be “Founder A”, “Founder B” and “Founder C”. The number is not correlated in any way to the importance of each and not even to the order in which they were interviewed, or in which they will be introduced in the text.

The whole interview will take between half an hour and an hour.

3.5. Sample size

The decision to interview only three actors is justified by the fact that the research is small, due to funding reasons and because of the time available; therefore, the possibilities were limited. It was decided to make a smaller research in order to have more time to dedicate to each candidate, to ask more questions and to go more in depth with the research topics.

It is assumed that the point of view of the individual subject who makes themselves available for the interview is essential for capturing aspects of the complexity and details of phenomena,

that would otherwise remain confined within more standardized and generalizable characteristics that are less true to reality.

3.6. Research tools and methods

These interviews are part of academic research aimed at studying the values of the founders of art and creative practices for environmental awareness projects; and if the environmental education plays a role in it; and the correlation between creative practices and the environmental awareness in general. The method of semi structured interviews has been decided to investigate the research questions. This type of interview was chosen as Semi-structured interviews allow for the identification of important factors related to the use of a preliminary framework and, consequently, potential improvement measures (Di Cicco-Bloom & Crantree, 2006). Indeed, this kind of interview is the most suitable for investigating values and for when the research population is small, as in our case.

In order to prepare the semi-structured interview form, first, the literature was reviewed and then the interview questions were prepared following the schema of Ilyushin & Azbel (2017). I have taken inspiration from them and adapted the sections and the questions to the particular case that regards founders of environmental awareness with arts projects. Some questions were inspired also from the research of Kishita et al., (2018) and Severi (2024).

Furthermore, the interviewer's set list is predetermined to investigate values, but with questions that are open-ended and adaptable according to the direction of the interview.

The interviews will be recorded and transcribed, in agreement with the interviewees.

Two of the three interviews will be held in Italian and one in English; after that, the two in Italian will be translated integrally in English by the researcher.

In order to make the interview more comfortable, I repeated some parts of what they said and used them to introduce the next question, in order also to make them feel listened to.

The questions that were really necessary to be asked for the research purposes were those about the project creation, purpose, values and feelings, and then those about environmental education and about art in their life and in their projects.

After the first interview, through some deep analysis it was possible to further readjust the questions to the specific case. In fact, the order of the questions initially chosen, during the

actual interview were in an unclear order, and some resulted redundant. I realized that the questions were too many, moreover by following exactly the structure and order of the questions suggested by Ilyushin & Azbel (2017), I found that it was not suitable for this kind of research. As the more in-depth questions were mixed with those more superficial, they ruined the flow of the interview; because of that, I have adapted them to be more in line with the themes treated in this thesis.

Some questions resulted redundant, for the fact that the interviewees already answered to those in previous ones. Some of them also could be asked together for a more in-depth answer.

After these considerations, the structure of the interview has become different from the one of Ilyushin & Azbel (2017); from 9 sections, I decided to have only 6 and instead of 64 questions, I posed initially 24 questions that then became 18 and, in addition to that, 2 conclusive questions.

Results will be analysed with the help of previous research and literature, such as the work of Ilyushin & Azbel (2017) and Ham, Mrčela & Horvat's (2016) work: "Insights for measuring environmental awareness". Especially for the qualitative responses, I have also followed the model of the work of Türkoğlu (2019).

In the analysis will be selected the most relevant answers that will be useful in order to investigate the research questions. That is, answers related to environmental education, environmental awareness according to Ham, Mrčela and Horvat (2016) and its components, the purpose of the projects, and the background of the founders.

3.6.1. Discarded questions

During the first interview, I valued that these questions were not useful for the purpose of the research. Some of them were redundant, like n.1 and n.2; some were out of topic, like n.4 and n.5; and others were not clear or put too much pressure on the respondents, like n.1 and n.3.

1. Do you remember the first time you talked about your idea to someone, and it became real?
2. What is the most important meaning of your work in the project?
3. How are you changing the world with the help of your work?

4. What do you think that could be a future scenario about environmental preservation in the world?
5. What do you think are the actions that can be taken from an individual being for environmental issues?

3.6.2. Questions

Section 1: Professional biography regarding the project.

In this section, I will collect information on the founders' biography regarding their projects. In order to make it possible to have an idea of the setting and of the situation in which they are at the moment within the project. According to Ilyushin and Azbel (2017), this is also a way for clustering and identifying sub-groups who share a common pattern.

1. How did this project start? What was the idea behind it?
2. Is the project your main job or do you work also somewhere else?
3. What is your role in the project now? Besides you, how many people are now involved in it and what role do they have?

Section 2: Meaning and system of values of becoming a founder of an environmental awareness art project.

In this section, the founders are asked to reflect on the values and goals of their projects. More specifically, question 6 brings them to reflect on what is important for them regarding the project. And then the last two questions serve the purpose of identifying their meaning and values regarding the arts.

4. Were the goals at the beginning the same as they are now? Or did they change over time?
5. Do you aim to create a community? Also in the sense of building relations with people who have similar values in the long term?
6. What is the part of the project that you find most fulfilling and inspiring?
7. How do you think art plays a role in the success of your project? Would it work the same without the art part, just with the informative part? How does art play a role in engaging people?
8. Before the project, what role did art play in your life? And now?

Section 3: Attitude towards the project.

This section aims to understand the attitude of the founders towards their projects, at first with a positive oriented question and then with one that makes them talk about something more negative, that could perhaps be worrying for them. Both questions aim to investigate the emotional part, which is a component of the environmental awareness. The last question serves to see what the perception of the audience is, as seen from the founder.

9. Are you enjoying your work in the project at this point in your life, for example this month? Did something you achieved, or that one of your collaborators did, make you happy this month?
10. Is there something that makes you worried in/about your project?
11. What kind of people participate in the project the most? What range of ages?

Section 4: Environmental awareness of the founder and development/innovation in the project.

This section serves to investigate the cognitive component of the founders, their opinion on building the environmental awareness; but also to understand better what aspects are more important than others for the background of each founder in order to create this kind of projects, and moreover to investigate what kind of external influences are involved.

12. How and when have you started to come in contact with environmental topics and issues, and why and how did you decide you wanted to do something about it?
13. What kind of education did you have? Have you ever been in contact with environmental education in your childhood or adolescence?
14. Do you think that environmental education in school could be an important factor in order to have more environmentally conscious people? Do you think that if environmental education was more spread, more people would participate in projects like yours or even create more of them, or even that there would not be a need for them to exist?

Section 5: Free time.

This section is conclusive to the interview, its scope is to go back to less deep themes to conclude the session. Some interesting outputs that could come out of these last questions are how respondents relate with their hobbies, if the latter corresponds to the practices in the

projects and to see if any answers give more insights, especially on the relationship with art but also on the relationship with the environment.

15. What do you like to do in your free time? Do you have a hobby?

16. After the realization of the project, did your hobbies change? If so, why?

Closing questions:

These last feedback questions can make the interviewees reflect on what has been said and on what instead has not been said.

17. How do you feel after the interview?

18. Are there any questions we did not ask you, but you would like to answer?

CHAPTER 4

4.1. Analysis

All the questions mentioned above were specific to answer the research questions stated at the beginning of this chapter, and in general to do research on the topic of this thesis. The division and order of the questions was made to facilitate the fluency of the interview, so that the respondents could have a sense of chronological order in their discourse. Moreover, the depth and relevance of the questions was increased gradually during the duration of the interview, so that the more personal and reflective questions could be asked after a while from the beginning of the interview, in order to not to put the interviewees on edge.

The answers, especially those that correspond to the third research question, which is the environmental awareness of the founders, will be analysed considering the three components of environmental awareness of Ham, Mrčela and Horvat (2016) mentioned in the previous section, that are the conative, the cognitive and the affective.

During the interviews many interesting insights came out, some expected and some unexpected.

In the following analysis, I will examine the most relevant answers so as to investigate the research questions, not in the order in which they have been made but in a rational related order of contents and themes. These answers will be regarding the following topics, in the order:

- *The Projects*: how it started, what they find most fulfilling, the aim of creating a community, what makes them worry.
- *Environmental awareness and the three components*: the conative, the cognitive and the affective.
- *The role of the arts*: as a mean to convey an environmental message, the need to integrate art with scientific topics, relationships before and after/during the project, art in the founder's life and in the project.
- *Environmental education*: experiences during funders' childhood, connections with the natural world and the family component, their opinion about environmental education in schools.

To make the reading of this analysis more fluid, I have divided it into thematic topics, as listed above, in the form of subchapters.

4.1.1. The Projects

For all the three founders, the decision of creating the projects came out from the necessity of doing something, especially to respond to the environmental situation that, in different extents was becoming always more pressing. These are some examples of answers to what pushed them to start the project:

“The idea was to use it as a pretext for talking, to start a discourse, a dialogue at the end (on environmental issues)”. (Founder A)

“Out of a deep frustration on my part that, in 2014 there still seemed to be a lot of confusion about science that really should have been very clear because it had been clear really since the 1980s. (...) We can't let this happen. Describing climate science at the time and describing what would happen exactly as the way it's unfolded. (...) Do something that would help people to really connect with an issue that's otherwise very abstract for most people and when you think about it, the climate”. (Founder B)

“After the conference of the parties on climate change and there were different initiatives in Paris, different initiatives around the world that wanted to push in short, people's awareness”. (Founder C)

For some of them, there were one or more triggers on climate and in general environmental issues, but something that their answers have in common is the will to be part of a change, whether it is big or small, the will to start a dialogue.

An aspect that connects the founders is what they find most fulfilling about their work for the project, in which they have a leading and organizational role. In fact, they state:

“Meeting people, getting positive feedback from people. (...) One thing that I think was very satisfying because it really made me say, ‘Okay, so what I had in mind was going in a possible direction,’ is that still the people who came to do the workshop very often got involved in these other (environmental awareness) activities as well”. (Founder A)

“I think the most important thing for me is just being having the opportunity to work with really, really creative and awesome, brilliant people who come to the project”. (Founder B)

“But the beautiful thing that makes me happy is to deal with the people who are part of this group and not only that, others, we deal with hundreds of artists from all over the world. And to see that there is a changing sensibility and to see that so many people care and that there are so many beautiful people and beautiful initiatives. (...) when you deal with these things, you see

how many people support these initiatives, you feel that it's not as it seems, that is, there is as much black as there is white, let's say. Only the white has less visibility, and being inside these projects you can see it and it's very beautiful". (Founder C)

And it can be seen that their answers give already a preview of the response to the question of whether they aimed with their projects to create a community. In fact, all of the founders put a certain level of importance on the interaction with other people. What seems to be a factor of success of the projects is precisely the impact on others; only from that it is possible to see, from their point of view, a real feedback.

"Yes, yes, definitely yes. In fact, one of the things that just in my opinion made me say from the beginning this thing can work, because anyway it's typical that around a manual activity like this you create a community. A little bit the basic interesting thing is that, I mean why put together environmental awareness with a manual activity, I mean just because of that, because you sit around a table and you share information and you share manual skills, but at the same time you start a dialogue with a group of people that then over time has also expanded a lot, different people have come by who didn't know each other, who we didn't know, and so that's kind of what, maybe I think is the biggest strength of the project". (Founder A)

"Yes, our goal is to also build community at other levels as well. You know, when we do events, we always have an audience engagement segment where people can come together and talk about the music and what they experienced during the concert. You know, we work with the broader community of partners, and now as we start to accelerate, we also are really starting to work to build an online community as well". (Founder B)

"To create a community, to unite, in my opinion the key thing is to gather this desire of so many people and help them to be able to develop it, because when you feel isolated as certain situations also want us to feel you don't have confidence, and when you don't have confidence you become apathetic. Instead in being together you realize the beauty, by helping each other you transform things. It really has to change the general mentality, though, it goes through the individual, each of us". (Founder C)

Meanwhile, what made the interviewees worry about the project was not homogeneous, but very different between them, probably because of the different conformation of each project. As stated by them:

“The only thing that maybe I'm a little sorry about, that compared to the work we've done so far, including communication on social (...) we are probably going to lose a little bit on that side”. (Founder A)

“I mean our biggest challenge frankly is simply money. You know, what we do costs money, and you know, fundraising”. (Founder B)

“Let's say more than it worries me, I'd like there to be a turnover, that we're working on it actually, that we gain a minimum of, I don't say structure, but the ability to be able to move forward, even if I'm not there”. (Founder C)

Two out of the three respondents said that their projects have an heterogeneous audience, regarding ages because they can be adapted for everyone from children to elderly people, but also regarding gender and ethnicity. The audience of the third project instead was more homogeneous, consisting mainly of young women, roughly under the age of 35.

4.1.2. Environmental awareness and the three components

The environmental awareness level of the founders is obviously high. In these specific interviews we can say that, analysing the three components of environmental awareness according to Ham, Mrčela and Horvat (2016), the third one, which is the conative one, can be taken for granted. It can be taken for granted because the founders, by creating and working in and for their project, are already doing something, their willingness to act and their intentions towards environmental conservations and the spread of environmental awareness already translated into facts.

“I decided to try something that would be an easy entry point for people to learn more about the science to understand the urgency of the issue and to learn more about what could be done about it. And that's how the project started”. (Founder B)

What is interesting to investigate is the other two components that consequently influence the conative one, which are the cognitive and the affective.

With regard to the cognitive component, the opinion they have about the environment, environmental situation and actions toward environmental conservation is represented in these statements from the founders:

“That is, as far as I am concerned, it is one of the most important issues at the moment, because we are talking about the world we live in, and if there is no world we live in, then we don't exist either, so basically it should be a priority for everyone. I think the opposite is perhaps stranger”.

(Founder A)

“I do believe that, you know, take away the climate crisis, and you still have other issues that are out there that are equally important, from biodiversity loss to contamination and pollution, things like that”. (Founder B)

“I said to myself: - Calm down, perhaps the environmental problem, or at least not a problem, but anyway, lies at the very basis of life, of existence. A balanced relationship between humans and the environment-”. (Founder C)

The feelings and emotions towards the environment and all that concerns its protections, that comprise the affective component, are expressed for example in the following statements:

“As for (environmental) issues, there are many concerns, but I think that's normal. Ultimately, we live in a very complex world, and these are complex issues that are difficult to convey. I also think there is a lot of mystification, in the sense that there is misinformation, so I think that, in the end, the most important thing is to continue trying to disseminate the most accurate information possible”. (Founder A)

“this is definitely a labor of love, and if it were not, it wouldn't be possible because it's so much work. (...) You know, even understanding the importance of it, I mean, I think at the same time you really have to feel inspired to do it. Otherwise, it's just too much that you get crushed by the weight of the work”. (Founder B)

“However, from the moment you see beauty in something, you also love it a little and protect it. (...) It is not through fear that we grow, but through love. And the desire to protect”. (Founder C)

4.1.3. The role of the arts

As expected, the arts play an important role in the founders' lives, in different ways and extents. For some of them music is crucial, for another creative practices are, such as the crochet, and for yet another the visual arts are. And this applies to both their personal life and mostly their projects.

All of the respondents confirmed that in their projects the arts are fundamental, mostly because of the fact that arts can be a definitely more powerful mean to convey the message on environmental issues than informative initiatives alone are.

“Without the artistic part there are already many (projects) and it is also partly proven to be partially ineffective in communication, because very often even graphic visualization of data scares and drives people away rather than bringing them closer, and so I would say yes, it is fundamental the artistic part because otherwise the effect would not have been achieved”. (Founder A)

“As cultural responses to the climate emergency I think are completely vital and again, they're vital because issues like climate change are incredibly complex. (...) the arts in general are a way for people to, as I say, have the ability to begin to interact with an issue in a way that's non-threatening, in a way that is understandable intuitively, at least at an intuitive level or a visceral level, and where people can then begin to dive in and begin to learn more”. (Founder B)

“That is, the same things have been repeated for years and years and people are now informed, however, it is not enough”. (Founder C)

Having regard to this recurring opinion, that information alone about climate change or other related issues are not enough, there is the need to take a step forward. And in order to overcome this problem, according to the respondents, arts come in help. Arts are the way in which people are engaged at best, not only on an interest level, but also on a deeper emotional one.

“These two worlds (arts and science) that need so much to work together. Science speaks to the head, art speaks to the heart, and the head without the heart doesn't get busy. *Name* who has worked with us a few times, has often told us that he has been saying the same things (about environmental issues) for forty years, but nothing changes”. (Founder C)

For the founders the relationship they had with art did not change before and after/during the project, what they said that changed is their perception of some artistic aspects.

“I realized that I had an evolution in this part (artistic) as well, and so maybe this especially”. (Founder A)

“Yes, in the sense that I have different perceptions that I didn't have before, that is, it is always basic passion, the love for music is always that. However, the way of perception is different”. (Founder C)

An interesting insight that resulted from the interviews is the fact that all three of the founders have a strong artistic side, in different forms and ways, but they are all passionate about it. And what is relevant is the fact that all of them took their passion and made it the core part of their projects. In fact, it is not only something that they would do in their free time, as they state in the interviews, but it is something that they enjoy so much that it became the artistic and most important part of their projects.

4.1.4. Environmental education

All the three respondents have not given emphasis to any environmental education given to them at a young age, neither in elementary nor in middle school. Only one founder, after a more in-depth question on environmental education, recalled having done some activities regarding the recycling process or similar issues, but nothing really meaningful according to the respondent.

Nonetheless, another respondent said he attended a course related to environmental education in college, but nothing prior to that. And then he also did a master's degree on environmental sciences that was meaningful for his pro-environmental behaviour and knowledge.

In general, what seems to appear from the respondents' answers when talking about environmental education is that it was not so relevant for them, especially in school as child, because they did not experience it.

An interesting thing that comes out from the analysis of the interviews is the fact that all of the three founders recall having had a childhood where, being in contact with nature, being in nature, was very important instead of having a proper environmental education. And they say that it could be one of the reasons that made them more sensitive about environmental related problems, also thanks to the fact that their families were used to be in nature or were mindful about topics like climate change or environment related issues.

“So it's an issue (the environmental one) that has always touched me, anyway. I don't know if partly because of a sensitivity in the family as well. (...) I really like being outdoors, so I go out a lot hiking, trekking, as often as I can”. (Founder A)

“I was very lucky because I was able with my family to spend a lot of time outdoors (...), especially on the ocean and so that already gave me, it made me very close to the natural world and when I got into school, I was already very interested in environmental issues”. (Founder B)

“So, I've always liked it very much, I mean I feel very countryish, I was born in the middle of the fields, the poppies, the earth, the mud balls. And then I remember, I mean I always liked the world and nature, I used to do explorations. (...) I always did things like that in the middle of nature”. (Founder C)

Despite this, all respondents, in response to the question of whether they think environmental education is a topic that should be covered and be part of the program in schools, answered in the affirmative.

“In my opinion yes, (...) I think we have also gone a step further than ‘reuse’ and ‘recycling’, I mean beautiful reuse and recycling, however in my opinion we would need something a little more informative (...) it is an issue that is being felt more and more by the new generations, (...) but it also creates a lot of anxiety, and so I think it would be useful to introduce both quality information and tools to manage ecoanxiety anyway”. (Founder A)

“(...) take away the climate crisis, and you still have other issues that are out there that are equally important, from biodiversity loss to contamination and pollution, things like that. And I do think that the absolute overriding critical task for our species in general in this century, now among the adults who are alive now, is to find a way to redefine how we relate to each other and how we relate to the planet around us. (...) I think that environmental understanding and education should be an absolute core part of every young person's education”. (Founder B)

“It is critical, very important”. (Founder C)

4.2. Discussion of results

The founders assumed their role of respondents easily and stayed involved in the dialogue during the whole interview. It has been observed that there seems to be a link between the founders' ages of experience and the degree of confidence in responding to the questions. No agitation or anxiety were perceived, but in general relaxed answers to the interviewer (Ilyushin & Azbel, 2017). No one refused to answer any questions.

The aim of this research part of the thesis was to investigate the dynamics of the creation of a project aimed to the spread of environmental awareness with arts, from the perspective of the founders of these realities. And then to understand how art and creative practices can be useful in these kinds of projects, where the field is dominated by scientific data and approaches.

It is important to consider that this research for necessity has been conducted on a small scale, and it could be implemented for a bigger population and more reliable data on a bigger scale.

So, the result I am going to explicit are of a small sample, whose purpose is to have a rough but solid idea of what the dynamics and elements in this kind of phenomena are, and not to generalize the results based on schematic data.

To respond to the research question of “how do art and creative practices in the three examined projects play a role in the context of environmental awareness?”, what emerges from the interviews is that the artistic component is fundamental to the success and functionality of the project. In fact, all interviewees agree that without music or crochet, people's involvement, especially on an emotional level, would not be possible. Art therefore plays a real role in emotional involvement, enabling people to develop a sense of affection and emotion that binds them to a specific topic. As we have seen previously, since the affective component is part of what makes up environmental awareness, this goes back to how fundamental art is to the success of these projects and to the development of awareness among participants.

But it is not only art, as the interviews show, that is a means with which a project like these can go beyond standard and dry communication and reach an audience that is genuinely interested and involved in the issues being addressed. The founders often repeat that informative communication alone cannot bring engagement from people. However, this does not mean that scientific data is not important. In fact, all projects are based on real data, whether it be temperature changes, pollution, or data concerning specific areas. But what differentiates their communication is precisely the artistic component and the deeper involvement that this can create. This is also thanks to the fact that these projects are carried out in places and contexts where it is possible to experience them in person, whether they be talks, concerts, crochet workshops, etc. The interviewees affirm that experiencing something like this in person makes the concepts and issues stick with people longer. This is both because a direct experience is in no way comparable to an online experience, for example, and also because in this type of context, the participation of several people makes it possible to share a sense of community with other participants. It is possible to share practices, thoughts, skills, feedback, and values, and it is precisely this sense of closeness and community that drives many people to continue participating and being active in a project. This brings us back to the first component of environmental awareness, namely the cognitive component, in which people can form and share their opinions on issues related to the environment, including sustainability, conservation, and, in some cases, environmental activism. Returning to the initial question, it is in all these ways

that art plays a fundamental role in environmental awareness. As for the last component, the conative, in this case, when talking about people who actively participate in these projects, we can say that their willingness to participate and act is already reflected in their participation in the projects. But in general, it is up to the individual to decide and evaluate to what extent and in what way to act, according to their level of environmental awareness.

Proceeding with the analysis of what came out regarding the research question: “what were the elements that contributed to the creation of the projects? Does environmental education play a role somehow? Or for example the previous relationship with nature and the environment?”

To answer this question, various statements made by the interviewees were taken into consideration. First of all, the analysis showed that environmental education, especially at school and at a young age, had no direct impact on any of the interviewees. It is important to consider that the three interviewees are all of different ages, one of them attended school in a different state, so their experience of environmental education is not directly comparable. Despite this, it is clear from their interviews that environmental education was not part of their school curriculum. This was both because it was not considered a subject worthy of inclusion in schools at the time, and because teachers were unaware of the possibility of integrating certain topics into their lessons. In fact, environmental education, particularly through art-based methods, as seen in chapter 2.3, is still not very widespread. In fact, only one of the founders had any real experience with environmental education, but this was after he had already passed the developmental stage, i.e., in college. It therefore appears that in this limited case, environmental education at school at a young age did not have any significant impact on the development of environmental awareness, mainly because it was not taught at all. However, what emerged from the responses of all participants was that they had in any case developed a strong relationship with the natural environment. In other words, a passion for being outdoors, in nature and in contact with it, which unites all the founders. Furthermore, the responses show that the family plays a significant role, which seems to be the origin of this interest from an early age.

Another noteworthy element that emerges from the interview analysis, regarding the factors that contributed to the creation of such a project, is the founders' common desire to create something that could bring about change. This desire emerges from the interviews as a trigger factor; for some, it was following the 2015 conference of the parties, for others it was the frustration built up following a master's degree on environmental issues, stemming from a

general confusion among people on issues that should have been clear for some time (such as climate change), and for others it was participation in meetings with an association dealing with environmental issues throughout the territory.

All these motivations, and many more, prompted them to create something of their own, a project that could help raise people's environmental awareness with art as medium.

With the whole interview we researched on what are the cognitive, affective and conative components of environmental awareness of the founders and thus consequently those of the projects, which was the third and last research question of the thesis. We answered to this question already during the first part of this chapter. Moreover, we gave initially for granted the conative components of the founders, for the fact that they are already acting upon the environmental awareness as they created the projects. But more than that, it is possible to say that their conative component is shown also in the interviews, especially when they explain the actions they are taking to help the environment and how they are actively trying to achieve their goal. An example:

“But what we know we can do is we can hopefully connect a lot more people to the issue that wouldn't otherwise connect to the issue and engage with it early on. Early enough, even if very late. And so, you know, the danger, of course, is that things just start, the climate system just starts doing its own thing and then things get out of control and then that's, you know, then there's at that point, you know, we say that action on the climate emergency is urgent. But it's only urgent because we still can do something about it”. (Founder B)

Thanks to these interviews, it was possible to answer all three research questions initially posed. This research has led to new knowledge that was previously unknown, or little known. However, the research does not end here, as the possibilities of implementing this type of analysis are vast and useful to investigate. In fact, trying to understand and comprehend the phenomena that drive people to create projects with the goal of environmental awareness is fundamental.

CONCLUSION:

The aim of this thesis was to answer the question of what role art and creative practices play in spreading environmental awareness, especially within projects that use these means.

Firstly, through a review of the literature and the existing projects, it was possible to gain a general overview of how art is used in the environmental field. This includes environmental art, a derivation of Environmental Humanities that studies how art is created with the specific aim of raising environmental awareness in various fields. Subsequently, it was seen how art-based methods are often used in contexts where environmental education is sought. “By encouraging exploration and experimentation, educators can cultivate a spirit of innovation and creativity among students, empowering them to approach environmental challenges with fresh perspectives and creative solutions” (Liao, 2024, 26549). In fact, these are particularly effective, especially in developing interest and empathy towards the environment and, consequently, more attentive and caring behaviours. Sobel observed: “What’s important is that children have an opportunity to bond with the natural world, to learn to love it and feel comfortable in it, before being asked to heal its wounds” (1996, 10).

However, these examples are mainly based on cases applied to children or young people attending elementary, middle, or high school. “A key point of environmental education through art is the provision of interactive experiences and the adoption of creative processes to connect children with the natural environment” (Papavasileiou et al., 2021, 288); consequently, the question arises: “why not do the same with adults?” Adults are often not considered in academic contexts of art-based methods. Furthermore, most of the research cited reports a lack of importance given to this type of research and urges further exploration of the topic and greater emphasis on how art can be a functional means of educating individuals to be aware and attentive to the environment.

To investigate the role of art in environmental awareness projects, two projects were taken as examples: ‘Hot as Crochet’ as a small local case and ‘The ClimateMusic Project’ as a more widespread international case. Other projects and artists who use art to spread a pro-environmental message were then identified and investigated.

The projects considered can all be placed in the field of environmental art, but they can also be considered as art-based methods for environmental education.

All this led to a consequent interest in investigating specific cases and, thanks to field research through qualitative interviews, it was possible to understand in greater detail the phenomena

affecting the projects. What emerged is that art is a fundamental component for the success of these kinds of projects. In fact, it is art and creative practices that manage to convey the message in such a way that it can be internalized and understood. As we have seen in previous chapters, art and creative practices, in all their forms, manage in various ways to reach the emotional sphere. In doing so, particularly through the face-to-face encounters that the projects involve, it is possible to generate empathy and awareness of the environment in people who may never have come into contact with certain issues in such a physical way. Indeed, the fact that these projects are usually in person and provide real data on climate change and related issues means that information can be conveyed, but the usage of the artistic component makes it more effective and less frightening for those who approach it.

The projects of the founders interviewed all have the characteristic of being based on art and creative practices for environmental awareness. The founders all appear to be interested in environmental conservation to some extent.

In my specific case, environmental education was the turning point that sparked my interest in environmental issues and started my relationship with the environment. It was therefore interesting to investigate whether this was also the case for the founders. In fact, this was an unexpected result, because this was not indeed the case for the founders. For them, regardless of the diverse cues they received during their education years, environmental education at a young age was not relevant, therefore they all believe that it should be a more important part of school curricula, based on a predetermined program. What emerged as a common element in their approach to environmental issues was, in part, the family component, which was already sensitive to similar issues. But even more so, it was the time they spent during their childhood in nature and with nature. It would be interesting to investigate further, perhaps with a larger sample, how much time spent in nature can actually be a factor for individuals who have a greater sensitivity towards it. In fact, empathy towards the environment is fundamental, and this thesis suggests how art plays a fundamental role in creating and activating it.

All of this must be taken into consideration, but with one precondition: Art in contexts of environmental awareness must be used and carefully considered in the right way, otherwise it risks being counterproductive. For example, as mentioned by “Founder C,” a piece of music that creates discomfort or even guilt in those who listen to it can generate eco-anxiety. For this reason, it is important to tailor what is offered to the audience and what is most suitable for them. Therefore, coherence and attention are needed.

The limitations of this study mainly concern the reduced time frame and sample. With a larger and more representative number of participants and more time to conduct more in-depth interviews, focusing on more specific topics and narrowing the target of the interviews, it would be possible to achieve a result comparable with that of Ilyushin & Azbel (2017), or similar to others of equal relevance.

As mentioned above, it would be interesting for future research to investigate the family component in greater depth, and the relationship with time spent in and with nature. Another aspect that could be investigated further is how these types of projects can be expanded into various contexts, so that it becomes a standard approach both in school settings and informal ones, for local and international communities.

As stated at the beginning of this thesis, the agency of a single individual is relative when it comes to climate change, as is the tangibility and veracity of climate change itself. However, even if we are not geologists, physicists, etc., it is still right to talk about it. It is right to make climate change part of everyday conversation, to be informed about it. It is not a topic that should be exclusively reserved for experts or policy makers. Even if it is not physically verifiable, even if it may seem distant, it is necessary for more and more people to talk about it and take action in their own small way, which over time could become increasingly significant. And art and creative practices are fundamental in achieving this in contexts where information alone is not enough.

When you have affection or love for a certain object, you are motivated to protect it, learn about it, and care for it. This also applies to the environment and to how we behave towards it, which can also be developed through experiences in contact with nature but also with arts. A pedagogy that can recreate this can become a reason for people to protect the environment and beings (Gray & Thomson, 2016, 7-9).

Perceiving art could potentially provide a personal, direct experience with climate change, it may help to bring the issue closer and provide the emotional basis for taking action. Provided that the emotional impact of the experience is strong enough, the experience may be remembered for a long time. Art can trigger emotional, cognitive and behavioural responses in both the long and short term (Roosen, Klöckner & Swim, 2018, 8).

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Attachments:

- Informed consent form



Ca' Foscari
University
of Venice

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Research name: Creative practices for environmental awareness.

Brief description of the research and of the methodologies for the study: The aim of the research is to investigate arts-based projects for environmental awareness. The research idea comes from the interest to investigate more in depth the relation of arts and creative practices with environmental awareness methods, but also to research the roots of these kind of projects. It results relevant to understand how these projects have been created and how they can make always more people engaged with environmental issues.

I, the undersigned _____
born in _____ on _____
e.mail _____ cellphone _____

declare to be aware that:

- the objective of the study is research regarding creative methods for environmental awareness;
- each participant is free to seek clarification on the data collection procedure and on any aspect of the study from the research leader;
- the research activity will not pose any danger or risk, temporary or permanent, to the mental and physical well-being of the participants;
- each participant is free to leave the session at any stage of the research;
- refusal to participate or abandonment of participation in the research will not result in any negative consequences for the participant;

I further declare that:

- **I am of legal age;**
- **I have carefully read and fully understood all the points in the previous statement;**
- **I have been able to ask all necessary questions to the person in charge of the research;**
- **he/she gives his/her consent to participate in the research.**

Date _____ Signature _____

CONSENT TO THE PROCESSING OF PERSONAL AND SENSITIVE DATA

I, undersigned _____

☐ agree

☐ do not agree

to the processing of my personal and sensitive data collected in this research in the terms and manner indicated in the following points, in compliance with applicable current regulations and in particular:

- the data collected will be used for the purpose of conducting the research described in the foreword and then processed in a manner that is not incompatible with that purpose;
- the interview will be fully recorded and transcribed, then the collected data will be processed anonymously;
- communication to third parties and/or publication for scientific purposes may take place only after the data themselves have been anonymized, by and under the direct responsibility of the person in charge of the research.

Date _____ Signature _____

RESEARCH LEADER: Misha Pizzati

cellphone:; e.mail:

- There are no “right” or “wrong” answers in this interview;
- If respondents do not want to answer the questions, they are free not to;
- The interview consists of 24 questions divided into 6 sections;
- The interview will be recorded and later transcribed as text;
- Any subsequent citation of the interview will be anonymous, and we can provide a printed copy of the interview text to interviewees upon request.