



Culture and sustainability

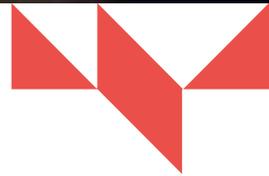


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Nordic Culture Point



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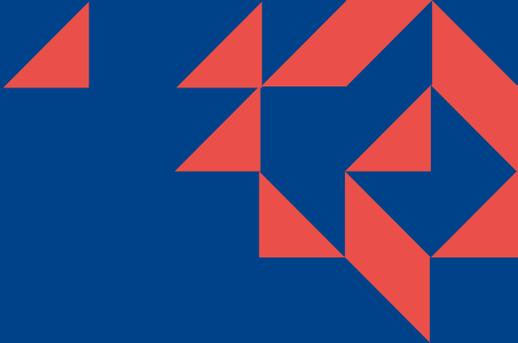
Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Introduction – Per Voetmann | 4 |
| Promoting a sustainable Nordic Region through strong cultural partnerships – Per Voetmann..... | 5 |
| The Role of Culture in Sustainable Society – Sustainability in Art and Cultural Projects – Marjo Mäenpää..... | 14 |
| Training and educating in culture and sustainability in practice – Laura McAtackney | 16 |
| How to work with art and sustainability: Pappa'n i de mänge land / Daddy World Wide – Angela Goldin | 20 |
| Funding as a tool for sustainability in dance – and in other art forms – Sanna Rekola | 22 |
| On “Bullshit!” and what comes next – Ulrika Lind..... | 25 |



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Nordic Culture Point



Introduction

Sustainability is one of the defining themes of the 21st century. It receives huge amounts of attention, and is vital to the survival of humanity. But it is increasingly clear that sustainability is not just about survival – it is also very much about being able to live a good life. And the concept of a link between a “good life” and culture is interesting. As such, culture and sustainability are also on the political agenda.

Nordic co-operation acknowledged this when the culture ministers adopted their strategy for 2013–2020. One of the strategy’s themes is the sustainable Nordic Region. The idea is that culture can enhance the sustainability of the Nordic societies, for example by being accessible and inclusive.

Nordic Culture Point’s events and funding schemes help turn the culture ministers’ strategy into reality. Cultural encounters are the tool we use to achieve this. By bringing together, ideas, projects, etc., we generate knowledge, development, progress and solidarity. In practical terms, we contribute physical space (events), financial space (funding) and digital space (knowledge, dialogue and inspiration).

The purpose of this short publication is to make the whole theme of culture and sustainability more tangible, and to inspire not only people in the cultural sector – institutions, artists and applicants to the grant programmes that Nordic Culture Point runs on behalf of the Nordic Council of Ministers – but everyone interested in culture and the role of art in society.

Per Voetmann
Director



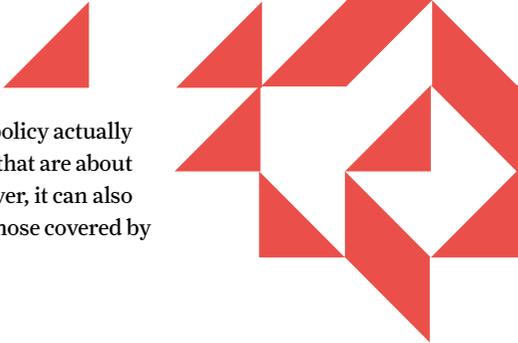
Promoting a sustainable Nordic Region through strong cultural partnerships

Per Voetmann, Director, Nordic Culture Point

Culture is an important foundation stone, not just for society's survival, but for ensuring that it thrives. This is perhaps culture's most significant contribution to a sustainable society. And this perspective forms the basis for many of Nordic Culture Point's activities. We contribute to a more sustainable Nordic Region, because an active cultural life is, quite simply, the foundation for a well-functioning and coherent welfare state. In the following, I will summarise some of Nordic Culture Point's observations and insights, and indicate the direction our work will take in future.

What is culture?

There are many different definitions of culture. Some position it as merely synonymous with art, but this is a very narrow conception. Others interpret culture as virtually everything people do, but this is perhaps too all-encompassing. It is possible, therefore, that culture cannot be precisely defined in any meaningful way. Suffice to say that Nordic Culture Point's concept of culture is much broader than just art, but not so wide that it includes virtually everything. Nevertheless, as discussed below, the nature of the concept can be very important.



There is also a discussion of what cultural policy actually is. In this context, it is restricted to policies that are about or affect the frameworks for culture. However, it can also encompass policies from areas other than those covered by the culture ministers.

What is sustainability?

The Brundtland Report¹ defines sustainable development as follows: “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” Sustainability is therefore the idea that we should *leave the Earth in as good or better shape for future generations than we found it for ourselves*. Based on the work of the Brundtland Commission, it is broadly agreed that sustainability consists of three pillars: ecological, economic and social.

However, in recent years, more and more voices have asserted that sustainability also entails *a cultural dimension*. Indeed, the Brundtland Report includes arguments for this.

The fact that it is now on the agenda as part of the very definition of sustainability is due to culture’s role as a forum for open, dialogue-oriented human interaction.

As part of the follow-up to *Culture 21* and *Rio + 20 process*, etc., in 2014 the UN Secretary General² presented a report on the role of culture in sustainable development. During the process, it has been argued that culture imbues humankind with creativity, critical thinking, empathy, trust, willingness to take risks and mutual respect – to name just a few important traits.

In a sustainable society, art and culture enable individuals to take part in and help to develop society. In other words, an active cultural life promotes democracy and participation, and generates the preconditions for a good life. Nordic cultural partnerships underpin and enhance active cultural life in the Region.

But culture can also play other roles in connection with sustainability. Several European researchers (collectively known as COST)³ who have worked together for many years suggest at least three types of roles: The following sections describe these roles. However, it should be emphasised that these subdivisions were outcomes of a process of scientific analysis. They more or less constitute ideals – and as with other ideals, they don’t necessarily exist



in reality. In addition, there will often be overlap between the roles, as will become clear in the discussion of real-life examples. However, ideals are useful in terms of describing what can feasibly be achieved and identifying the measures on which we should focus.

1. Culture must be seen as integral to the very concept of sustainability: Culture in sustainable development

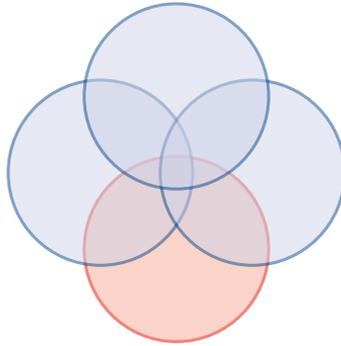
In this role, culture is considered so vital that it must be sustainability's fourth pillar. Culture brings to society fundamental qualities that are just as important as the ecological, social and economic perspective. These qualities are, e.g. creativity, critical thinking, empathy, trust, mutual respect and a willingness to take risks. What is new is that the very concept of sustainability must include a cultural dimension to ensure that the cultural qualities are understood to be absolutely fundamental to the existence of society and to social progress.

¹ The Brundtland Report was published in 1987 and was made by United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development. It gives a comprehensive overview of the global environmental crisis and proposes solutions for the problems.

² Note by the Secretary General: "... culture is an essential component of sustainable development; represents a source of identity, innovation and creativity for the individual and community; and is an important factor in building social inclusion and eradicating poverty, providing for economic growth and ownership of development processes."

³ The so-called COST Action IS1007: Investigating Cultural Sustainability, see www.culturalsustainability.eu

The three illustrations on the following pages are taken from this project's final report. The project is referred to as COST. COST worked on the following question: "Is culture truly a 'fourth' pillar of sustainability alongside ecology, society and economy? Or is it more central, more fundamental, more essential? How does culture act as a catalyst for ecological sustainability, human well-being and economic viability? What would our futures look like if sustainability was embedded within culture in all of its multiple dimensions, including different worldviews and values, ways of life, and other forms of cultural expression? A cultural transition that embeds sustainability in the cultural understandings and daily practices of society has the power to shift humanity's currently unsustainable trajectory."



Culture in sustainable development

This perspective emerges in many of the projects that Nordic Culture Point supports. The role of art as a democratic eye-opener for children is clearly outlined in a project on the International Children's Art Museum in Norway: *"Art provides children with an opportunity to say something about how they experience the world, and it is precisely through speech that we help shape the world we live in. The opportunity to be heard and taken seriously as a culture-creating equal citizen early in life lays the groundwork for participation, creativity and influence on society into adulthood. This, we believe, is a prerequisite for a sustainable society."*

This perspective is also reflected in the Survival Kit arts festival, staged in unconventional venues in Umeå. The festival's works of art, lectures, film screenings, etc. encourage critical questions and alternatives to the various crises facing humanity and the biosphere. The project states: *"It is only by establishing a deep, long-term sustainability concept that we as humans can develop, live and survive."*

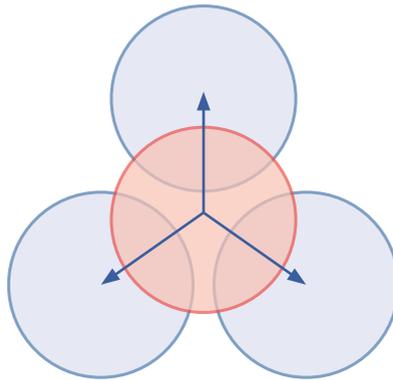
On a more overarching level, elements of this type of thinking are also found in, e.g. the work of the Danish Centre for Culture and Development (CKU). (It may also be argued that the work of the CKU could be placed in Role 3, as described below.) The CKU focuses on:

*"Empowering people through active participation in art and cultural activities."*⁴

In terms of Role 1, COST states that culture policy usually enhances *culture's value, creativity and diversity* in cultural expressions, and focuses on the ways in which art and culture contribute to people's ability to participate in society.

2. Culture helps ensure ecologically sustainable development: Culture for sustainable development

In this role, culture is primarily considered an instrument that helps to clarify and put into perspective the challenges, especially the ecological ones, that the world faces. It is also seen as a tool that can connect and balance the other pillars of the sustainability concept – because without culture, there can be no interaction between ecological, economic and social perspectives in sustainable development.



Culture for sustainable development

The Nordic Council of Ministers' overarching strategy "A Good Life in a Sustainable Nordic Region" (2013) briefly mentions culture, but does not really expand upon the culture ministers' perspective. Rather, the Nordic Council of Ministers' ⁵ approach is dominated by culture for sustainability. Senior advisor Yvonne Halkjær Jensen of the Nordic Council of Ministers puts it like this: *"The linkage between culture and sustainability is highly relevant in a modern society where things are changeable. Culture builds bridges between different*

⁴ The Danish Centre for Culture and Development is an independent institution under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Its job is to manage Denmark's strategy for culture and development ("The Right to Art and Culture") in collaboration with Danish embassies and diplomatic representations. <http://www.cku.dk/om-center-for-kultur-og-udvikling/>

⁵ Apart from the culture ministers, the Council of Ministers' focus is on culture for sustainable development. In the culture ministers' strategy, culture is closer to the first role mentioned, i.e. as a tool in sustainable development. However, as the quote below illustrates, the Council of Ministers does not operate on the basis of any sharp demarcation between those roles.

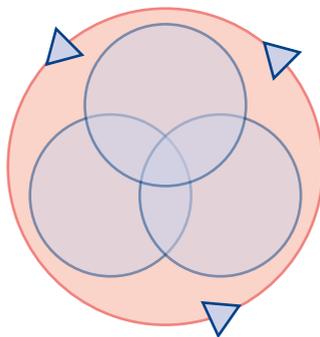
interest groups and contributes to social development, identity and inclusion. It's a valuable add-on to the three pillars of sustainability – the economic, social and environmental.”⁶

This perspective is also evident in Culturability BSR, a wide-ranging project involving co-operation between the countries around the Baltic Sea. Most of the sub-projects focus specifically on the role of culture as a tool for sustainable development in the original three pillars. The project's overall goals and strategy are as follows: *“To build knowledge on culture as a driver for sustainable development – and through showcasing and demonstration encourage multiplication of good/best/next practices for culture and sustainability in the Baltic Sea Region and from that develop a number of high quality high impact projects in the field.”⁷*

According to COST, in this perspective, cultural-policy work is usually about positioning culture as a *tool in other policy areas*, e.g. the environment, industry, human settlement, etc.

3. Culture plays an absolutely fundamental role in society: Culture as sustainable development

In this perspective, the concept of culture is usually very broad. Culture is almost synonymous with human action and interaction – and it goes without saying that without it, there is no society.



Culture as sustainable development

If we return for a moment to the example of CKU in Denmark, then this broad understanding can also be read into their goal of “*Enhancing empowerment via active participation in art and culture*”. The other points from CKU’s strategy further emphasise this:

- Ensuring freedom of expression for artists and others involved in the cultural sphere
- Contributing to economic growth via creative industries
- Consolidating peace and reconciliation in post-conflict areas via art and cultural activities
- Promoting intercultural dialogue and co-operation

The role can also be read into the previously mentioned project by the International Children’s Art Museum in Norway, which aims to turn children into good citizens: “*Art provides children with an opportunity to say something about how they experience the world, and it is precisely through speech that we help shape the world we live in.*”

This broad view may also lie behind the vision of art and culture expressed by the Danish party The Alternative: “*Not least we dream that a society’s wealth is not defined by material and economic growth, but to a much higher degree by cultural, intellectual and personal growth. It is not least through culture and art that we can have the courage and inspiration to imagine a radically different sustainable future.*”⁸

According to COST, cultural policy in this context focuses on culture’s contribution to the broader transformations in society and to the *development of capacity* in individual residents and communities.

What next? The essence

As previously mentioned, the relationship between culture, art and sustainable development can be described in many ways. What they have in common, however, is that they all recognise and understand that culture has a special role (or roles) to play.

⁶ <http://nordicway.org/2014/06/culture-fourth-pillar-sustainability/#.VYqEVObNL03>

⁷ <http://www.culturability.lv/index.html>

⁸ http://alternativet.dk/partiprogram_7-0/

In recent years, Nordic Culture Point in Finland has endeavoured to illustrate this, not only via our activities and through the development of our strategy as a Nordic cultural institution, but also by presenting examples of projects that have addressed the theme of culture and sustainability.

In this light, we believe that culture and sustainable development together may constitute the most promising of the themes outlined in the Nordic culture ministers' strategy for 2013–2020.

Nordic Culture Point's work going forward

In the process of developing a new vision for Nordic Culture Point, we came up with the wording:

“We promote a sustainable Nordic Region through strong partnerships in culture.”

What the people of the Nordic Region have in common is culture and language – these are what bind us together. And, along with art, they also help to inspire, develop and renew the Nordic welfare model. A sustainable Nordic Region is based on a dynamic cultural sphere and close cultural collaboration. Art, culture and co-operation also serve to nurture democracy. For these reasons, Nordic Culture Point wants to play a greater role in the Region and contribute to sustainable Nordic societies.

Nordic Culture Point aims to provide knowledge about the Nordic Region, inspire closer collaboration, and bring new perspectives to cultural co-operation. The aim is to develop and strengthen the Nordic Region – to ensure not only our survival, but that we are strong and cohesive.

Nordic Culture Point strives to create spaces for cultural encounters. Specifically, this is done through physical space, financial space and digital space.

Cultural encounters, i.e. between people, ideas and projects, have always been a fundamental part of Nordic co-operation. They generate knowledge, development, progress, solidarity, etc., and provide a forum for dialogue. They add a human and public dimension to official co-operation, in a manner that is unique to the Nordic Region.

As mentioned previously, art and culture nurture attributes like creativity, critical thinking, empathy, trust, mutual respect and a willingness to take risks. In our opinion, art, culture and cultural encounters are important parts of the foundation for a sustainable Nordic Region.

Nordic Culture Point will continue to focus on several aspects of culture and sustainability:

1. Cultural activities must themselves be sustainable, including in terms of resources and energy consumption. Culture must also be part of the ecological pillar. **Nordic Culture Point** will draw up a policy for our own actions in this context.
2. Culture in itself constitutes a pillar of the sustainability concept. Art and culture teach us, among other things, creativity, critical thinking and the value of democracy – all of which are essential elements of a sustainable society. **Nordic Culture Point** will illustrate how by showing good examples for inspiration.
3. Culture and art can be used as instruments with which to visualise, discuss and analyse the general challenges facing society in terms of sustainability. **Nordic Culture Point** will illustrate how by showing good examples for inspiration.
4. Culture can be seen as the basis for all human activity – and therefore it is crucial to sustainable development. **Nordic Culture Point** will strive to illustrate this by presenting prime examples – even though not many exist as of yet!
5. Last but not least, **Nordic Culture Point** will work to show that culture is crucial for developing a truly sustainable society. The latter is a natural extension of the culture ministers' strategy.

It is clear that the concept of sustainability is undergoing a vital transformation. As part of the work on our vision, we here at Nordic Culture Point will make an active contribution with a view towards ensuring that the concept of sustainable development incorporates an understanding of art and culture. ■



The Role of Culture in Sustainable Society – Sustainability in Art and Cultural Projects

Marjo Mäenpää, Director at the Division of Art at the Department for Art and Cultural Policy, Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland

The recent Nordic councils of ministers strategy for Nordic cultural co-operation lists sustainability as one of the five main themes. The principle for sustainable Nordic region means that there is a common understanding and will that Nordic cultural life will improve sustainability on the Nordic societies by being more accessible and engaging. It's also said in the strategy that sustainability and sustainable society are being build with the help of art and culture. "Art and culture challenge and develop us individuals and as a society and thereby help to promote a sustainable society."

Sustainability in society consists of three pillar; ecological, economic and social. It is also obvious that these pillars are basic human actions in all civilizations. It is the culture that imbues humankind with knowledge, creativity, critical thinking, empathy, mutual trust, willingness to take risks and mutual respect. Culture is the recourse for societal, economic and ecological sustainability.

In the conference on cultural sustainability last May in Helsinki organized by the Cost-network of European cooperation in science and technology, the message was that culture matters in sustainable development. "Many if not all of the planet's environmental problems and certainly all of it's social and



economic problems have cultural activity and decisions – people and human actions – at their roots. Solutions are therefore likely to be also cultural-based, and the existing sustainable development forged from economic or environmental concern are unlikely to be successful without cultural considerations.”

In this context I’m sure that there is no doubt that we already have a common and clear understanding and answer to the question what is the role of culture and art in the sustainable society. Art makes us understand the world and the human nature it enhances the dialogue between different cultures. The objectives of sustainable cultural policy relates to creativity, cultural diversity, and equity. Development is only sustainable if the cultural environment is nurtured and diversity is respected.

Through the strategy for Nordic cultural co-operation Nordic countries aim to contribute and encourage the sustainable development to enable more effective interventions. In every country the challenge is to provide favourable conditions for the work of artists, other creative workers, and cultural and art institutions. Our task is also to make art and culture accessible, to enhance equal access to the culture and art.

While trying to solve the challenges of making cultural productions accessible and strengthen the conditions of making art we are also strengthening the important basis of sustainability. This seminar at the Nordic Culture Point is valuable for changing good practises, experiences, and sharing knowledge. We really need a common understanding that art and culture play an important role in the further development of a sustainable society. ■

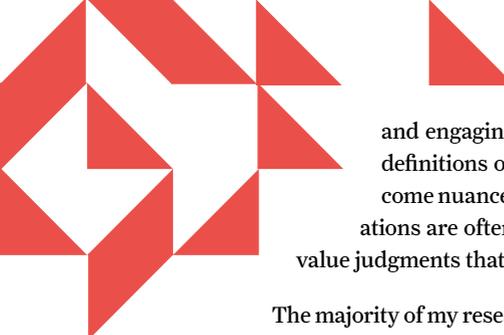


Training and educating in culture and sustainability in practice

Laura McAtackney, Associate Professor in Sustainable Heritage Management, Aarhus University

My particular interest in the relationship between culture and sustainability relates to two areas: my role as an educator of Masters students in Sustainable Heritage Management at Aarhus University and my research into sustainable heritage in the context of Ireland. To provide an intellectual context I will start by detailing my research experiences of culture and sustainability before linking it to my aims in training and educating the heritage managers of the future.

Despite a lack of consensus as to what terms such as ‘culture’, ‘heritage’ and ‘sustainability’ actually mean (particularly when they become hybrids), this does not mean that research has not articulated how useful they are as concepts and how they have real world implications. Increasingly, academics involved in research into cultural heritage have bemoaned ‘sustainability’ as a concept being most clearly developed in the context of natural heritage⁹. This is often linked to a claim that the term still needs refinement in the studies of culture. There are many reasons for this imbalance. Stubbs has emphasized that there have been many influential studies that assess sustainability in a ‘natural’ context deploying quantitative methodologies and appraisal indicators that are often lacking in cultural designations¹⁰. Indeed, in the UK organizations such as English Heritage and The National Trust have increasingly included intangible aspects such as ‘sense of place’, links to local character



and engaging with an agenda of social inclusion in their definitions of cultural heritage. While this reveals a welcome nuance of thinking these more ephemeral considerations are often qualitative and can be laden with personal value judgments that make guidelines difficult to provide.

The majority of my research has taken place in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, which act as interesting contrasts regarding the role of cultural heritage and the engagement with cultural sustainability. Elizabeth Crooke has noted in her research on Northern Irish community museums that sustainability, culture and the museum space are considered important in post-conflict Northern Ireland¹¹. She has shown how museums have been forefronted by government agencies to work with local communities in ways that link to issues of economic and social sustainability as well as addressing problematic areas of social inclusion, cross-community and single identity work. While, heritage sites and museums have been eager to gain funding through addressing such initiatives she questions the appropriateness of using them to fulfill this agenda, particularly when many of the heritage practitioners are untrained in dealing with the difficult issues around using cultural heritage in divided societies in effective and sustainable ways¹². I have voiced similar concerns in my research into the use of official public art in placemaking strategies that often do not engage with the non-official memorials, paramilitary murals and flags that surround and contradict them¹³. In the context of Northern Ireland the relationship of culture and sustainability is not only multifaceted but must engage with culture and sustainability in ways that takes into account the political context and the potential for overt party political interference.

By contrast, in the Republic of Ireland I have been involved in a three year archaeological / heritage project that began by examining, recording and interpreting historical graffiti that remains in situ at a former prison that is now a national heritage site in Dublin (Kilmainham Gaol). The project was funded by the national funding council, the IRC, with the aim to relocate women who

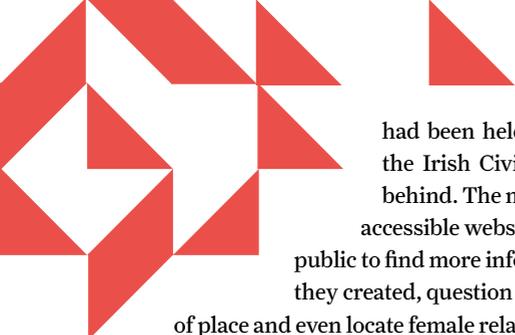
⁹ ee M Stubbs. 2004. Heritage-sustainability: developing a methodology for the sustainable appraisal of the historic environment. *Planning Practice & Research*. 19: 3, 285-305 and R Harrison. 2013. Forgetting to remember, remembering to forget: late modern heritage practices, sustainability and the 'crisis' of accumulation of the past. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*. 19:6, 579-595

¹⁰ Stubbs, 2004, Heritage-sustainability, 287-288

¹¹ E. Crooke. 2010. 'The politics of community heritage: motivations, authority and control' *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 16: 1-2, 16-29

¹² Crooke, 2010, community heritage, 25.

¹³ L. McAtackney. forthcoming, 2015. Re-remembering the Troubles: community memorials, memory and identity in post-conflict Northern Ireland. In *Irish Arts in Crisis* (ed vol). Cambridge: Cambridge Scholarly Press.



had been held as political prisoners at the site during the Irish Civil War (1922–1923) and left graffiti traces behind. The major output for this project was a publicly accessible website that allowed interested members of the public to find more information about the women, see the graffiti they created, question what graffiti can tell us about experiences of place and even locate female relatives who may have been held at the gaol¹⁴. As we move through the ‘Decade of Commemorations’ in Ireland - when the formation of the state 100 years ago is extremely prominent in the national agenda - working on this project has highlighted the relationship between culture and sustainability in different way. Primarily, it has shown how old sites are still able to provide new narratives, open up interpretative possibilities and allow us to use commemoration to question rather than reaffirm the past (and they are well funded, if short-term, as a result). However, being involved with heritage practitioners in reinterpreting the site it is clear promoting footfall at historic sites can be detrimental to its material integrity. The increasing wear and tear on the most popular parts of Kilmainham Gaol have led to a need to question the site’s sustainability and be creative in providing solutions. The custodians have had to reconfigure the site to move beyond the walls of the prison, with the adjacent Kilmainham Courthouse renovated to hold the museum collections. There are also suggestions that AVs will be increasingly used to reveal the prison in ways that do not require physical interactions and that the emphasis of the present guided tours (that emphasize the executions of the Easter Rising leaders 1916) are to be broadened to include more narratives of the site to spread the burden of tourist feet.

Taking the case of Ireland, the relationship between culture and sustainability in practice is multifaceted and spans a variety of heritage forms and practice. In the context of my teaching practice I draw on my experience not only as a heritage researcher but also as a previous heritage student (over ten years ago) in order to refine the training and practice I provide, alongside my colleagues, at Aarhus University. Our programme in Sustainable Heritage Management has been deliberately designed to ensure that a balance of theory and practice is maintained throughout the two year course, to emphasize the need for practical experience but also to forefront the range of cultural forms involved in heritage and how sustainability is key. The first year of the course concentrates on providing a bedrock of theory, case-studies and understandings of how to conduct research and negotiate the various levels of institutional frameworks that the students will require to work as practitioners. The practicalities of working with heritage is further emphasized through part of the second year being devoted to practice where we emphasize the need to conduct a specific project to ensure students can use their experiences for research as well as practical experience purposes. The

overall concept behind the teaching and training is to ensure the students have practical as well as theoretical experience; they know how to conduct research and they are aware of the central importance of sustainability as they go forward as practitioners and critical researchers. We promote that idea that sustainability is broadly defined and is key to heritage practice on a global level but that the configuration of what sustainability means is not a case of one-size-fits-all, rather it must be assessed in terms of the context they are working in, who they are working with and their aims as heritage practitioners.

My own experience of working outside, inside and alongside national and local heritage providers is that one must be aware of a range of sustainability issues, including funding, the community agenda, environmental conditions, the role of heritage in the contemporary society, and the political will to facilitate our roles. I am keenly aware that while many of our students join our courses with the aim of working in national museums many of them will ultimately have to think more broadly: they may find employment in shorter-term projects, local initiatives with community focus, other forms of heritage role that is not museum based or they may become university researchers. We aim to embed our teaching in best practice, use global case-studies, provide the theoretical context and couch our course in terms of sustainability in order to facilitate their transition beyond their MA to the world of work. In doing so, we aim to balance these different strands and provide the individual student with the skills and ideas they need to move into the career they wish to pursue in sustainable heritage, even as their aspirations evolve, change and/or reaffirm. ■

¹⁴ <http://kilmainhamgaolgraffiti.com>



How to work with art and sustainability: Pappa'n i de mange land / Daddy World Wide

Angela Goldin, director at The International Museum of Children's Art in Oslo

Nordic Culture Point has asked the International Museum of Children's Art to present one of our latest projects, namely "Daddy World Wide", which is an example of how to use art and culture as a catalyst for a sustainable society. The project takes a thorough look at the father role – seen from the children's perspective!

We have in collaboration with various Nordic partners carried out a documentary and intermediary project where the father role is contextualised and examined in relation to its historical development and its geographical differences.

The project consists of an exhibition with paintings and drawings done by children aged 3-18 from 20 different countries as well as a book where experts from Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden contribute with their viewpoints on the father role. In the book "Pappa'n i de mange land - Daddy World Wide" The International Museum of Children's Art researches what the term "father" entails, by asking children and youth what they associate with fatherhood, and what they think is important about being a dad. What is a dad like, and what does he do? What do they find important about being a dad? And which geographical differences and historical variations do we find when we investigate the term father as a concept?



We have deliberately chosen to work with an international perspective with “dad material” from many different countries. This has resulted in a broader approach to the various societal factors that influence a child’s everyday life: living standards, work life arrangements, leisure time, public provision, equality, economy etc. All of these are important societal aspects that affects and constitutes the father role.

But how does the project relate to sustainability ...?

My reply is that through art children is given a chance to say something about how they experience the world, and it is precisely by expressing ourselves that we can take part in shaping the world we live in. To have the possibility to be heard and taken seriously as culturally creative equal citizens early in life forms the basis of participation, creativity, and influence in adult life. This, we believe, is a prerequisite for a sustainable society. ■



Funding as a tool for sustainability in dance – and in other art forms

Sanna Rekola, Director, Dance Info Finland

Cultural sustainability – more precisely, culture as a key element in sustainable development - has been a topic of discussion for almost thirty years. Yet the concept still remains vague and ambiguous.

Sustainability Think Tank, arranged by Dance Info Finland within the Nordic-Baltic keõja 2012-2015 project, took on the challenge to elaborate on what sustainability could mean for dance. The report *Recommendations for a Nordic and Baltic Dance Field* was published in spring 2015.

The concrete recommendations and suggestions challenge policy makers, funding bodies as well as the dance community to change attitudes, renew operating and working models and reform ways of thinking. Although the work of the Think Tank was grounded in the dance field in the Nordic and Baltic countries, feedback has proven that the recommendations are relevant and applicable outside this context as well. Some of the Think Tank's recommendations are more suitable for national or local funding bodies, some could be put in to practice within Nordic funding mechanisms.

The analogy to ecological sustainability was found to be a useful way of looking at things from a new perspective: the dance field could be seen as an ecosystem. Growth in the dance field is about strengthening the system, not always aiming for more. There is a need for entire life cycle thinking and a holistic approach to development of the dance sector. Both those who fund



art and culture and those who are funded and create the art should be more aware of how the resources available are used. Economical, human and other resources should be used in a sustainable, more effective, long-lasting and targeted way.

Developing sustainable funding mechanisms on all levels

Governments need to utilise on going analysis of the arts and trends within society and the economy, on local, regional and global levels. Sustainable cultural policies and strategies should pay much more attention to the dance and the potential it has. There is a need for more sophisticated indicators to measure quality and growth and to understand the full contribution of the dance field to the rest of society.

A variety of funding sources and types of funding is one criterion for sustainable funding. In order to achieve long-term impact, there is a clear need to move from project-based funding to process-based funding. There should be a shift from passive decision-making (decisions made without discussions, feedback or involvement of the dance field) into interactive decision-making. There should be more discussions and coaching in the application process, instead of merely submitting applications and issuing reports on paper.

The funding lines should correspond to life-cycle thinking, where things have a beginning (incubation phase or seed money), middle (development phase) and an end (changeover phase, from which you can go back to the beginning or on to the next level). There should be funding for all phases. Funding should also be available for other kinds of activities besides performances.

Long-term planning will help in using resources in the most effective way. In some cases, collective support could be more sustainable than individual support; therefore there should be funding opportunities for co-ops, hubs, centres, clusters, etc.

The existing restrictions on making a profit currently do not create incentives for maximising incomes that could in turn be used later for project development and internationalisation.

The funding systems need to be diverse and flexible. There should be both big, long-term money and small, fast money. There should be funding bodies that can react quickly with project money to generate and maintain momentum – in other words, a pot of flexible funding. There will always be unex-



pected, brilliant ideas that could generate additional funding for a country, region or city through channels such as EU funding.

There should be earmarked national co-financing available in all the Nordic and Baltic countries for projects that have been financed by international programmes (including Nordic-Baltic programmes, Interreg and Creative Europe). This would help especially small actors, which most within the arts are, to collaborate internationally.

Sustainable mobility

There is a need for new mobility funding policies and funding lines to support different types of mobility. With the increased importance of internationalisation, more cultural export and touring funds should be made available for the dance sector.

Supporting festivals and joint networks in the Nordic-Baltic region, which enhance both the cooperation within the region and also act as hubs for performances from other continents would also create sustainability.

Only a short performance period after the premiere is common in the dance field, and this is waste of resources. Better touring possibilities would increase income opportunities and prolong the life of productions. Among one of the most concrete Think Tank's recommendations and perhaps one of the easiest to realise is the support for a Nordic-Baltic touring. Support for traveling (individuals and also for companies) is granted within the current Nordic Baltic mobility program, but this support does not create touring, only sporadic, singular visits.

Mobility could be regarded as more sustainable if it was contextualised, i.e. if something more was added to a tour or a visit besides just a few performances, for example staying in the region for a longer time and having workshops for local dance professionals. More attention to audience outreach is also desirable, e.g. organising more workshops and making the most out of a stay when performing abroad. ■



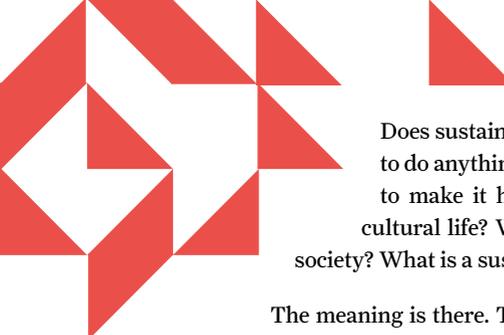
On “Bullshit!” and what comes next

Ulrika Lind, Project Manager/Advisor

“Yeah it’s pretty trendy right now to put a sustainability label on everything you do,” my friend says. And she should know. Her job involves guiding big companies towards environmental certification – a procedure that requires knowledge, patience and time.

We were musing over the slightly weird phenomenon of festivals labelling themselves “sustainable” – what does that even mean if it’s not tied into genuine sustainable development work all year round? What I had in mind was organic food in restaurants, eco-labelled clothing in shops, social spaces in towns/cities, pleasant parks, clean water and safe cycle paths suitable for kids to play on.

Sustainability is yet another politically correct term people want to be associated with – to be good at – but hardly anybody actually devotes time to. It’s more satisfying to mock than to take it seriously. Bullshit bingo is a great game at conferences – just shout “Bullshit!” in your head every time a speaker uses clichéd terms like accessibility, equality, diversity, participation and sustainability. Good fun, but why? Well, because there’s seldom anything substantial behind them. They don’t inform working practices. Sustainability policies are usually geared more towards satisfying grant-funding criteria than making a genuine impact. We can’t be bothered being sincere. But then again we don’t have to.



Does sustainability mean anything? Do we have the time to do anything about it? Do we have sufficient knowledge to make it happen? What does sustainability mean in cultural life? What does culture look like in a sustainable society? What is a sustainable society?

The meaning is there. The knowledge is there. Culture is a prerequisite for a sustainable society in which each and every one of us feels that we belong; where art, books and music bring us together or give us points of contention to discuss; where, through the power of reflection and creativity, we can build a strong common foundation that will sustain us into the future. And we do have the time. In fact, time is all that we have.

All of the clichés flash past us and we don't stop and fill them out with meaning. The real meanings lurk somewhere beneath the surface and we don't quite grasp them. They exist for a purpose. They are part of a conceptual ecosystem. But they just don't resonate. We need to give ourselves the time to understand them properly and incorporate them into our day-to-day work. Only then will we make a difference. And in essence, the ideas behind them are simple: a fair and equal society. I shouldn't have fewer opportunities than anyone else. An accessible society. I shouldn't be shut out because of my disability, where I come from or how much money I have. Participation in society. I can play a part and influence my own life. A diverse society. As many as possible of us should accept and celebrate each other's differences, show solidarity and treat each other with consideration and respect.

I'm 14, love music, have internet access, watch gigs online, get to meet professional musicians who pay attention to me and teach me, I listen and write music, feel welcome at gigs, can be myself, fall ill rely on the health service, get guidance and trust and feel happy at school. All of these things sustain me.

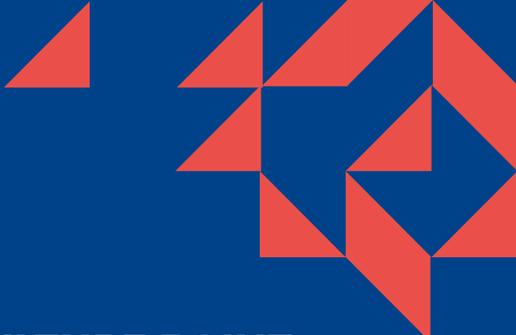
I'm 92, have read hundreds of books, been to Paris and Nairobi, am a widow, can recount the evolution of the film industry from Chaplin to Box Office, like to spend time outdoors, discuss the news with my friends, peruse the National Museum's collection online my grandkids, am met with love and respect. These things sustain me.

I'm 25, grew up in Kobane, my gran used to sing for me, I love good food, live in the Nordic Region now, have learned two new languages, yearn for home, want to study, want to find true love, want to be an actor, my brothers and sisters are dead but I have someone to talk about that with, sometimes I want to laugh, other times to cry, I am able to get a good night's sleep. These are the things that sustain me.

The things that sustain us seem lasting. Like part of a system of collective endeavour that seeks to enhance awareness of what it is that we are trying to achieve every step of the way. A system that pursue ultimate goals of equal opportunity and equal value for all.

I look forward to being part of a more conscious collective, or whatever we choose to call it – the label's not that important. It may well just be a trend. But at least it's a welcome one. We need to make time. Time to think. But most of all time to do things.

Time to walk different paths, to seek new partners and collaborators, to work together, to seek knowledge, to think and to communicate. Because time equals quality. And from quality we can forge something meaningful, something lasting. Something that is firmly anchored and stable, which is self-sustainable. Something that is – ah yes, there's that word again – sustainable. ■



ABOUT NORDIC CULTURE POINT

Nordic Culture Point is an active cultural organisation that works with the whole of the Nordic Region as its platform. It has three main areas of activity. We provide the secretariat function for three Nordic funding programmes: the Culture and Art Programme, the Nordic-Baltic Mobility Programme for Culture and NORDBUK.

We run a cultural centre and library in the heart of Helsinki, which spreads knowledge of culture in the Region. We are responsible for the profile of Nordic cultural partnerships in the Region and beyond. These activities create physical, financial and digital spaces for cultural encounters.

Nordic Culture Point is under the auspices of the Nordic Council of Ministers.

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