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Paper and presentation delivered to the programme on Sustainability, Humak University of Applied Sciences, Helsinki, directed by Dr Marcin Proprawski: 12 October 2023. Lecture title: **'Arts & Cultural Organisations in Cultures of Sustainability'** by Dr Jonathan Vickery, Reader in Cultural Policy Studies, Centre for Cultural and Media Policy Studies, and Managing Editor of the *Journal of Law, Social Justice and Global Development*.

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### **'Arts & Cultural Organisations in a Culture of Sustainability'**

This protracted lecture revolves around two questions I have been given: How is 'sustainability' related to the arts? And, how is sustainability relevant to cultural organisations? This amounts to one big question – what is *sustainable cultural organisation*? This is not simply a request for a definition of 'an organisation that is 'sustainable'; rather, it indicates a need for cultural management and policy researchers for a policy model on organisations – a cultural organisation defined by sustainability. Moreover, it retains the semantic ambivalence in the word 'organisation', which is both noun and verb (both an entity and an activity). In the cultural realm (and certainly the arts) organisations should be creative and dynamic, not static corporate structures that facilitate the work of creative producers: this matters to sustainability, or an organisations ability to adapt to a sustainable mode of being.

For this to be intelligible, I need to spend a first section defining 'sustainable'. And I do so [cf. PowerPoint images of climate Change activists, Extinction Rebellion, etc.] by indicating how the term sustainable emerges from a complex discourse that is more than just a response to climate change. Indeed, in some areas (as I will point out) the sustainability agenda has been 'hijacked' by climate change activism, and this has overly-influenced policy responses in the arts sector (in the UK, at least). 'Sustainability', I will explain, may have started with an emphasis on 'environment', but what counts as environment, and the implications of inserting environment into social, industrial and economic policy, means that in reality a climate change response is just one dimension of a broader policy discourse of global development: and this expanded sense of global development encompasses the UN's other priorities, such as rights and security.

### **Part 1: Conceptualising 'sustainability'**

One of the most significant research projects on this subject was in part led by Finland (University of Jyväskylä) and resulted in the 2015 report, 'Culture in,

for and as Sustainable Development: Conclusions from the COST Action IS1007 Investigating Cultural Sustainability' (Dessein, et al. eds., 2015). I wish to start with this, as this report still identifies a theoretical boundary that has probably still not been crossed. Or perhaps this is a question of methodology — in talking about sustainability and culture, I would start by arguing that for cultural policy research our starting point should be theoretical methodology (and a conceptual understanding on aims and rationales for those aims) — to be followed by 'how' questions, on how we conduct research and so advance towards these aims. I will begin with a long quotation, which sets out the main line of argumentation in the COST Action report (which identifies 'three important ways we identify for culture to play important roles in sustainable development'):

First, culture can have a supportive and self-promoting role (which we characterise as 'culture in sustainable development'). This already-established approach expands conventional sustainable development discourse by adding culture as a self-standing 4<sup>th</sup> pillar alongside separate ecological, social, and economic considerations and imperatives. We see a second role ('culture for sustainable development'), however, which offers culture as a more influential force that can operate beyond itself. This moves culture into a framing, contextualising and mediating mode, one that can balance all three of the existing pillars and guide sustainable development between economic, social, and ecological pressures and needs. Third, we argue that there can be an even a more fundamental role for culture ('culture as sustainable development') which sees it as the essential foundation and structure for achieving the aims of sustainable development. In this role it integrates, co-ordinates and guides all aspects of sustainable action. In all three roles, recognising culture as at the root of all human decisions and actions, and as an overarching concern (even a new paradigm) in sustainable development thinking, enables culture and sustainability to become mutually intertwined so that the distinctions between the economic, social and environmental. (p.8)

The mention of 'pillars' is a reference to a term used by UNESCO and has an uninteresting history as a policy theory of sustainability as resting on the '3 pillars' of environmental, social and economic policy and data. It's only interesting in terms of the critical response to the UN's SDGs – Sustainable

Development Goals, which emerged 2015-17 — by agencies such as Agenda 21 for Culture, now Culture 21, whose advocacy for a ‘fourth pillar’ of culture is the subject of a broader lobby of cultural groups for more inclusion in the global SDG policy framework [I cite further in the bibliographic notes at the bottom of this paper]. Before we move on, I must cite the original ‘Agenda 21’, as it plays a crucial formative role in the policy theory of sustainability: Agenda 21 was a non-binding action plan and a product of an UN Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 1992:

<https://www.un.org/esa/dsd/agenda21/Agenda%2021.pdf>

Reports in and of themselves are plentiful and not taken as seriously as, say, scientific or major scholarly works. Yet, as a ‘declaration’, the 1992 Agenda 21 statement remains a landmark in the embedded politics of the UN, where ‘sustainable development’ has become a new meta-theory of global progress. It still provokes huge protest around the world (indeed is ‘banned’ in several US states), and is often mistaken as a ‘communist’ paradigm of common ownership. It is worth noting how SD does indeed force a paradigm change in the following senses:

The ‘environment’ is no longer purely material, but is a human ecosystem and thus *social*. Furthermore, we can extrapolate that...

- Democracy must be applied to resource, environment and economic management on a planetary scale — particularly in the role of ‘extractivist’ industries (e.g. mining).
- A planetary ‘scale’ will allow scrutiny of certain activities whose impact seems favourable locally or nationally (i.e. mining is a huge economic benefit to a locale and country, but potentially very damaging to the planet). This has three logical corollaries:

(i): the environment and its (ecosystems) possesses ‘rights’ and protections (the rights of future ownership, not just present).

(ii): Private property and consumer freedom to consume are now relative to the needs of a planetary collective sustainable development.

(iii): ‘Development’ must not be defined in terms of economic ‘growth’ (where ‘time’ is relative to national political calendars, government or policy cycles) but in terms of longer term (sustainable) evolution of the earth as a single economy of eco-systems. The new *temporality* of global development must be open ended — i.e. that all development creates viable conditions for an expanse of time that is not measurable but where development can continue at a current optimal rate.

These are my own extrapolations – you need to read the report, as huge as it is. There was one major problem with it, both UNESCO and culture itself were not a large part of the proceedings (culture was largely ignored). Though, it must be said, unlike subsequent reports, such as the ‘anniversary’ report from a Rio gathering held in 2012, and called ‘The Future We Want’, a growing cultural policy advocacy emerged — in fact, advocacy had emerged by 2004 in the form of the UN supported Barcelona-based United Cities and Local

Government (UCLG) and their now-seminal statement on how culture is internal to sustainability. This statement was effectively an extension of the Agenda 21's Chapter 28, the 'Local Agenda 21' and was subsequently adopted by both UN-HABITAT and UNESCO.

<https://www.agenda21culture.net/documents/agenda-21-for-culture>

Agenda 21 for Culture, a small advocacy and strategy organisation that was set up by the 2004 initiative, has itself achieved a lot in terms of facilitating city-based policies around the world. But it took a decade for major academic projects to begin theorising the whole framework and ask 'What is sustainability when applied to culture? 'How can 'culture' be a substantive centre of sustainability in development contexts (which are usually economics or social policy-based)? This is the significance of the COST Action project (of 2015) I began with. It argued that we are all familiar with culture 'in' [alongside] and 'for' [supporting] sustainable development — but we need to consider culture 'as' sustainable development.

But for sustainability to be a credible pathway for organisations and their strategic needs, we need some policy theory, and indeed the COST report attempts to do this with the addition of case studies. They helpfully define three definitions of culture and sustainability in terms of policy: the first concentrates on the intrinsic values of culture ('culture in'; as a diversity of creative expressions and artistic traditions), the second invests in the strategic use of culture for other policy fields ('culture for'; social, economic, urban, and so on, i.e. which we all know all too well), and the third is where...

'[...] policy will promote broader transformations towards more holistically sustainable societies, for example through increased awareness and behaviour changes that can provide catalysts and enablers for grassroots collective actions, and through the development of the capacity and capability of individuals and communities to adapt and carry on more sustainable ways of life.' (p.9)

Or, to quote further (echoing Birkeland, 2015), 'Culture appears and is understandable through narrative organisation, and cultural sustainability can emerge as a social process created through narratives that connect the past with the future, and the local with the global' (p.31). This is a more *activist* understanding, of 'culture' being the mediator 'between society and environment', as a form of critical consciousness of values and behaviour as central to any vision of a sustainable place. It is a transformational understanding of culture as the evolutionary centre of human life, and 'truly evolutionary culture, or an eco-cultural civilisation, involves practicing a new understanding of the human place in the world, and recognising that humans

are an inseparable part of the more-than-human world' (p.31). This involves intentions, motivations, ethical and moral choices, rooted in values that drive our individual and collective actions – and against 'consumption cultures' of waste, the new initiative for sustainable communities requires innovation in its use of energy and resources, new policy development in terms of inclusion and participation, and a new approach to the kinds of social life that is embedded in our material existence, and has local knowledge and the basis for collaborative change to another set of parameters. This new set of parameters is at once narrower in limiting the consumer desire of citizens, but at the same time more expansive, and the report quotes Paul Gilroy's observation that we are seeing is a new 'planetary humanism' emerging from and fed by new forms of urban conviviality and transnational human rights movements (Gilroy, 2004: 28).

Finally, the COST report clarifies the *origins* of the concept of sustainability in the now famous report of the UN's World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) called 'Our Common Future' (popularly known as the Brundtland Report of 1987). It is immediately apparent that we are now a long way from 1987 in terms of policy theory, yet at the same time the policy discourse (or the evolution of policy statements such as this) remain internal to the legitimacy of statements of such global scale and scope. Indeed, even though (as we will see) sustainable development has now taken a much more socio-political turn, it maintains a discursive appeal to the original model of global development that began with Brundtland in 1987.

Brundtland's seminal statement (and thus formulation of the concept of sustainability) appealed to an awareness of existential danger (the dangers presented by climate change combined with progressive ecological degradation generated by industrial damage) on both local and global scales – the need for sustainability was always *both* local and global simultaneously. Brundtland proposed a re-scaling of developmental change, the globalisation of common developmental aims, the re-planning of human habitation in relation to nature, and the emphasis on values, motivations, ethics and human behaviour in integrated terms (social, economic, environmental, place-based, all of which is broadly defined as 'cultural'). This has become an enduring paradigm shift.

Before we get to the question of theoretical methodology (how we, as cultural policy researchers, are to adopt sustainable development as a framework) we need to detail the 'paradigm' in terms of our concept of culture. In doing that, we will establish that *a sustainable development framework is not just an abstract and universal box within which we are trapped — it is an ethical means of re-aligning and re-scaling all the dimensions of culture with which we are already working*. I emphasise this, as there is a lot of research being conducted within the framework of 'sustainability' that is 'environmental' and so assumes to be (a synonym of) sustainability. Brundtland in 1987 emphasised the fact of human 'need' — not just of survival or subsistence but



of the attainment to a level of capacity that would evolve (develop) within an open-ended temporality (indefinitely, historically). Mere subsistence requires perpetual subsidy, and sustainability is not in itself an argument for a permanent universal welfare economy; sustainability is intended to work within existing frameworks of economy and development, but provides both a material basis, historical scope, and ethical orientation. This does not give a policy everything it needs, but demands an active alignment with other theoretical frameworks in order to address specific problems (material, social, economic, environmental and so on).

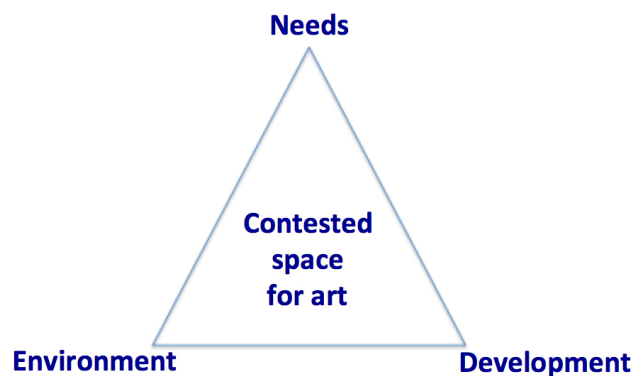
Brundtland's use of the term 'needs' emerged in the now famous and endlessly quoted statement, 'Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (UN World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). In terms of discourse, it made reference to the then 'Basic Needs' discourse, which indeed argued for a universal welfare economy (which grew out of the work of the ILO World Employment Program of the 1970s: Rimmer, 1981). Brundtland's use of the term 'environment', was also interconnected with the global discourse of the ecology movement (such as Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, World Wide Fund for Nature and the various anti-nuclear and 'Green' political parties) – and which primarily addressed ecological danger and abuses, pollution, material extractivism, and the potential for planetary destruction by nuclear weapons (an assumption that subsided with the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s).

In this context, as I will point out later, the concept of 'environmental art' emerged, and this, by implication, became a proto-sustainable cultural production. However, given that 'environmental art' is still a contemporary art genre, we need to be clear on the limited meaning of 'environmental' in this context — i.e. for the most part only pertaining to the materials and material conditions of production (in an empirical sense). In other words, environmental art and its models of cultural production are part of the older ecological paradigm that was invested in the preservation, care and welfare of the natural world and the materials it provides; it often re-connects energy consumption with the processes of artistic production, and with a conservationist sensibility define means of enhancing not extracting the sources of materials or material substances art requires. Sometimes environmental art has a research or educational mission, revealing the sources or material constitution of the media that so often conceals and not reveals its organic or chemical substrate.

Talk of art and the environment, of course, invokes the long tradition of philosophical Romanticism (both German and English), invariably concerned with the ways in which human and material nature were in a state of alienation. Aesthetics (assumed to be both the experience of art, and of nature, is a dimension of human experience that facilitates both an awareness of alienation and a means of overcoming this: Schiller's *Letters Upon the*

*Aesthetic Education of Man* of 1794 is a classic text). The Romantic project maintained that the human experience of nature (or the exercise of human faculties that were capable of apprehending dimensions of nature, such as perception or the visual cognition) could reveal the means by which we could begin to restore our understanding of, and unity with, our material conditions of existence. Of course, for the Romantics, this was an ego-centric venture in the sense that they did not imagine that nature itself would need to be freed from its own alienation by human beings – while the industrial revolution did awaken a sense that huge destruction was being wrought (In England, Blake’s ‘dark Satanic mills’; William Morris’ arts and crafts movement; the English Garden City movement, and so forth). While this history is evoked by Environmental art, current sustainability policy thought is not philosophically inclined to the alienation thesis (which later became a basis of most cultural studies as influenced by the ‘post-romantic’ German Frankfurt School).

Nonetheless, Environmental art remains an expansive arena for thought and creative practice in revealing the materiality of art and its implications in how we relate to that, but we need to be concrete on its difference to an art that works within ‘sustainability’. Environmental art is ‘critical’ in the sense of created in opposition to an inherently destructive and deception system of thought and production — the modern industrial conception of material nature as pure and infinite resource for human progress. But, it is not paradigm-changing; it is inherently paradoxical — like Brundtland, it remains with a ‘humanism of human need’, where ‘needs’ are defined primarily in terms of material resource, physical construction and space. But if understood in terms of ‘development’, this is only one dimension of ‘what people need’ so to speak: people need social care and the kinds of organisation that is not physical, but cultural or personal — which, arguably, have material conditions also — but people also need a collective cohesion that is animated by a unifying moral aim (in modernity, it was progress). So, while there remains intractable problems with this observation, it contains elements that remain important to us and so it is helpful to picture the field of Environment art as a triangular motion of thought and practice.





We now need to clear up some semantic issue on the use of words, the term sustainable has an empirical semantic or 'dictionary meaning' that continues — that something (anything) can be 'sustained' (or simply continued if the present conditions or state of affairs carry on). Sometimes 'Sustainable arts' is used in that sense, and is a form of Environmental art or extensive with the ecology movement and its post-romantic values. Sustainability as 'Development' is more scientific, and as a policy, as we indicated, is a paradigm shift in global governance — all steadily being worked out in relation to each and every form of production (from factories to the film industry) and each environmental context (place, geographic region or locale).

Sustainability, as I will use it, is a *form of* 'development', and uses of the term sustainability without 'development' will entail vagueness and an overlap with earlier semantics. 'Development' is not merely a policy in giving aid to poor countries; it is project that asserts that human society and economy is in a process of evolution, where material and human nature have a related pathway in that process. What this means is still being worked out of course, so I am not implying an established framework for sustainable development. As I indicated, the open ended temporality of sustainability means (or should mean) that it is forever a 'project' (forever evolving in meaning and application). The problem immediately emerges that Development must always be a time-bound process — people have needs; places need aid; disasters or climate impacts need attending to. And yet, to be sustainable, an emphatic 'historicity' must be maintained within Development, whereby nothing *remains only* a quantifiable entity and coordinate in any given plan but is continually evolving and interrelated with a matrix of other entities and processes. This is why sustainable development remains a policy theory conundrum for agencies like UNDP, who are under pressure to maintain a time-bound productivity, in producing measurable results, and where much of the actual place-based work is carried out by corporate (or unreconstructed organisational) entities — whose values and modes of application are not necessarily sustainable. Indeed, most 'developing countries' remain in a long industrial revolution, whereby carbon-heavy processes of industrial production are still in motion — fast transformation to carbon-neutral industry is not possible and because of this the policy theory of sustainability has not evolved universally (except, it must be said, in limited 'indigenous' environments: see Watene and Yap, 2015, for an early framework).

As a basic conceptual proposition, the insertion of sustainability as the temporality of Development, has surprisingly large implications — for to set out a process of production that is embedded in the matrix of human socio-material evolution, the older resource-heavy forms of industrial production are no longer possible. We begin to see how a new lexicon of organisation itself is required, and I can suggest the following:

(i): A knowledge expanse — no one agency, agent or scientific system will be able to contain or exhaust the forms of knowledge that the evolutionary process of material and human interaction over time will require, or generate.

Engaging community (specifically, professional communities of practice, but also place-based social communities, stakeholders, networks of interest, and so on) becomes a necessity, and by implication, this also generates a sense that knowledge has multiple sources and is multi-directional. 'Local knowledge', where a community maintains a certain intimacy to a form of production or development process (like indigenous peoples), can facilitate an empowering of place-based communities to shape their own future and contribute to a planning and implementation that is potentially of lower consumption if retaining a smaller scale matrix of evolution.

(ii): Temporal unpredictability — the assumption that production and development is a systematic, linear, logical process through which time can be planned, costed and contained, is no longer credible. Of course, planning and project management are important, but with sustainability they become embedded in the multidimensionality of place-based production (production within a developing socio-economic matrix) – where unpredictability, risk and open-ended possibility are no longer enemies to be removed but conditions of possibility. With an existential horizon (and not one based on rationalist assumptions) human productivity becomes relative to the need to evolve and improve a more general care, resilience and growth.

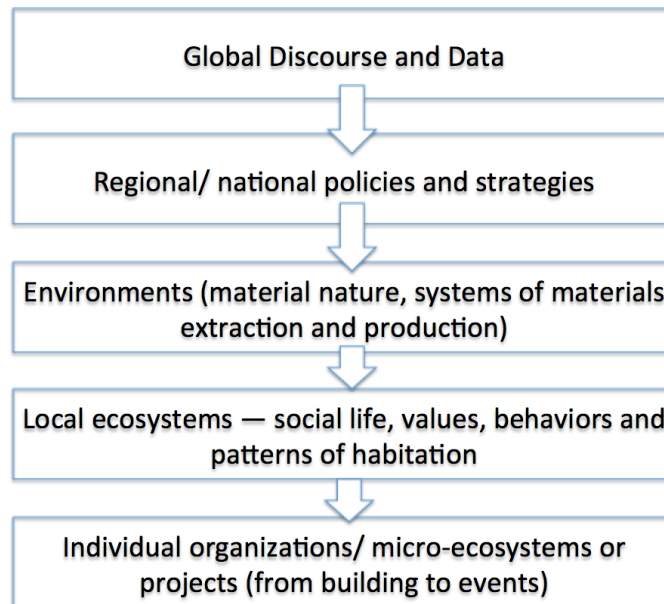
(iii): The impact expanse — across an evolving matrix, while we may build more adaptive and resilient systems of production, 'impact' becomes a factor internal to development (i.e. not a causal after-event that is singular or discrete). Impact is internal to the pre-production of planning, resource allocation, construction, and all the minor forms of economic shock, environmental disaster, socio-cultural change that previously were 'around' or 'out there' as 'environment'; these are all now considered to be material conditions (i.e. essential coordinates).

(iv): Value distribution — it becomes evident that sustainability, permeating every dimension of human production, needs to recognise the effectiveness (and equity) of 'inclusive growth' — this will generate a distribution of the value of sustainability that, in turn, generates a social investment in sustainable modes of working and living (i.e. lifestyle change; consumer choices; decision-making in local governance).

(v): Circular economies — within sustainable development are multiple 'economies' that operate on different scales and scope and density: a 'circular economy' approach is where resources are used according to strategic efficiency and waste-minimisation, recycling, upcycling and repurposing extend the material lifespan of objects and processes and are considered to be normative at the design stage.

(vi): Generative dynamics — within a developmental process, productive forces can work against change or distort the aims of change (to disadvantage others, create costs or lessen value). Frameworks like the 'triple bottom line' can be used in structuring decision-making processes with economic, social, and environmental requirements, aiming to ensure that business and development activities contribute to all three dimensions.

If you want a more concrete looking framework in which this all may become practical, then sustainable development discourse anticipates that, operationally, it will work within differing scales – from, of course, the global level (of UN policy and the SDGs) right down to the local and individual entities, (as follows):



'The Levels of Sustainability Discourse' (© Vickery 2023)

UNESCO's 'Hangzhou Declaration' of 2013 (the outcome of a UNESCO congress held in the Chinese city: UNESCO 2013) is probably the most central reference point for any historical discourse on culture and sustainability. Entitled 'Culture the Key to Sustainable Development', it was supported by the Chinese government and at the congress featured some notable Chinese scholars proposing that 'Chinese thought' will help sustainability policy thinking gain a greater degree of philosophical coherence [I note the features of this Declaration below]. It must be noted that President Xi had just become leader of the Chinese Communist Party, and had recently (in 2012) delivered several speeches in which he used the term 'Chinese Dream', notably at a high-profile tour of an exhibition curated at the National Museum of China (Zheng 2014). That is, the centrality of culture to a new national vision for change, was unusual but strategic — Xi essentially presented a critical alternative to the UN's sustainable development, but not as a direct (political) confrontation. The 'alternative' aspect appeared in the form of a claim to greater political coherence – that only a 'communist' vision could guarantee the unity, interconnectedness and uncompromised delivery of substantive paradigmatic change, which is what the concept of sustainable development presupposes.

Research writing on the Chinese Dream (politically, a 'national renewal' project, but where a vision of a 'cultural' China becomes a vision for global development) is now plentiful (recently, Gering, 2023). Of immediate

relevance is the ‘new global Humanism’ that it introduced into the putative global public sphere — which may not be immediately understood as a doctrine, but whose values have indeed permeated development discourse (or perhaps simply resonated with values already present). These values can be defined, in the first instance, with a series of oppositions:

- Against Western liberalism, secularism and individualism.
- Against Western rationalism and ‘science’ as a template for social organisation.
- Against political sectarianism (i.e. towards a universal model of emancipation and collective welfare).
- Against Western psychology, where being ‘human’ is defined in terms of individual human ego (and not a collectively defined relation between human-material nature).

It is not a surprise to see that China’s vision of sustainability is defined in opposition to Western capitalism (which is understood not merely as a static economic system, but an evolving civilisational force for domination and control of resources). This is significant, as sustainability is indeed – cf Agenda 21 [link below] – an alternative concept of ‘economy’ altogether: the assumed role of ‘freedom’ in labour, the means of production and property rights, distribution and markets, and consumption and lifestyle, is held up as a destructive deception. The normative dimension of this condemnation is not so much argued for as it is exemplified by the observations, data and growing political consensus on climate change. It demands the displacement of the following older normativity endemic within Western capitalism:

- That ‘self-interest’ (and resulting competition) is both productive and self-balancing;
- That markets provide the most effective means by which social agency maximises its resources and optimises productivity;
- That property rights are invested in the individual (or individual corporate entity), absolute, and necessary for any market to function;
- That ‘growth’ is the principal aim of an economy and synonymous with ‘progress’.
- That industry, technology and labour are ‘objective’ mechanisms of production and not to be subject to social, moral or political demands.
- That the means of economic production cannot be held responsible for collateral damage or spillover impacts — the social effects of energy consumption, or environmental damage, for example. Corporate businesses or organisations should, in effect, be similar to embassies in how they are granted a state of exception in how they operate in relation to local or national laws, customs and regulations.

And so on: this list is just an indication of the implicit critique of the way Western capitalism has evolved organisationally and legally, and how the facets of economy that we all take for granted. We assume that individual self-determination is economic and not just political; that people have rights not nature or land itself; that the welfare of people is wholly a local or national

political responsibility, however sufficient or equitable; and that the question of justice is a social, institutional or purely legal question and cannot be a feature of an economic system itself. Our conceptions of 'use-value', utility, instrumentalisation, practical, need and necessity therefore all need revision, and where new reference points are introduced in the form of biodiversity, heritage, human development, low-or non-carbon emitting productivity.

The new Chinese humanism has become (through the UN and other media) a new form of intellectual globalisation, a new conceptual integration of economics and the social order, human welfare and environmental prosperity (see Wei-Ming, 2009). It is, in many ways, more accommodating of the three current priorities of the UN — rights, diversity & equality, and sustainability — even if how these all work practically at the level of policy is still to be demonstrated. But you would be right — in the Chinese claims on global harmony and human-material nature — in detecting an ancient conception of reality, which pre-dates the divisions and categories of European enlightenment (objective/subjective; human nature/material nature; body/mind; reason/feeling; material/metaphysical; freedom/restraint; and so on).

## **Part 2: Thinking about culture and Organisation**

What about the artists? It's all too easy, when thinking of art, to think of objects, and of culture, to think of activities — but with both, we are principally referring to forms of production (of creative labour) and of work. Even before Romanticism (or throughout the industrial revolution and economic modernisation) 'the natural world' had been a major object of philosophical speculation as much as artistic expression, and many an artist has been inspired by their experience of it. Without too much of a digression, I would refer you to four cultural phenomenon that have a distinctive viewpoint on sustainability. The first is what became known as Land Art: this took many forms, but I would refer you to the writings of the late Robert Smithson (d.1973; Smithson 1979) and his essays 'The Monuments of Passaic' (1967) and 'A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects' (1968): they are innovative and interdisciplinary forms of critical writing, which give a role to art in exploring the geo-ecological forces of materiality and natural evolution within which our history and our notions and efforts on human society emerge.

The other three notable artistic developments are 'Permaculture', the 'Autonomous Culture Zone', and 'Cultural Ecology'. The permaculture movement did not rise to the significance that it should have; the term was short for 'permanent agriculture' and introduced artists to working with actual organic nature as an autonomous life form (i.e. not a resource to be chemically converted into a 'medium'). Permaculture was thus place-based and spawned numerous projects around the world. My first actual encounter with this was as a speaker at the Warwick Mead Gallery exhibition opening for 'Artists' Plans for Sustainability' in 2013, featuring among others the work of



Josef Beuys (1921-1986) and the Copenhagen-based n55 (co-founder, Ion Sørvin). The collective n55's artistic planning for sustainable living is still a major resource (<http://www.n55.dk/>). Ion Sørvin has devised a means of providing downloadable plans or templates, which can then be used in constructing shared resources and promoting urban interactivity (interventions in public planning in response to its failure in meeting social needs). Urban knowledge is thereby converted into a design of mobile-movement-processes – adaptive, self-made, individual or collaborative systems of construction — becoming an agency for the creation of social space.

The 'Autonomous Culture Zone' and 'Cultural Ecology' phenomenon are patchy with respect to their relative achievements. I cite them, as by implication they open a large conceptual door to original thinking on sustainability and its implications for a productive society. There have been many experiments with autonomous culture zones — attempts to demarcate a space, often an urban space in a city, as a place determined by social productivity and creative expression and not static state or regulatory law. Freetown Christiania in Copenhagen (est. 1971) is one example, perhaps a bad one given its descent into hedonistic futility and 'alternative' posturing. By implication, parts of cities or other spaces could be defined with a specific mission, perhaps with a more focused 'Living Lab' strategy, and where culture (not economics or social order) becomes the governing means by which sustainable living is explored and established. In a more strategic way, 'Cultural Ecology' is something that has appeared in many creative city or urban development schemes — My own encounter was as speaker at an event for the 'CreArt: Network of Cities for Artistic Creation' project, funded by the EU's Culture programme from 2012. Currently in a new phase [<https://creart2-eu.org/creart-3/>] a fundamental premise of the project concept was that an origin of European cities was artistic culture (as well as social and economic formation) and that urban development must allow ecologies of culture to grow once again and once again become a central fulcrum of a city's evolution.

Now to the question of art or culture as organisations: art is an object, formed by a producer, and today, even in a world of individual artists, exhibition halls, dealerships, galleries and institutions, are the organisational formations through which most art 'enters the world'. How have cultural organisations responded to the challenge of sustainability? We are not to take 'organisation' as a set of assumptions on a form of social agency, such as an institution, company or business. But we are right in assuming that organisations play a central role as actors in the formation of a cultural 'sector' or 'the arts' generally. It is easy to assume simple economic realities, when we are, in fact, allowing agencies of power to operate without critical attention to their role in production. And in the UK, as most countries, the arts and culture is defined, developed, indeed dominated by professional organisations. And organisations rarely come in the form of open projects (like Eastside), but are structured in a definite 'legal-economic' way. Indeed, public funding is often



predicated on a cultural or arts organisation being structured in a certain way, both in terms of the executive, operations and financial management. The realm of cultural production is less predictable, but also less of a priority than the professional roles and responsibilities – which since the 1990's, have almost wholly emerged from the adoption of US strategic management.

Culture and the arts, then, remain in a paradox, for sustainability, as Sacha Kagan has stated, is not a 'fixed state' but 'a continuous process of change that orients us towards possible futures' (last year's lecture; Kagan, 2015; 2022). How can arts organisations respond to this 'continuous process' — through the material entity of the organisation itself. How static 'corporate' organisation has become established in the cultural sphere is the subject of an increasing amount of critical literature: embodiments of neoliberal assumptions on economy and production (Alexander, 2018). First articulated by Paul DiMaggio back in the 1980s, we now face a cultural realm that is defined by 'institutional isomorphism' — organisations of arts and culture (i.e. whose rationale is production) replicate the discourses and practices of their funders or their governing authorities (Powell and DiMaggio, 1983). In the last forty years or more, organisations in the arts and culture in the UK have arguably replicated the professional values and practices of their host, funding or governing body, more than they have created or innovated unique or culture-specific forms of organisation (Powell and Dimaggio, 2012). This is not universally true, but tends to be true where a cultural sector is de facto governed by large, government funded and professional, organisations or institutions. A 'corporate' approach to facilitating cultural production therefore persists in our society and economy (where even creative producers themselves are often inculcated with 'corporate values' through the practices of marketing, financial reporting and audit, evaluation and accountability — which can all be worthy activities, but for the most part emerge as articulations of generalised forms of power and authority: McGuigan, 2016).

My interest here is in the way that 'sustainability' is defined and then facilitated. The pioneering London-based organisation, Julie's Bicycle [<https://juliesbicycle.com/>], is a good example of how funders and strategy agencies are challenging the arts in their response to the environment, but not in the structural features of the arts as organisations (executive, operations and financial management). This is not to say their priorities are not worthy, and do not challenge the way organisations use their facilities, engage with spaces, and facilitate participation. But the emphasis is on a crisis 'out there' — the 'climate crisis'. Now while there persists a crisis, and the word 'emergency' is commonly used (and mis-used), this comes at the cost of a certain social psychology, whereby 'environment' is defined in some fundamental way (energy, resource, consumption, and so on) as having moral authority. This tends to be the rubric of government approaches to sustainability, cascaded down to funders, such as Arts Council England (ACE), and conveyed by agencies tasked with strategic reporting and advocacy. The ACE annual report, called 'Culture, Climate and Environmental

Responsibility' is not only reporting on how art organisations 'act on national and international climate targets' (Arts Council England, 2022: 4), but figure the new demands placed on arts organisations with public funding to respond to certain stated environmental conditions — from emissions targets ('Environmental Impact Reduction Objectives, EIROs, in-line with the goals of the Paris Agreement using Science Based Targets, SBTi,, etc.), to 'eliminating single-use plastic', 'installing energy efficient lighting and/or lighting sensors/timers' and 'actively promote teleconferencing' (p.13).

Again, these are worthy activities that should be promoted, but as a huge sectoral trend it indicates how sustainability has become absorbed into a climate-agenda that is neutral on the endemic politics of culture or political economy of arts organisations and the evolution of cultural production itself within a sustainable society (of actual places and people). This is not to overstate the fact; the above report does have a 'Beyond Carbon' section that indicates how environment necessitates a critical attention to other subjects, from freedom of expression to land rights: (p.15).

But, a climate agenda as adopted by an arts organisation will both define that agenda in opposition to the current set up of the local economy (i.e. few arts organisations have choice over which buildings they inherit or use, or the facilities available, or the costs of their activities), but it will also indicate how organisations are embedded in their local economy. I will cite four examples worth closer examination, where a climate-based environmental agenda facilitates a closer engagement with the conditions of local economy.

Firstly, is the 'Circular Economy' promoted by the Maire de Paris — first launched in 2017 — stating, 'We are initiating this major change in the way our society works as a whole by substituting the idea of reuse for that of replacement, to create a world free of waste': (Maire de Paris, p.1). Their innovative framework of the 'urban metabolism' demands a continual analysis and accounting for the means and processes by which the city's production, consumption, wastage and emissions operate (how the city, as organism-like entity, processes all the materials it takes in, forms through production of various kinds, then outputs, and so forth): At the end of 2014, the cities new Urban Ecology Agency created an impressive data visualisation of these flows and projects. The Circular Economy is a 'territorial' model of local engagement (in part, grounded in the urban spatial models of EU urban development), *which recognises the fundamental role of both geography, location, and topography.*

My second example is the 'Changing Climates Festival' of 2021 and 2022, staged at the Belgrade Theatre in Coventry (my university city). This is what I would call a collaborative model, where the mechanism of a festival event is used to incentivise other city arts organisations so as to (i) collaborative on finding ways of sharing resources, including skills and capabilities, across cultural organisations; (ii) incentivising younger generations as the means of

future change; (iii) inspiring the imagination by using the environment for creative and broad-themed performances (which exceed the science and economics of the low-carbon agenda), and (iv) use the agenda on climate 'emergency' to stimulate the city's business community in offering their support (sponsorship; supporting job opportunities; for example). *This collaborative model facilitates local partners in delivering on an environmental agenda, which remains internal to their creative production.*

My third example is the Mayor of London-sponsored World Cities Culture Forum, whose 'Tacking Climate Change Through Culture' and 'Culture and Climate Change' report [which seems not to have continued] and the Handbook for City Leaders (2019), are all valuable contributions to leadership in what they specify as 'sustainability through an environmental lense' (p.5). The lead advisors are Julie's Bicycle and the aim is to inspire creative projects that facilitate compliance with the 2015 Paris Climate Accords. Nonetheless, I call this the 'Forum dialogue model' of engagement with local economy, as it operates with *an open participatory and research-based strategy approach.*

My fourth model I call an 'artistic creativity model', or, in the words of the Citta Cittadellarte project, '...a research and innovation format... to contribute with concrete elements of social resilience, inspired by the current needs of the ecosystem and with the aim of consciously creating new forms of production'. Their CirculART project, at least notionally, attends to the processes of production as creative process and not just through economic or industrial categories of material production, consumption, waste, and so forth. *Engaging with environment while maintaining artistic aims is the way their creative practices of production are being transformed and becoming sustainable.*

My purpose in proposing these four examples of concrete environmental agendas in culture, is to indicate how strategic approaches to the 'environment' should aim at the relation between that organisation and its local economy — and not see the organisation in terms of how it can discharge a pre-packaged governmental climate agenda. Or, rather, a low carbon environmental agenda should be inserted into a broader cultural sustainability framework — a more integrated understanding of sustainability as internal to cultural production, and not just something cultural organisations could function to deliver. And these examples indicate four available conditions for that — exemplified at least by what I called the 'territorial model' (place-based), 'collaborative model', the 'forum dialogue model' and 'artistic creativity model'. These 'conditions' are not criteria or a tick-box requirement — they indicate the ways in which organisations can grow sustainably, through an attentiveness of the following

- geography, location and topography (including local nature)
- collaboration, participation and co-creation
- maximising professional intelligence and knowledge
- internalising environmental consciousness within the methods of creative production

And so, I arrive at my approach to *sustainability as organisation*: (the opening question – what is *sustainable cultural organisation*?) This is not simply ‘an organisation that is ‘sustainable’, but an organisation defined by sustainability. These are not simple ingredients — we need to devise a model that is critical in its resistance to some strong forces animating the sustainability agendas within the cultural sector.

While the SDGs are not legally binding, many national environmental directives that follow from them are indeed imposed (whether through funding conditions or legal imperative). And while their aims are often admirable, the imposition of directives has implications for an organisations independence, ethos and values, decision-making and governance. Indeed, whatever the nature of the imposition, it extends the neoliberal trend of previous decades in converting public policy making and local governance into non-negotiable regulatory and compliance mechanisms of centralised government. It creates an institutional culture of ‘compliance’, diktat and a policy agenda that overrides local participatory democracy. Further, the climate emergency and de-carbonising agenda have not only been alarmist in their rhetoric, enforcing a sense of priority that cannot definitively be fulfilled, but have overridden the need for a growing public knowledge of broader pathways to sustainability. Altogether, the above processes gradually extract the requirements of local research and policymaking, according to the individual conditions and shared requirements in a local infrastructure, and replace it with a form of managerialism whose priority is government and not governance.

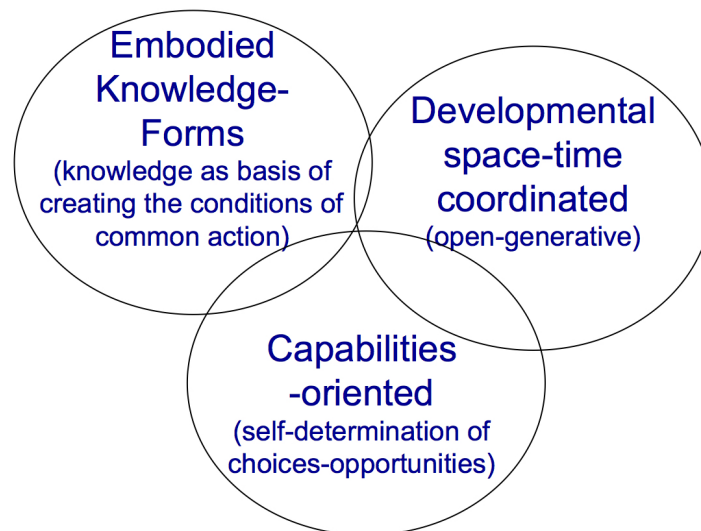
This, again, is not to over-state the imposition of environmental directives, many of which are not necessarily onerous. My main point is that these directives have represented themselves as ‘sustainable development’, when environmental concerns should be part of a locally formed, researched and agreed sustainability strategy model. The challenge of sustainability, is not simply to limit the damage to the planet from human industry, but to devise place-based ways of making productive the dynamic relation between human and material nature — of giving ‘nature’ agency. It is to this end that I conclude this paper with another part, starting with an abstract model, but a model whose reference points are proven fields of policy knowledge and afford us the opportunity of comprehending a political imaginary of sustainability as culture and making this internal to organisational development (‘sustainable organisation’).

### **Part 3: a model of sustainable cultural organisation**

Constructing a ‘model’ of practice, is important in how it can assert a strong theoretical statement on something. It also comes with a challenge in simplifying or identifying the elemental dimensions of something – only essential components are usually included in a diagram (whose value, in part, is that it can be taken by others and used in varying contexts).

The diagram below is a model of sustainability through culture, where culture (in policy terms) is both epistemic and experiential: It is *a media through which*

*we think the world* (particularly the local material world in which we work and live), and *a means of communicating, reflecting and refracting* that world (providing a self-reflexive experiences of our self-world relation — where ‘self’ is both collective and individual). This model, then, is defined in terms of the three dimensions of policy thought (as exemplified in the last section, making possible the four conditions indicated by the above four examples), as *the general ontological features of organisation* — of knowledge, space and human capability (people and what they are able to do). As inflected by the previous study, we can qualify these terms by saying that the ‘Knowledge’ evolves and continues as critical/ reflexive thought processes; ‘Development’ is transformation as new conditions for action; ‘Capabilities’ naturally expand toward greater consciousness of freedom and self-actualisation. This ‘trialectical’ arrangement (cf. Lefebvre, 1991) will form the conditions of possibility for my examples of growing sustainably given above — Place (territory), collaboration, dialogue and creativity.



‘Sustainability Culture and Organisation’ (© Vickery 2023)

To clarify again, *Dimension 1*: ‘Organisation as Embodied Knowledge’ can be understood as extending the discourse on *place-based participatory policy making, such as Agenda 21’s circles of sustainability*: (Agenda 21, 2014); *Dimension 2*: ‘Organisation as Developmental Space’ can be understood as extending the discourse of the UNESCO’s creative economy report 2013, on pathway development or the local conditions of an activity or organisation; and *Dimension 3*: ‘Organisation as capabilities-Oriented’, can be understood as extending the UNDP’s Human Development discourse, or more specifically, ‘The Capabilities Approach’ (building on the work of Amartya Sen, which is one strain of that discourse). The integration of these three policy discourses in an emerging ‘trialectical’ methodology gives us more



substantive discourse basis for using the model, so it's less abstract or less an abstraction of an empirical description of an organisation.

But what does this look like in practice? I do not want to make contentious claims about current cultural projects or cultural sustainability ventures – but I must illustrate this with some familiar past projects. One reason for this is to underline how these necessary dimensions of sustainability are not new inventions or imagined aspirations, but are strategic means of transforming the environment. Promises of fast, complete and permanent change, are usually authoritarian (as Adorno would not, idealism — the imposition of an abstract paradigm, and not one with present material conditions of possibility, which has evolved historically: Adorno, *passim*). Though, in my view, we are right to be sceptical of claims of 'total change' or immediate revolution, where the material conditions for such have not already evolved: So, I will provide three closing examples of older forms of sustainability, identified by this model, which are practical ways in which sustainability is already an organisational reality.

The Custard Factory is the now-famous converted custard factory buildings, south of the city centre of Birmingham. Its history as a pioneering adaptive reuse building began with an experiment in 1993 by London-based entrepreneur Benny Gray, where housing a diversity of creative businesses and practitioners, events and associations, has allowed for the growth of a cultural brand as well as a popular visitor destination. It is often used as a case example of a contribution to the city's economic growth, but looking more closely at its history, there are aspects of its emergence relevant to us:

*As Embodied Knowledge:* the adaptive re-use of an industrial site was not just a building or construction project, it was a form of cultural entrepreneurship: serious strategic thought was involved in repurposing a largely degraded factory space could be converted at minimal cost to form a multi-purpose creative industries facility that could continually adapt as moving forward into an uncertain future. Central to this 'strategic thought' was someone willing to talk, discuss, pursue lines of inquiry, and innovate specific and local options. In other words, there was no static 'real estate' model imposed on the place, but a new form industrial activity evolving by intellectual engagement.

*As Developmental Space:* the 'open' spatial design of the site was shaped through evolving needs (the fixed structures of the building walls were relative to the organisational flux of the people and empowered enterprises, as the spatial management attempted to include all levels of revenue, rental income, and none).

*As Capabilities-Oriented:* An initial internal economy of resource distribution (sharing of facilities) allowed for a diversity of people to evolve in their skills and aspirations and for the space to change, reinvent itself and consolidate as a stable location for organisations to evolve and business to develop. For anyone who knows the Custard Factory, this may seem self-evident. But this dynamic interaction of thinking, shaping and evolving professional capabilities, was something that formed an 'open' process that could adapt and continue



even under more difficult, later (economic recessionary), conditions. It expresses resilience, specifically in the role it plays in the place-making and re-making of this neglected part of the city:

<https://www.digbeth.com/workspaces/custard-factory>

Another organisation that I find interesting is 'PSRC: the People's Republic of Stoke's Croft' (a community management initiative in a district of the South East English city of Bristol). While there is a lot to say about the seeming-anarcho syndicalism that has not actual been able to create a radical alternative of a self-managed place, the creative leadership that emerged is instructive, and from its origins in 2007, it has become an example of small-scale but vibrant organisational evolution. As *Embodied Knowledge*: the enterprise of re-establishing a creative mission and common identity in this district of a city increasingly controlled by centralised authority, has produced a visually engaged means of critical thought. Its generally non-partisan yet 'radical' political representation of local interests, is defined through using an increasing knowledge of local history, people, the coordinates of place and potential for creativity, on how this place needs to work, socially and economically for people to experience an aspiration to collective self-determination in culture.

As *Developmental Spaces*: it began with an artist-craftsperson making visual statements, objects and projects, involving others and growing community and participatory events, the gradual constructing of a basic cultural infrastructure identifies social and economic urban needs and conditions for community and wellbeing.

As *Capabilities-Orientation*: Community self-management, training, advocacy and political liaison was a new career pathway for many local people and provided the conditions of a growing local social economy. People can 'grow' at PSRC:

<https://prsc.org.uk/>

My third example is 'Eastside Projects', an artist-run gallery, a short distance from the Custard Factory, south of Birmingham city center. Since 2008, and with support from various city and national stakeholders, the gallery has pioneered engaging forms of curating and public programming, which have inserted the gallery into the policy discourse on the role of culture in the evolution of the city [Birmingham is traditionally the UK's 'second city', after London]. As *Embodied Knowledge*: the gallery created a curatorial discourse that involved shaping this ex-industrial space as a city resource for facilitating the creation of a *public* for art (i.e. the public is something 'created' and not simply a social fact of a given location, and its knowledge of art is something that needs cultivating).

As *Developmental Space*: The space is not called 'gallery' but 'projects' (plural) and not simply for exhibitions but for a space where the concept of both art and space in the city are evolving according to changing material conditions (specifically, social life, young and new people, the law and policy and cultural funding conditions).

As *Capabilities-Orientation*: The ‘projects’ are where artists and the ‘public’ co-produce their own relation — identifying the value of art, the social need for art, the role of the public in art, the changing experience of art, and writing, discussing and research on how this gives us an insight into understanding culture, both national culture, the urban culture of the city, the international contemporary art world culture, and the everyday social culture that we all live in (including education, entertainment, music and so on):

<https://eastsideprojects.org/>

## Conclusion

My model of sustainable organisation asserts the creation of the means of self-reflection and place-based self-knowledge, and a sense of situation within the political economy of culture, both locally and nationally. Self-aware organisations are strategic organisations, as they experience a sense of autonomy and relation to material conditions of possibility as much as the growing diversity of the social populace. As strategic organisations, they produce an internal discourse within which their people, stakeholders and participants can think and develop media for communicating thought, reflecting and imagining and evolving collectively as thinking beings. This process is the opposite of the kinds of business strategy planning models that are taught in business schools or indeed preferred by governing bodies. This process aims for ‘embodied’ power (i.e. where the organisation has a phenomenological reality — a distinctive experiential realm, which people can inhabit it, learn from it, contribute to its evolving intelligence and form part of its growing knowledge).

The role of space is to engage with temporal realities (time and the coordinates of change), given how ‘change’ is the centre of all imagination, transformation is the centre of all creation, and the prospect of change is the fulcrum of all hope. The role of ‘capabilities’ is to first recognise people and the value of people — the value created by people that evolve, grow, find ways of collective habitation, creativity and production. The capabilities approach understands potential, fulfillment and the need for personal, social and cultural growth, where management and production are not forms of control but expression and self-actualisation.

To conclude, this conception of *sustainable cultural organisation* moves beyond the bureaucratic diktat of national carbon targets, or the pragmatism of reducing energy consumption, and though preservation and conservation are critical features of any sustainability, the ruling ethos of this model is one of freedom and self-determination. Compliance and management control will always be a feature in any organisation, and it would be naive to think not, but culture itself enlightens us to how changing our language, our frameworks,

our values, our approach to life and each other, can still affect meaningful change.

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### **A briefing on the original lecture [student preparation]:**

An important principle in understanding sustainability, is that since the original formulation of global sustainability policy – in the 1992 Earth Summit and its focus on the natural world and material environment – policy makers have been steadily expanding the term to all aspects of social cultural and

economic life.

<https://www.un.org/en/conferences/environment/rio1992>

The SDGs were an expansion of the previous Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), where in the year 2000 and marking the turn of the millennium, the largest ever meeting of world leaders met in New York and proposed a new global-scale plan for the welfare of the whole world. The previous MDGs (there were only 8) had failed short of their targets, but did generate some very significant cultural projects — many in the form of the Spanish-funded 'MDG Achievement Fund: see

<http://www.mdgfund.org/content/cultureanddevelopment>

<https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

Since then, there have been numerous events, documents, studies and projects all devoted to making the new SDGs more specific and effective, for example, the recent 2021 International Year of Creative Economy for Sustainable Development:

<https://unctad.org/topic/trade-analysis/creative-economy-programme/2021-year-of-the-creative-economy>

For a very basic introduction to *culture as a form of sustainable development*, see the joint UNCTAD – UNESCO publication of 2009: *The Power of Culture for Development*.

<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000189382>

In terms of your studies, and the way culture (mainly through the work of UNESCO) has become embedded in the global sustainability agenda, see the following documents (most available online). They give a good historical overview on how culture became a major driver of sustainability for global development policy and practice), and illustrate how the years from the establishment of the initial MDGs to the SDGs – from 2000-2015 [a 15 year period, then subject to 2 years of delays and policy arguments] – as this period was where most of the 'discourse' of culture and sustainability was formed.

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See also the continuing 2005 Convention monitoring reports:

<https://www.unesco.org/reports/reshaping-creativity/2022/en>

*And the discussions continue*; see the recent event:

'Cultural Diversity and Biodiversity for Sustainable Development: a jointly

convened UNESCO and UNEP high-level Roundtable held on 3 September 2002 in Johannesburg, South Africa during the World Summit on Sustainable Development':

[https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000132262\\_eng](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000132262_eng)

The principal innovator in culture for sustainable development, have been cultural agencies themselves; **Agenda 21 for Culture** was part of that policy development: it is now called just 'Culture 21'

<https://www.agenda21culture.net/>

Many institutions are aware of the SDGs (like universities) and have embedded them in their organisational performance plans. The large framework is referred to as 'The 2030 Agenda': <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>  
The bureaucratic monitoring includes an annual Global Sustainable Development Report:

<https://sdgs.un.org/gsdrgsd2023>

There is a sense that many policy areas at UN level with an historic or 'preservationist' aim, tend to have adapted easily to the new imperative of sustainable development. The 2013 'Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage' is a good example.

<https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention>

The central UNESCO convention – the global cultural policy in the form of the 2005 'Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions' is also 'intrinsically' promoting sustainability:

<https://www.unesco.org/creativity/en/2005-convention>

This is also true on policy statements on indigenous peoples or Cultural Rights, for example, the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples:

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/declaration-on-%20the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples.html>

From 2010 there have been a number of UN resolutions and statements on culture in relation to sustainable development, and sustainable development itself. 2013 was an important year, which featured a UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), UN Development Programme (UNDP) and UNESCO joining together in affirming the Hangzhou Declaration: 'Placing Culture at the Heart of Sustainable Development Policies',

<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000221238>

This was accompanied by the publication of a huge five year project, and third UNCTAD/UNESCO collaborative report, 'Creative Economy Report: Special Edition – Widening Local Development Pathways', supported by the International Federations of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies (IFACCA), Coalitions for Cultural Diversity (IFCCD), Agenda 21 for Culture, the EU's



Culture Action Europe, Arterial Network, the International Music Council, ICOMOS, IFLA and the Latinoamerican Network of Arts for Social Transformation. Then (extending into 2014) came the advocacy 'Culture as a Goal in the Post-2015 Development Agenda' and the '#culture2015goal' campaign launched:

<https://www.agenda21culture.net/advocacy/culture-as-a-goal-in-post-2015>  
[http://culture2030goal.net/sites/default/files/2022-09/culture2030goal\\_Culture%20Goal%20-%20ENG.pdf](http://culture2030goal.net/sites/default/files/2022-09/culture2030goal_Culture%20Goal%20-%20ENG.pdf)

<https://en.unesco.org/creativity/screen/report-widening-local-development-pathways>

2014 also brought the 3rd UNESCO World Forum on Culture and the Cultural Industries, 'Culture, Creativity and Sustainable Development', adopting the 'Florence Declaration' on the role of culture in the Post-2015 Development Agenda:

<https://en.unesco.org/events/third-unesco-world-forum-culture-and-cultural-industries>

And also the first UCLG Culture Summit (in Bilbao), by the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) called 'Culture 21 Actions: Commitments on the role of culture in sustainable cities'

[https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/culture\\_in\\_the\\_sdgs.pdf](https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/culture_in_the_sdgs.pdf)

IN September 2015, the UN General Assembly adopted the '2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', with 17 new goals to be established as a global framework for all development policy: it is managed by the UNDP (the UN Development Project – a huge agency of the UN) – but you will find hundreds of other agencies, projects and consultancies all promoting these 'goals'.

<https://www.undp.org/>

However, many people working in the arts and culture do not take much notice of global-level policy, but work only their own national and locally-based policy frameworks – UN member states are under obligation to 'translate' (make into 'domestic law') the terms of international agreements, like the SDGs, the 2005 Convention, and any new measure or regulation adopted by the General Assembly. It is therefore the case that many of our city-based and national frameworks 'echo' the aims of the global policies, but also have specific features.

'Sustainability' has a range of meanings — and not necessarily in direct relation to the environment (the term 'environment' has also many applications – particularly in cities where the 'natural' world or biosphere is not very large). In the arts in the UK there are specific 'environmental' policies, based on sustainability aims, but also 'sustainability' policies that integrate the

principles of environmental sustainability into every aspect of organisational life.

*For an example of these two large categories, see...*

London's Serpentine Gallery and its Environmental Policy statements (in part, because it is located in one of London's Royal Parks):

<https://www.serpentinegalleries.org/environmental-policy/>

Or the Tate galleries (a national network of 5 major art galleries, including the famous Tate Modern on the banks of the Thames river in London)

<https://www.tate.org.uk/about-us/tate-and-climate-change>

The, sustainability in terms of the geo-natural environment:

<https://www.groundworkgallery.com/>

Then, a more general 'sustainability as an ethical responsibility over all resources:

<https://www.vam.ac.uk/info/sustainability>

Then there's another category, not so visibly focussed on environment, but on 'sustainable development' itself — which includes social justice, health and wellbeing, and community issues. It is a more expansive project, encompassing culture, consumerism and other lifestyle dimensions, here's an example from the UK city of Bristol:

<https://sparksbristol.co.uk/>

This project doesn't look like sustainability on the face of it, until you look at the organisers and their rationale:

<https://globalgoalscentre.org/>

The British Council have now developed their own strategic approach to sustainable development and the SDGs:

'The Missing Pillar – Culture's Contribution to the UN Sustainable Development Goals' (2020):

<https://www.britishcouncil.org/arts/culture-development/our-stories/the-missing-pillar-sdgs>

See a further commission: 'The Missing Foundation: Culture's place within and beyond the SDGs' (2023)

<https://www.britishcouncil.org/research-insight/missing-foundation-report>

A major reference for this latter report was the important UNESCO World Congress MONDIACULT of September 2022: in it, the case for culture's role in sustainability emphasise's culture's unique role as a 'global public good'.

<https://www.unesco.org/en/mondiacult2022>

To illustrate this, I asked ChatGPT the two questions of this seminar:

**ChatGPT** – *its always useful to begin researching a new topic or concept with a summary overview*: ChatGRP is not an analysis nor an interpretation – it is a linguistics-based 'overview summary' that is extrapolated from its own bespoke digest of its own bespoke survey of all the main internet-published

sources on this subject — prioritised according to its own bespoke (unstated) criteria]

**For Creative Practice, search:**

1: The Environment as a catalyst of awareness, perception and consciousness of the role of material nature and the biosphere in our social development.

2: As Communication, sustainability can be conveyed, depicted and represented by the visual arts — including topical issues such as entropy, environmental degradation, and the importance of conservation.

3: Artistic Materials are often ‘extracted’ or part of the cycle of consumer economy and this is an area in need of examination (especially in the matter of recycled materials, renewable resources, and non-toxic substances).

4: Sustainable practice – design, construction, architecture and urbanism are now integrating principles and research on the design process and its values in relation to materials, energy consumption, harvesting systems, upcycling, recycling and renewability.

5: Conservation and preservation – these are older (nineteenth-century) concerns, but are now being updated through more current sustainability research.

**For cultural organisations, search:**

1: Environmental Impact: (environmental footprints and energy use, maintenance of buildings; transportation; exhibitions; ecological impact, reducing energy consumption, water usage, and waste generation, etc.).

2: Preservation of Heritage: (documentation and archiving; historical artifacts; places and buildings and natural habitat; land. Time-bound resources conserved).

3: Resource Management: (Efficiency; money in relation to environmental impact; installing energy-efficient lighting and heating systems, operational costs, carbon emissions, etc.).

4: Visitor Engagement: (audience reach; platforms for sustainability education; current affairs and topics like climate change, biodiversity, and sustainable living).

5: Exhibition Design: (environmental impact and eco-friendly materials, such as LED lighting; interactive displays for sustainability education).

6: Ethical and Social Responsibility: (the mission of sustainability in life-

decisions, choices and consumer preferences, spending, standard of living, consumption, cultural values and ethics. This the basic motivational psychology of responsible stewardship of resources and constructive conduct).

7: Policy and Advocacy: (support sustainability discourse, research, practice, such as green building standards, conservation efforts, public transportation initiatives for audiences, and so forth).

8: Collaborative Partnerships: (share or coordinate with other sustainability-focused orgs, enabling capacity building, organisational learning, interconnection with policy and economy to address sustainability challenges collectively).

9: Innovation and Creativity: (innovative solutions; new approaches and new data; addressing sustainability in ways not linear, logical or scientific).

10: Community Engagement: (local leadership in promoting sustainable practice; participation and people-centred sustainability; raising awareness on environment).

11: Financial Sustainability: adopting sustainable practice within financial management; reducing operating costs, increasing project opportunities; enhanced revenue generation through eco-conscious programming; securing longevity; next-generation-focussed, etc.).

Of course, it is interesting to see how ChatGPT summarises this huge area of policy making — *but beyond a summary it is not a great deal of use, as some of these areas belong to other established policy fields, and policy fields are usually embedded in budget structures or the financial management of a country, government or economy of a place (like a city).*

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*It is worth looking at some arts organisations and their own perspectives and policies on sustainability.*

This is a purpose-build sustainability arts venue: **The Green Music Center (GMC) at Sonoma State University (California, USA)**  
<https://gmc.sonoma.edu/>

**The Royal Court Theatre** (London): has planned out every element of its activity in terms of the SDGs  
<https://royalcourttheatre.com/about/environmental-policy/>

**The Open Jar Collective** (Glasgow, Scotland), project-based, socially-engaged sustainable arts  
<https://openjarcollective.wordpress.com/>

**Invisible Dust** (Scarborough, north East England), pioneering cross-disciplinary partnerships in new sustainability strategies

<https://invisibledust.com/>

**Grizedale Arts** (Cumbria, north West England) place-based eco-creativity agency (one of the UK's original commissioner of land and eco-arts, e.g. the well-known Andy Goldsworthy <https://andygoldsworthystudio.com/>

<https://www.grizedale.org/>

**Deveron Projects** (Huntley, northern Scotland) a small-town local-global engaged arts organisation

<https://www.deveron-projects.com/home/>

**The morning Boat** (Jersey, island near France but UK territory) – an international artist residency 'lab' working with every dimension is island culture and economy.

<https://morningboat.com/>

*Also interesting examples:*

<https://www.theblackgoldtapestry.com/>

<https://elanatsui.art/>

<https://www.studioantoinebertin.com/>

<https://www.byhula.com/aoana>

<https://www.earthcodesobservatory.org/>

<https://www.tempestryproject.com/>

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