

# Surviving or being sustainable?

These days, in the midst of debates about the crisis and the ways to solve it, *sustainability* is certainly a topic not to neglect. Despite being on everyone's tongue, what does it really mean?

Leaving the thought of money aside, let's ask ourselves some unexpected questions and attempt to broaden our perspective on what sustainability is. Can the connection between culture and agriculture promote a different audience-flow from cities to towns? Have the production houses found a new model to engage artists, audiences and communities? What is the North American point of view and how does it differ from the European approach? How does an artist combine creation and time?

## **Moderator:**

**Michele Losi – Associazione Etre & Scarlattine Teatro Campsirago Residency – Italy**

## **Speakers:**

**Jan Hartholt - Ministry of economic affair - Netherlands**

**Sjoerd Wagenaar, and Henk Keizer - Peer Group - Netherlands**

**Euripides Laskaridis - Osmosis Theatre - Greece**

**Nicole Mion - Springboard Performance - Canada**

**Angelica Maran - Scarlattine Teatro Campsirago Residency - Italy**

Sustainability has been approached from various standpoints during the session, but all the angles highlighted the idea of developing a sustainable culture, that would respect natural environment and each nation's history.

The sharing of different visions and experiences of what sustainability is or could be helped everyone to develop a more focused knowledge on what may be the right way for future projects, and the next move to make in sustainable cultural development.

Sharing different visions and experiences on what sustainability is or should be, participants aimed to identify the right strategies of moving towards a truly sustainable cultural development.

Nowadays, "acting sustainable" meets plenty of obstacles, such as social prejudice, a lack of government support, restrictive laws, etc. In different countries, artistic expression that conveys an urge for sustainability, takes different forms and reaches different impacts.

## *How are agriculture and culture related to each other?*

As the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs, former Ministry of Agriculture, Jan Hartholt demonstrated us through its successful project of creating a sustainable economic policy<sup>1</sup>, rural development can be made possible. What about cultural development?

Culture is bound to agriculture and it is often inspired by it in many ways and through the diversified approach of many artistic expressions: we find traces of rural environments for example in paintings, in poetry, cinema, theatre, design, gaming and music.

**Agriculture** means sustainability and thanks to its sustainability it can assure a constant growth within a country, within the inhabitants and their culture. For the presenters, **Communication** is also one of the keys that can open the heavenly gates of knowledge, through public debates and experiences comparison and it also helps the **flowing of culture**.

Natural environment and culture are deeply related, and we can't expect to change one without influence the other.



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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.government.nl/issues/energy-policy/sustainable-fuel-mix>

As a community work in northern Holland, PeerGroup<sup>2</sup> Company has built a castle made out of straw bales, called “Straw Castle”<sup>3</sup> in the middle of the countryside, in order for it to be a social and also performing event by hosting a large amount of public. One of the main purposes was to have citizens moving to the country and meeting a different way of life in the context of an also different landscape.

This castle represented a metaphor of the European agriculture’s potential but it also stood for the respect we must owe to natural environment. This completely sustainable building was created as a result of the collaboration and communication between different actors of local community: prisoners, farmers, scientists and artists who lived in or came to the village.

Unfortunately, natural environment is nowadays one of our most harmed resources. Nevertheless, we still can make an effort for its safeguard and defence: this requires a cultural exchange and sharing experiences.

To solve these issues, it is necessary to create a network to make people interact with each other in order to create a sustainable way of working and living, a new connection and real communication.

Although it may sound a little utopical, every ministry should have a policy which task is to defend culture and assure its sustainability: if on one hand the Dutch input may have been just a singular initiative, on the other hand it can prove the possibility of a sustainable culture’s existence.

It should be an environmentally friendly movement and in order to obtain a small change, the whole local community must be involved in this process, there must be a **connection and a cultural exchange**.

## *Same Ancient Greek Tragedy? Maybe another time!*

This is the case of what happened in Greece. The island of Lemnos, considered an exile island, where state criminals were to be sent, and which also armed for several years against Turkish invasions, has experienced a transformation through culture.

Euripides Laskaridis<sup>4</sup>, who founded the Osmosis Theatre Company, decided to create at the same time a community work and a performance in the main historical theatre of Lemnos.

The project was a challenge both for him and for the local inhabitants: finally, in order to take part in a 10-day workshop the residents gathered, driven by the opportunity to give a personal interpretation of

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.peergroup.nl/informatie/english-information/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.behance.net/gallery/5473813/2005-2006-Straw-bale-castle-strokasteel>

<sup>4</sup> <http://euripides.info/>

their own island and by the chance to discover an unknown part of their own history. Although being far from the traditional ancient Greek tragedy, the play represented Lemnos' history in its making and was the mirror of the community's soul. As the mayor of Lemnos saw the great amount of participants and the proficiency of the workshop's results, he financially allowed the project and gave the local community the chance to be part of the making of their public image and let freedom of expression flow onstage.

Unfortunately though, this event is an exception if compared to the lack of sustainability with which Greece has to deal nowadays: it shows how sustainability cannot be automatically provided by the institutions, or even artists, but rather shall arise from people's creativity, entrepreneurship and support.

These non-professional actors tried to build a professional environment, relying mainly on the local human and cultural resources: despite of this factor, or rather thanks to it, the project had the possibility to continue its run also during wintertime.

## *Playing with Lego isn't the same as playing with vaulted spaces*

The question of how to create a sustainable form of art is also vital for North America.

The answer came not so unexpectedly from Canada, more specifically from Nicole Mion and the West-Canadian non-profit organization Springboard Performance<sup>5</sup>.

One of their aims today is to induct residencies: the challenge they had to face was how they could create sustainability for the entire community. About 8 years ago, during the olympics they had the idea to start a project called "ContainR"<sup>6</sup>, an ambitious initiative where shipping containers were fitted for community and cultural purposes. These pop-up and itinerant theatres gifted the local communities in the area of Calgary and Vancouver with live performances and microbiological agriculture.

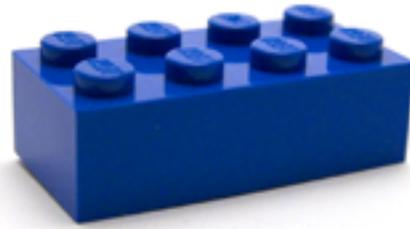
*"We had trucking companies and arc welders working so they could cut holes out of the containers to make a vaulted space, so we weren't compressed in using each of the containers like Lego".*

*Nicole Mion.*

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<sup>5</sup> <http://springboardperformance.com/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://springboardperformance.com/containr/#containr-sunnyside>



Progressively the project began to grow and from a single double-decker container, they reached the number of 9 shipping containers and their number continued to enhance, this means today they are able to supply multiple services to the inhabitants, and obtained the connection of different communities.

By creating what they call “urban agriculture” and promoting a healthy and sustainable way of life, the locals had finally the opportunity to understand what microbiological culture is and start a new nature-respectful activity, within this cultural project.

### *Offering residency within an extremely small village may sometimes be a bit of a problem.*

Campsirago, in Italy, is a small village of around 36 inhabitants. Everyone knows everything about everyone else, so it’s easy to imagine what may happen if something new upsets this small world’s order.

“Campsirago Residency”, is a production centre based in the Ecomuseum of Brianza Mounts and Lakes, lead by the artistic group ScarlattineTeatro, which provides hospitality and a space for meeting and discovery. So this decision of starting a hosting activity for companies and artists both in their main venue (a courtyard belonging to municipality) and in their nomadic tend as an additional itinerant venue was a bit of a shock for the local community: the inhabitants were very suspicious and didn’t understand exactly who were all those artists and performers doing in their small town.

The biggest challenge Campsirago Residency had to face was finding a way of spreading culture and making the local community aware of what surrounds it, aware of the local identity created in part by cultural events and media. Being conscious of what surrounds us is extremely important and creativity is the only way to spread this knowledge through sustainable art. Culture has the power to create three fundamental elements unavoidably related to mankind: human capital, social capital and symbolic capital.

<b>Human Capital</b>	<b>Social Capital</b>	<b>Symbolic Capital</b>
<p>Human Capital is a collection of resources: all the knowledge, talents, abilities, experience, intelligence and wisdom possessed individually and collectively by individuals in a population. These resources are the total capacity of the people that represents a form of wealth which can be directed to accomplish the goals of the nation or state or a portion thereof</p>	<p>Social capital is the expected collective or economic benefits born from the cooperation between individuals and groups. The shared idea is that social networks have a certain value. A network can increase productivity both individual and collective and so do social contacts, they affect the productivity of individuals and groups</p>	<p>Symbolic capital can be referred to as the resources available to an individual on the basis of honor, prestige or recognition, and serves as value that one holds within a culture</p>

From Pierre Bourdieu's "Le capital social" 1980

The concept of surviving is strongly connected to the concept of sustainability because they both are generated by mutual support: sustainability is a way of surviving. In order to survive each one of us must be aware of the limit between the resources and their possibility to be exploited. An example of this concept is the limit existing between agriculture and culture: in order to cross this border there must be a large amount of creativity, but we must always concern about an environmentally respectful impact.

This session demonstrates us that being sustainable isn't just a utopian thought but it can be the right path to walk through in order to help the landscape, the natural environment which surrounds us and also help ourselves to live in a more respectful and creative world.

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