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Beyond Green: The Arts as a Catalyst for Sustainability

Sunday, February 21, 2016

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If you do intend to write for your own organization either whilst you're here or after the session, please make sure to observe the **Chatham House Rule** (information on which is in your Welcome Pack). If you're in any doubt, do not hesitate to contact Louise.

We'll be updating our website with summaries from the panels and interviews with our Fellows, all of which you can find on the session page:

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We're updating both our Facebook page www.facebook.com/SalzburgGlobal and our Flickr stream www.flickr.com/SalzburgGlobal with photos from the session during this week and also after the session. (If you require non-watermarked images for your own publication, please let Louise know.) We will also be posting photos to Instagram www.instagram.com/SalzburgGlobal



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What are our conscious limitations?

If we aim to change mindsets and shift behavior with our art, we need to understand how the brain works, argued one Fellow at the Salzburg Global program *Beyond Green: The Arts as a Catalyst for Sustainability*.

For non-neuroscientists, much of our understanding how we think and how our brains work is based on four assumptions. We assume:

- We're rational and logical;
- We notice things when they're put right in front of us;
- Our memory allows us to accurately store and recall information;
- We all grasp the ideas of time, the past, present and future.

Through a series of short exercises in Parker Hall, the Fellows were made to realise these assumptions were in fact false: "The human mind is particularly prone to cognitive illusions."

We often do not apply logic, such as laws of probability, to our decision making. We fail to make very basic observations when our attention is trained elsewhere; our brains can become trained to filter out what it assumes not to be important. Our memory doesn't function how we assume – we don't remember our past,

we often reconstruct it in response to stimuli in our present.

One of the most important fallacies for those seeking to tackle inertia surrounding climate change is that we assume we can achieve more in a given time in the future than we can in the immediate present. People frequently overestimate how much work they can achieve in a week in the future than they can in the week currently facing them.

By recognizing these false assumptions, we can start to recognize why such tactics as repeat messaging, appeals to logic, arguments based on time, and emotional appeals have been unsuccessful. One method that can prove useful to change mindsets and shift behaviors is by creating analogies to process new data – and this is where art can play a powerful role.

Besides understanding our neurobiology, we also need to expand our understanding of "sustainability" and "understand what sustainability is in our own contexts."

Panelists also urged Fellows to seek to build trust. "Trust is not about feeling safe... It is the relation I build to you and sharing my lack of safety with you."



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Raising Awareness and Catalyzing Public Engagement

Patrick Wilson

Artists have a powerful role to play in raising awareness of social injustices. As the African saying goes: “Until the lion finds their storyteller, hunters will always be portrayed as the hero.”

As the Fellows of *Beyond Green* heard on the first night of the session, artists can help share the stories of areas afflicted by unsustainable development. Many communities have been and continue to be displaced in the pursuit of “development,” such as a community in Cambodia whose ancestral lands will be devastated by the building of a hydroelectric dam.

Provocatively, one Fellow remarked that we have all been displaced “because we have become disconnected from nature and the green spaces and the beauty of the world. We’re more connected to technology... than we are to the natural world... this has made us isolated.” Art can help us to

reconnect with that beauty and, in turn, inspire us to protect it.

The following morning, discussions continued in a plenary session on the topic of “Raising Awareness and Catalyzing Public Engagement.”

Panelists started by looking at artistic exhibits and campaigns in Bangladesh and the struggles one Fellow faced in attempting to present socially impactful pieces of work and collections. Although now an independent country, and nominally a democracy, one Fellow pointed out that like many countries, a democratic society may not be as democratic as it appears: “Elections in themselves to do not mean a democratic process.” Art can give people a way to express themselves in undemocratic and oppressive situations. One project highlighted was *Kalpana’s Warriors*, which featured a combination of poetry, performance and laser burn art to promote knowledge and discussion about an indigenous woman of the Chittagong Hill Tracts who spoke out

against military occupation and was abducted on June 12, 1996.

It is not only in Cambodia and Bangladesh where art can play an important role in public engagement and democracy, with another Fellow sharing an example from the US.

Beautiful Solutions, which stemmed from the book and documentary *This Changes Everything*, is a gallery, lab, web platform and book that “gathers the most promising and contagious strategies for building a more just, democratic and resilient world.”

By engaging the public and collecting and sharing “real” stories, the project aims to change society from that in which someone has “power over” others, to instead a system of “shared power.”

Grassroots efforts and engagement are important, and such projects can promote change from outside of a structural system – but still have impact on the system.

However one Fellow made a counterpoint that “we have to go inside the structures to change their behavior.”



Learning from ArtCOP21

From September to December 2015, leading up to COP21, 550 events were held under the auspices of ArtCOP21, with 54 countries engaged, and 250 artists present in Paris. But to what end?

For many people the COP events are too technical and political, rendering them inaccessible and incomprehensible. One aim of engaging artists alongside COP21 was to lift this mystique and make the event understandable and relevant to the general public.

As one Fellow remarked, ArtCOP21 “did it’s job” – it was diverse and it was visible. Indeed, as another Paris-based Fellow corroborated, the French capital, and more broadly France, has become a more climate- and sustainability- aware city since.

Besides making the international convention more accessible to the general public and mobilizing people to take action, ArtCOP21 also aimed to include culture in the political agenda of climate change and position the artist as an important stakeholder in the debate.

The arts and culture sector has become increasingly prominent at such events. As one Fellow shared, at COP15 in Copenhagen in 2009, ARTPORT making waves (an “international curatorial practice” that raises awareness of climate change and environmental issues) struggled to find a space to exhibit and attracted few visitors. At Cancun, Mexico in 2010, ARTPORT partnered with museums to bring in a ready audience of school children. Building on these past experiences, despite the “extreme bureaucracy”

in France, COP21 was much more successful. Their project, while created for COP21, will not be an isolated, one-off exhibit: it will now travel to Astana, Kazakhstan for the next World Expo and later New York. ArtCOP21, engaged diverse artists, including poets, cultural experts, and performers, eschewing the approach of “one big name in one gallery” of COP15.

Bringing art into the negotiation space (usually a drab conference center) and encouraging the negotiators to connect with the issues on a more intimate, human, rather than political level, was mooted. One of ArtCOP21’s project, the COPbox, had sought to do this, collecting messages from Parisians as the installation traveled around the city ahead of the event. However, following the Paris terrorist attacks, the budget for the final installation (through which the negotiators would all have to pass), was cut in favor of increasing security.

Engaging directly with “the system,” be that at the international level of COP21 or with local, municipal governments, is important, one ArtCOP21 participant reminded Fellows. “We need to focus on systems change instead of behavior change” because too many individuals have too little agency. As another Fellow remarked, “We have to get on board the people who are actually creating our world,” not just artists, but also designers, politicians, business, et al.

We need to avoid what one Fellow admitted was his greatest fear: “We in the arts are talking to each other – we are not talking to the world.”

“The artist has left the building”

Artists need to “opt in” and go beyond the gallery to inspire political change

Marina Abramovic might have called her show *The Artist Is Present*, but as Frances Whitehead remarked in the opening evening’s panel of *Beyond Green*: “The artist has left the building and gone to city hall!” And why to city hall? “That is where the decisions are being made.”

For art to have greater impact, artists need to change strategies away from “acting up,” pointing out,” and “opting out,” to instead “opt in,” Whitehead argued. Quoting Janeil Englestad, she urged artists to “make art with purpose.” Artists are not there to only draw attention to issues but to encourage change.

Opting in can lead the artist to engage in domains outside their usual realm, but opting in does not stop the artist from being an artist: “Opting in is not about becoming someone else. We never stop being artists as we enter other domains,” said Whitehead.

One such “opt in” project is *Environmental Sentinel*, part of the greenway/linear park “The 606” in Chicago, USA. *Environmental Sentinel* combines art, landscaping and climate change monitoring with civic engagement. While the project’s focus was beauty and public engagement, it also incorporates sustainability and climate change activism. The planting of over 400 Amelanchier trees not only provides beauty along the 606 route, but also enables monitoring of the microclimate by encouraging the public – citizen scientists – to note the blooming of the trees – a practice modeled on the traditional annual cherry blossom festival in Japan. This approach blends participatory arts practices, climatology and public infrastructure; inspired by the blossoms, Whitehead calls it “pink infrastructure” – infrastructure for raising climate awareness.

However, if the project had had an explicit climate change remit, it may have been tied up in political discussions. By being called “art,” *Environmental Sentinel* was able to gain wider support.



Hot Topic: “Why should artists be involved in discussions surrounding sustainable developments and what do we expect of them?”

Patrick Wilson

“I believe artists are really important stakeholders in negotiations and what kind of future we want to design. We can help scientists and politicians to be more creative and we can succeed where scientists and politicians fail.”

Anaïs Roesch

Project Manager, COAL (Coalition for Art and Sustainable Development), Paris, France

“I think that artists need to be involved because artists are not different to anyone else; we all need to be part of discussions about sustainable development. I think we need to ask what is particular about artists when we look at what we expect from them. Artists have a certain ability to see the things others can't, they're cunning like a fox to get things to happen and they use certain practices that are interesting – and work.”

Ben Twist

Director, Creative Carbon Scotland, Edinburgh, UK

“Art is a very efficient tool to transport an idea about sustainability and the conservation of nature in general. “Sustainability” is a vast word and artists are thinkers who are linking different issues and different layers of society. Artists can be catalysts of transmitting an idea or message. Art is usually more touching to the normal citizen than a document.”

Anne-Marie Melster

Co-founder & Co-director, ARTPORT_ making waves, Paris, France

“I think we need to define “Artist.” I define “art” as the word that capitalism made up to deal with the concept of culture. It's a word that slips in and outside of the current paradigm that has caused the problem of climate change. Artists make commodities and they also exist in a spiritual plane outside of commodities. I think artists need to be double agents in society that can leverage resources and power towards the grassroots.”

Rachel Schragis

Visual Artist & Cultural Organizer, New York, NY, USA

“I believe the artists should be engaging in sustainability because sustainability is boring. It's not popular and people just don't care about it. Art is the tool to make it more interesting and to simplify the idea that everything is wrong and we are destroying our planet every day. I've spent half of my life using art as a tool and I think I've achieved amazing results. Getting exposure in mass media through art is a powerful tool for change.”

Mundano (Thiago Ackel)

Artist; Founder, Pimp My Carroca, Sao Paulo, Brazil

“I'm not sure there really is such thing as sustainable development; I think this is a term that should be examined. The reason to have artists involved is we are uniquely skilled at critical analysis that can understand this philosophically as well as offering practicality in new cultural models.”

Frances Whitehead

Principal, ARTetal Studio; Professor, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, USA



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Beyond Green: The Arts as a Catalyst for Sustainability

Monday, February 22, 2016

Arts, Sustainability and the City

At the international policy level, such as the Sustainable Development Goals or Agenda21, explicit references to “culture” are often left out, but cities are included – “and once you have cities, you have culture, because cities know the importance of culture.”

Thus cities prove a valuable means of promoting culture at the international level. Some dismiss the need for explicit inclusion in such agendas because “culture is everywhere,” but “if culture is everywhere, it will be nowhere.”

Cities “understand” culture, as well as heritage and tourism. Their smaller size and forms of representation means cities can engage their citizens in a more direct manner than states and regions, and art can be a valuable method of engagement. “The time that the town hall makes all of a city’s decisions are over,” remarked one Fellow; cities need to engage their citizens. Artists are especially well-placed to help assert the fact that cities are a place for solidarity, community and equity, especially in cities where there are huge disparities between the rich and the poor, rather than just drivers for economic growth and development.

This is not to say that artists should be willing to be “instrumentalized” by their cities, but instead form partnerships and help cities imagine artistic engagement in manners they may never have considered – and imagine a shared future. Co-creation and participatory design projects can help promote dialogues throughout the city. As one Fellow remarked, “We need to build dynamic relationships that allow people to articulate what they want at a grassroots level.”



Omar Nagati, Christine Gitau, Francis Sollano, Singh Intrachooto and Liz Thompson

Turning trash into treasure

Whether it’s manufactures’ waste, informal spaces, or plain old garbage, the panelists of the fifth plenary session of *Beyond Green* brought new meaning to “one man’s trash is another man’s treasure”.

The presentations of initiatives from Egypt, Thailand, the Philippines and Kenya, elicited utterances of “cool” and “wow” throughout Parker Hall, with one Fellow tweeting, “Singh from Thailand is really blowing my mind right now.”

Thailand’s “Scrap Lab” works with manufacturers to collect their waste, experiment with it, and ultimately turn it into marketable and profitable new products. Recognizing that manufacturers would be less resistant to this “upcycling” than to simply reducing their waste output, Scrap Lab doesn’t plan to change companies’ business models, but instead turn their waste into new business ideas. Examples of this reuse of waste have included turning the leftovers from the button making process into an alternative to terrazzo, glass dust into porous “eco stones” to help water plants, and even coffee into tiles (that cover the walls of a Bangkok Starbucks).

In the Philippines, a similar approach has been adopted, turning

garbage into desirable fashion items. Initially seen as a massive irritation, the trash of the city of Cebu, has been transformed into “trashion” by skilled local workers. This small industry has not only given the community additional income, but also a sense of pride and greater purpose. The locals now wants to make this industry and their communities more sustainable, with Youth for a Livable Cebu engaging younger residents to not only harness their honesty (“Kids will tell you if it’s trashy”), but to also engage their parents and wider community.

The trashion products are marked “Made in Cebu,” not “Made in Philippines” – a branding choice understood and being adopted in Kenya. Rather than exporting all its raw materials, Craft Afrika is seeking to expand Kenya’s design and manufacturing industries. If Germany inspires thoughts of cars and Switzerland watches and chocolate, what could “Made in Kenya” become most positively associated with?

The use of waste isn’t limited to trash; “junk” informal spaces in post-revolution Egypt are being utilized innovatively, from street stalls to mini urban parks, and even into access ramps to highways that would otherwise bypass whole communities.

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Voices from the regions

Escaping the plenary sessions of Parker Hall, the Fellows broke out into regional groups to examine what projects already exist in the region and how they can collaborate.

In **Latin America**, despite the footballing rivalry between Brazil and Argentina, the group explored projects that will connect water and garbage management with education to promote sustainable practices on a wider international scale.

A combined group representing **Africa and the Middle East** acknowledged that we need to look to neighbors and discover existing networks. They encouraged the Fellows to be more pragmatic, especially when considering the powerful role of artists that can work outside of traditional morals and systems to promote change.

The **Asia** group focused on the way language can cause a rift when discussing sustainability. The word sustainability in itself is not necessarily a commonly understood word when translated across Asia, but there are many other definitions and practices rooted in traditional culture than can promote the same message in more understandable and less daunting manner than terms that are only understood in a Western context.

The nature of **Europe** was a major starting point for the European group. Questions were raised on identity in Europe and the major role the EU takes in facilitating networks and the bureaucratic structures that connect across boundaries. Several key points were noted such as the shift in the way energy is produced, consumed and transmitted, and the attempt to descale back-to-basics when thinking about sustainability.

Lastly the **North American** group made the provocative statement that the land they work on is stolen land and was built by stolen labor. They believed this was inescapable from their identities. This free flowing discussion moved on to ponder what the individuals believed in, whether that be love, their city or art, and encouraged colleagues to ask questions like this of each other to encourage both hyper-local understanding as well as their context in the rest of the world.



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Enablers of change

If we want to enable and sustain positive change, we need both the rabble-rousers and the insiders.

Post-COP, there is now a sense of urgency – but also a sense of paralysis. What do we do next to seize this moment and accelerate change?

Artists can help ask questions about our “inconvenient truths” and disrupt the current power structures. But artists can also prompt and facilitate difficult conversations between diverse actors. Under oppressive regimes, it can often be valuable to work with or around the system, and learn how to look about society but without touch politics – and avoid being silenced.

Artists and creatives, institutions and custodians, policymakers, and audiences all have vital roles to play but they don’t always know how to speak to or help each other.

Organizations, such as Julie’s Bicycle in the UK, can help support artists, institutions and policymakers looking to foster change in multiple ways. Julie’s Bicycle provides resources such

as “how to green a festival,” conducts research such as carbon footprinting the whole of the UK’s music industry, and hosts events where like-minded artists, organizations and individuals can come together. These activities not only provide artists with the means of greening their own behavior, but also provide valuable evidence for policymakers. To have lasting change, “We need to come together, amplify our voices and talk up” to power structures, not just to each other.

Funders also have a key role to play in helping artists working to enact change, and not only by strategically investing funds; they can also offer a “bird’s eye” view of what else is happening and help artists collaborate.

The two notions “to change everything it takes everyone” and “the front lines of crisis are the forefront of change” may seem conflicting, but climate change offers the chance for equity and solidarity: “We will soon all be in the same boat, for a change.”



Kusumawijaya with panelists Zayd Minty, Ania Rok, Margaret Cullen and Anupama Sekhar

Marco Kusumawijaya: Change happens “community by community, postcode by postcode”

Patrick Wilson

The city is often cited as a driver of change, but it is important not to overlook the role the communities within those cities can play in delivering that change.

One Fellow determined to highlight the role of the communities within cities at the Salzburg Global program *Beyond Green: The Arts as a Catalyst for Sustainability*, was Marco Kusumawijaya, the director of Rujak Centre for Urban Studies (RCUS), based in Jakarta, and founder and director of the Bumi Pemuda Rahayu (BPR) sustainability learning center in Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

Speaking on a panel on “The City as a Driver of Change,” Kusumawijaya spoke of the role the community can play as an important intermediary to promote change. Change that begins with one person, can spread to their family and then into the community, and onwards. Change happens “community by community, postcode by postcode,” he told the gathered Fellows.

The community thus acts as intermediary level between individual behavioral changes and systemic change. “While I don’t see one as more important than the other, I think there’s a role I can play more successfully,” he explains. “I don’t have the power to make change from above at a governmental level but I think I can do it at a community level

because I have the skills to organize people and encourage engagement.”

Kusumawijaya directs RCUS’s main program “Citizen Urbanism,” where he is responsible for co-production of urban knowledge in eight Indonesian cities with different communities and partners.

“We do research but we call our way of working a ‘co-production of knowledge,’” he told Salzburg Global during the session. “We encourage and work with communities to co-produce knowledge about their own cities, organize exchanges and encourage initiatives.”

Kusumawijaya believes that more work can be accomplished when we acknowledge that human beings always live in a group and are essentially social animals. In addition to Citizen Urbanism, this manner of thinking also comes across in projects such as The Artist in Residency (AIR) program at BPR. The biannual project invites Indonesian artists from a variety of disciplines to live at BPR for three months making work with the local community in relation to their practice. Programs like this, he believes, allow us to recognize the right of citizens to participate in the formation of the future of their cities through learning about art and new skills to promote development in cities and new ideas.

“We see art as a way of knowing, as a way of researching and as a way of touching the hearts of people and communities,” he explained. “It

allows us to encourage doing things that are fun but also at the same time critical and promote deeper thought.”

Something that requires deeper and more critical thought, according to Kusumawijaya is the word “development.” While frequently used when talking about countries in the Global South and in terms of creating more sustainable societies, for Kusumawijaya the word has negative connotations.

“The word ‘development’ was an economic term but economy has become so hegemonic that people think if you’re not developed economically, you’re not developed in any other fields of life. For me this is simply wrong,” says Kusumawijaya. “Somehow we moved from a sense of general welfare for all to measuring our governments by what rate of economic growth they deliver.

“I think one of the most important revelations from the research of many fields is that growth has nothing to do with equity. The largest amount of growth goes to the smallest amount of people.

“It’s wrong to base development theory on growth.

“That’s why I think the term ‘sustainable development’ is poisonous; its meaning has been nailed to growth rate. The economic idea has even been used to measure other parts of life which is wrong. For example, I don’t think our dance tradition is underdeveloped – our classical Javanese dance or West Sumatran dance is very well developed. Of course it is different to ballet and Western traditions, but it would be wrong to say it’s underdeveloped as compared to it.”

Whilst his work is challenging, Kusumawijaya has found support in the community of Fellows in Salzburg.

“There are so just many ideas being shared and passed around by the Fellows,” he said. “I think I only knew maybe one or two people in the group before coming here so one of the most important parts for me is to meet all these people who are thinking, working and experimenting with brilliant ideas to promote change. While I still have to digest them all, the mere fact there are so many people, thinking and working with the same aspiration of change as me is incredibly heartening.”



Hot Topic:

“Do you agree that ‘development’ has become a poisonous word?”

Patrick Wilson

“The word ‘development’ was an economic term but economy has become so hegemonic that people think if you’re not developed economically, you’re not developed in any other fields of life. For me this is simply wrong... That’s why I think the term ‘sustainable development’ is poisonous; its meaning has been nailed to growth rate. The economic idea has even been used to measure other parts of life which is wrong.”

Marco Kusumawijaya

Director, Rujak Center for Urban Studies, Jakarta, Indonesia
(Read our full interview inside!)

“Development is now in many ways considered a bad word, also in Asia. We need to work out how to make people understand the value of sustainable development. In many ways we are very romantic about the past but it is coming to the point where you have to see the urgency to have change.”

Margaret Shiu

Founder & Director, Bamboo Curtain Studio, Taipei, Taiwan

“It’s an interesting point because I’m interested in the redefinition of the word development rather than thinking of it as economic development. We should start thinking of it as a holistic human development and what does it mean to invest in holistic individual societal development and evolutionary development.”

Alexis Frasz

Researcher & Strategist, Helicon Collaborative, New York, NY, USA

“Nowadays, not only in Argentina but all over the world, development is still very much connected with growth of GDPs and economic development and that is exactly the disease. It’s a very one dimensional view for a multi-dimensional problem. I think we still don’t understand what the goal is, economic growth could be important but it is not the goal. The goal of development is for people to flourish.”

Christian Tiscornia Biaus

Founder & President, Amartya Buenos Aires, Argentina

Join in online!

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Beyond Green: The Arts as a Catalyst for Sustainability

Tuesday, February 23, 2016

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 starting 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 find 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 floodings 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.”