

Culture in Sustainability: Towards a Transdisciplinary Approach

Edited by Sari Asikainen, Claudia Brites, Katarzyna Plebańczyk, Ljiljana Rogač Mijatović, and Katriina Soini

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Culture and sustainability are two complex concepts which have been defined across many disciplines. Still, in both cases, no common definition has been accepted, nor can we say that the studies of these issues have been complete. On the contrary, culture and sustainability will always be relevant issues for analysis, because they strongly affect our daily lives. To determine the ways in which culture and sustainability are interconnected in this rapidly changing world is, obviously, a difficult task to undertake. Even though the editors argue that culture has rarely been central to discussions around sustainability, this ends up being less relevant. The reason is that the book is primarily about new models of transdisciplinary thinking in sustainable development.

Edited by Sari Asikainen, Claudia Brites, Katarzyna Plebańczyk, Ljiljana Rogač Mijatović, and Katriina Soini, *Culture in Sustainability* is a collection of papers presented at the final conference of the COST Action entitled 'Investigating Cultural Sustainability' that was held in May 2015 in Helsinki. The four-year COST Action started in 2011 with an overall aim 'to increase understanding of and determine the role of culture in sustainable development based on multidisciplinary principles and approaches'. The 2005 World Summit on Social Development identified three pillars of sustainability: economic development, social development, and environmental protection (United Nations General Assembly 2005). The main idea behind the COST Action was to consider a fourth pillar, culture, which would have three different roles: culture *in* sustainable development,

culture *for* sustainable development, and culture *as* sustainable development. While culture as sustainable development is more fundamental and exerts the greatest influence on sustainability, the first role of culture is more supportive, trying to expand the conventional discourse on sustainability. The title of the book *Culture in Sustainability* therefore suggests that the emphasis is on the maintenance of cultural capital for future generations (Soini and Dessein 2016). As noted, the transdisciplinary approach advocated in the book deals with transcending intellectual boundaries among disciplines and engaging both the academy and civil society (McGregor 2012). Thus, the book questions how integrated knowledge in the field of culture can solve complex problems such as sustainability.

The book is divided into three parts. The first part is devoted to key concepts important for understanding the relationship between culture and sustainability. The second deals with policies and practices, and the third tackles approaches in aesthetics and the arts. The first part contains three chapters, starting with Hans Dieleman, who skilfully combines science, culture, and spirituality, thereby provoking what would Gadamer call the *fusion of horizons* (Nicolescu 2014). Right from the beginning, Dieleman's article opens a new paradigm of reality to the reader where s/he sees the culture of sustainability as a narrative of 'embodiment and planetary consciousness'. The authors of the chapter entitled 'Understanding cultural sustainability: Connecting sustainability and culture' take a somewhat more down-to-earth approach; they explain the basic distinctions between transdisciplinarity and interdisciplinarity and offer insights into the concept of interculturality, as well as the background of the missing fourth pillar in sustainability. The following chapter by Philippe Vandebroeck provides an overview of the complex change that the concept of culture has undergone over time and analyses how culture has been all — 'embodied resource and immanent repository, enabler and constrainer, homogenizer and differentiator'. However, he leaves his conclusions to the other authors who close this section of the book.

The second part of the book provides the most interesting and engaging materials. Following the conceptual thinking of the first part of the book, this part deals with policies and practices, but in a manner that is concrete, clear, and inspiring. Urban sustainability is dealt with in two articles. In the first, Ferreira and Duxbury open the question of citizen participation and dimensions of local sustainability by presenting fieldwork

conducted in a small town named Palmela in Portugal. In the second article, Veldpaus and Roders analyze urban heritage management. In the following chapter, Mari Kivitalo presents Bourdieu's concept of embodied cultural capital as an intermediary between humans and nature in a rural municipality of Keuruu in Central Finland. The last chapter in this section deals with the so-called photovoice research method employed to investigate how marginalized people, in this case the Baka communities in Eastern Cameroon, identify themselves and view their daily problems. 'Life told in pictures' would be a simplified description of the result of this engaging method, which sometimes provided disturbing insights into various social problems, and, consequently, led to critical awareness among people and helped generate the process of change. Overall, this section successfully illustrates some very inspirational examples of the research on culture and sustainability across a range of communities – urban, rural, and marginalized – and shows us their reality, but not from the outside; on the contrary, their stories demonstrate that everything and everybody are interconnected.

Although, in general, the academic language stays unambiguous and clear throughout the book, the third and final part of the book may require more effort and prior knowledge on the reader's part, especially when it comes to understanding the aesthetic dimension of environmental and sustainability ethics. In the articles in part three, the environmental aesthetic of the American philosopher Arnold Berleant has been dealt with in detail. The limits of the aesthetic valuation of landscape and the issue of translating aesthetic values into economic ones are addressed as well. The last two articles are focused on agency in cultural sustainability. The article, written by Lummina Horlings, stands out in this section because it reflects on the role of artists and researchers in sustainable place-shaping. Horlings highlights the importance of 'place' which has indeed been neglected in the context of sustainability and arts. The last article, Jan van Boeckel, inspired by the Goethean approach in the interpretation of nature, discusses a four-stage transdisciplinary process of artful empiricism.

In conclusion, one could say that the message of this collection of papers is clear— sustainability is a cultural issue. In general, the authors argue for the differentiation of 'culture' from the 'social', both of which have connected, yet separate roles in the context of sustainability. Culture needed the fourth pillar to stand out from the label of social sustainability. Yet,

the question is how culture can be a distinct reference point. In this sense, I would agree with Nunes, Söderström, and Hipke when they say that cultural policies should be considered as specific tools to achieve sustainable development (p. 32).

This book is a valuable resource not only for the scientific community, policy-makers, and practitioners, but for anyone who is interested in the vast field of culture and sustainability and is willing to expand his or her horizon and help develop 'new organs of perception' (p. 154). The only critique one might level at the editors is that they should have provided more information on the authors in the book. That would have certainly helped the reader to understand the authors' positions and their points of view, especially considering the transdisciplinary approach to the theme. The book is available for download at the following link.

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