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Beyond Green: The Arts as a Catalyst for Sustainability

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Bold policymaking

If art can reach people's hearts, mind and souls, it is important to remember that policymakers are people too!

Policymaking needs to be bolder to tackle our unpredictable and rapidly changing world. We have to identify the edge, Fellows were told; we should be working at that edge and realize we do not work at the core.

Bolder policymaking necessitates collaborative approaches and transdisciplinary research. Artists can help transcend these boundaries and enliven the body, mind and soul to embolden policymakers. We should stop thinking about art works as objects and start thinking about them as triggers for experiences.

Sustainability and culture is rising up policymakers' agendas, even as they tackle other, oft-considered more pressing issues, such as the ongoing refugee crisis in Europe. Art, for example, can play a key role in helping with integration and acceptance.

In Dublin, Ireland, The Science Gallery's *Hack the City* exhibition and events program invited locals to "adopt a hacker mindset to bend, tweak and mash-up Dublin's existing urban systems." The aim was to empower citizens to share how they want to live in their city. "Hacking exposes the cracks in the system, finds the weaknesses and looks at how they can be exploited for individual purposes and/or the common good," explain *Hack the City* curator Teresa Dillon.

Significant systems changes need to happen to build a more sustainable world. Art has the potential to help provide the spaces needed for collaboration to bring about this change, both in the street and in the corridors of power.

All the recaps, interviews, newsletters and photos will be uploaded to the session webpage. Check out online: www.SalzburgGlobal.org/go/561



Political food: voting with our forks

"If we are what we eat, then tonight we are all small Austrian dumplings!" The mood might have been jovial and the topic – food – familiar, but the post-dinner fireside chat's purpose was serious: what role can food play in improving sustainability?

Food is indeed important. It is both a commodity and a commons; a connection between rural and urban communities; able to make us healthy and sick; and a source of conflict – but also a basis for connection.

Everyone has their own (love?) story with food, and communities frequently connect around food. As Fellows supped on cups of Native American herbal tea, panelists from the USA, Austria and Lebanon shared their own stories of food, communities and sustainability.

Native Americans have long had a deep connection to their land and what it produces [see interview overleaf], using herbs, roots and leaves as natural medicines. These practices are being lost as communities are uprooted and now live in "food deserts." Many rely on food banks or gas stations for food on their reservations if they're unable to make the several hours' drive to the nearest well-stocked super markets. Organizations such as the Boys and Girls Club of the Three Affiliated Tribes in New Town, ND are now making sure their heritage and understanding

of the land is passed on to future generations, to promote self-sufficiency.

Austria's Wastecooking has grown from one man's dumpster-diving interest to a documentary series and even a "Free Supermarket" – stocked with still perfectly edible food discarded in dumpsters across Vienna. Although the store was shut down by the authorities, Wastecooking continues to highlight the issue of food waste (90 million tons in Europe alone) and how we can make the most of our leftovers, through more film showings and cooking demonstrations.

In Lebanon, food has provided a way for the heavily divided post-conflict society to come together. Starting with a farmers' market in Beirut, Souk el Tayeb went on to take the (consumers') market to the farmers with weekly food festivals in small villages, selling not only produce but also producing local speciality dishes. Later capacity building activities were organized so that the local chefs (often women) could produce these dishes for larger numbers, and most recently helping the most disadvantaged – the large but diverse refugee communities – build up their cooking skills. But Souk el Tayeb is not really about food – "it's conflict resolution through cooking."

As Fellows were reminded: "Food is a political act – we vote with our forks!"



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Prairie Rose Seminole: “We must reclaim our land where we can and make our voice heard”

Patrick Wilson

When considering the role the arts can play as a catalyst, it is important not to overlook the role heritage can play, as it often comes hand-in-hand with our connection to the natural world and how we produce food.

Prairie Rose Seminole is a prevention specialist for the Boys and Girls Club of the Three Affiliated Tribes in New Town, ND, USA. She is a citizen of the Three Affiliated Tribes of North Dakota, a descendant of the Sahnish/Arikara, Northern Cheyenne and Lakota Nations, and a member of the Waterbuster Clan.

In her role with the Boys and Girls Club, Seminole uses data from different agencies including law enforcement, public health and government, to understand and explain the scope of issues facing Native American society – such as alcoholism, depression, obesity, domestic violence, and low life expectancy – with the ultimate goal of finding effective strategies for intervention.

“It allows us to make culturally relevant approaches and, for a tribe like us, allows us to lift up our heritage and culture and the art forms within that, whether related to food or quality of life. Sustainability is really at the heart of that because it allows us to reflect on who we are and what our legacy is as a people.”

Seminole works very closely with food and encourages people to respect

nature and understand the cultural practices surrounding food.

“I took for granted the education my dad gave me on planting, gardening, stories of the food we plant, and the songs we sing around our food. It all helps to represent the idea that food is sacred – we have a relationship with it. Food has spirit and life because it gives us life.”

“We don’t use pesticides or harmful things that will impact the earth in a devastating way. We were taught how to live with the earth. Certain things go into the earth and give us life and compliment what else can grow. So we look at complimentary plants: what can grow well with corn, beans or squash?”

Like so many Native Americans, devastation of their land is something Seminole’s tribe is all too familiar with. After the forced relocations due to flooding for hydroelectric dams in the 1940s and 50s, the Three Affiliated Tribes’ land is now facing the scourge of unregulated oil exploration, with oil being extracted directly next to farmland.

Seminole now passes on her learning surrounding heritage and food culture to the next generation, some of whose knowledge is sorely lacking.

“I remember when we took the kids out to garden and told a story about a corn seed and they didn’t know that by planting a kernel of corn a whole stalk would grow! They just

didn’t know that’s where corn came from. Being part of enriching the soil, planting the seeds and weeding allows them to make the connection that they can feed themselves and that they’re not just dependent kids anymore. They can be a provider and provide for their family. It’s a rite of passage that comes with all these teachings; you learn you’re not only a provider for your family but for the environment too.”

The multitude of health and environmental issues faced by Native Americans are compounded by their lack of representation and participation in the state and federal government and electoral system.

“We’ve been left out of the system for so long it’s going to take huge organizing efforts from inside our own communities to feel a part of that system and structure again.

“We have been seeing native voters shifting election results but the fact is that they have to come to us. We don’t go to them to get their interest in serving us as a population or to feel like our interests are being kept in mind from a federal level.”

Polling locations are another issue facing Native Americans. Tribal and federal elections can take place on the same day at two different locations.

“On a reservation, my interest is going to vote at the tribal election because that benefits me. It’s hard for people to see how the state and federal system will actually affect them or having a direct impact even though it really does when it comes to policymaking.”

At her “fireside chat” on “We Are What We Eat,” Seminole told Fellows, that her community urgently needs to “reclaim our land where we can and make our voice heard.”

Seminole’s participation in Salzburg was made possible thanks to a grant from the Bush Foundation. Reflecting on her time in Salzburg, she said: “I’ve had an incredible experience here. The insightfulness of each of the participants and the dialogue we’ve had has allowed me to gain so much knowledge of international frameworks of environmental justice. I think my biggest take away is having a better understanding of the language we use to speak about the issue of sustainability and better channels to actually effect decision making.”