

Sustainability Center - At the Crossroads Conversation

6/15/16

Intros: In Shik and Nick

Intros from the audience, a little over 20 people in attendance some organizations represented:

Music producer, art instructor, EcoVillage resident, Draw/paint professor, Photographer, Cornell professor, Community Arts Partnership, Renovus, Sustainable Tompkins, Bioneers, Snug Planet, Master gardener, Cornell environmental history professor, Graduate student, Multicultural Resource Center

Points made during intros

- How environmentalists use humor to get their message across
- The term sustainability and the culture that surrounds it; How art and entertainment can redefine human interactions with nature and not have humans act as manipulators
- Using art/murals to support peoples' voices and messages

Beginning of Discussion

- So, how are we defining sustainability?
 - I think that it is easier to say what is not sustainable than what is, for example if an action permanently damages an environment you can say that was unsustainable.
 - Nothing about our society is sustainable in the current system.
 - To have a standard of living so that future people can at least maintain the same level.
 - Don't use up resources so that the future cannot use them. Issue with saying this with split between undeveloped and developed countries.
 - I think people are too fixated about the resources aspect, sustainability is more of a holistic quality, we have to widen the pathway because it is hard to define and talk more about the human.
 - You cannot talk about sustainability without talking about justice issues (racism, poverty, class issues, etc.) because it is all tied together. We won't reach our goals unless we are all going together.
 - There's the US perspective on this, but in Latin American environmental movement they critique capitalism and other US systems as working against sustainability.
 - We need to ask: Sustainable for who/what? Who's lifestyle? Who's standard of living? Every social movement has had tremendous contribution to and from art

because people can identify more with art that this concept of “the cause” and art can magnify importance and emotion.

- I think that sustainability is often presented as a technical problem, but we have to change the culture too, not just the technical stuff.
- I think, but wonder if others agree with me, that the use of sustainability themes in art and entertainment is an effective way of making these ideas more mainstream, more institutionalized?
 - It is all just part of a gigantic effort, it can be effective and important, but I do not think it is enough on its own.
 - Back to cultural change, one example is teaching people to play their own music versus having people buy music and really give that experiential component to the topic.
 - We have the World Bank’s concept of sustainability, but you cannot only think economically. Music was central in a lot of social movements – protest songs that everyone participated in were huge, I think that has change in recent movements.
 - One of the dangers in Western civilization – arts have become something that only these specially trained people do and display their work in these special buildings. We have gotten so far from the non-Western concepts of art. I am grateful for things like murals because they act as great reminders, but we need to figure how we get people reengaged with art to build community.
 - I think that engaging in the creation of the art is very important.
 - The Clearwater Festival is a great model of engagement. Something around Cayuga Lake might be a neat idea.
- Is there anything special about sustainability that makes it an easier/harder better/worse art subject?
 - Sustainability is such an abstract concept. Think of the food system with its limited access we need to complete a whole system change, not just focus on satellite issues but main core issues.
 - Sustainability can be defined so many different ways which is great because then it is for the artist to decide, and that decision empowers the artist.
 - I love the broadness of the messages encompassing the subject matter. Using the arts as a positive approach to inspire people and to remain optimistic about environmental issues that can honestly be depressing at times. It expands our ability to communicate and helps to shift the paradigm and create community.
 - I think that sustainability is too abstract a concept to work towards but instead to work towards related ideas and see if you’re actually solving problems along the way, example of how working towards energy efficiency is not only great for

the environment but also promotes job growth for underemployed demographics and improves all-around health, they have synergies. It's a movement to more concrete objects/ideas.

- There's this concept of "Anything that you love, you can save." We can reawaken a love for the natural world using art. If people can connect that idea, it will help us save the environment, and that it is a cool place for artists to start.
- It gets people thinking about how we value nature and thinking about to lead to change.
- I think that the digital revolution is allowing non-artist to be more creative. Look at how viral videos spread.
 - An easy project digital project idea would be to have elementary students record one line of sustainability song and then add more lines from other schools.
- Soho in NYC used to be abandoned warehouses but then artists moved in and beautified the area and it attracted people. Art like that can transform attitudes and awareness.
- We could also think about how the production of art itself (paints, computer parts, etc.) actually has massive environmental impacts and how we can sustainably create art.
 - *American Garbage* exhibit and how the art supplies were all gathered from the trash to reuse and make into beautiful sculptures, there are other artists who do similar work; working with reused supplies makes things exciting and engaging.
- The process of doing is what is important. When teaching kids I am really directing their focus.
- Book recommendation: *Who Are You Really? : Understanding your life's energy* which goes into desires to create and express. Historically, artists have been marginalized so they do not buy into the system. Typically artists are not leaders of social movements, but instead are major supporters. How do we make sustainability actionable? Concrete? We need a hook from someone's everyday life to get people to connect.
- How have you (artists) been influenced by or incorporated climate change on sustainability in your work? How have you (susty enthusiasts) used art or entertainment in your work?
 - As a teacher I made collages with my kids out of recycled materials and they loved it. It gave the kids the concept that any material can be created with.
 - Example of the clothesline exhibit, art and messages on t-shirts which are hung on a clothesline for people to view. The great thing about this was that it was

not trained artists, but just people expressing themselves and raising awareness to move other people to action.

- Project ideas:
 - Having people simply express something they care about that is in danger
 - Utopia/Dystopia theme
 - Something ongoing vs a one-time project
 - The Story of Stuff project and the GPGP, making art from single use bottles
 - Having individuals make a blanket square and then making a giant picture
 - Recycled jewelry making
 - Partner with Sew Green and making energy snakes to put under doors
- How do we grow the movement? Also, understanding injustice and unsustainability? Human rights training would be a great resource.
- Given the discussion tonight – does there need to be follow up on this? What follow-up actions would make sense?
 - There are grants that the CAP offers to sponsor artists. We could also do something at the Ithaca Festival that has variety, something we can type up some text for to handout along with it, there's lots of people that go to the parade.
 - Start an email list, or other communication mechanism.
 - Have something happening on a regular basis.
 - Lots of people are overwhelmed by environmental issues and then do nothing as a result of those feelings. The art should be paired with some kind of educational aspect.
 - Forums/workshops that you can move between projects/groups to get exposure.
 - We need to raise consciousness. yousustain.com is a great resource to show ways how. We should not exclude the digital arts and websites in addition to events. Social media is also important.
 - We should share examples of artists doing these kinds of things that we find inspiring with each other.
 - I think it is important to look for inspiration, but we as Ithacans can also come up with something for people outside Ithaca to take note of.

Wrap up from Nick, left a few minutes for networking and individual conversations

Anne Rhodes Notes from the same meeting / Crossroads Conversation: Arts and Sustainability

Notes:

- Something they love that's threatened; something they didn't/don't want to lose.
- Vision of the future we'd like to have
- Utopias and dystopias
- One-time, or annually, or on-going
- Our community, or bigger than that
- Exhibits of artists who are addressing these themes
- "Let's get rid of _____." (single use bottles; fear of tap water)
- Partner with Sew Green
- How do you grow the movement?
- HR training for people involved in the arts
- Art supplies into marginalized communities
- John Spence – "If you had some money what would you do with it?"
- For example, something at Ithaca Festival – ask for proposals
 - Something hands-on; send the message you want to send. A grant application requires
 - people to articulate what they are trying to do. (put together a book)
- self-formed interest groups – a mechanism to pull together, on-going.
- Arts and educational aspect – How (x) affects the environment; How to make changes to their own lifestyle.
- Drawing class – with sustainability prompts
- Consciousness-raising. Usustain.org
- Choose 1 or 2 personal practices and determine the impact of your change.
- Digital art
- Come up with something that can inspire other communities,
- Participatory art
- Amateur artists

Guiding Questions:

- How could we use our arts to promote citizen engagement?
- How could we use our creativity and art to
 - Give people voice?
 - Connect people to each other?
 - Allow people to experience something differently?
 - Let people feel joy and well-being?
 - Bring people together to celebrate?
 - Allow people to experience the natural world more deeply?
- What is the effect we would like to have on people and the public?
- What do we hope to change, to accomplish?