

Art toward cultures of sustainability

The term sustainable development gained popularity due to increasing insights over the limits of growth and had become political mainstream at latest during the World Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. It quickly developed into a popularized term which was used by different political elites in different contexts and meanings depending on how they needed it.

The concept mirrored the attempt to reflect upon the complex systemic contradictions between ecological, economic and social dimensions of development and how these contradictions could be brought into accord.

In essence it was about the question how the needs of the present generation could be met without endangering or undermining the living conditions of future generations.

Therefore, the cultural dimension of development and its interrelation with the arts and sciences was widely neglected up to this point.

This is the reason why the potential for change of a global (environ)*mental* cultural transition and the role of art within this process are at the core of this thematic window of the conference.

Life styles, modes of production and consumer behavior are changing, new cultures of sustainability emerge, old ones are revived or there is a fight for their preservation, as the example of the Andean Buen Vivir shows.

We humans are not born into our living conditions, but instead we are consciously constructing them for ourselves.

Cultures of sustainability are therefore obligated to the search for conceptual alternatives which are derived from biological and cultural diversity and in so doing enables human welfare.

This search process for alternatives includes economic practices which are based on the commons.

These could contribute to reducing the predominant fixation on private property, the narrow minded tunnel view of the market logic and our usury driven monetary economy. They are both deeply engrained into our cultural and mental infrastructures. Such alternative approaches could help facilitate a greater diversity and cognitive flexibility in socio-ecological transformation.

The cultural dimension of this search for the required socio-ecological transformation of the (in the double sense of the word) fossil growth based society orientates toward a cultural change of both reason and emotions.

It is built on the creation of a world to be experienced through one's senses. These will be inspired by the love of life and the passion of their creators.

Gregory Bateson defined the aesthetics as the ability to recognize re-occurring pattern of processes, interrelationships between stakeholders and between different dimensions in complex systems (and in their transformational processes) and to respond to them¹. In this sense we are speaking of an aesthetic or art (toward cultures) of sustainability.

The cultural researcher Sacha Kagan² connects with this an understanding of art which discovers themes and incorporates them into processes that go beyond conventional patterns³ of classification/categorization/allocation, and that are interdisciplinary⁴ and are committed to a justice orientated ethic.

Sustainability cannot be conceptualized or practiced through one discipline. According to Adrienne Goehler an “aesthetic loading” of the term ‘sustainability’ yields the opportunity to withstand its erosion.

Art is not merely a means or a medium, but in itself a representation of the search process for ways into a post-fossil era, a new era of human development based on an aesthetic of sustainability. Herein lies the cross roads of the debates over new funds for art projects or the establishment of a Fund for Aesthetics and Sustainability, as suggested by Adrienne Goehler⁵.

The Italian artist Michelangelo Pistoletto has devised a new term and symbol for this new era: The “Third Paradise” and the expanded upon sign of infinity. It symbolizes the first, the natural paradise and the second, a paradise created through human intelligence. Out of the fruitful (re)union of these two grows a new human society. The Third Paradise. (Heike Löschmann 13/09/2011)



¹ Mind and Nature: A necessary unity, New York: Dutton, 1979, S. 8: aesthetics is that which is “responsive to the pattern which connects” see also S.118: the aesthetic preference of a mind is “able to recognize characteristics similar to their own in other systems they might encounter...”

² Art and Sustainability, Connecting Patterns for a Culture of Complexity, Bielefeld: transcript-Verlag, 2011

³ With reference to academic, professional disciplines, thematic sectors or personal groupings/subcultures etc.

⁴ This means the term interdisciplinary to go beyond what is most widely understood by the term multi or interdisciplinary. It is to mean an extension of these disciplines beyond the conventional limits of those subjects, enabling elements of other disciplines to be integrated.

⁵ Adrienne Goehler, with collaboration of Jaana Prüss, Blueprint for a „Fund for Aesthetic and Sustainability, see http://zne.anschlaege.de/PDFfaen/ZNE_Visionspapier_final_web.pdf (accessed 12/07/2011)