

RAISING AWARENESS ABOUT SUSTAINABILITY IN THE CULTURAL MANAGEMENT PRACTICE¹

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Summary:

Sustainability is not just a word, but a “cultural change process”, which requires also an ongoing learning both of individuals and organizations in the cultural sector, so that they can see the “bigger picture” of operating in a harmony with the overall political, economic and social systems. There are several areas where we see crossings between arts and sustainability. The first one is the increased awareness of artists about global issues. Second, contemporary art is becoming more and more interactive and engaging by different means – artists involve audiences and people in their interactive projects. Third, art nowadays are not anymore closed within disciplines: the ability of artists to work interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary is becoming more and more important. As political agendas and scientific projects rarely take artistic perspectives into consideration, the artistic communities worldwide combine efforts and form their own networks, associations and coalitions.

Key words:

sustainability, sustainability management, arts, culture, interdisciplinarity, community

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Culture as part of the sustainability model

It is indeed important to keep a critical eye on what people actually mean when they use the word “sustainability”. The most commonly used defini-

- 1 The article is based on a video interview, David O'Brien Centre for Sustainable Enterprise, Concordia University, Montreal: <http://johnmolson.concordia.ca/en/faculty-research/research-centres/david-obrien-centre-for-sustainable-enterprise/our-people/research-associates>
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tion of sustainability (World Commission on Environment and Development., UNESCO document 1987) is that this means “*meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs.*”³

The word “sustainability” becomes especially fashionable in the first decade of the 21st century – with diverse definitions and interpretations. When discussing sustainability, we usually mean two things:

- A system that can run effectively without further input from outside because it uses its own resources once when set in motion.
- Financial sustainability – a business model that generates money in a long-term on a reliable basis.

Sustainability also refers to the process or strategy of moving toward a sustainable future in all areas, including arts and culture.

The world of arts and sustainability

The so called “*four-pillar model of sustainability*”⁴ incorporates four inter-linked dimensions:

- environmental responsibility
- economic health
- social equity
- cultural vitality (well being, creativity, diversity and innovation)

This model highlights that culture and arts are critical for building up a sustainable future in the 3 other areas. It also emphasizes on the importance to consider strategic support systems for arts and cultural organizations and projects. The “four pillars” model recognises that culture contributes immensely to building liveable cities and communities where people want to stay, live, work, and visit, which actually plays a major role in supporting social and economic health in a sustainable mode. The quality of life and vitality

3 Reference: United Nations. 1987. “Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development.” General Assembly Resolution 42/187, 11 December 1987.

4 Reference: Culture: The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability, CECC – Cultural Research Salon, SFU, March 31, 2006: <http://www.cultureandcommunities.ca/downloads/Salons/Salon3-handout.pdf>

of our communities are close related to its cultural expression, engagement, and dialogue.

The “four pillars” model is also about the need to incorporate culture, arts and creativity in the regional sustainable plans and strategies. This is one of the reasons why the “creative city” approach to policy and development plans have become very important worldwide in the last years.

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Engaging professionals in sustainability and the arts

The issues of sustainability management are more understood and applied in the business world than in the field of arts. Here are several areas where I see crossings between arts and sustainability:

- a. The first one is the increased awareness of artists about global issues: Artists have a special ability to see and explore what other people do not seem they inspire, provoke, bring on the surface our emotions; they shake us and make us think and change. Sustainability is about the need for a global positive change. This is why their engagement in global issues, including sustainability is crucially important.
- b. Second, contemporary art is becoming more and more interactive and engaging by different means – artists involve audiences and people in their interactive projects. Artists are “leaders” and “opinion-makers” and they are in a great position to provoke people to rethink the future of our planet. Two of the many examples of such artistic-public collaborative approaches are:
 - Julie’s Bicycle⁵: making environmental sustainability an intrinsic part of music and performing arts; working with the arts and creative industries to understand and reduce their environmental impacts, and
 - Tipping Point⁶: aims to ‘energise the creative response to climate change’. Through intense two-day gatherings taking place around the

5 Website: www.juliesbicycle.com

6 Website: <http://www.tippingpoint.org.uk/>

world, the organisers aim to precipitate intense dialogue between artists, scientists and others close to the heart of the issue.

- c. Arts nowadays are not anymore closed within disciplines: the ability of artists to work interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary is becoming more and more important – not only between art disciplines, but also between the arts and other areas such as environment, health care, education, social area, etc. This cross-collaborative commitment is an efficient way to communicate sustainability and to link artistic ideas with burning issues related to sustainable development.
- d. Managing artistic organisations and projects in a sustainable mode is not a new, but is a gradually developing trend worldwide – for example taking care of electricity and water consumption during big events, recycling of garbage, using recycled materials in artistic projects, etc.
- e. Finally: as political agendas and scientific projects rarely take artistic perspectives into consideration and the debates around climate change tend to be shaped by economist, scientists and politicians but not artists, the artistic communities worldwide combine efforts and form their own networks, associations and coalitions. These networks aim at raising public awareness about climate change, to encourage the implementation of environmentally friendly artistic practices and to also inspire and involve communities. They are engaged in advocacy-based actions to catalyze changes among the general public. Some of these networks bring together landscape architects, artists, engineers, ecologists and educators who feel passionate about improving and sustaining the quality of our urban and natural environment, including through artistic means.

Engagement of young people

In order to tackle climate change effectively, it's crucial to engage younger generation. There are numerous successful examples of involving children and young people in concrete environmental projects with artistic elements where, young people can get hands-on experience with tools and strategies that can be used in our daily life to decrease CO2 emissions.

One of the projects aimed specifically at young people is Cape Farewell⁷ project, initiated in by David Buckland in 2001 (a designer, artist and film-

7 Website: www.capefarewell.com

maker). It is widely acknowledged as “*the most significant sustained artistic response to climate change*“. The ambition was to create a new bank of ideas, to find a new language to talk about climate change. The project brings artists, scientists and educators together to address and raise awareness about climate change. Together with annual expeditions to the Arctic (started in 2003), the team organises exhibitions and events. The project is focused on the effectiveness of combining science, art and other subject areas in the educational curriculum to educate young people about climate change and to inspire them to engage creatively with the challenge.

New technologies in help of raising awareness about sustainability through the arts

A popular blog among artistic and environmental communities is ecoart-space⁸. Founded in 1997, this was one of the first websites dedicated to art and environmental issues. Ecoartspace is a growing community of artists, scientists, curators, writers, non-profit organisations and businesses that are developing creative and innovative strategies to address global environmental issues. Their approach is participatory, collaborative, interdisciplinary and uniquely educational.

Other well known blogs and networking websites are:

- Eco Art blog⁹ – A blog on ecological aesthetics, art research and land poetry.
- Ecostreet blog¹⁰ – an independent green blog and web directory.
- Ecotheatre blog¹¹ – A project focusing on how theatre artists can strive to create theatre without sacrificing the environment and the long-term health of our communities.
- Green Museum¹² – a 100% volunteer run online museum of environmental art founded in 2001. The goal is to inform, inspire and connect people through environmental art and encourage the creation of new work .

8 Website: <http://ecoartspace.blogspot.com/>

9 Website: <http://ecoartblog.blogspot.com/>

10 Website: www.ecostreet.com

11 Website: <http://ecotheater.wordpress.com/>

12 Website: <http://greenmuseum.org/>

- GreenMuse¹³ – A website of green ideas and innovations, covering environmental news and green design from around the world.
- Sustainability and contemporary art blog – deepening relationship between contemporary art and notions of environmental sustainability.

Artistic communities are also looking at the connections between nature and technology. For example, the Nature Version¹⁴ is a survey of artists who reinvent environmentalism for a digital age in a number of ways: by examining how digital technologies can make ecological problems more salient, by reusing and recycling obsolete technologies for new uses, and by exploring how digital spaces and the public domain may require environmental protection much like nature. Re-imagining the relationship between nature and technology, Nature Version 2.0 suggests an ethics of the network and an environmentalism of natural, built and digital spaces.

A valuable online collection of resources is the Research in Focus on LabforCulutre “Climate Change: artists respond“, completed in 2010¹⁵. It looks at individual and collective artistic practices in Europe and beyond and the way we share knowledge and experience on initiating and running such artistic projects. The resources collection highlights artistic projects, online platforms and individual viewpoints raising awareness about climate change among artistic communities.

A success story merging arts and sustainability

Arts and festivity are an amazing source of pleasure, happiness, discovery, learning and wonder. Major cultural events can cause damage to sustainability, or if well managed – can contribute to the greater welfare of the population. The International Jazz Festival ¹⁶ in Montreal was opened more than three decades ago. Now the festival features every year more than 1000 concerts and activities – 60% of which are free of charge. The festival brings over 2 million visitors.

13 Website: <http://thegreenmuse.com/>

14 Reference: <http://ecoarttech.net/sustainablefutures/exhibition.html>

15 Reference: <http://www.labforculture.org/en/home/contents/climate-change-artists-respond>

16 Website: <http://www.montrealjazzfest.com>

From the first editions of the festival, organizers demonstrated care and respect to social and environmental values through concrete actions – and in that time there were no many discussions about “sustainability“. The jazz festival now is now a model for sustainable and responsible development.

- 20 years ago the festival was already recovering waste on its activity – a very pioneering action among the artistic communities in that time. Today, the Festival recuperates approximately 30 tons of waste (carton, plastic, glass, aluminum, wood) – in cooperation with consortium Echo-Logique.
- The festival is carbon neutral (removing as much carbon dioxide from the atmosphere as we put in.) for already four years now – making it one of the first events in North America to have received that certification.
- Another effort made is using stage equipment with energy efficiency standards, using organic cleaning products in dining areas around the festival, printing promotional materials on recycled paper; harvesting rainwater to water plants, composting, offering ecological clothing and accessories for sale in the boutiques.
- The festival organisers care not only about the environmental issues and economic aspects, but also-about the cultural development of the community- supporting local artistic talents, empowering community to make music through a free outdoor program – an extraordinary public platform for the local artists.
- Other way of involvement in the community is that the festival hires more than 1000 people every year – young people and students. It also offers personalized services for people with limited mobility.

Engaging professionals in sustainability and the arts

We need collective efforts and constructive dialogue at all levels to tackle the complex relations between sustainability, culture, arts and communities.

- First of all: we need to bring the cultural dimension of sustainability at the agenda of policy-makers through collective advocacy actions. Policy makers still consider culture and arts as a “luxury” area to subsidized, but not as an essence of our sustainable future.
- Second, it is important to include cultural and artistic projects in the plans and strategies related to corporate social responsibility: cultural

and artistic life of communities is equally important as their education, health and well being is.

- Third: collaboration between artists and educational institutions is essential in order to foster experimental learning. Young people are the ambassadors of the sustainable development messages and without their understanding and active engagement we couldn't succeed.
- Finally, we could initiate and invest in smaller community projects and emerging artistic initiatives related to sustainability in every small city. Effective changes sometimes starts from very small projects, and on individual level. If each one of us is involved in one way or another in creative and artistic solutions to sustainability problems, we could achieve a lot.

PODIZANJE SVESTI O ODRŽIVOSTI U PRAKSI KULTURNOG MENADŽMENTA

Apstrakt

Održivost nije samo reč, već „proces kulturne promene“, koji takođe zahteva permanentno edukovanje i pojedinaca i organizacija u kulturnom sektoru, da bi mogli da vide „širu perspektivu“ upravljanja u skladu sa celokupnim političkim, ekonomskim i društvenim sistemima. Ima nekoliko oblasti u kojima možemo videti preklapanje umetnosti i održivosti. Prva je povećana svest umetnika o svetskim problemima. Drugo, savremena umetnost postaje sve više i više interaktivna i angažovana na različite načine – umetnici uključuju publiku i pojedince u svoje interaktivne projekte. Treće, umetnost u današnje vreme više nije zatvorena u okvire određenih disciplina: sposobnost umetnika da rade interdisciplinarno i trans-disciplinarno postaje sve značajnija. Pošto politički planovi i naučni projekti retko kada uzimaju u obzir umetničku perspektivu, zajednice umetnika širom sveta udružuju napore i prave sopstvene mreže, asocijacije i koalicije.

Ključne reči: *održivost, menadžment održivosti, kultura, interdisciplinarnost, zajednica*