

Nordic Talks - The role of culture and arts in the environmental movement in the Nordic Region and internationally

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Introduction - Is the climate issue a cultural challenge?

Climate change has moved from a purely theoretical subject to an apparent reality in everyday life. As the American environmentalist Bill McKibben (2005) pointed out, people never really understood climate change even though theoretically they knew about it as it was not part of their culture yet. "Where are the books? The plays? The goddamn operas?" he wondered. It is undisputed that only art can translate the often incomprehensible, from the non-experts, scientific facts into human emotions and break the intangible issue of climate change into small personal components.

In everyday life, culture and art generate economic and social capital therefore, they are important for the economy, as well as for human health and well-being, social integration, renewal and perhaps most importantly, shape urban identity (Blessi et al. 2012). Nevertheless, their potential role to promote environmentally sustainable cities remains largely unexploited.

In a series of events, practical solutions and countermeasures to climatic change are discussed within the artistic and cultural framework of modern cities. How can culture and art prepare us for the challenges that climate change will have on our cities and bring social resilience in our communities? Could the cities be more open and accessible for anyone? How can the public get involved to promote a sustainable society?

There are no ready-made answers nevertheless, in the following Nordic Talk event, cultural experts discuss the responsibility, the opportunities and possible artistic working methods to realise more resilient societies and therefore resilient cities. (stockholmresilience.org)

Chapter 1:

Nordic Talks as a sub-event of SOS Climate Waterfront conference in Stockholm

In 2022, Intercult organised three talks that acted as a sub-event of the SOS Climate Waterfront conference in Stockholm. In these Talks, climate change experts, architects, urbanists, artists, and activists -most of them selected from the SOS Climate Waterfront experts' pool- came together to discuss and create a common agenda for the future of our cities especially within the Nordic context (Table 1). The Talks were planned to contribute to a holistic goal that unites different social and political struggles; to raise awareness, inspire change and propose actions while presenting and promoting the actions in the Nordic region.

The Nordic Talks event titled "The future of our cities - Challenges and solutions in the Nordic region and internationally" was funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers & Nordic Council. The physical event took place in Stockholm and the city acted as a leading example where infrastructure, city environment, social and cultural life came to focus.

The event was part of something bigger. The first talk was linked as an associated event to the “Stockholm +50” international meeting hosted by Sweden and Kenya in Stockholm, Sweden on 2nd-3rd June 2022. Furthermore, the talks were relevant for Intercult’s active membership with “We Don’t Have Time”, a review platform and social media network for those engaged in tackling climate issues and share Intercult’s conviction that culture can make a difference.

The future of our cities - Challenges and solutions in the Nordic region and internationally			
	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3
Title	<i>Climate change on urban waterfronts- SOS for the cities and citizens?</i>	<i>How can culture / artists contribute to the social resilience of the city?</i>	<i>The Role of Culture in Sustainable Society – Sustainability in Art and Cultural Projects</i>
Hosts	Intercult & Europa Direkt Stockholm	Intercult	Intercult
Date	27th May 2022	9th June 2022	24th October 2022
Place	Färgfabriken	Intercult's office	Online
Speakers	Pedro Ressano Garcia (PT), Coordinator Horizon 2020 S.O.S. Climate Waterfront and Professor Laval University Quebec, Canada	Karen Jonkers (NL) Researcher and Proces-manager C-REALIST	Germaine Sanders (NL) Artist Urbanist Futurist - Lecturer in Sustainable Urbanism design and strategy
	Katarina Larsen (SE), KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Div. History of Science, Technology and Environment	Hugi Ásgeirsson (SE) Co-founder of Blivande & Cobudget	Ed Caroli (LT) - Community artist
	Ana Neiva (PT) Practitioner architect and Invited Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Porto	Annika Bromberg (SE) Set and costume designer with a focus on international performing arts and sustainability	Fred C. Sanders (NL) - Director of CPONH (an NGO that supports civilian initiatives)
			Iwona Preis (SE) - Director at Intercult and Smart Coop Sweden. President of European cultural network River//Cities Platform Foundation, board member of Kulturresevatets People University.
Moderator	Iwona Preis (SE) - Director at Intercult and Smart Coop Sweden. President of European cultural network River//Cities Platform Foundation, board member of Kulturresevatets People University.	Iwona Preis (SE) - Director at Intercult and Smart Coop Sweden. President of European cultural network River//Cities Platform Foundation, board member	Elisavet Papageorgiou (SE), Communication coordinator, Architect, Designer, Intercult

Table 1. Nordic Talks programme and speakers

Session 1: Climate change on urban waterfronts- SOS for the cities and citizens?

Pedro Ressano Garcia, Katarina Larsen, Ana Neiva

The first session of the Talks series aimed to the reimagination of urban areas and waterfronts as laboratories for innovative climate adaptation solutions in different geographical, environmental and cultural contexts; what we can learn from this diversity and how planning for waterfronts goes beyond urban and economic features and reflect upon cultural, political, environmental and social characteristics.

The discussion addressed the challenges that climate change will impose on cities and the role of the researchers and citizens in this battle. The goal of the event was to disseminate the findings, the conclusions, and the warnings arising from each visited city involved in the project "SOS Climate Waterfronts", to people living in those cities, in Europe.

As argued by Pedro Ressano Garcia, the European cities that are involved in the SOS project are investing in softs modes of travel, more public transportation and bicycles to limit the use of cars and CO₂ emissions. Resilience means mitigation and adaptation^[AP3]. Reducing our environmental footprint requires a mosaic of strategies - permeable soils, controlling urban heat islands and expansion of green and vegetation in the cities are some of them. People need to adapt and understand the climate change effects.

Katarina Larsen highlighted the need to revitalise history and past knowledge as the way forward. The consequences of climate change may come in highly unpredictable ways therefore, integrating people and traditional methods in that process should complement current knowledge and experts opinion. When thinking about relevant solutions, local knowledge and its relation to system-based solutions should be considered.

Undeniably, in the architectural world, there is consciousness in building green. However Pedro noted that green large scale buildings should not be awarded, since the ability to simplify things is far more important than technology. The use of local material and the optimization of traditional ways of building are fundamentals in the building process. Ana Neiva summarised that "To be green is just to be clever". Design by learning on the bioclimatic and passive systems can bring change. It is necessary to be grounded in one place and make the knowledge transferable.

A holistic model of partnership between sectors respecting the necessity to reflect current developments and catalyse opportunities is needed. However, the gap between researchers and civil society is big and could only be bridged when creating a sense of belonging to a place. People need to invest in the quality of collective spaces that will create possible interactions in the community. Community spaces make people feel safe and create dialogues between citizens, architects, planners.

Naturally, individual responsibility is the key to success. Everyone can have a role in the full process with small actions in everyday life. The creation of potential and social capital engages communities that don't rely on governmental decisions and actions. Young people are more engaged and keen to fight for a sustainable planet. In that context, there is a clear conflict between emerging young people and the dominant established who want to continue

in the same business model they are used to. People are inheriting a number of systems of solutions that are dominated by the idea of “men will control nature” which is an obvious mistake, highlighted Pedro Ressano Garcia.

We need to regain our relationship with nature. Culture has this tremendous importance to open the eyes of the people and question their lifestyle. It is the mediation which can be disturbing and it is powerful as it creates emotions and delivers the message. This is how change comes.

Concluding, the speakers were asked to give an advice to the audience

Ana Neiva suggested everyone to leave their car and walk or bike instead. Pedro Ressano Garcia urged people to reduce the use of technology and find happiness in nature.

Katarina Larsen suggested talking to the neighbours and exchanging knowledge in practical ways. Furthermore, Katarina claimed: “The climate can be a force for people to act but it can also be paralysing. Be visionary in what way you want to live and create realistic future solutions.”

Session 2: How can culture / artists contribute to the social resilience of the city?

Karen Jonkers, Hugl Ásgeirsson, Annika Bromberg

During the event the guests commented on how artists, grassroots activists and other creative minds are currently working to help on building sustainable communities and environments in the cities and neighbourhoods.

It is widely accepted that people over-consume and excessively build a material world possibly due to the lack of interior motivators within the social structure that create satisfaction and fulfilment. As Hugl Ásgeirsson explained, in Sweden people are generally ahead of the curve when it comes to understanding the importance of taking care of nature, the personal rights on public space, permits and obligations for the general good. Swedes maintain those sorts of cultural norms not only because of social cohesion but also due to the system that supports its citizens. In Stockholm and the Nordic region as a whole, several experiments are taking place to provoke a new way of thinking in the quest for a sustainable future. This is proof that a lot of action must be taken at the top level of international politics and among multinational companies.

People that are environmentally self-conscious like Annika Bromberg are suffering from cognitive dissonance in their private life. Corporate environments but also cultural organisations like theatres need to become more environmentally sustainable themselves.

Karen Jonkers provided concrete statistics: “If you are around 50 years, 80% of the greenhouse gas emissions in the atmosphere have been released during your lifetime.”

Changing the general mindset to focus on social cohesion in the local community will have a major impact on the climate itself. People become more invested in their own community and this has enormous systematic effects. If the municipalities promote cultural activities and ask citizens to take initiatives, then a friendly environment is created that hosts inspiration

and better solutions. Art and culture could be an ideal way to raise awareness and enhance creativity.

People need to focus on sustainability through circular thinking. It is important that all new knowledge is shared immediately so that others can implement the ideas without delay. Everyone should be willing to share new findings or solutions with the rest of the world and not be overprotective over the new solutions.

What can we do together in our own communities and how can we raise awareness as individuals? Karen Jonkers advised to reach out to the neighbours and communicate about the common space and everyday issues. This is where solutions are hidden and life quality values to be found. People can find together the questions and answers on their street.

In the performing arts sector, Annika Bromberg suggested theatre leaders take responsibility and support the cultural sector by paying the directors, set designers and other artists for their work in sustainability.

Hugi Ásgeirsson spoke directly to the listeners: “If you don’t have a big idea to save the world or make everyone aware of something, that is fine. You are probably going to make more impact if you are acting very locally with the people that you are connected to. The actions around us are never too small. The better way is to organise your community by making it more livable and thriving for you and the ecosystems around you.”

Session 3: The Role of Culture in Sustainable Society – Sustainability in Art and Cultural Projects

Ed Caroll, Iwona Preis, Fred Sanders, Germaine Sanders

The purpose of this talk was to define culture and sustainability more tangibly, and to inspire everyone interested in culture and art in society. The discussion was focused on the role of art and culture in sustainability, development and accessibility of places and the way that people can be involved in this process.

There is a stress today, as Ed Caroll noted, that art has to be productive, having impact and giving results and the artists keep falling in the trap of trying to be effective. The mainstream message of sustainability is solely market driven. At the same time, the challenge of the climate change impact is so massive that people cannot control it individually.

Artists are used to imagining and explaining intangible things. Culture makes people understand, open their minds and use their senses. This is why artistic view has been proposed as an adequate way to approach the climate issue. But how to practically use culture in the climate change fight?

The speakers unanimously proposed the bottom up solutions as the most effective means. Iwona Preis argued that adaptation of the city planning and fighting climate change is not possible without engaging citizens and communities. Furthermore, Germaine Sanders noted

that climate change cannot be guided from the top, on the contrary, the effect of climate change needs bottom-up changes which is culture per se. According to Germaine, culture will make the change because culture makes every message understandable.

Communication comes from people's common need to share or to be protected from a common threat, and only with physical contact. Protests have to stop and people have to shift and vision the future. The use of history, the knowledge of the present, nature and landscape can develop an urban vision for the neighbourhoods.

From another point of view, Fred Sanders believes that community feeling is more common in green areas i.e. the open spaces between work and home buildings where people actually meet in large scale cities that are lacking communication between the citizens. Ed Carroll compared the big scale of the city with the human scale, likened academics to microscopes, that could help citizens to learn how to live sustainably in a big city. As he argued, academics and citizens/artists should cooperate and react to this situation collectively. Iwona Preis noted that building emotional relations with culture and art, creates the feeling of belonging and this is a productive way to handle the big scales.

Germaine Sanders stated that climate change is not a threat but an opportunity. World is always changing with cultural awareness. People are in survival mode in the urban environment and culture always comes last so the understanding of the value of culture is crucial. Culture makes the difference because it uses imagination that helps in problem solving.

The end of the talk found all speakers summarising their opinions and providing suggestions to the listeners. Ed Carroll advised people to find their community and Iwona Preis to engage with its people. Participation is a way to engage whereas engagement opens a window for activism. Active resilience is important. Fred believes in a worldwide free internet where people can connect freely about climate issues. On the other hand, Germaine does not support the digital connection and suggests the creation of gardens that create common spaces, educate children and remind people that they are part of nature.

Arts and culture: a vital part of climate solutions

Following the reasoning presented by many observers so far, the climate issue is a cultural challenge that requires action here and now. "Art and culture challenge and develop as individuals and as a society and thereby help to promote a sustainable society." (Mäenpää, 2015)

Sustainability nowadays receives great attention and culture is an essential component of sustainable development despite the rare attempts to explicitly combine those (Soini et al, 2016). Simultaneously, the economic and social value of art and culture is finally increasingly recognized in urban environments – especially in the Nordic countries – however, it is much less known how these values can contribute to the creation of environmentally sustainable cities. The role of culture is a resource for climate change mitigation and adaptation(unesco.org). It represents a source of identity, innovation and creativity for the

individual and community and it is an important factor in building social inclusion, citizens empowerment through active participation and economic growth. (Voetmann, 2015). In conclusion, it is evident that culture is crucial for creating socially cohesive cities that are resilient, future-proof and much more enjoyable places to live.

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Voetmann P., (2015). Promoting a sustainable Nordic Region through strong cultural partnerships, *Culture and sustainability*, Nordic Culture Point

Nordic talks videos:

Session 1

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ryie-YMIZsQ&ab_channel=Intercult

Session 2

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7xv3XyrEP-k&t=682s&ab_channel=Intercult

Session 3

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u8JGnHosN0U&ab_channel=Intercult