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# Culture Shift

*How Artists are responding to Sustainability in Wales*

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Image: Labyrinth by Erin Rickard and Sean Puleston, commissioned by Emergence



*Raindrops, Emergence Land Journey,  
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# Preface

"...Most indigenous cultures did not have a word for "art" because they did not separate experience from the expression of that experience. (This role goes back about 40,000 years to the cave painters and music makers whose "art" still silences us with its power to convey experience.) This remarkable study from modern day Wales has the potential to reestablish the ancient role of artists: to illuminate to their community the important skills and sensitivities on which their survival depends. And through their artistic expressions, to aid their community in fully experiencing the dangers and delights of their present way of life.

Wales--a creative culture where artists are in abundance--is one of only three democracies willing to hold themselves legally accountable for promoting principles of sustainability. It is no surprise, therefore, that this leading edge report comes from Wales. Without artists how can we ever fully feel our way into a sustainable community or create the relationships that sustain us through difficult times? I am indeed grateful for this groundbreaking work..."

Margaret Wheatley, activist, consultant and author of many books, including *Leadership and the New Science*, and most recently, *So Far From Home: Lost and Found in Our Brave New World*.

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A comprehensive list of appendices including: definitions and principles of sustainable development; survey results summary; maps; tables; graphs; references and bibliography; list of useful resources and contacts; details of survey respondents and their projects and authors biographies are available on the Emergence website here: <http://www.emergence-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/CULTURE-SHIFT-Appendices.pdf>

# Introduction

*"If the scientists are right, we're living through the biggest thing that's happened since human civilisation emerged. One species, ours, has by itself in the course of a couple of generations managed to powerfully raise the temperature of an entire planet, to knock its most basic systems out of kilter. But oddly, though we know about it, we don't know about it. It hasn't registered in our gut; it isn't part of our culture. Where are the books? The poems? The plays? The goddamn operas?"*  
(McKibben, B. 2005)

So wrote the environmentalist Bill McKibben in an article for *Open Democracy* in 2005, a sentiment echoed in the same year by the writer Robert MacFarlane in *The Guardian* who asked "Where is the creative response to what Sir David King, the government's chief scientific adviser, has famously described as "the most severe problem faced by the world"?" Over the intervening years, that creative response has developed and more recently we've seen a growing interest in the role of the arts in environmental and social issues. Charting these responses and, more specifically, *exploring* the experiences, challenges and reception of arts projects that set out to 'know about' (in Bill McKibben's use of the phrase) the major environmental problems we are both causing and facing, ensures that this work is visible, understood and is responding as effectively as possible to Bill McKibben's call.

At worst, the combining of arts and sustainability has been interpreted as an instrumental tick-box exercise or a social engineering project; at best it is seen as part of a growing need for the arts to help us find our way in the current cultural shift we are moving through.

## The Re-Enchantment Of Art

*"I suspect we are at the end of something - a hypermasculinised modern culture whose social projects have become increasingly unecological and nonsustainable."* **Suzi Gablik**

In 1991, American art critic Suzi Gablik wrote the seminal book, *The Re-enchantment of Art*, in response to the following questions:

- Are political and social concerns in the arts informing a new aesthetic?
- Are artists becoming more involved in work that addresses social issues?
- Is there a new relevance to this art?
- Are artists actively invoking nature and issues of the environment in new ways?
- What is the relationship of their work to environmental activism?

Her answers to these questions raise issues about the use of art in the world and remind us that only five to ten percent of a group of people need to change in order to create change in the whole. "It is precisely to the *periphery* and the *margins* that we must look, if we are to find the *cores* that will be central to society in the future, for it is here that they will be found to be emerging."

*The Re-enchantment of Art* went on to become a key inspiration for artists and creative change-makers. It is still widely read and appears more relevant now than ever before.

## Sustainable Development Definition

For this report, we use the Welsh Government definition of Sustainable Development:

"In Wales, sustainable development means enhancing the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of people and communities, achieving a better quality of life for our own and future generations:

In ways which promote social justice and equality of opportunity; and in ways which enhance the natural and cultural environment and respect its limits -using only our fair share of the earth's resources and sustaining our cultural legacy.

Sustainable development is the process by which we reach the goal of sustainability."

Wales is one of only three democracies in the world with a statutory duty to promote the principles of sustainable development. The Welsh Government introduced the Sustainable Development Charter in 2012 and intends to introduce a Bill in 2015 to strengthen this position.

This report, *Culture Shift - How Artists are responding to Sustainability in Wales*, was commissioned by the Arts Council of Wales (ACW) to explore this 'creative response' in Wales: to identify key projects, initiatives, networks and organisations that are part of what is becoming an emerging 'sector' within the arts; to draw out themes, threads and commonalities; and to establish a representative picture of how principles of sustainability are being used to underpin creative projects, and, conversely, how creative principles are being used to enhance sustainability projects.

There is a raft of arts and sustainability initiatives, including Transition Towns, Dark Mountain, Tipping Point, Julie's Bicycle, Platform, Creative Carbon Scotland, Case for Optimism, and a growing 'community of practice' here in the UK. The existence of these initiatives and networks has led to the UK being recognized as a leader in creative responses to climate change, social justice and sustainability, with many of the above receiving invitations to contribute to and organise gatherings worldwide.

Simultaneously, a more loosely connected but highly responsive wave of artists has developed, engaging with systemic issues like regeneration, community, social justice and the environment.

This report consciously builds on the UK-wide work of others in this area: In 2010 *Sustainable Ability* (Neal & Jennings, 2010) sought to "map transformative responses to resource scarcity and climate change from individuals and organisations working in the arts". More recently, *Sustaining Creativity* (Julie's Bicycle, 2014) surveyed arts organisations in "an ambitious new programme to turbo charge the cultural response to the environment".

It is a commonly held perception, especially for those living outside its borders, that Wales is a mecca for green initiatives. The Centre for Alternative Technology, John Seymour - pioneer of the 'back to the land movement - and Tipi Valley, one of the UK's original eco-communities, all established themselves here in the 1970's and 80's and since then 'low-impact' communities such as Lammas have followed in their wake. The introduction in 2011 of a charge for carrier bags has cemented this perception. However, in the context of *creative* responses to sustainability, the two reports mentioned above appear to contradict this notion of an environmentally aware, eco-conscious nation.

*Sustainable Ability* identified 190 UK initiatives but mapped no activity in Wales. The results of *Sustaining Creativity* were also disappointing with only thirteen Welsh arts organisations choosing to contribute to a UK wide survey about sustainable attitudes and practice. Such results seem to show that Wales is either invisible or performing below the UK average in terms of current engagement.

The aim of this commission is to look at this picture in more detail and find out what is happening. It aims to give voice to something that is very much 'in the air': namely that many artists are fundamentally questioning or changing their creative practice. Some are in the early stages of this journey, while others

## Why artists are responding – Energy and the Environment

*Here's the problem. If we continue to burn fossil fuels at the present rate, the emissions will trigger massive and irreversible changes in natural systems. But global demand for oil is exploding.*

Atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> has now risen to over 400 parts per million, higher than in any time during the past 800,000 years. Over recent months, following direct first-hand experience of the human and economic costs of our changing climate, many people are beginning to wonder just how much worse it could get. Without tougher decarbonisation targets the world faces even more devastating consequences that will not only destabilise and cause conflict between many regions of the globe, but will also destroy the homes, livelihoods and businesses of millions of people. (The Royal Society. 2007)

## Why Wales?

A hundred years ago 232,000 men were working in 620 mines. Wales supplied a third of the world's coal. Cardiff was the Kuwait of its day, exporting energy all over the Empire and beyond. There seemed to be no limit to capacity or to growth in this, the world's very first industrial nation. It was all here: iron, lead, coal; canals, railways, the sea ports; but none of this could have happened without the skills, the graft, the ingenuity of generations of working men and women.

Wales led the world into fossil fuels, pioneering the changes and the challenges these fuels have brought, yet today Wales has now become a leader in the race to find new ways of delivering our wellbeing, based on new clean energy sources more suited to the economic, social, and environmental needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Wales has all that is required to lead the race out of fossil fuels. It has some of the best renewable resources in Europe; wind, tidal, wave, bio-fuels. Wales has skills, training, manufacturing, innovation, connectivity and an emerging sense of national confidence. But getting the best out of such a massive triple challenge means using the time and the oil we have left to their very best effect. Despite being a world leader in many ways, the rate of transition is still far too slow to provide a reasonable chance of catalysing global agreement and preventing devastating environmental changes. There are of course technical barriers but the biggest challenges are cultural. (Zero Carbon Britain; Ashbourn; Wales Underground; BBC Wales History)

have been evolving a renewed approach for years. Some work in isolation, while others take on a leadership role and develop collaborative processes.

In order to track the extent and variety of projects, and to look at who is doing what, where and why, we included both the 'official' (known to ACW and in receipt of regular funding) and 'unofficial' (peripheral or invisible) arts sectors in Wales. Our hunch was that while there are a few key leaders of change within the

identified cultural establishment in Wales, there is much leadership coming from the margins. This includes artists and individuals breaking away, operating with little or no profile, working alone or leading projects whose impact and ambition outweigh their public recognition. These would not have been relevant to the remit of the *Sustaining Creativity* study and would have been missed by *Sustainable Ability*, needing more local knowledge to track them down.

For our survey we were inspired by the Brundtland definition of sustainable development - "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (*Our Common Future*. 1987). We also asked respondents to attend to their own 'intuitive' understanding of sustainability. Wales is one of only three democracies in the world with the delivery of sustainability built into its Constitution (see box) and what is fundamental to both these definitions and to the work identified in this report is that sustainability has a wide reach and is about systemic change, not just single issues. Communicating something this far-reaching and complex is not easy. Wallace Heim, writing about Stephen Emmet and Katie Mitchell's lecture piece *Ten Billion*, said "This is a far more confused territory, requiring human imagination and many avenues of intelligence, deliberation, conflict and consent" (Heim 2012).

The work identified in this report is the response by artists to a perceived need, to a sense that circumstance has created an 'art shaped space' around some of the biggest challenges we currently face – and that it is our responsibility to inhabit that space in ways that are useful, to encourage agency and enable cultural shift and change.

Necessarily, much of this work starts close to the people, the communities who need it. It is emergent, often edgy, often difficult to categorise. As our report reveals, this sense of civic responsibility and response is felt by a wide range of creative practitioners. Dancers and furniture designers, playwrights and community activists are all speaking the same language. This is not simply work 'about' sustainability, it is work that models sustainability in form as well as content, forcing new artistic practices and methods of public engagement that do the jobs that art needs to do now.

The art in this report does not exist just for itself; it exists in relationship – to the world, to community, to change, to wholeness and to our need for a positive future. Together with the artists who have contributed

### Joanna Wright

During 2012/13 filmmaker Joanna Wright worked as artist in residence at the Centre for Alternative Technology, funded by Arts Council Wales, to work with the Zero Carbon Britain research project.

"In my experience the best case scenario for a residency will allow an artist to question and to develop work in response to a specific project in an open, inquiring and unrestricted way and not place any pressure to convey a specific message or act in a media production or promotional capacity. A major challenge, for science, and for the arts, is to create open communication that is accessible, in order to engage new audiences and start new conversations around complex and divisive issues.

I am continuing the collaboration with Zero Carbon Britain and involved in discussions about sustainability and the arts including with specific arts and science projects in the United States."

[www.cat.org.uk](http://www.cat.org.uk)

[www.oriel Davies.org/en/exhibition/future-postcards](http://www.oriel Davies.org/en/exhibition/future-postcards)



to this report, we hope that it plays its part in “encouraging the emergence of a more participatory, socially interactive framework for art”. (Gablik, S. 1991)



*Tilting at Windmills, Jess Allen*

# Research Overview

One of the principle aims of this commission was to identify a network of individuals, projects and organisations working within the arts for whom sustainability is a core organizing principle. We chose to describe these as ‘initiators’ using terminology introduced in Lucy Neal & Hilary Jennings's *Sustainable Ability* report (2010) and we suggest that they are leading the way in Wales’ creative response to the important issues of our day. We are aware that these initiators have much in common in terms of attitudes and drivers although there are significant differences in terms of scale, turnover or activity. By means of a survey, case studies and in-depth interviews, we sought to identify common threads in the processes and principles adopted by these initiators; what might support *more* change in this area; and what the perceived barriers and challenges are to furthering their work. Our research enabled us to gain an idea of what role Wales-based creative practitioners think they have in creating a sustainable future; and to identify the extent and type of sustainable arts activity currently operating in Wales. For the purposes of this report we have given this activity context by compiling a list of resources, projects and initiatives operating within the rest of the UK and further afield. These resources are included in the appendices of this document.

## Methodology

The team for this project was selected on the basis of its experience in the fields of sustainability and the arts, and includes knowledge of working from grassroots to policy level, in a range of arts genres, and areas of sustainability.

The intention was to record specifically the views and experiences of arts practitioners known for their commitment to sustainability. We chose to use a survey to gain a data-driven snapshot of the extent of sustainable arts practice at this moment in time, and to gain further qualitative information through semi-structured interviews and case studies. These helped to inform a more holistic picture of what is currently happening in Wales, and are found referenced and featured throughout the document.



*Green Routines, Awe Aman Tawe*

## Interviews and Case Studies

Case studies and interviews were consciously chosen to reflect the diversity of individuals and projects working in this field. The 14 case studies, included in the following pages, were chosen from survey

respondents who commented on specific points relevant to this report. They are chosen more as *representative* of this type of work rather than as the only examples of best practice encountered. Members of the team conducted a further set of in-depth interviews, four of which are included at the end of the report.

## Survey

The survey sample was not random, but rather a set of contacts identified by the project team through word-of-mouth, formal contacts and informal networks. This was a representative but not exhaustive list of both arts contacts (perceived to have a sustainable practice or mission) and sustainability contacts (working through the medium of the arts). This list comprised those based in almost every region of Wales and included as wide a range of art-forms and activities as possible. In addition, substantial effort was made to locate contacts working primarily through the medium of the Welsh language. A number of advisors and a specific member of the team were appointed to ensure this.

A bilingual Survey Monkey questionnaire was designed in which we addressed a range of issues from turnover and funding, to values, motivations and barriers. We were interested in gaining a sense of common threads within projects, across a number of variables including art genre, region and language.

The survey was mailed out to 150 contacts via Mailchimp, with an invitation to forward on to others whose work was considered appropriate to the project. This was followed up with personal emails from members of the team to encourage a wider uptake. The survey was live for three weeks in February 2014. In response to a request from Arts Council of Wales, the 71 Revenue Funded Organisations (RFOs) were also invited to participate in the survey. In total, we received 104 responses (4 in Welsh), 64 of which were from organisations (including 19 RFOs). The map below gives details and location of respondents.



## Survey Overview

There is a vast array of sustainable arts projects operating in Wales with and without funding, a list of which can be found in the appendices to this report. Large and small, well-funded and un-funded, they range across regions and arts genres. But they do have a substantial amount in common, one of the key things being that they share a belief that the arts have a role in creating a more sustainable future

Sixty-five percent of the respondents consider themselves to be 'initiators' in this emerging sector; people who believe (and act on the belief) that 'the arts has a role in creating a more sustainable future.' The survey showed a number of responding RFOs (18%) recognising the importance of sustainability, a handful of which are leaders in the field. In parts of the report, including the interviews and case studies, we focus specifically on the results of these initiators to explore their experiences in more detail. Initiators' results reflect a pattern of being informed, motivated, active and connected in terms of sustainability issues. This seems to confirm the picture that a small but pioneering cohort of artists in every genre is pushing ahead towards a sustainable future.

An overwhelming number of 'initiators' feel sustainability has become much more important over the past two years and will increase in importance in the future. Crucially, this acknowledgement of the importance of sustainability is matched by an understanding of the issues, with nearly all respondents reporting either a good or excellent understanding. This could indicate that artists are mindful that a commitment to sustainability will stand them in good stead when they apply for funding; however it is more likely to be evidence of the growing sense of purpose and social responsibility we are witnessing in relation to the role of the arts in transitioning to a "life-sustaining society" (Macy, J. 1998).

Respondents agree that the arts have a crucial role in transitioning towards a more sustainable future, with 78% of 'initiators' reporting that the arts are vitally important and are able to do something that *no other sector* can do. Most state they are involved in 'relational' or 'empathic and participatory' art. One third

## Wales Millennium Centre

Wales Millennium Centre is a large arts complex, with nine creative organisations under the one roof as well as independent retailers. The Centre has two theatres, the 1900 seat Donald Gordon Theatre, a 250-seat studio, foyer performance spaces, meeting and hospitality rooms, cafes, restaurants and shops.

"Opened in 2004, the Centre was not designed to BREEAM standards. Nonetheless it has been built to international standards. With that in mind the Centre decided to go for international environmental accreditation ISO 14001 awarded in 2009. This was our first step towards sustainability.

In embarking on our journey, communication was key, tailoring discrete messaging for management, stakeholders and staff alike. For example, staff themes were based on saving the planet, and what they as individuals could do at home. For senior management, the messaging included cost savings, competitive advantage (in terms of fundraising, event bookings from CSR conscious companies etc).

As climate change debates escalated, it became clear that staff could no longer relate to the bigger global messaging. In 2011 the Centre became one of the first arts organisations to sign up to the Welsh Government's Sustainable Development Charter. Initially there were sceptics who questioned whether we could deliver on this. However, when we looked into the commitment required, we concluded that it was everything that we do all the time. Messaging and staff buy-in henceforth became easier when they realised sustainability was more than just about the environment; that it was also about social progress and economic activity. Now it is clearly understood that savings made, for example on energy (£250k per annum from baseline 2006/7) are ploughed back into the arts, community engagement and creative learning, to achieve our charitable objectives. Gaining UK-wide recognition (e.g. the BIFM Award for Sustainability and Environmental Impact 2012), has engendered greater commitment to the principles of sustainability at all levels and amongst stakeholders." (Bet Davies, Head of Communications, Wales Millennium Centre).

[www.wmc.org.uk](http://www.wmc.org.uk)



define their work as 'community arts', a further 30% say they work in theatre and drama, but there is an apparent shift whereby artists are increasingly adopting a multitude of roles and media, assisted by technology and a sense of the artist as a creative agent rather than as being bounded by a single art-form.

This is discussed in more detail in the bulk of the report where we explore, using survey data and backed up by case studies, the overwhelming belief that the arts can do what science, politics, academia, media and other disciplines simply cannot. Art has the power to create spaces for dialogue; art can communicate information which might otherwise be alienating to people; art can bring communities together and make difficult things understandable; and, art can inspire people with visions of a sustainable future: in short, art can transform.

The survey results draw out the issue of content versus practice. The largest group of respondents (almost half) consider sustainability to be vital to both the mission *and* delivery of their work. However, making improvements in the processes and delivery of artists work by lowering the impact of buildings and facilities is still considered vital, especially since 72% of respondents' work is building based, albeit increasingly in non-traditional arts spaces such as empty shops (Volcano@229 in Swansea, Newport's International Airspace and re:store in Bangor).



*Hands fragment, Fern Thomas*

A minority of our initiators run organisations with a turnover in excess of £500,000, reaching over 100,000 people annually, but the majority are small initiatives of around ten people or fewer, with a turnover of £50,000 or less, reaching about 5,000 people annually. Larger organisations of course have a significant role as they have the potential to reach so many people - Bet Davies from Wales Millennium

Centre reports, "major players like ourselves should be used as models of best practice." That said, she also emphasises a role for smaller, more flexible organisations: "the assumption is that if you are big you can do more, but it is in fact easier for small organisations to make shifts, and change culture. Turning a big ship is more challenging than manoeuvring a small boat!"

Of course these larger organisations have enormous impact on the sector as a whole as emphasised by Artsadmin's Judith Knight at a recent Emergence conference "It's really important that large organisations take the lead. Smaller organisations obviously have less clout...larger organisations need to share their expertise and knowledge and invite smaller ones to join with them"(Knight, 2010).

Although sustainability might be a core operating principle for these people, their principles are not necessarily reflected in formal policies. Less than half of respondents have an environmental policy, a quarter have a sustainability policy and only three respondents have signed up to the Welsh Government's Sustainable Development Charter (two of which are ACW RFOs). Policies alone do not necessarily create behaviour change but they do have an important role in supporting or accompanying change in a sector or society by demonstrating a statement of intent. The danger is that a commitment to sustainability is embedded in a company policy but not practice. Also our results show that many of our initiators are individuals or loose collectives without formal constitutions, business plans or formal mission statements.

"It often seems that the social networks and the cultural and arts media of Welsh speakers are completely invisible to the eyes of individuals and groups who do not speak the language... In addition, it could be argued that Welsh speakers and their arts groups are also to a large degree invisible to establishment and state agencies."

*Gareth Iwan, 2004*

Many of these change-makers, however, show a commitment to sustainability by their choice of collaborators, commissions they accept, processes by which they work or even names they go by (for example, eco poet Susan Richardson). One of our recommendations at the end of this report is that policy and practice need to go hand in hand, whether formalised in company documents or in the written or unwritten statements of the artists themselves.

There are of course barriers to change - around half of respondents cite the most serious concerns or major obstacles to be lack of time, lack of funding for these projects, and a concern that sustainable arts are a difficult concept for funders or sponsors to understand or sell. Access to funding is often cited as a barrier to making work but, according to respondents, it is not only money that is lacking in this field. Greater awareness of this type of work, its impact and potential audience is also crucial. The ways in which ACW can support projects is identified later in the document.

The small number of respondents in Welsh makes it difficult to make specific claims about Welsh language sustainable arts projects, but the fact that there were only 4 respondents is itself significant and raises important questions: Are there fewer Welsh speakers working in this sector? Even though much effort was made to contact Welsh speaking artists, are they less known to the team (considering that this is a targeted survey), are their networks different? Do Welsh speakers have different definitions and relationships with sustainability than that offered in the survey? Although we touch on these later in the report, they are questions that need further research.

Of the whole, only a small minority of respondents felt that sustainability communications and discussions in Wales adequately reflect the importance of the Welsh language. It could be suggested that the survey supports the view expressed by Gareth Ioan, as 2 of the 4 Welsh respondents said that isolation and lack of an arts network was a major irritation or a serious concern in their efforts to create work that upholds the principles of sustainable development. For any significant change to happen in Wales it is vital to recognize the importance of the Welsh language.

Effective dialogue is inherent in any working definition of sustainability, as is diversity and a commitment to resilient local networks and communities. The vision of a sustainable Wales needs to bring everyone into the conversation on an equal footing. We make the recommendation that it would be a fruitful area for further enquiry to assess whether artists working through the medium of Welsh are operating with different terms and practices in relation to sustainable development and how this might contribute to future sustainable practice in the country as a whole.



*Wales Millennium Centre, Phil Boorman*

# Sustainable Arts – Common Themes

## Space for Dialogue

Creating a space for dialogue is a key aspect of many of the projects identified in the research. Ninety-four per cent of respondents stated that the arts can support a cultural shift towards a sustainable future by creating 'spaces for dialogue'. But when respondents talk about space, it is not necessarily a pre-existing 'arts space' or venue. Sixty-two per cent said that their projects are carried out in site-specific / non-building based spaces. The key point made here is having access to a safe, creative space where people have 'permission' to speak, to explore their ideas and connect with other people. The space in which that dialogue is performed, and in which transformation occurs, is viewed by many as an artform in itself. The art is the process, the exchange, the development of ideas. It has a relational aesthetic. In our recommendations at the end of this report we suggest that this aesthetic needs to be acknowledged and supported.

"It is time that the Arts Council of Wales considered relational aesthetics as an indicator of quality and understood the power of art works that seek to connect and encourage dialogue as their primary medium."

*Jess Allen*

These kinds of projects are conducted by artists and organisations in a range of genres, and cross-art forms as well as collaborations between scientists and artists. The spectrum of spaces that artists are carving out for dialogue is huge. They range from dedicated eco-venues like Small World Theatre and Tom Payne's Ty'n yr Helyg Barn where they facilitate dialogue on issues of sustainability and the responsibility to act as global citizens; to unbounded spaces, for example movement artist Jess Allen and writer Emily Hinshelwood walk and talk to people about sustainability in rural landscapes as an arts practice; to virtual spaces like Mike Erskine's 'I know a story' website that promotes stories of creative people's impact on sustainability.

"The role of organisations and funding bodies is not 'to lead the way', but to support people 'to find a way.'"

*Sian Cornelius, Dreamscape*

Sculptor Sara Holden's Nature into Art project enables communities to explore environmental issues through making sculpture at beaches and nature reserves. The Emergence Land Journey brought artists together on a 5-day walk to exchange ideas on arts and sustainability through a direct daily connection with the landscape. Awel Aman Tawe's *We're Oil in it Together* community performance questioned the audience on how to make a play about sustainability without turning people off.

Where the space exists is not important. What *is* important, and what is common to the projects mapped in this report, is what *happens* in that space. Sustainable Development is overrun with jargon, Environmental Science is thick with facts and figures, the media and politicians too often present biased opinions. By



opening up a creative space for dialogue, the arts enable people to consider crucial questions by exploring their own personal understanding of them. Facilitated well, people are able to acknowledge uncertainty; they can be *confused* for a while.

## Tom Payne

In March 2010, Tom Payne followed National Theatre Wales launch year as a researcher, rehearsal observer and performance maker.

"In attempting to map the nation through what I understand to be largely relational or participatory performance practices, NTW has facilitated relations between all kinds of artists, spectators, organisations, places, and things. In terms of the sustainability of the theatre sector in Wales, NTW's launch year project has created a fertile space in which emerging artists and companies might learn from existing Welsh theatre practitioners and other international artists.

NTW's emphasis upon conversation and dialogue – evidenced not only through performance, but also through NTW TEAM, the National Theatre Wales Assembly and its online community – is indicative of the capacity of dialogic art forms to facilitate debate and contestation, and perhaps for this reason, these and related practices are particularly suitable for engaging with urgent local and global issues associated with sustainability."

[community.nationaltheatrewales.org](http://community.nationaltheatrewales.org);  
[nationaltheatrewales.org/assembly](http://nationaltheatrewales.org/assembly)

As Margaret Wheatley (2009) says "change always starts with confusion...Of course it's scary to give up what we know, but the abyss is where the newness lives".

Dialogue allows a flow of meaning. Within a group of people, this flow may evolve into a new understanding - a new shared meaning - that becomes a kind of glue or cement that holds people together (David Bohm). Bohm and also Senge, Scharme, Jaworski & Flowers (2005) talk about the importance of 'suspending' one's habitual patterns, opinions and assumptions. This is the first crucial phase in behaviour and attitude change – it often feels like 'stopping' or 'being brought up short or caught off guard'. The information presented feels disturbing but it is our response to the disturbance that leads to new learning and resilience - hence the need for a 'held' or curated/facilitated dialogue.

This process of opening up to uncertainty is a feature of well-established creative forms: collaboration, improvisation and play are all forms of creative practice that encourage the production of new ideas, learning

and new approaches to the familiar or everyday. Improvisation encourages the breaking of habits and therefore can be a useful creative tool to encourage perceptual shifts and alternative modes of research, for example Jess Allen's practice of dancing in the landscape.

As with improvisation, collaboration and play, dialogue cannot be too tightly choreographed or pre-designed. We can set the conditions but we cannot predetermine the outcome nor should we, since the nature of the form is to produce new thoughts, new ways and ideas that arise from the particular and unique conditions of the

*'It is very difficult to give up our uncertainties – our positions, our beliefs, our explanations. These help define us; they lie at the heart of our personal identity. Yet I believe we will succeed in changing this world only if we can think and work together in new ways.'*

*Margaret Wheatley, 2009*

situation. This is perhaps why improvisational and collaborative forms are so conducive to arts practices where sharing and conversation are at the heart of the artists' intention.

Until people can start to see their habitual ways of interpreting a situation, they can't really step into a new awareness (Bohm). By connecting people within spaces that support dialogue, the arts are able to trigger deep, powerful, lasting and transformational connections. People can find the vocabulary with which to express their opinions and to accept the uncertainty of the future. They experience sensations that impact on their consequent behaviour.



Given this, it is hardly surprising that community arts feature prominently in this report. Community arts account for a third of respondents' work, and reflect the emphasis on participation and facilitation of dialogue. This is not just organisations, but individual artists, such as writer Sarah Woods who runs multi-media participatory shows that involve audiences in imagining positive futures; and storyteller Sian Cornelius whose work is focused on the sharing of stories as a way of finding creative solutions. This ability to create a 'safe' space and manage dialogue within that space is a skill that is sometimes overlooked and undervalued. It is hard at times to recognise the *process* itself as art, and it can get confused with community development or group facilitation. In our recommendations, we suggest that the ACW raises the profile of relational arts, cross-art forms, and that less emphasis is placed on product and output, and more emphasis on process, and the journey.

## Communicating Complex Ideas

The traditional Irish story, 'Cormack's Adventures in the Land of Promise' sees the protagonist given a magical musical instrument which, if shaken, allows the bearer to either drop into a deep sleep or to become wide-awake. As it is a cautionary story, the first part of his life is spent in a comfortable stupor, and at every turn when confronted by unwelcome information or a difficult choice he chooses sleep. The story becomes interesting when instead he chooses to use the instrument to 'wake up', be present and create change for the better (Rees, 2014). This story is familiar to us all even if

*"Art cannot be a monologue... contrary to the current presumption, if there is any man who has no right to solitude it is the artist."*

*Albert Camus, Resistance, Rebellion and Death*

we have not heard the tale. The Janus-faced qualities of the arts which operate in the same way as Cormack's magical instrument are part of their enduring power.

There is always the temptation, as things get overwhelming, to switch off into distraction and denial. The arts can assist us to do both. Suzi Gablik (1991) reminds us that "persons who grow up in a society are culturally 'hypnotized' to perceive reality the way the culture experiences it...The challenge of the next few decades will be to awaken from this hypnosis." At times of social and political change, artists are often the outriders and alchemists in the vanguard, becoming more engaged and socially aware before the rest of society. Extrapolating from the results of this survey, artists, it is suggested, not only have a role in creating a sustainable Wales, they also have a responsibility. More artists than ever have found renewed energy to work in areas such as social justice and sustainability to generate change.

People trust artists. The interviews and case studies appear to attest to this - "they can get different people in a room talking to one another when no one else can" (Ann Jordan, maker and co-founder of Elysium). They are therefore in a powerful position, one that neither the politician nor the scientist can occupy. "Of all lies, art is the least untrue." Gustave Flaubert.

So what *can* the arts do and how? An overwhelming number of respondents reported that the arts can communicate important ideas and information which might otherwise be alienating, too complex, or might cause people to switch off; and can help transform difficult, complex information into something understandable that we can act on. But how do the arts do that?

## Creating story and new narratives

Through telling different stories and finding different ways to tell those stories, we enable people to better engage with our current crises. Stories are an enormously effective way to communicate complex ideas in a specific and human way. For example, Sian Cornelius' Dreamscape project and Mike Erskine's 'I know a Story' project (see box).

### CREATE Nights

OXFAM in Castle Street, Swansea regularly plays host to 'CREATE nights.' The key aims of the CREATE nights and in-shop exhibitions are:

- To give a platform to local artists;
- To inspire people to create; to do something positive;
- To bring the ideas of creative living to unsuspecting shoppers and passers-by.

CREATE nights are relevant but not limited to OXFAM's aims and ideals; fairtrade, slavery, re-use, recycling etc.

"The clearest and most positive outcome of CREATE has been the confidence gained by those without an 'art' background; the appreciation of the possibilities, the opportunities, the interest in taking their work forward, out of the comfortable quiet safety of their homes and into the wider world.

The Fine Artists in turn can be inspired to take their work forward, out of the comfortable quiet safety of 'the art world' and into the wider world. (Phil Broadhurst, curator)

[www.facebook.com/oxfamcastlestreet](http://www.facebook.com/oxfamcastlestreet)

## Mixing fact and fiction

Over the last ten years or so, we have seen fact and fiction draw closer and closer, both in our seemingly insatiable appetite for reality TV, and in the place that fact is carving out in the arts, from verbatim testimony to the lecture-performance. This development suggests a role for the arts in exploring real life events, enabling art to directly deal with complex factual issues. For examples see Philip Ralph's play 'Deep Cut' produced by Sherman Cymru and Sarah Woods' 'The Roadless Trip' and 'The Empathy Roadshow.'

### Mike Erskine

"If you want to learn about a culture, listen to the stories. If you want to change a culture, change the stories."  
Michael Margolis.

Mike Erskine developed *I Know a Story* as a place to collect and share stories of passion, spirit and soul from around the UK.

"The project was borne from a personal frustration that lots of good, inspiring stories relating to sustainability were not being told. Not enough attention was being placed on the power of a story and I wanted to create a place online where these stories could be collected and shared in a meaningful way.

I felt that the stories themselves should be the interesting part - the individuals, the challenges, the success, the passion, the reason, the values. Different stories appeal to different people. I also wanted to collaborate with other individuals who were already capturing stories and share their work too."

[www.mikejerskine.com/i-know-a-story](http://www.mikejerskine.com/i-know-a-story)



*Submergence, Mike Erskine*



## Characteristics of Systems Thinking

### *Shift of perspective from parts to whole*

Living systems are integrated wholes whose properties cannot be reduced to those of smaller parts. These properties are destroyed when a system is dissected, either physically or conceptually, into isolated properties.

### *Inherent multidisciplinary*

All living systems share a set of common properties and principles of organisation. This means that systems thinking is inherently multidisciplinary.

### *From objects to relationships*

At each level the living system is an integrated whole with smaller components, while at the same time being a part of a larger whole. Ultimately - as quantum physics showed so impressively - there are no parts at all. What we call a part is merely a patterning, an inseparable web of relationships. Therefore, the shift of perspective from the parts to the whole can also be seen as a shift from objects to relationships.

### *From measuring to mapping*

In science, we have been told, things need to be measured and weighed. But relationships cannot be measured and weighed; relationships need to be mapped.

### *From quantities to qualities*

Mapping relationships and studying patterns is not a quantitative but a qualitative approach. Thus, systems thinking implies a shift from quantities to qualities.

### *From structures to processes*

In systems science, every structure is seen as the manifestation of underlying processes. Systems thinking involves a shift of perspective from structures to processes. Hence, the understanding of living structures is inextricably linked to the understanding of metabolic and developmental processes.

### *From objective to epistemic science*

To quote Heisenberg (1958, p 58): "what we observe is not nature itself, but nature exposed to our method of questioning." Thus systems thinking involves a shift from objective to epistemic science; to a framework in which epistemology - "the method of questioning" - becomes an integral part of scientific theories.

### *From Cartesian certainty to approximate knowledge*

In the systemic paradigm, it is recognised that all scientific concepts and theories are limited and approximate. Science can never provide any complete and definitive understanding. The fact we can formulate approximate but effective models and theories to describe an endless web of interconnected phenomena, and that we are able to prove our approximations over time, has been a source of confidence and strength in the scientific community.

**'The Systems View of Life: A Unifying Vision'. Fritjov Capra and Pier Luigi Luisi. (2014) Cambridge University Press.**

## Systems theory

Holistic or joined-up thinking is fundamental to this sort of practice. Part of communicating complex issues is the ability to create conditions for connected thinking – a sort of 'if this, then that' approach. The vital ingredient in the mix is often the presence of new or disturbing information that the system itself can utilize and learn from. The artist is as likely to be the bringer of this information as the scientist. In the words of social sculptor Fern Thomas, it is a "communal process which draws on forms of knowledge, expertise, vision from a community of people – ecologists, human geographers, entomologists etc – it is always a holistic bigger picture approach".

## Collaboration, new leadership and self-organisation

Leadership is not simply a position occupied but a skill to be internally cultivated; in other words one has to lead oneself as well as a process, given the right conditions. These forms of leadership are more likely to be collaborative, and cumulative. They may start around an idea and draw other people and other ideas together. In this type of situation, new knowledge is something that arises *through* people. It is often the artist and the process of making collaborative, participatory work encouraging self-organisation that provides these conditions. Emergence, itself an arts led initiative, aspires to put these principles into practice on each individual project whilst working with a growing network of artists.

### Different forms of knowledge

Founder of analytical psychology, Carl Jung speaks about the "four ways of knowing": intuition, feeling, sensing and thinking. "Cognition is not restricted to one function, and each function provides its own kind of knowledge". (Lenhart, G.A. 1996) The arts are adept at speaking from, and to, all four ways of knowing and have the ability to place us in an embodied relationship with an issue rather than simply providing analysis or information. From in-depth research into brain science over the past two decades we now have evidence for something we have always intuitively known - that our decisions are made as much emotionally as rationally (Perry S. 2009). This explains why science and statistics alone cannot create long lasting behaviour change. See the work of movement artist Simon Whitehead and 'tracktivist' Jess Allen who both emphasise that the power of 'feeling' and 'sensing' in their work helps to create dialogue.

This is not to merely advocate that artists become the spokespersons for scientists – it is about dissolving boundaries and honouring collaborative practice. "This is about being part of the new world view ushered in by twenty first century physics, ecology and general systems theory with its call for integrative and holistic modes of thinking." (Gablik 1991) Neither is this a call for artists to become agents for simplistic, single-issue politics. It is about recognising and encouraging a new sort of permeability. As academic and theatre maker Tom Payne emphasises, "artists have the ability to occupy the space between - constructing a space in between the early and late adopters.

#### Simon Whitehead

Movement artist Simon Whitehead developed Maynard as a resource for located Dance in rural West Wales, curating dance events as a medium for embodiment, social and cultural engagement and dialogue.

"Here in Abercych, lower Teifi valley, we are developing and curating a body of Dance dialogues that promote and explore different ideas and interpretations of place and identity. Through dance artists residencies, performance and social dances we invite the local public to share in conversations and experiences that reveal the often complex, ephemeral and kinetic relationships to our bodies, homes and existential territories.

We have been using social dance evenings/Twmpaths as a device to promote particular embodied experiences within our local community. The Twmpath is a social medium where contact is fundamental and the effect of this continues beyond the event...

These events happen three times a year and are often preceded or followed by a festival or residency. There is little or no cultural provision for this small diverse rural community. As resident artists we are developing a role as curators/ animators with a particular focus on the medium of Dance. Dance as a way to 'engage with what is there...' and promote dialogue and touch."

[www.may-nard.org/maynardcomehome](http://www.may-nard.org/maynardcomehome)

I wouldn't necessarily want to make work about sustainability but the principles are central to the work I make. If the artists aren't interested – others won't be interested either."

## Inspiring People with Positive Visions of the Future

"Humans are capable of a unique trick, creating realities by first imagining them, by experiencing them in their minds... By this process it begins to come true. The act of imagining somehow makes it real... And what is possible in art becomes thinkable in life." (Brian Eno, *The Big Here and Long Now*, 2003).

The Centre for Alternative Technology's report, *Zero Carbon Britain*, shows that sustainable living within the finite resources of our planet is practically possible – however, it is the cultural challenge of making it 'thinkable', as Brian Eno notes, that we are now facing. Many of our survey respondents feel that having more scientific information in relation to a positive future would be an effective tool for their work, and we return to this in our recommendations. In the 1960s, stories of the future were full of excitement, adventure and progress. But now – at a time when we most need to imagine new, positive ways of being - our dominant cultural narrative is one of dystopia and darkness.

*Blade Runner*, *The Road*, *28 Days Later* and *World War Z* are just a few examples of the sort of future we are culturally engaged with. So, do these dystopian narratives affect the way we engage with sustainability and the future? Yes, according to George Marshall of COIN: "Attitudes on climate change are not just internally formed: they develop over time mediated by socially constructed narratives" (George Marshall).

The telling of different stories that encourage solutions-based thinking around sustainability is a key driver of the work surveyed here. The "I Know a Story" project was borne from a personal frustration that lots of good, inspiring stories relating to sustainability were not being told." (Mike Erskine).

### Zero Carbon Britain – *Rethinking the Future*

The evidence from the most recent Earth Systems science demonstrates the need for us to respond at a much faster rate than is currently accepted by the mainstream - there is an urgent need to achieve zero carbon emissions as soon as possible. In response, the Zero Carbon Britain project integrates a wide range of detailed knowledge and experience from a spectrum of disciplines to show how we can meet this goal - offering detailed proof that positive solutions to the climate problem really do exist.

Their most recent report *Rethinking the Future* uses hourly weather data (sunlight, wind speeds, temperatures etc.) over a ten-year period between 2002 and 2012 – a total of almost 88,000 hours – to show that we already have the technology needed to power the UK with a 100% renewable energy system, how we can feed ourselves sustainably and leave a safe and habitable climate for our children and future generations - whilst still maintaining a modern standard of living. The project team actively communicates their findings in order to support us in how we think about such transitions, build awareness, bust myths, break through misunderstanding, trigger further research and stimulate debate about how we think about the future.

Through integrating our arts and our sciences, we can both strengthen and stimulate humanity's 'unique trick' described by Brian Eno. In calculating new realities - whilst also envisioning ourselves inhabiting them - what we create, not only becomes thinkable in life, we have both the plans and the confidence to make it real.

[www.zerocarbonbritain.com](http://www.zerocarbonbritain.com)

It is not just the difficulty we have in facing a changed future that is the issue, but the story of climate change and of sustainability does not fit our Western narrative story structure either. That narrative is one with clear causes and events, with goodies and baddies. As George Marshall identifies, in the story we need to tell, the only enemy is *ourselves*. The effect of this is what the futurist Frederick Polack called defuturisation, a retreat from constructive thinking about the future that lets us dig ourselves into the present. "We have lost the ability to see any further than the end of our collective nose". (Frederick Polack)

'There is no rule book written for what we need to be doing, there is no box that will fit, there is no map for this road we need to walk. We need to be trusted and supported in being able to help create solutions'.  
*Sian Cornelius*

### Sian Cornelius

Sian's work is about connecting people to nature and building community. She is currently working on using sensory story walks and sensory labyrinths that combine therapeutic knowledge of play theory, specific historical sites outdoors, storytelling and music.

"What agendas are we allowing to influence the changes we need to make as a society? Are these agendas the same ones that have caused the problem rather than something that's going to help find a solution?"

We create society and chose the way we live, so the changes we need to make need to come from us, as individuals working together, not from government led agendas or large international business.

The power of process is fundamental to change. Part of the creative process for me is having the humility to let go of a fixed agenda to allow creativity to reveal the beauty that lies there waiting, whether this is storytelling, ceramics or group facilitation. We need to let the process lead the work not the agenda of an end product."

All this seems to leave us backed into a narrative, cultural and psychological corner, a disconnected place of double-think, where knowing that things need to change exists alongside apathy and inaction. The artists identified in this report are leaving finger-wagging and polar bears behind in favour not only of new narratives – but of new narrative forms.

"If the future is going to look like what we think it's going to look like, if what we think is happening is happening - it's absolutely vital that creative people make tomorrow accessible and we try to make it desirable, we try to make it exciting... That's our job."  
David Colwell.

The artists represented by this report understand that not only are we living in a changing world, but that artists have a role to play in enabling us to imagine it, to rehearse it – to put the costume on and try it out. That way, we can begin to engage with that process

of change, as Andrew Curry identifies: "If we imagine what that future's like, when we see fragments of that world coming by, we can actually reach out and sort of hold on to them and say well actually that's a fragment that I'm going to need." (Andrew Curry, Director, The Futures Company).

"There is sometimes an uncomfortable hinterland to face where artists in making the change need to let go dearly held beliefs or painstakingly developed skills."  
*Suzi Gablik, 1991*

It is Eno's 'art of the possible' that the artists surveyed here are grappling with: in order to make the future, we need to make the future thinkable. The role for arts in this has been made by scientists



and politicians, as well as artists, as Caroline Lucas so clearly states: "I think it's incredibly important to inspire people with a vision of what life could be. The more that we can send postcards from the future if you like, that talk about a really positive, fun way of living then I think we'll motivate people alongside all of the very real warnings we also have to give about what happens if we carry on along our current path." (Caroline Lucas, MP).

## Fern Thomas

Fern Thomas' Institute for Imagined Futures & Unknown Lands is a post-apocalyptic research unit which explores how we vision the future through the use of image and the imagination. Rooted in the processes of Social Sculpture, the work can take the form of performance, discussion, installation, text and participatory forms.

The Institute emerged from the idea that we are each a mobile research unit interacting with the world. It explores the inner unknown worlds that are rich with imagery and potential. The Institute has facilitated events, exhibitions and participatory forms, operating on different levels depending on context. In the past environments have been created which at first sit like a theatre set, another world, until it is activated by the viewer/participant or through a participatory event.

The Institute is a space which invites others in as co-researchers, helping shape the project as it grows. Works made can blur fiction and reality, opening up new spaces to imagine a future. Also rooted in the processes and principles of social sculpture, Fern has developed these future fields to explore the potency and social relevance of the image in the broadest sense, working with participatory forms, objects and text.

"The artist can have a mercurial role operating from the edges and the in-between spaces. Imagination is the key tool in achieving a sustainable future. We need to be able to picture a future in order to move towards it. Through images, stories and encounters, artists can loosen the boundaries between times and realities creating new worlds in which we can imagine sustainable futures. For me there is no distinction between work and life which is what Joseph Beuys meant when he said 'everyone is an artist' meaning that we each have the capacity to shape our lives and society, to know that the decisions we make all contribute to the kind of world we want to live in." (Fern Thomas)

[www.imaginedfuturesunknownlands.org](http://www.imaginedfuturesunknownlands.org)  
[www.thesefuturefields.eu](http://www.thesefuturefields.eu)



*Susan Richardson, Poetry in the Dark, Nick Treharne*

## Susan Richardson

Several years ago, having been working as a freelance poet, performer and tutor of creative writing for more than twelve years, Susan Richardson decided to focus exclusively on ecological issues.

"My decision emerged both out of a sense of desperation at the planetary crisis, an urge to avert my increasing feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, and also from my belief that poetry, in bypassing the mind and heading straight to the heart, really does have the potential to make a difference. Time and again, my experience has been that people who connect with ecopoetry, either by writing their own or by reading/hearing published work, develop a deep and enduring connection with environmental/sustainability issues, which can ultimately lead to behaviour change.

Giving up all the courses I'd been teaching felt risky, and I feel very grateful that I've since been able to find enough ecopoetry work to enable me to make a living. When I approach organisations, however, I still continually have to convince them of the power and value of using poetry as a tool for inspiring change - this is an ongoing challenge. And more recently, as the financial climate has worsened, I've also twice had the experience of organisations enthusing about my proposals, then opting to take my ideas and give them to a volunteer (with no poetry experience) to put into practice instead.

In spite of the taboo, I feel very strongly about using the word 'ecopoet' to describe myself. I'm not someone who engages with environmental issues on a part-time basis or who just happens to get the occasional poem published in an ecopoetry journal. My engagement informs everything I write, perform and teach, and I don't want to hide that commitment behind the more general word 'poet', even if it means that I'm not embraced by the poetry establishment as a result.

## Earth Hour Poetry Project for WWF Cymru

In February/March 2013, I approached WWF Cymru's marketing officer, outlining my belief in the potential of poetry to inspire shifts in perception and create new patterns of thought and experience, and enquiring if they had ever considered using poetry as a tool for stimulating people to engage more deeply with both sustainability and conservation issues. Fortuitously, my approach came at the very moment that plans for Earth Hour were being discussed: the theme for 2013 was renewable energy and I was able to persuade the WWF Cymru team that facilitating a poetry project around this theme was a worthwhile idea. It helped that there was a generous budget available and plans could be put into effect almost immediately - by contrast, whenever I've approached other organisations, external funding has needed to be secured and the whole process, from conception to realisation of the project, has been much longer.

As a result, I offered a series of poetry workshops on the theme of renewable energy for adults at Chapter in Cardiff and also for a group of home educated children, ranging in age from 8 to 15. Following the workshops, I did some one-to-one/mentoring work with the participants in order to ready their renewable energy poems for publication in an Earth Hour poetry pamphlet, for which WWF again had funding available. This pamphlet was launched at a reception in the foyer of Chapter during Earth Hour itself and many of the participating poets performed their work at the launch by candlelight. The pamphlet has since been reprinted several times and the project has also had an online presence."

[www.susanrichardsonwriter.co.uk](http://www.susanrichardsonwriter.co.uk)

## Who, What, Where is this Art?

Many of the artists who responded to the survey are fundamentally questioning what it means to be a "successful artist working in the world today" (Gablik, 1991). Within the traditional model, this might be measured by the number of invitations to exhibit one's work in high profile group shows or solo exhibitions, tours to flagship inter/national venues or being included in high profile publications. But what we are

Artists need different types of spaces that nurture this kind of work. They are more likely to "need internet access, a big table to sit around and a kettle than a studio. It's about creating opportunities for connections and conversations."  
*Owen Griffiths, Social Sculptor*

increasingly seeing across disciplines is a re-addressing or re-making of artists' own practices. This can involve as Gablik identifies, 'giving up' reputations or identities in favour of uncertainty and potential isolation. This can be further exacerbated by lack of supportive networks. Those who have 'come out' are sometimes met with ostracism or lack of understanding from other artists.

These artists often make new types of work, in surprising and unconventional spaces. They are not just *making* the art, they are making the very spaces in which the art happens (G39, Cardiff; Elysium, Swansea). These spaces take us out of the everyday, and as with NTW's National Assembly projects, "there is more at stake and at play, more for the spectator to read from. It's not just about the space, it's about the social relations that are made in the making of the space" (Tom Payne).

Within these spaces the artist adopts different roles, often as a facilitator of dialogue or change processes. Sometimes an 'object' is made, but this play, music, picture, dance or art object provides focus and a reason to gather rather than being an end in itself. The transformation is in the process of 'making something together' (Maker, Ann Jordan). Sometimes these people do not look like artists at all. Perhaps they look like gardeners (Vetch Veg), community renewable energy developers (Awel Aman Tawe), or walking instructors (Simon Whitehead, Jess Allen).

The type of work produced by these artists is usually less a personal expression of an individual's creative process and more an expression of a collective identity or concern that is sometimes formally articulated but often not. There is a sense in which these artists put themselves in a position where they can be 'acted

### Ariana Jordao (Bio Artist/Curator)

Ariana's work involves creating spaces for personal, collaborative and public enquiry in order to elicit narratives on connection and shared intrinsic values whilst nurturing cultural curiosity for trust and risk. She is currently working with hello!earth visual arts collective

"Art done to a community is different from art moving through it. Participation is not something to be drawn on as an afterthought but if there is to be real inclusion this must be attended to in the creative and planning process.

It's vital that something visible happens, a risk is taken, a trust tested, to evolve the potential of a project beyond the temporal and financial dimensions it was contextualized by.

If the function of the creative process is understood less in terms of a vision of self-expression and more about creating the conditions for change to occur, making engaged work relies on expanding preset definitions of where, with and for whom a project takes place."

<http://helloearth.cc>

through'. The artist then becomes spokesperson, agitator, mediator, medium and in some cases, healer. This demands a great deal of risk-taking and trust in imagination, described by Social Sculptor Fern Thomas as the ultimate form of 'renewable energy.' Artists working within hotly contested topics or social spaces also require an ability to withstand oppositional points of view, uncertainty and transitional states.

### Sculpture by the Sea UK

Sculpture by the Sea UK runs educational and fun workshops that inspire creativity and imagination, as well as giving participants an experience of environmental awareness.

"We have found that the empathetic knowledge of nature gained from such events is an important key to getting young people engaged with the practice of sustainability so that they will be encouraged to make lifestyle changes that help reduce climate change. If information about sustainability is delivered in an enjoyable way through art, young people will be more conscious of their lifestyles and realise effects caused. It allows them to have intergenerational conversations about sustainability with others as informed individuals." (Sarah Holden, Managing Artist)

[www.sculpturebythesea.com](http://www.sculpturebythesea.com)

According to these pioneers and outriders, there is a more fluid and 'expanded' definition of the arts than ever before. It is often in the final "framing" of a work of art, says Owen Griffiths of Vetch Veg, but "then the artist goes on and something tangible is left behind to sustain the community in real and practical ways". These artists tend to mix more with scientists, builders, economists, energy specialists, farmers and future scenario planners than with the peers they might have trained with. Within the world of systems theory they are the part of the organism that responds to "disturbance" in the form of new or alarming information. They tend to have the ability to connect the organism to itself, they are fluid and flexible and their activity either suggests adaptive changes that re-establish equilibrium or creates a new order. As Ariana Jordao says, this work is less "a vision of self-expression and more about creating the conditions for change to occur".

In exploring change, it often starts from where we are, as Rabab Ghazoul says: "Participatory practice is about engaging with what is there. And what is there is everything that individuals making up communities bring", be that in a spatial or temporal community. This act of starting from where we are, and not having preset plans, enables others to shape the project from the beginning. This theme is important in distinguishing the work from agit-prop or issues-based community work, styles which have haunted socially-engaged artwork for the last twenty years or so.

While these artists have views about the world that are deeply thought through and deeply felt, the focus is on co-creation, rather than didacticism.



*Sculpture by the Sea, Phil Holden*



## Jess Allen

Jess Allen is currently developing a practice called tracktivism: walking, moving and talking in rural landscapes as an eco-activist arts practice. It combines elements of walking art, talking (dialogical) art and site-based ecological performance to facilitate conversation – with individuals or communities – around issues of environmental/social concern.

"I've long been preoccupied with the troubling idea that popular/material culture, social networking, the internet – that vast, brilliant barrage of information that is not only at our fingertips (which implies we have a level of control over it) but also up to our necks (a more accurate depiction of how it constantly threatens to overwhelm us) – are all somehow conspiring to breed collective apathy. And to me that doesn't seem to be encouraging or exercising the kind of communal human ingenuity – in the real not the virtual world – that we will need to live truly sustainably, in whatever ecological niche we carve out for ourselves from the future.

Of course, a genuine engagement with any artwork is on some level a creative two-way process, so it could be said that all art has a potential role to play in re-finding some sense of this kind of lost agency. But my argument here is that, in an age where we are and will be facing unprecedented challenges as a species, there is a much greater need for more relational artwork (including social practice art, social sculpture, dialogical art, littoral art) which: creates a social environment in which people come together to participate in a shared activity. [As Nicolas] Bourriard claims "the role of artworks is no longer to form imaginary and utopian realities, but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real, whatever scale chosen by the artist.

In relational art, the audience is envisaged as a community. Rather than the artwork being an encounter between a viewer and an object, relational art produces intersubjective encounters. Through these encounters, meaning is elaborated collectively, rather than in the space of individual consumption." (Bourriard 2000).

So this is not at all to suggest that all new art must be within this genre, but that the key elements of relational aesthetics – challenge, engagement, co-creation, participation, motivation – should be more widely recognised and applied as indicators of quality or success of artworks of the future."

[allinadaywalk.org.uk](http://allinadaywalk.org.uk)

[www.tiltingatwindmills.org.uk](http://www.tiltingatwindmills.org.uk)

[dropintheocean.org.uk/artists](http://dropintheocean.org.uk/artists)

This means that audience participation is often a feature, with the artist as creator-facilitator, offering the audience "the capacity to shape our lives and society, to know that the decisions we make all contribute to the kind of world we want to live in." (Fern Thomas) Empathy is very much part of this process of engagement, for many artists. It starts with listening, with paying attention. It develops into a shared space of collaboration, co-operation and Sculpture by the Sea, Phil Holden trust. When there is empathy, we are allowed to be more human, more vulnerable, revealing ourselves a little more, and as a result being more open to change.

Empathy is there in any meaningful human relationship, and it is this sense of connection that is the bedrock of this practice: "In relational art, the audience is envisaged as a community. Rather than the artwork being an encounter between a viewer and an object, relational art produces intersubjective encounters. Through these encounters, meaning is elaborated collectively, rather than in the space of individual consumption." (Bourriard 2000).

It is systemic, non-hierarchical and it takes account of complexity as well as simplicity, of those things that do not fit as well as the things that do. As David Colwell says, "There is no such thing as a side effect, there are only effects. They may not be effects you want, but they are every bit as much a part of the consequence of the end effect you want".

It is easy to see how this work finds itself at a distance from what we classically define as art, not through perversity but through its essentially

responsive nature. One of the hurdles that artists working in these ways come up against is about how art is defined, the idea that somehow much of this work is not art. Perhaps this is because it gives primacy to

process rather than product, seeking to achieve an end that lies beyond the idea of an authored and owned work.

Almost half our survey respondents feel that sustainable development is a key driver for both the mission and delivery of their work, favouring a systemic approach to sustainability, embedded in practice and process. As Emma Evans from Creu Cymru says, it is “not simply about reducing carbon emissions but about more efficient and effective allocation of resources, meaningful interactions with communities, ideas and aspiration, social justice – it is about the society we want to be”.

## Arts, Culture & the Welsh Language

A sustainable world is a world in which everything is connected in a dynamic, flexible and changing system. But even within a system, there can be a tendency to focus on more prevalent flows and for other aspects to be marginalized. When considering the role of language in sustainable development in Wales, we must seriously endeavour to ensure that every part of the system is given proper consideration.

Whilst there are a few highly visible, centrally funded flagship arts institutions operating through the medium of Welsh (for example Theatr Genedlaethol, the Urdd and National Eisteddfod), it has been said by a number of Welsh commentators, such as Gareth Iwan, that Welsh language culture can be 'invisible' to non-Welsh speakers and difficult for the dominant monitoring systems to measure or record.

*“Language diversity and biodiversity are joint dependent elements. The threats to both are the same. And the solution is the same: empower local people.”  
Nettle & Romaine, *Vanishing Voices**

Welsh language arts activities are often culturally embedded in local contexts, such as the Young Farmers' Clubs, Merched y Wawr, community choirs, Menter Iaith and local Eisteddfodau. These arts activities have a deeply embedded and localised role in Welsh culture. The importance of the specific and the local in Welsh language culture is reflected in the rich variety of dialect and vocabulary from one village or “bro” to the next. Arts Council programmes such as “Creative Wales” have the potential to support Welsh language work because they give artists the opportunity to live and work in their communities where the Welsh language, and even their specific dialect, is spoken. There is much to be learnt from the tradition of communal artistic practices in Welsh culture in relation to sustainability and the arts. Here, the arts starts from work in their communities where the Welsh language, and even their specific dialect, is spoken and brings a diverse range of community members together, for example the tradition of Y Fari Lwyd.

The cultural traditions of Wales contain a sense of belonging, a feeling of community, and community resilience. As Euros Lewis points out, the word 'Cymru' derives from the old Welsh 'Combroges' - people who share a community. “Language itself tells us that Wales is a collection of communities; where people belong to each other and maintain the responsibilities of belonging”. Welsh language arts activities are not

confined to the Arts Centre or to spaces defined for the arts, but rather they often exist in public and community spaces. This helps to nurture and support an awareness of our relationship with our local area/land/country in a manner which seldom happens in a traditional building. It could be said that this cultural practice has influenced the strong tradition of site specific Welsh language work in Wales, expressed clearly in the work of the experimental theatre company Brith Gof as well as many contemporary practitioners.

Eddie Ladd is a former member of Brith Gof and a dance artist who has been creating performances in the Welsh language in Wales and internationally for over 30 years. Very often she chooses a specific site or a specific historical or political subject to research and present through performance. Eddie's work embodies the experience and history of specific sites. Her work sharpens our awareness of the significance of our relationship with land and its use (for example in "Gaza/Blaenannerch" 2012), an awareness which is essential as we consider a sustainable future in Wales.

In the interview accompanying this report, Euros Lewis describes the possibility of less hierarchical structures within Welsh language arts contexts because Welsh as a minority language is able to express alternative viewpoints to the status quo that more dominant languages such as English cannot do. Euros describes the more fluid practice of Theatr Troed-y-rhiw; less a case of the 'artist' presenting work to 'receivers'. This practice has more in common with the move towards a relational art highlighted in this report. Where the arts are embedded within a culture, there is the potential for arts to be something which a community not only has *access* to, but something in which a community can participate or even actively *initiate*.

This experience in the Welsh context resonates with a wider international experience of the relationship between the arts and community. Ananda Coomaraswamy (Hinduism & Buddhism, 1959) has been widely quoted as stating that "the artist is not a special kind of person, but every person is a special kind of artist." As an example of this, within the Indian tradition art and life are *not* separate. Director of Schumacher College, Satish Kumar, emphasises that this separation is one of the consequences of a mechanistic, dualistic rather than a holistic approach. One of his recommendations is to find ways to bring art and everyday life together. This he believes enables us to mend the split that industrialisation has created within society.



This is not to advocate that there is no place for the professional artist. Rather, this report highlights the fundamental role of the artist as a change-maker, and the increasing recognition that the artist needs to re-connect *with* the community, as we see already existing in Welsh language cultural tradition.

“art became very much ego-centred, in the sense that I am doing art, it’s coming from me, whereas in India, art comes from the community. Traditional Indian art never came from the ego-centred individual...We have paid a big price for these great works of art. We are living in an ugly world as a result, because we have put all this art in one little corner, in a compartment, or in art schools, where you go to become an artist. And then out of ten thousand students going to art college, ten might become the masters. What a waste of energy and money and time! In India, we want all ten thousand- every single one of them- to become artists, and therefore, no single master. That is the price we have paid.”

*Satish Kumar.*

### Creu Cymru Emergence

Creu Cymru Emergence is working with eighteen theatres and arts centres across Wales to consider the challenges and opportunities of making sustainability intrinsic to their thinking and practice. It aims to better understand the barriers to behaviour change and to identify the most effective interventions that can be made to support sustainable development in the sector.

"Sustainability should be integral to organisational development rather than another tick-box for funding or political priority. We need to promote sustainability in its full sense enabling individuals and organizations to see that it is not simply about reducing carbon emissions but about more efficient and effective allocation of resources, meaningful interactions with communities, ideas and aspiration, social justice – its about the society we want to be, it's about leading the discussion.

For me sustainability is about what kind of a world we want to live in and there is huge potential for theatres and arts centres to be catalysts for this change. " (Emma Evans, Creu Cymru Emergence Coordinator)

[www.emergence-uk.org/projects/creu-cymru-emergence/#the-project](http://www.emergence-uk.org/projects/creu-cymru-emergence/#the-project)  
[www.creucymru.com](http://www.creucymru.com)

The survey response reflects a tendency for Welsh and non-Welsh-language artists to move and work in different networks – according to cultural context as well as opportunities, resources and funding. But as suggested in *Vanishing Voices*, "the problem of sustainable development is more likely to be solved if indigenous systems of knowledge and languages are valued and brought into play." The Welsh language therefore is relevant to everyone living in Wales, not only Welsh speakers. This report suggests that more than ever there is a need to find opportunities for cross-language and cross-cultural learning.

This, of course, does happen. Menna Elfyn, award winning poet and playwright, in her talk ‘Symud yr Agenda’ (*Moving the Agenda*) states that “change has happened in Wales, especially in the field of poetry. In 1986, *Fel yr Hed y Frân* (*As the Crow Flies*), an anarchic group, visited pubs and schools in an attempt to take poetry away from the safe and narrow confines of the National Eisteddfod’s competitions.” She talks of how social issues can bring artists working in both English and Welsh together, such as the publication of a bi-lingual collection of anti-apartheid protest poems in the 1980’s. Theatre companies such as *Sherman Cymru* are producing Welsh language plays with English surtitles and accompanying talks for Welsh learners.

Welsh language cultural activities are increasingly opening up to Welsh learners with a new Welsh learner Eisteddfod recently established. Publishers are producing bilingual poetry collections, such as Menna Elfyn’s *Cusan Dyn Dall/Blind Man's Kiss*, and projects like *Awel Aman Tawe* are running bilingual arts and



climate change competitions and events. But, this report maintains, more needs to be done to connect artists and communities using both languages.

The majority of our survey respondents feel that "the status and strength of the Welsh language is intrinsic to any definition of sustainable development in Wales." Eluned Hâf, Director of Wales Arts International speaks passionately about the role of resilience and adaptation in a minority culture - "Resilience" is the ability to change, to react and to benefit from change; ...We in the arts now have a duty to use this opportunity to encourage discussions in order to challenge not only those within our own arts and culture to get involved but also the wider society." (Eginio: Celfyddau, Diwylliant a'r Amgylchedd/Emergence: Culture, Art and the Environment").

If we are to imagine, let alone create, a sustainable Wales, these discussions must bridge both languages. The Welsh linguistic heritage of 'responsibilities of belonging,' that feeds into the Welsh language arts tradition offers us clear areas of exploration as we move forward in developing the role of the arts in sustainability in Wales.

This report makes a recommendation that we need more research, events and activities in order to explore and engage with notions of 'sustainability' within the specific cultural context of Wales. This report also strongly maintains that the Welsh language is vital in order to fully access the specific cultural context of Wales and should be integral to the process and discussion of sustainable development in Wales.

## Barriers and Challenges

The most significant barriers that respondents say they face in delivering arts and sustainability projects are funding and time. Other barriers and challenges faced to a lesser extent by respondents are a lack of information, skills, tools, knowledge and networks, in the fields of both arts and sustainability.

Forty-one per cent stated that a lack of funding was a major issue, in six cases a complete barrier to progress. It is suggested by 36% that 'arts and sustainability' is a difficult concept for funders,

### Head4Arts

Head4Arts is creative commissioning company specialising in community arts, operating in partnership with the local authorities of the county boroughs of Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Merthyr Tydfil and Torfaen. Head4Arts uses engagement with the arts as the mechanism for promoting regeneration and stimulating creativity.

"Head4Arts places a strong emphasis on reusing materials and helping people learn craft skills that encourage refashioning or mending rather than replacing goods or creating a demand for newly manufactured items that squander resources. Participants are encouraged to view recycled materials as inspiring and valuable resources and there is an emphasis on skill-sharing. One example was the "Made by Hand" textiles project in Cwm targeting unemployed women lacking sewing skills. This resulted in the creation of a large wall hanging celebrating creativity and linked to the Adain Avion Cultural Olympiad event in Ebbw Vale in 2012. Craftmaking projects using recycled materials are frequently developed in areas of economic deprivation as part of the measures to address poverty - the transferable skills gained giving potential routes into volunteering, social enterprise and employment." (Kate Strudwick)

[www.head4arts.org.uk](http://www.head4arts.org.uk)

commissioners and sponsors to buy into or understand. Over 67% of respondents said that they sustain their arts and sustainability projects either through the free economy (sharing, bartering, exchanging), through keeping costs to zero or a bare minimum, or subsidizing them through another paying job. While this is not necessarily a barrier to work, the challenges of having little or no income, and juggling paying and non-paying jobs can lead to uncertainty, stress and project vulnerability. Partly as a consequence of this issue of funding, 42% stated that lack of time was a serious concern.

Many of these projects appear to slip through the arts funding net in Wales by virtue of the fact that they look different from a 'traditional' arts project. Some expressed disappointment that they can get funding in England but not in Wales. One respondent who is considered a leader in her field in England, where she is offered many commissions and work, has been turned down for even small amounts of matched funding from ACW for doing work in her home area in Wales. Another respondent says that she has difficulty persuading project officers that she is working in a legitimate art form, and as a result has pursued funding from academic sources, which is the only way she has been able to keep working in Wales, though it is not her preferred route.

Another barrier that respondents face in applying to the Arts Council for arts and sustainability projects is an expectation of 'product' and 'output' rather than process and journey. As outlined in this report, a lot of the work in this field is process rather than product based. The impact of this type of project is difficult to quantify and evaluate in the existing ACW report procedure, and the suggestion was made by respondents that project officers are less willing to support projects that cannot be monitored in their standard format.

A key aspect of sustainability is to value the importance of the local, the indigenous, as opposed to 'flying in experts'. Artists whose work is grounded in sustainability and delivered via sustainable means feel sometimes overlooked when it comes to commissions 'about' sustainability being awarded. Well-established artists are often given the commissions due to the fact that they are a 'name', and consequently held up as beacons of sustainability without having demonstrated sustainability credentials.



Furthermore, some artists in rural areas feel somewhat marginalized, and as though their work is considered insignificant due to the fact that the local population is dispersed. Artists working in community arts said they sometimes feel the same - that the work they do with local people is considered less 'serious'. And yet, major community arts projects like NTW's The Passion, an enormously inspiring and engaging event that lives on in people's minds, offer proof that community arts is a powerful genre.

As this report demonstrates, very many projects in this field are relational, participatory - they involve people: people who are experiencing 'disturbance' in their lives, people who are in denial, in confusion, people seeking answers, people with strong opinions and people who do not know how to express their opinions. Every person responds differently to the current issues we are facing. The artist who steps into that space is not taking on an easy task. They face a fierce range of emotions: fear, loss, anger and guilt among others. In addition to their role as artist, publicity manager, project officer, report writer and so on, they often also become healer, sustainability 'expert', researcher, and documenter.

This is significant. Small organisations or sole artists working on shoe-string or un-funded projects, with little backing, or support networks, within a field that is in many respects 'taboo' are vulnerable to burn-out. Their decision to work across two sectors where there is little funding and limited public respect is a demonstration of their commitment to this emerging field of inquiry. They require support.



*We're Cutting our Carbons, Awel Aman Tawe*

# Implications & Recommendations

It is vital to acknowledge the great number of artists and sustainable arts projects throughout Wales (see appendix for the list of projects we have been told about). This needs to be celebrated. But as Gablik says, "where do we go from here and how?" How do we sustain and grow this emerging community of practice?

It is recommended that the Arts Council of Wales:

- acknowledge the role that the arts play in the cultural shift taking place in Wales and beyond;
- broaden the frame for the arts in Wales;
- actively identify and support the delivery of sustainable arts projects in Wales.

## Acknowledge the role that the arts play in the cultural shift currently taking place in Wales and beyond.

This report documents a growing number of Wales-based artists who consider sustainability to be a key part of their work. Artists from all genres are making a shift in their working practices. There is a definite move towards 'being' more sustainable, and 'thinking' more about sustainability, but what has been particularly striking in this research is that sustainable arts practices are showing a clear emphasis on relational arts, transformative arts and arts that are grounded in community. There is significant evidence that the arts have a crucial role in – and a responsibility to – the current culture-shift taking place in Britain. Artists are able to do something that no other discipline can achieve. Through the arts, they can create space for dialogue, they can help to communicate complex ideas, they can support people in imagining a positive future. The arts give people 'permission' to be confused and uncertain as well as to give voice to new and emergent solutions. There are many artists taking on this challenge.

Conversely, in the wider picture at UK government level, there is a significant policy gap emerging where the arts are being left as 'bystanders' while sustainable development policies get drawn up. For Welsh Government, however, sustainability is a 'central organizing principle' and the Sustainable Futures Bill is due for implementation in 2015. There is, therefore, significant scope for the Arts Council of Wales to respond to this emerging movement of artists; and to develop a strategy that lays a solid foundation for Wales' 'creative response' to current global crises. In order to be a leader in this sector, sustainability needs to be embedded within the arts sector rather than being another tick box



## Broaden the frame for the arts in Wales

The work of many of these initiators blurs the boundaries between rigidly defined arts funding categories and, most definitely, between the 'us' and 'them' of performer/artist and audience/observer. Often these artists do not consciously define what they are doing as 'sustainable development' - such words are not attractive to many artists; but nevertheless what they share in common is a desire, through creating a shift in consciousness, to create vibrant communities, enhance wellbeing and ultimately create a sustainable Wales.

We are seeing a hybridization of art forms and a developing relational creative practice. Artists working in this area can suffer from having "less profile as it is hard to know exactly what it is they do" (Fern Thomas). Their strength is in their fluidity, flexibility and ability to move between disciplines and boundaries, make conversations happen and speak to those outside their own sector. These artists create transformative structures and need to be supported to do so.

Such 'what if...' work is not typically taught in traditional drama or arts schools but is a growing area of recognized practice. Institutions that blur and expand definitions of art, such as the Social Sculpture course at Oxford Brookes University or the former Dartington College of Arts, trained many artists now working at the forefront of sustainable creative practice. What might a Welsh Centre for Creativity and Sustainability look like?

This report recommends that ACW raises the profile of relational arts, cross-art forms, and collaborations between non-artists (eg. scientists) and artists; that less emphasis is placed on product and output, and more emphasis on process, and the journey. This isn't a call to stop exhibitions of paintings or theatre

### But how do we recognize a good sustainable arts project?

The Bechdel Test in just a few years has become a recognized international benchmark measure for something that before might never have been deemed serious enough an issue to be measured. Might we in Wales devise the "Gablik Test" to fill a gap which evaluates the credentials or aspiration of an arts sustainability project?

#### The Bechdel Test

What is now known as the Bechdel test was introduced in Alison Bechdel's comic strip *Dykes to Watch Out For*. In a 1985 strip titled "The Rule", an unnamed female character says that she only watches a movie if it satisfies the following requirements:

- It has to have at least two women in it,
- who talk to each other,
- about something besides a man.

The test, which has been described as "the standard by which feminist critics judge television, movies, books, and other media", moved into mainstream criticism in the 2010s. By 2013, an internet newspaper described it as "almost a household phrase, common shorthand to capture whether a film is woman-friendly," and the failure of major Hollywood productions such as *Pacific Rim* (2013) to pass it was addressed in depth in the media. According to Neda Ulaby, the test still resonates because "it articulates something often missing in popular culture: not the number of women we see on screen, but the depth of their stories, and the range of their concerns."

In 2013, four Swedish cinemas and the Scandinavian cable television channel Viasat Film incorporated the Bechdel test into some of their ratings, a move supported by the Swedish Film Institute.

Several variants of the test have been proposed—for example, that the two women must be named characters, or that there must be at least a total of 60 seconds of conversation.

[Wikipedia](#)

productions, but rather to broaden the frame of what constitutes 'art' and to consider projects and their potential impact holistically. Taking inspiration from the way many Welsh language arts activities are embedded in culture and communities, there is an urgent need to look beyond 'established' art and artists, and recognise arts within communities as playing a significant part in the realisation of a sustainable future.

## Actively identify and support the delivery of sustainable arts projects in Wales

### Collaboration and Networks

Collaborations and networks are increasingly important to initiators, especially since many of them are operating outside the traditional funding model, touring circuits or centres of culture. Forums do exist (for example Tipping Point, Julie's Bicycle and Emergence) but the majority are in England. Nearly all of those attending these types of networks reported in our survey that the experience of networking had a valuable influence on their work.

There is a tangible sense that real and virtual networks (such as Culture Colony and Emergence) in Wales will become more important for those involved in change creation. An overwhelming majority of respondents to our survey said that the creation of forums and networks is just as important as making more funding available. Practical information, tools and training in sustainable practice are also important. It is clear that artists need to meet each other in order to do this work. It is recommended that the ACW could play a more decisive role in bringing people together, both for collaboration and to share knowledge, information and creative ideas. Furthermore, to support the marketing of projects via sustainable means, thus retaining the integrity of the projects.

### Funding Application Procedure

Based on evidence in this report, assessing for 'sustainability' during an application process isn't just a tick-box exercise. A sustainable arts project is not just about using LED lights and maintaining low carbon buildings. One would expect such a project to demonstrate a clear sustainability intention with a process and delivery that compliments it. Nor is it necessarily about quantifying numbers of performances, or visitors to an exhibition. The application procedure needs to be versatile enough to ensure that sustainable arts projects (as identified in this report) don't slip through the funding net due to their inability to provide a full list of anticipated outcomes. This doesn't imply that 'anything goes', or that we are condoning 'woolly' applications, but rather that the application procedure takes into consideration more 'relational', 'transformational' artforms and that forms are revised accordingly.

Some projects may incur risks, in that artists are unlikely to know in advance the outcome or the journey they will take, but evidence demonstrates that the creative process often requires this uncertainty in sustainable arts projects, and artists need to be trusted. Time is another important factor to consider. These

projects often take longer and have less defined milestones. But, conversely, the long-term impact can be greater due to the fact that they make deep, powerful and transformational connections.

In light of the fact that many of these artists are looking towards creating a sustainable future, there is a significant gap in the tools available to artists to understand and monitor the ability of their work to affect behaviour change. It is recommended that ACW work with projects that have been specifically designed to support behaviour change (for example the Wales based PIRC; Public Interest Research Council), and in particular to assess and explore evidence-based monitoring of the impact of the arts on culture shift.

Some organisations are already working with academic institutions to develop monitoring systems for this work, for example Awel Aman Tawe have been working since 2010 with Oxford University to monitor and evaluate behaviour change as a result of their sustainable arts programme. But Welsh university departments need to be encouraged to become involved in this work. In addition it is recommended that ACW utilise existing tools to identify objectives and measurable targets and for monitoring sustainability, (eg Julie's Bicycle's IG Tools) and to look for projects that have formal sustainable development policies in place and/or are signatory to the Sustainable Development Charter.

### **Actively encourage sustainable arts projects in communities across Wales.**

Our survey received responses from artists across the country, across genres, in urban and rural areas. It is suggested that artists who choose to work in rural and remote areas will play an increasingly important role in developing resilience and the report recommends that their work be considered as important as that which is part of a centralised gallery/theatre system. Importantly, this type of work has the potential to enhance links with existing arts activities within Welsh-language communities and culture and consequently may help to bridge the language gap in this emerging sector. Local artists are well placed to facilitate projects in their own areas, and it is suggested that ACW seriously consider supporting artists within communities that are undergoing change in reference to sustainability (e.g. places where large supermarkets are proposed, or fracking, or indeed wind/solar farms).

### **Encourage bilingual collaborations and cross-cultural learning**

This report strongly maintains that the Welsh language is vital in order to fully access the specific cultural context of Wales and should be integral to the process and discussion of sustainable development in Wales. The survey respondents primarily work through the medium of English, and yet, the arts play a significant role in Welsh language culture - a role that many of the projects outlined in this report are aiming for. The time is ripe for cross-language and cross-cultural conversations about sustainable arts. It is recommended that more research, events and activities are carried out to explore and engage with notions of 'sustainability' within Welsh language culture and to facilitate and encourage new ways of learning between the two. There is a rich seam to be mined here, through which we can arrive at 'joined up' definitions and processes that speak to and include those working in both languages.

### Recommendations from survey respondents:

"ACW could play a far more decisive role in bringing people together and encouraging collaborative and creative thinking with some grant calls. (along the lines of Arts and Humanities Research Workshops)."

"I think all RFO's should commit to the Sustainable Development Charter and set themselves objectives and measurable targets."

"Require arts organisations to answer to how they are addressing sustainability issues (content or office/organisational daily practices)."

"It's time that ACW considered relational aesthetics as an indicator of quality and understood the power of art works that seek to connect and encourage dialogue as their primary medium."

"ACW needs to lead the way in embedding sustainability rather than presenting it as another priority/tick box. Communication and understanding is key."

"Consider longevity and continuity in relation to community engaged projects and institutions".

"Develop a specific pot of money to make available through an application process for collaborative projects between the arts organisations and the science and sustainability groups."

"Train arts council staff in sustainable development."

"Don't create another separate category but weave issues of sustainability into all projects and funding streams."

"(Encourage) working in partnership with other organisations across the sectors".

"I think that one large scale successful project such as Vetch Veg has opened up local arts organisations and also Swansea Council to this kind of working – so sometimes there needs to be an example project to reference when talking about future projects."

"Shared resources (I'm imagining a beautiful warehouse full of old sets, props, bookable technology etc). Shared resources also in terms of organisations outputs / events / shared concerns, partnerships on shared endeavours."

"I think the Arts Council should be a bit like the EU, who have cross cutting themes in funding applications where people have to answer, in terms of funding any project, how this relates to resilience in the face of climate change. That would get everybody thinking about it. For any sort of European funding you have to answer to three cross cutting themes and one is equality, one's environmental sustainability and the other one's about IT."

"Sustainability of the arts is like managing woodland: cutting dead wood and making space for the new to grow."

## Supporting the individual

An important question is how do we sustain those doing this work? As the report identifies, there is a high incidence of burn out amongst artists and also those working in sustainability. For those working in sustainable arts the risk is two-fold. Currently many of those at the forefront are taking on the multiple roles of artist, project manager, researcher, press officer and so on without sufficient support. How can these artists be valued for the pioneering work they do? Is there a role for an 'Unofficial National Theatre for Sustainability' or a new "Self-organising Sustainability RFO" or Creative Producer?

While there are some UK wide programmes set up to support cultural leaders and innovators (for example the Clore Leadership Programme), many initiators develop their work without the benefit of mentors or supported leadership programmes. There is a new breed of leader who takes a more 'DIY approach' and is more likely to promote collaboration rather than develop hierarchical structures. These leaders have a significant role in envisioning and getting us to the future we want. A small number of individuals are currently doing a great amount of work, and yet there are few programmes set up to support them. In this area, a little investment can have enormous influence. Mentorship programmes such as Volcano's Yr Odyn or NTW's Wales Lab are crucial as are the presence of creative mavericks such as the late Kim Fielding of Tactile Bosch or Ann Jordan of Elysium, both leaders / generators of change and new spaces. We recommend a more formal mentoring of creative leaders interested in sustainability.



*Wall Hanging, Head4Arts*



# Epilogue

Although outside of the remit of this report and tender, part of our exit strategy reflects that we are interested in developing in partnership with ACW, future-directed interpretation and engagement with the report's findings by artists from a variety of art forms. These could be in a digital format, in the form of literature or live art presentations. We would be interested in commissioning Welsh artists with a track-record of producing sustainable art to respond to, interpret and interrogate the results of the report. This could be funded through future funding applications including NESTA, Lottery and Arts Council Funds.

Running alongside these commissions, Emergence proposes organising a number of symposia in the form of practical, experiential days that would include disseminating the report's findings. These would help build the network, obtain further information enabling additional data collection and thereby increase the dissemination, reach and profile of the project. These Emergence symposia will be run by members of the team and be organized so as to give a good geographical spread throughout Wales. They will be hosted in partnership with identified regional activists whose work has been highlighted in the initial mapping report. These will be intimate (20 participants or so) and potentially take place in informal settings. We see these symposia as being the next iteration of Emergence.

Funding for the artists commissions described above and to run a number of symposia will be sought following submission of the report.



*Maynard Come Home, Simon Whitehead*

# Interviews

## Interview with Rabab Ghazoul

### Participation and Social Engagement

An ongoing question for me is why are we engaging people? On whose terms does that take place and what agenda does that serve? My experience is that participatory practice forces me to really engage with those questions in a critical way and rigorous way.

In my early practice, I was working within theatre and experimental contemporary performance - 12 years ago I moved into a much more visual arts informed practice. I think what I'm fundamentally interested in as an artist is - how do we connect? What creates meaningful connections? A lot of my work is about the conversational and it manifests in my work in a range of ways. The work is interested in spaces in which people meet, in spaces in which people cross over and engage with each other.

When we talk about cultural integration, about community cohesion or health and wellbeing or healthy communities or regeneration, what does it mean? What does a community or a group of people look like? So my practice as an individual artist, practitioner, and also then in a wider sense as a person leading, or managing projects is informed by the social. I'm quite aware that our institutional practice is often interpreting that, not always consciously, but in quite a narrow way. That's often because of the limitations of resources, of funding, of time of capacity. But when we are working with people, we're not just interested in our work as practitioners but opening up a wider realm and inviting people in. Especially inviting people in who would not be your usual attendee to that film festival or that set of exhibitions - how and why we do that is a real responsibility. A lot of my work is interested in who the audiences and participants coming into a particular space are. How do we open those spaces up?

### Process and Product

I'm interested in how our creative intervention creates new possibilities for people, enhances what a community can be through the power of cultural practice or creative work. I'm interested in challenging some of the existing or conventional approaches to culture and creativity and art.

I can see how that's had an impact in projects I've worked on - people are able to develop a sense of fluency and a sense of community, communication and connection - and I think that's something we talk about a lot and the cliché of 'oh community doesn't exist in the way it used to.' I think that's partly accurate and that's also partly a romanticisation of how we think communities functioned in the past. I think in *every* era there's a challenge to how we connect. Cultural strategy has a really powerful way of drawing out what

people have to offer, really drawing out people's potential. What does it mean to realise ourselves and realise more of ourselves?

## What does this work look like?

I absolutely believe that creativity always exists, anywhere you go, whether there is or isn't an arts centre or cultural space or community space. Often I might make work alongside people - placard parades, for example - sometimes that's me working as an artist and with a concept that I want to pursue, other times that might involve other people in something that is quite literally a procession, an intervention in a public space. Presenting ourselves in the public realm and activating responses or simply an awareness that things can happen in a different way is part of a cultural strategy that I think is effective because it presences culture, it presences creativity, beyond the gallery or the theatre stage.

## Dealing with Difficulty

The other thing I have to find ways of dealing with is the conflicts that emerge within those situations and the lack of clear and easy routes whenever one is working with people. Whether it's the pressures and the huge challenges of being in isolation or poverty or deprivation that manifests itself in so many different ways. The lack of opportunities in terms of education or unemployment, all of these are huge issues for communities and sometimes very specific communities who have long standing challenges.

Participatory practice is about engaging with what is there. And what is there is everything that individuals, and individuals that make up communities, bring. What I bring and what we bring as artists which is our own experiences and our histories and our potential and our limitations. What's interesting in those spaces is conflict and how we navigate that, towards a sense of connection and community, how we use creative practice to pursue that. Part of that process is the limits, the resistances, the tensions between groups, and I'm very drawn to that part of the process. The real measure of the power of cultural practice is how it can provide ways of navigating the natural things that emerge within and between human beings and how we deal with those simple things that come between people if we're interested in relating to them or sharing space with them, or moving issues forward with them, or challenging the council's particular take on regeneration.

There's also how groups of people or communities challenge institutional practices and challenge some of the narrative, or some of the ongoing narratives about what change is, what regeneration is, what transformation is, what social cohesion is. And I suppose it's challenging power structures as well. Where does empowerment come in? Where do we have dialogue or have conversations where spaces haven't existed for conversation before, or where people are fed up of dialogue because it's the same thing, and really move to spaces where people really have some sense of belief in that - where there's a new integrity around that? I'm interested in how we acknowledge and have a dialogue about our different perceptions of those goals or those aspirations, how does it feel to different groups of people.

## Is it Art?

One of the questions that emerges is: what is social practice and how is it different to the work of a community practitioner or a political activist? I suppose where artists really define what that practice is, is in using very specific strategies within their work or using very conceptual approaches. So there may be a crossover with community development or regeneration practice, but I think artists approach those areas in different ways. One is constantly interrogating one's own practice and how it feels... you're trying to draw out the essence of what you are specifically doing as an artist in a given situation, in a given context or given piece of work. I think that's a challenge for people that work with social practice or participatory practice, but at the same time it's a real opportunity.

## Is it Responsive?

I think it's almost impossible for artists not to respond, in the broadest sense, to what's around you, what's in the world. But I would say my practice - if I look over my practice it's always been interested in what is around me and it's hard to ascertain which comes first, it can be very intertwined.

I made a piece of work which relied heavily on a group of people that was a response to cycling around in December and seeing what I knew were really offensive ads, billboard ads from Coca-Cola that really took annoying advertising to yet another level. That was me, in my head cycling round, seeing enough of these billboards to eventually go 'oh'. What emerged was wanting to make a response to that, I could have made a response to that in a way that didn't draw on anyone's assistance. I could have just made a response in a number of ways to that as an artist. However I wanted to do that with a range of people, with a group of people. And in that sense it's a very open call... I'm hesitant to say open call because nothing is ever open because you're community is not the entire world - so it's an open call across a section of networks and communities.

But in that sense the realisation of that art work in that moment of that photograph - which is 35 - 40 people holding up a very different set of texts underneath a blank billboard - that's the combination of the aesthetic whereby you both are responding out and in, both to yourself - the ideas that you have as an artist, and to what's going on in your environment.

## Sustainability

I'm going to approach sustainability in a very literal way, so use of resource and use of materials just to start with. I'm always drawn to working with found materials or existing materials or going 'actually that's already been used'. I'm much more comfortable working around stuff that's already in use. Part of the approach is the response to things that are already there or a reframing approach if you like.

## Legacy

What is the impact of a project beyond the time that you're working on it? What emerges out of that? What occurs when that is lost or comes to an end? On one level I can say, okay, I did a ten month residency in Bridgend and I definitely feel that there was no coincidence that by the end of that project some of the people that volunteered on that project, who were quite strongly involved in it, didn't want to see the end of the project - although clearly the project was funded for a specific term and that was finishing and I was leaving. But a new arts group emerged out of that, that was run by local people who are continuing to do things in Bridgend with sourced funding. Sustainability in that sense is what is it that people are engaged in and how that enables them to sustain and continue to work in those ways.

I think a lot of the work that comes under the heading 'access,' 'outreach' or 'development,' when it isn't mainstreamed into our operational practices, or when it isn't mainstreamed into the core ways in which an organisation or project functions - we run the risk of developing really short term things that really serve our needs, tick our boxes and sustain our core practice - but can become quite exploitative if we're not thinking about what is the long term potential and what is being sustained in terms of people's engagement and involvement. What are the terms in which we involve particular groups of particular communities and especially those who we could term as more 'excluded or 'marginalised'?

If we are trying to engage people, how do they become engaged, how do we sustain their engagement beyond that initial, very specific exposure? How do a group of people become our core audiences? I think that's really critical, and connected up to that is, how we view audiences and how we view potential participants and I think sometimes we do compartmentalise. How do we develop very particular spaces which enable us to cross fertilize our audiences? We address access or exclusion by having bespoke programs for particular communities, but those people never actually turn up to your gallery or your arts centre or your concert hall. If those people are not returning and not feeling like part of a wider contingent of people who are enjoying the arts or attending projects then I think there's a question there about sustainability. Galleries have been free for a number of years but still people don't feel a sense of ease walking into certain spaces.

[www.axisweb.org/p/rababghazoul](http://www.axisweb.org/p/rababghazoul)



## Interview with David Colwell

### The Creative Challenge

It seems to me that the creative challenge - if what we think is happening is happening - is to make tomorrow accessible, desirable, exciting (and) challenging, but no more challenging than necessary. That's our job. It is about language and what people receive - the received wisdom. In my world it's very much received in what you have around you. There is a reason that if you are aspirational, you have an oak framed mock-Tudor house, because it's about security - but how can you be so disinterested in now?

Go to a furniture show, 100% Design or something like that, and there's virtually nothing there that couldn't have been designed in 1953. This mid-century modern thing is absolutely everywhere. You can see why. That was a period when there was a great deal of creative energy and a sense that things couldn't be worse. That whole war-time experience and the technologies that came out of that and a tremendous amount of newness and enthusiasm and energy.

That world is the world I grew up in. But that world wasn't about finite resources. It was about the American Dream, or the Scandi version of the American Dream. I heard recently that the Festival of Britain wasn't the festival of Britain, it was the festival of Scandinavia. All that ethos we adopted was Scandinavian. It was egalitarian. It was affordable. It was exciting. It was a whole world of new materials: plastics, cast aluminiums - my own designer career started very much in that world. The perspex chair I did in 1968 as a student is now famous.

That dream is simply inappropriate for now. The modern movement - the Corbusier thing, house is a machine for living in or the Bauhaus thing, starting from the kind of Walter Gropius position, all of which comes from the state that Germany was in between the wars: destitute. But what all of those movements seemed to be looking for was an absolute. And the big change that we haven't come to terms with, is that it's relativistic - it's relative. There aren't any absolutes. Not really. Science has been telling us that since the late 1960s.

### From Absolutism to Relativism

So that's the big change, that it's a relativistic world, and we haven't grasped it. We have scientifically, but culturally we really haven't. And we have these reference points and in my world of furniture and woodwork, the model for that goes back even further - as indeed does the modern movement - it really goes back to the Arts and Crafts movement, and what's very interesting about the Arts and Crafts movement - A, it was very backward looking and B, it didn't invent anything. There was nothing technically new about anything they produced - there were nice patterns and some interesting writing, I'm not

rubbishing it, but interestingly enough it was completely uninventive. So to my mind there's this white canvas but it needs to gain a critical mass to move forward. (But) it doesn't work from an *economic* point of view. Having run a company with ten employees, the encouragement from the taxation policy is that you're much better off buying a machine than employing a person.

The work I'm doing now is being made in a factory in Coventry and it's been very difficult to sell them onto this idea. If you look at this timber, if you feel it, it has a texture. And usually what happens with wood is you saw it up, then you plane it, then you sand it - all of which is mechanised. All of which is energy intensive. With the cutting of this, there's a new generation of band saw blades, which are tungsten tipped, and they produce this very nice cut and it comes straight off the saw, What it means is, it's got to be right, because you only do it once. You've got to stand at the end of a machine passing this stuff through, so there's an element of skill.

There's actually less time but more skill, and there's much less wastage because to make this section it would have had to be 2mm bigger all round which is getting on for 25% of the volume. So you cut out the process of planing, and if you've ever been into a furniture factory, it's done on a machine that planes all 4 sides at once, the length of this room, and it'll have a dust extractor on it which will be drawing at least ten horsepower, and it's sucking air - don't know how many cubic feet per minute, but it would empty this room of air every five to ten seconds. Then it's got to be filtered - and of course, this is all air you've heated. And it's noisy. The newer ones are less noisy than the older ones, and it's going to cost £15,000. And it's going to have 20-30 horsepower of electric energy in it. To make it smooth. What's so good about smooth?

With the steam bending process, it's something where you're going from unseasoned timber to seasoned timber, formed in one hit, and with less energy. I've been doing that for 35 years now. I got a grant from Welsh Arts Council in 2010 and that's when I started doing this work. I haven't done a complete audit on it because there are so many variables. Probably about half the energy is saved and it's almost certainly getting on for twice as strong and there is a reduction of about a third in material content.

I can't sell 'em. I'm selling odds and sods. It's priced so that it'll take a wholesale mark-up, retail mark-up, all of these things. And I can't get anybody interested. I can't get Heals interested, I can't get Liberty's interested, because they're stuck in 1953, mid-century modern's what we want.

## Side Effects in a Holistic World

In the world of absolutes, there's something called a side effect. There is no such thing as a side effect, there are only effects. They may not be effects you want, but they are every bit as much a part of the consequence of the end effect you want: to get to Tenerife in 2 hours, or whatever it is, you have to look at all of the effects. So the side effect of having things made idiot proof - by a deskilled, hyper-mechanised

process - is that you end up with a bunch of idiots. I mean, it is bound to be. It can hardly be any other way. Life is going to become less rewarding. There is going to be a cost. And that cost is going to be things like the person's health - which is going to be expensive. The sense of purpose in the next generation, that's incredibly expensive!

## Stasis and Movement

I take a great deal of interest in what comfort is. You can sit in one of these chairs for hours and hours and the reason you can is: there's a question of shape, there's a question of texture, the fact that this surface which is not smooth, it's very slightly straightened, has a higher co-efficient of friction, which is what upholstery does, except upholstery is too much. What you want from a structure, which is going to support a body, is strength and flexibility. What you want from the point of view of long-term comfort is very slight movement, because when you introduce very slight movement, it reminds your body that although you're sitting and you're comfortable, you're still active. If you talk to somebody teaching the Alexander technique, they don't use the word posture, because that implies that it's static. And they would say that actually movement is what you want. To be articulate. So you're already going some way to what I want out of the world we're talking about - which is communication, which is openness. I just love sitting round a dining table and eating and rapping. It's actually the fact there's a table between you. It gives you your own space, but it's something that you share. There's something about the aspect of utility that, to my mind, hugely helps you out.

## Foolproof and Risks

My professor, who's long, long dead said that the craftsmanship is the workmanship of risk. Which is coming back to what we were talking about before, about fool-proof - it ain't craftsmanship. I'm talking about what it is to do things. There's something very levelling about the doing of things... And the notion that we can have a world where we're not involved in doing things: firstly - why? Secondly - it obviously ain't going to happen. Do we want to be in a vegetative state? Nah. There's nothing about that that is appealing. The other thing is fun: is it fun? The last thirty years in the visual arts, I call it the age of irony. And it's a very limited palette. Irony's slick and has a certain sort of chic but it's removed, it's a sideways step - you're looking at things from the outside. It seems to me that irony has been absolutely pervasive in the world of design since 1980. Philip Stark and all the Brit-art stuff. They're all ironic. They all work through reference to something pre-existing, and that doesn't interest me as much.

The craft world should be in a position to experiment but mostly we're not. There isn't an interest in technical innovation - there is in architecture more, but at the level of housing for people it isn't there at all. Yeah, it's got a bit more insulation and it covers building regs, but it doesn't grab. How do we approach the notion of it being climatically responsive? That's entry level, isn't it? It's there in your face. South is the way to face it. It's like it doesn't approach the subject of architecture, design, wellbeing. It's at that level.

## Structure

What I'm concerned about: the way it's made, the customer's experience, the person sitting on it. I'm concerned about the environmental impact and I'm absolutely fascinated by structure. Structure is like grammar is to a word person, or like the key is to a musician. Structure is unavoidable. It is there, it is the skeleton. Virtually no design courses have an element that deals with structure, it is foreign. I've taken an interest in it obviously - I'm dyslexic. Because the written word is something I learnt to avoid, in my formative years. That's a huge benefit because you get your meaning from elsewhere. So I understood structure before I could read. And what I'm trying to do is to meld these things and you're never going to get the very best of any of them individually. It's like, if you want to design a very, very fast car, a racing car, it's going to be absolutely rubbish at everything else. There's nowhere for the shopping, can't park it, can't afford it and the rain comes in. Everything about it is completely wrong - except that it's incredibly fast. So we don't want one of them. And the same applies to style. What I'm trying to do is to try to get all these things to work together, with the structure of all my chairs what you want from comfort is the same thing you want for the structure, that's really handy.

## Conviviality

We're having this conversation and there's one way we're not sitting, which is in a row. Which is how almost all public seating is done. It is the worst-case scenario. I've done stuff like that, and I've probably made more public seating that is like that than anything else, only because that's what people have asked for - but it's the worst of all worlds. Many of my public seating gives the option to have your own space, or to share, And that option makes you more open. There's a dynamic about it and there's a joy. There's something in the visual arts that has been amoral. I'm not after virtue, but I think ethics are terribly important. I think joy is terribly important and I think it's a complete cop-out not to have an opinion. You come across so many things where it leaves the question open - it's a film or it's a play or whatever it is and this is the problem. It's not about that. It's about solutions, otherwise why bother? Okay, flag it up - but you don't need a whole goddamned culture flagging it up. And that's what's been going on.

## The Role of the Artist

Our role is really simple. My role is simple. It is to do things that are relevant to now and tomorrow. To make sure the mythology is relevant, that it moves into the future. With this environmental issue - it's much bigger than that because it goes through idiot labour and all of these things - this is what you can do. And isn't this MUCH more interesting?

[www.davidcolwell.com](http://www.davidcolwell.com)



*"O" Range Table, David Colwell*



*Drwg Yn Y Caws,  
Gydweithredol/Troedyrhiw*



*Eisteddfod Cwmffradach, Rhodri ap Hywell  
a Meleri Williams*

## Interview with Euros Lewis

### The Conversation of Theatre

I work with three media at the moment: Troed-y-rhiw Co-operative Theatre, Radio Beca and Wes Gleï, a television production company. I consider the three media as aspects of the same thing: that is, everything I discuss works across all three media and it's a matter of identifying which is the main medium for that particular work. Theatre tends to lead as the main medium since I have an interest in the 'conversation of theatre' which depends upon people, their conversation and their response. The need that people have in being involved in some sort of conversation which is more than a direct, 'top-down', response to what is happening. I consider theatre not an institution, but as a dynamic, and wherever there is a society, the dynamic of theatre exists, even if it's invisible or in that virtual place within people's minds.

If I were to describe the activities of Troed-y-rhiw Co-operative Theatre, I would say that Troed-y-rhiw Theatre is a term or a name of something which already exists within the Welsh culture. In Ceredigion especially, the theatre is a medium of expression and of acting creatively and it has a high status within society. It's important not to limit this idea of theatre to the forms of stage, play, lines, narrative etc. Troed-y-Rhiw Theatre shares its roots with post dramatic theatre, a form which has much more to do with being together and sharing experiences.

### Cultural Sustainability

There are a great many different themes and interests that drive the work but all of the material is involved with the life of a minority and nonconformist culture (in Wales) and its sustainability. Not sustainability in terms of hanging on, but in terms of creating and maintaining the culture's ability to create because if the culture doesn't create it ceases to exist. The (culture) is dependent on people co-creating, and it's this co-creating which causes and is totally fundamental to the nonconformity (of the culture): it is in total contrast



to the structure of providers and customers, to put conformity in its most modern terms. That's why I talk about the difference between 'Culture' and 'Diwylliant'.

## 'Culture' and 'Diwylliant' – hierarchy and nonconformism

The big difference between Culture and Diwylliant is that Culture involves hierarchy in one way or another: political, royalist, capitalist. It involves supporting the pyramid and supporting the power at the top of the pyramid. It involves wealth creation and we know that this is the biggest threat to sustainability of all types: environmental and cultural sustainability. The important role that's developing for minority cultures is that they have a voice and power to stand up against the structure which supports the wealth and hierarchy of 'Culture'. We in Wales have a choice (to do this), to use and invest in our own culture. I don't think that they have a choice in England because they have to fight within the hierarchy which exists. 'Diwylliant' is a 'collaborative action' and people in a creative relationship with each other.

It is egalitarian and also radical because 'Diwylliant' is always about changing things and constantly creating and recreating society and community. That is why, regarding sustainability in Wales, that there is such a potential for discussion when people move into Wales: they can also join in this conversation and once they are part of the conversation, they are part of the culture. A sustainable culture needs to be in discourse with other cultures, but not to be deafened by 'Culture'.

Raymond Williams says that that it is very difficult for anything to change within a hierarchical system because the purpose of hierarchy is to maintain order. But if a community of people who have a strong relationship with each other want to unite and co-operate to change something then it is possible to change things from the bottom up. Radio Beca is such an example: I sent a message to the people and societies who have supported Radio Beca up until now, to encourage them to use Radio Beca as a media to share their values and visions with their communities.

My role as an 'agitator' or motivator within the culture is to help people to continue to think and act in a nonconformist way, according to their instinct. If we look historically at what has happened time and time again when we feel that the conforming 'Culture' is squeezing us out of existence, we have found a way of expressing something different through our culture. This expression arises because we have come together and have responded together: a theatre of expression has arisen. Creating a world full of Welsh institutions, that we rarely see within buildings, which is a very interesting point for the environmental discussion. The Welsh culture rarely expresses itself architecturally; the architecture is the active relationship between people.

## Welsh Vocabulary and Community

All the different Welsh terms roughly corresponding to the English word 'community': cymuned, cymdeithas, cymdogaeth, bro etc are full of different meanings. They are not nebulous terms; they are terms which are full of meaning describing specific things which exist. Joint responsibility and co-operation – not agreement! – are the foundation for these terms. Disagreement is part of co-operation and joint responsibility. Consensus within a society is rare; it involves discussion and different standpoints, but agreement on the joint responsibility for shaping the future.

One of the objectives when establishing the Pwerdai (Power Houses) was to remind people that they are the ones who define a community, not government (local or state) nor an external power. If we tried to organize an environmental discussion within a specific 'community' or society, it's quite possible that we would have great difficulty in maintaining that discussion. But if these questions arose from a discussion within a community a creative response would be developed and there would be no obstacles to that.

Nonconformist culture in Wales (such as Troed-y-Rhiw Theatre) doesn't have to be through the medium of Welsh. But I do believe that in reality it finds its full growth in Welsh because the Welsh language defines difference and expresses that what is being said is different. But the culture and mindset which I am talking about certainly exists within communities (for example in the south Wales valleys) where Welsh is not spoken so much today. The Welsh vocabulary has disappeared but the 'collaborative action' mindset still exists.

## A Subjective Understanding

It has been mentioned that sustainable development is something that incomers or people from outside bring in and 'do' for Wales and the Welsh: this belongs to a far wider question because part of the problem of comparing 'Diwylliant' with 'Culture' is that 'Diwylliant' from the standpoint of 'Culture' is invisible. Therefore, if situations of conflict arise, they do so because of people's inability to see the full situation before setting out the needs of the situation as it is.

[www.radiobeca.co.uk](http://www.radiobeca.co.uk)

[www.theatrtroedyrhiw.com](http://www.theatrtroedyrhiw.com)

## Interview with Ann Shrosbree (Small World Theatre)

### Sustainability and the Arts: Then and Now

We've always done work which relates to environmental sustainability, since 1979 when it was quite unusual. It's a core theme that goes through our work. Our first performances were with children and they're so open, it seemed incredibly important that what you were talking to them about was something of value, something that they needed to know. What you're doing is formative and that led us to working in Africa, in overseas development, using the arts.

We can chart when we were like a voice in the wilderness and then you'd get a certain point, say you'd been working in a school and children would come back to you with words like pollution, which they wouldn't have had any concept of ten years earlier.

It's great that there's a lot more going on, but also it's sad because it's taken such a long time and it's so blindingly obvious and urgent now. But it is part of the role of the artist - that you're sometimes waiting for the rest of the world to catch up. There's still a lot more work to do. It certainly isn't done.

### The role of The Arts in creating a Sustainable Future

It's about modelling good practice and supporting behavioural change, contributing to debate and making visible. And it's important to be rigorous about your own behaviour as well. To live what you're talking about and then to support audiences, or whoever you work with, to have it in mind. That's half the battle, to keep people thinking about it. It's not just like a lesson that you learn in school, it's more: what am I actually doing?

### Mixing Mission and Delivery

We'd needed a building for a long time and we wanted to create something that was a demonstration to local builders, to everybody, of what's possible with an environmental, sustainable building. It reflects our core values and it felt like there was nothing in the Cardigan area at the time when we built it that demonstrated what was possible.

The project started in 2005 with fundraising and design and we opened in 2008. We've got solar PV generating electric, solar hot water and air source heat pumps, underfloor heating, a high level of insulation, rain water harvesting and a massive rain water harvesting tank under the car park. We have a sedum roof and recycled slates on the roof. We built on the site of an old brickworks, so there's an area in the foyer that's bricks that were actually dug up out of the ground and from a demolished building locally. The walls at the front are all wattle and daub really, made out of puppet making materials - willow and

mud and things and clay are quite familiar to us. It's a public space, a place that lots of people come to for all sorts of different reasons.

We are just about to put up a screen up in the foyer when there's an event on so people can look and see what our energy consumption is and what's generating what in watts.

## The Arts in Community

Community means so many things doesn't it? There are so many different sorts of communities. We're part of many different communities. As artists we're a catalyst, but we're also holding, containing in a way. It's that vision of the artist as both outside and inside.

## Facilitation

We get asked to facilitate events quite often, we've done facilitation for public sector organisations and third sector organisations about how they're going to develop strategies for dealing with climate change in the future, how they're going to deal with the challenges, using creative facilitation methods, so it's not just performances that we do.

It's a crossover between our overseas development practice and arts practice, to help people think about and understand the impact of their behaviour and to look at behavioural change as well - not by telling people but by assisting them to find their own solutions.

You can have a very diverse group of people in the room and the arts, I think, have a role to play where there might be conflicting views, of creating a safe space to understand different perspectives without going head to head and to reach consensus, a way forward, some sort of action. We try not to leave a situation with a feeling of disempowerment, which can be overwhelming when you're talking about these things, but instead to enable small steps, things that people can actually do. Changes they can make that will be constructive.

## Art and Behaviour Change

Art doesn't create behaviour change, but it can support people to find their way to changing their behaviour. An emotional response is good because an emotional response does lead to action a lot of the time - but it's more than catharsis.

When we're facilitating, we always have leading people to action in mind. In performances it's not so easy, it depends what it is you're doing. We're just rehearsing a performance which is about money and bankers and it's an awful lot of fun, it's not perhaps obvious in terms of environmental sustainability, but then we have another one running in parallel which is all about disappearing cultures and languages set in Siberia.

## Art in Partnership

We work with people like the North Wales Wildlife Trust. There was a problem with swifts so we created a beautiful, big, twelve-foot woman – a giant Edwardian explorer, with a couple of dotty assistants. She leads field trips – we made swift boxes with audiences and then we went on field trips looking for swifts and those nest boxes are being put in different sites in North Wales. The people who made them can go and look on the North Wales Wildlife website and there will be little webcams on some of them, to see if any swifts have actually nested in there. There's a huge amount of learning and we have to do a lot of learning each time because we have to be a bit expert on whatever it is that happens to be the subject of the field trip. But she's the vehicle.

We've created an artistic vehicle for other organisations or other people to use to communicate their concern or to educate. What we've been about for a long time is saying: Hey, look we can help with this, why don't you use us to do this? And sometimes organisations do come to artists to do that, it just depends who's in that organisation and how visionary they are really. The more of that there is, the more people can see how effective the arts are in this regard and that means more people understand how to work with artists and how valuable they can be.

## Creating Change through Funding

I think the Arts Council should be a bit like the EU, who have cross cutting themes in funding applications where people have to answer, in terms of funding any project, how this relates to resilience in the face of climate change. That would get everybody thinking about it. For any sort of European funding you have to answer to three cross cutting themes and one is equality, one's environmental sustainability and the other one's about IT. It would mean that all artists would have to start thinking about it and answer to it and so would the Arts Council.

[www.smallworld.org.uk](http://www.smallworld.org.uk)



small world theatre  
theatr byd bychan



**Creating a Sustainable Venue:** In Small World Theatre we have built a venue for the arts and a creative community. It is an adaptable space for the organisation to develop new work and grow in strength. It is not just the building that is forging a carbon free future. Many of Small World Theatre's projects are linked to other aspects of environmental awareness, food, development, and culture. The space, our work and our ethos are interconnected.

*Small World Theatre*