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The Creative Power of the Arts: Reimagining Human and Planetary Flourishing

CULTURE, ARTS AND SOCIETY



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SALZBURG GLOBAL SEMINAR

CULTURE, ARTS
AND SOCIETY

The Creative Power of the Arts: Reimagining Human and Planetary Flourishing



APRIL TO NOVEMBER, 2021

Session 717

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Preface: How Can We Reimagine Human and Planetary Flourishing?

As the world confronts the compounded impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate crisis and structural injustices, societies are entering a protracted and complex period of reassessment, reimagination and restructuring. The culture and arts sector has much to contribute to these processes and must collaborate across sectors as societies reimagine more creative and regenerative pathways towards human and planetary flourishing.

With its broad program portfolio and its expansive arts and culture network, Salzburg Global Seminar is uniquely positioned as a strategic platform to support and advocate for these much-needed creative, cross-sectoral and holistic approaches to systemic transformation. Increased awareness of structural injustices in societies worldwide has led to urgent calls for the arts and culture sector to play a more active role in promoting social justice, designing and implementing more inclusive practices, and initiating and supporting complex processes of decolonization around the globe. These efforts need to be directed both across societies at large but also within the cultural sector itself and its own institutions.

To this end, from April to November 2021, Salzburg Global Seminar convened the program *The Creative Power of the Arts: Reimagining Human and Planetary Flourishing*. The program began with a series of online Focus Group sessions, which examined the systemic relevance of the arts and culture sector for creative reforms in the four target areas of climate, health, education and justice. Participants in these Focus Group convenings discussed intersections between the arts and culture sector and the following four interrelated strands:

- Reimagining a Greener Planet: Mitigating Climate Change and Furthering Sustainable Design
- Reimagining a Healthier Planet: Promoting Health and Well-being through the Arts
- Reimagining a Smarter Planet: Fostering Creativity in Education and Learning
- Reimagining a Fairer Planet: Advancing Social Justice and Processes of Decolonization.

In the process of convening these Focus Groups, it became clear that regardless of the area of focus – whether at the intersection of the arts and culture with climate, health, education or justice – Fellows were confronting similar challenges in their work that were standing in the way of true systemic change.

In early November, a joint convening of all four Focus Groups participants, accompanied by a parallel “Collaboratory” in-person meeting of 15 participants in Salzburg sought to enable a broader discussion among participants about these mutual challenges, to help them consider strategies for overcoming them. Together, panelists and discussants examined the following questions: What divides exist and how do we bridge them? How can we improve and expand collaboration both within and outside of the cultural sector? And, finally, what do we mean by systemic change and how do we transform systems – in a just, imaginative and sustainable way?

The following report summarizes the findings of this series of discussions that took place both online and in person over the course of the past year. By sharing the thinking of this global, diverse and engaged group of Fellows, we invite others to engage in a similar process of constructive inquiry to reflect deeply on what is dividing us, what is keeping us from collaborating better, and how we can achieve transformative change together.

– Susanna Seidl-Fox, Program Director

A screenshot of a Zoom meeting grid showing 20 participants in a 4x5 layout. The participants are:

- Row 1: Yolanda López, Suramya Bansal - New D..., Antonia Boemeke, Salzbu..., Ayaka Yamashita, Xenia Hanusiak
- Row 2: Pireeni Sundaralingam, David Fakunle, Ph.D. - Bal..., brandie macdonald (she/..., Abid, Birmingham, Susanna Seidl-Fox, Salzbu...
- Row 3: Kiley Arroyo, Erwin Maas, Shaina, Minneapolis/Dul..., Jordi Baltà, Barcelona, Maria FS
- Row 4: Rose Fenton, Ananda Breed, United Ki..., Khaled Barakeh / cocultu..., Alan Dix, Elena Mavromichali
- Row 5: Karima Grant, Mercy Nabirye, Georgia Manolopoulou, Sukyeong Kang, Soo-Siang Lim

The bottom of the screen shows the Zoom control bar with icons for Security, Participants (32), Polls, Chat, Share Screen, Pause/Stop Recording, Live Transcript, Breakout Rooms, and Reactions.

Summary

Over the course of a year, a global, diverse and engaged group of Salzburg Global Fellows came together to discuss in the context of COVID-19, the climate emergency, structural injustices, and the mutual challenges they are facing. Together, they engaged in a joint creative and constructive inquiry to reflect deeper on how we can overcome divides through collaboration towards a transformative change that leads to genuine human and planetary flourishing.

The inquiry started with the question: How can the creative power of the arts in the interdependent, interconnected and interrelated complex system we live in, play a more active role in the challenges we face in climate, education, health and justice? Throughout the four Focus Groups discussions, similar challenges and connective ideas emerged which were further developed by the Fellows in the three online forums and parallel “Collaboratory” meeting in Salzburg in November. The online sessions were framed around three key inquiries: What divides exist and how do we bridge them? How can we improve and expand collaboration both within and outside of the cultural sector? What do we mean by systemic change and how do we transform systems in a just, imaginative, and sustainable way?

In the process of sharing insights into those areas, key themes emerged, and new questions were developed. To bridge divides, safe spaces where uncomfortable and dangerous discussions can happen outside of our echo chambers, and with partners that are unusual allies, are needed. Embracing vulnerability and being authentic are the only ways to create meaningful collaborations. This requires awareness of privilege, power and resources, and needs deconstruction, decolonization and redefinition of what we see as knowledge. A new language and vocabulary are necessary to deal with systems transformation, but it is important to always be aware of the limitations of language. A place of radical love, trust, joy and empathy is the fertile ground for transformation; away from fear, rage and threat. Only then can real co-creation towards a new future happen, in a spirit of reciprocity, equity and authenticity and with children placed at the center. The creative power of the arts can help to imagine these new ways of knowing, seeing, feeling and being human. In a planetary context, only when our relationships with ourselves and others change, can transformation happen.

It is with the power of joint reflection and inquiry that spaces can be co-created with a new vocabulary, and with new ways of collaborating to find solutions for transforming systems in a holistic way.

Focus Groups

Salzburg Global's Reimagining Human and Planetary Flourishing program began with a series of online Focus Group sessions, which examined the systemic relevance of the arts and culture sector for creative reforms in the four target areas of climate, health, education and justice.

Participants in these Focus Group convenings discussed intersections between the arts and culture sector respectively with climate, health, education and justice. These Focus Groups were conceived as providing “food for thought” for the November online and in-person Collaboratory sessions, and opened up themes that were reflected upon further in the November sessions.

Building Back Greener

APRIL 20, 2021

The “Building Back Greener” Focus Group in April 2021 brought together many participants from the Salzburg Global program that was convened in 2016 – *Beyond Green: The Arts as a Catalyst for Sustainability* – to re-explore how the arts can contribute to mitigating climate change and designing a greener planet.

The group felt that many people are still stuck in “old thinking” and that there is still a lack of understanding among politicians and the broader public of what arts and culture can do to communicate the complexity of climate change, develop empathy, and create behavior change. Culture needs to be pitched as the infrastructure of the future. The language of the arts can create empowering anti-dystopian narratives. Storytelling can transcend geography and politics to imagine shared solutions that are regenerative and resilient.

Set against the background of preparations of the COP26 in Glasgow, the Fellows stressed the importance of getting different types of people – policymakers, politicians, artists, scientists – together as “unusual bedfellows” to have a different type of conversation. Collective intelligence and bottom-up approaches are needed to improve policy. Building change architecture is needed to dismantle, decolonize existing structures and invent the new with different ways of knowing, being, acting and doing, towards an embodied transformation, a behavior change that is manifested in new systems. It is important to be strategic about which levers to use by addressing policymakers who might be more responsive, such as mayors. It is crucial to create safe spaces to discuss issues and create an alliance – a network of networks – for the willing, to disrupt contexts in which fear and uncertainty have previously been accelerators of behavior change towards a dystopian reality.

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“CULTURE NEEDS TO BE PITCHED AS THE INFRASTRUCTURE OF THE FUTURE”

Building Back Healthier

MAY 20, 2021

The “Building Back Healthier” Focus Group in May 2021 brought together Fellows from Salzburg Global’s *Culture, Arts and Society* series as well as its *Health and Healthcare Innovation* series to explore ways in which arts, culture and human imagination can support health and center equity and justice considerations.

The overall realization was that great work is happening all around the world on the intersection of arts and wellbeing in practice and research, but the connective tissue and common language are not there yet. Research is not shared enough, especially not in and between the Global South and the Global North. Research, be it regarding good/bad practices or case studies, is not translated enough into different languages and into practice. Research in traditional indigenous healing practices needs to be a center of attention and investment, as it has been marginalized for too long. A key focus in the discussion was about cultural determinants in health and the consequences for people and the planet of the violence brought about by colonization. There is a need for racial and planetary healing, where arts as a medium for storytelling is the best bridge to heal those relationships with the land and with one another.

There is however a necessity for greater legitimacy of arts as a player in health, for reasons of lack of evidence gathered or lack of political will. Too often the arts are still categorized as “nice to have” but the critical importance of the aesthetic and emotional experience, as lived in a pandemic, is universal. Yet it is vital to connect that experience to the provision of support. There is a need to proactively reach out to different voices and convince medical educators and practitioners, leaders in international organizations, and policymakers with data and stories, to overcome skepticism about the power of arts and creative communication in healing and promoting mental health.

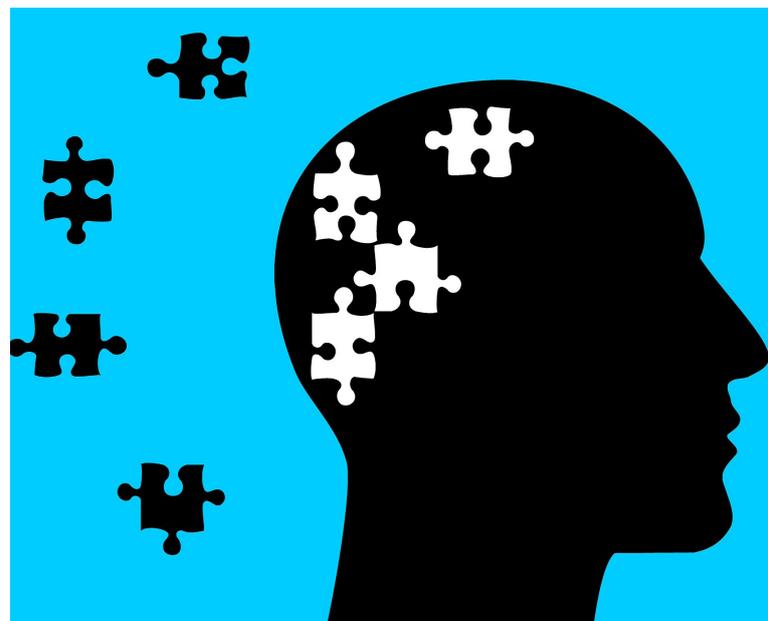
Good research is the best bridge to policymakers. The World Health Organization (WHO) published research on evidence of the role of the arts in improving health and well-being and partnered in the “Healing Arts” initiative, but more efforts are needed to create strong, more diverse, inter-sectorial networks with a larger narrative to give an identity to this field in a time of mental health and planetary health crisis.

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“ WE NEED TO GET OUT OF OUR ECHO CHAMBERS AND DEVELOP MORE STRATEGIES FOR INCLUDING PEOPLE WHO DISAGREE WITH US ”

Building Back Smarter

JUNE 22, 2021

The “Building Back Smarter” Focus Group in June 2021 brought together Fellows from Salzburg Global’s Education programs as well as its *Culture, Arts and Society* series to discuss ways to reimagine creativity in education and learning, questioning the traditional modes and understanding of education and the need to look at what arts for education can mean for achieving human flourishing.

They discussed how to think beyond the existing structures towards new ways of understanding, starting with the human being and using the arts as a process of self-expression. It is the humanizing power of the arts that helps us to learn and understand ourselves and defines us as human beings: the only species that produces art on the planet. The arts provide an opportunity for greater points of contact and connection across societies that might seem divided when looked at through other lenses. Dismantling the supremacy system to codify what knowledge constitutes would be a crucial step in changing the fundamentals of how education and learning are constructed in most of the world. How can we inject indigenous knowledge into existing systems and revive supplanted systems? There is a need to look at inclusive conceptualization in education that takes language and culture more broadly into account and develops different narratives in the context of racial inequalities.

The arts will be under threat in the recovery period from the pandemic, where a large part of the curriculum is still focused on literacy and numeracy. The Fellows interrogated the so-called tired arguments that constantly link arts and creative education to a neo-liberal approach to policymaking. It is important to have an argument for the importance of arts in education regardless of who is making decisions to support it. This means not just looking at an economic, social or innovation argument but looking at the importance of arts at a systems level. Data and research are available but need to be leveraged better internationally. The importance of creativity needs to be communicated better in a language that is understood by policy and decision makers. Perhaps the attention should instead be on “the art of humanizing power.”

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“THE ARTS CAN BE A DRIVER OF REFORM RATHER THAN A VICTIM”

Building Back Fairer

JULY 20, 2021

The “Building Back Fairer” Focus Group in July 2021 explored how the gaps in advancing social justice and processes of decolonization can be addressed, and what role the arts can play in this process. The importance of semantics, terminology, and language around decolonization was a thread throughout the discussion, as language programs the very minds that need to change. Might the word decolonization be replaced with indigenization? Can we talk more about equity? We need to find a common language to speak about decolonization, as so much is still defined by the North/the West, with a language used by people whose minds are still talking from a position of privilege. The system needs to be deconstructed before it can be reconstructed. Decolonization is both a practice and a process and starts with the language, the knowledge and the spaces we use. There are policy and knowledge-action gaps between grassroots and regional/national levels, but also between the cultural sector and other sectors.

There is a need to go beyond talking about decolonization: for accountability through action, beyond the performative. Holding spaces for different voices and reflection is necessary, as well as acknowledging and creating space for collective reckoning. The ability to take stock of global suffering tied to legacies like colonialism and ongoing imperialism (e.g. through digital colonization) and the understanding of what people physically feel can be addressed through embodied practice in the arts. Museums can also play an important role in healing, grieving and practicing vulnerability. Museums should be for people to tell their own stories, hold their own exhibitions and demystify the assumption that only curators have the knowledge to do things for others.

Traditional knowledge systems have been marginalized for too long in academia. There needs to be a greater parity of knowledge systems. Returning to indigenous values and ways of relating to the earth is imperative: both biodiversity and cultural diversity are essential. A paradigm shift can bring individuality back to the idea of the collective, towards a new enlightenment. Where does Descartes meet Buddha? Focusing on young people through education and designing processes where art is central in the space for imagining new possibilities is a way forward.

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“WE NEED TO CONNECT INDIVIDUALITY BACK TO THE IDEA OF THE COLLECTIVE. WHERE DOES DESCARTES MEET BUDDHA? WHAT IS THE NEXT ENLIGHTENMENT?”

Global Online Convening and Regional Collaboratory in Salzburg

Following the four online Focus Group consultations, it was clear that regardless of the area that was examined, similar challenges stand in the way of systemic change. Therefore, in a joint convening of all Focus Groups participants, accompanied by a parallel “Collaboratory” meeting of 15 participants at Schloss Leopoldskron in Salzburg, a deeper reflection took place around those mutual challenges and a reflection on strategies to overcome them.

In their joint inquiry process over three days, the participants examined the following questions:

- What divides exist and how do we bridge them?
- How can we improve and expand collaboration both within and outside of the cultural sector?
- What do we mean by systemic change and how do we transform systems – in a just, imaginative, and sustainable way?

Program facilitator Kiley Arroyo provided a framing piece – An Invitation to Healing – to ground the ensuing discussions and to help participants prepare for the hybrid program.



Kiley Arroyo – An Invitation Towards Healing

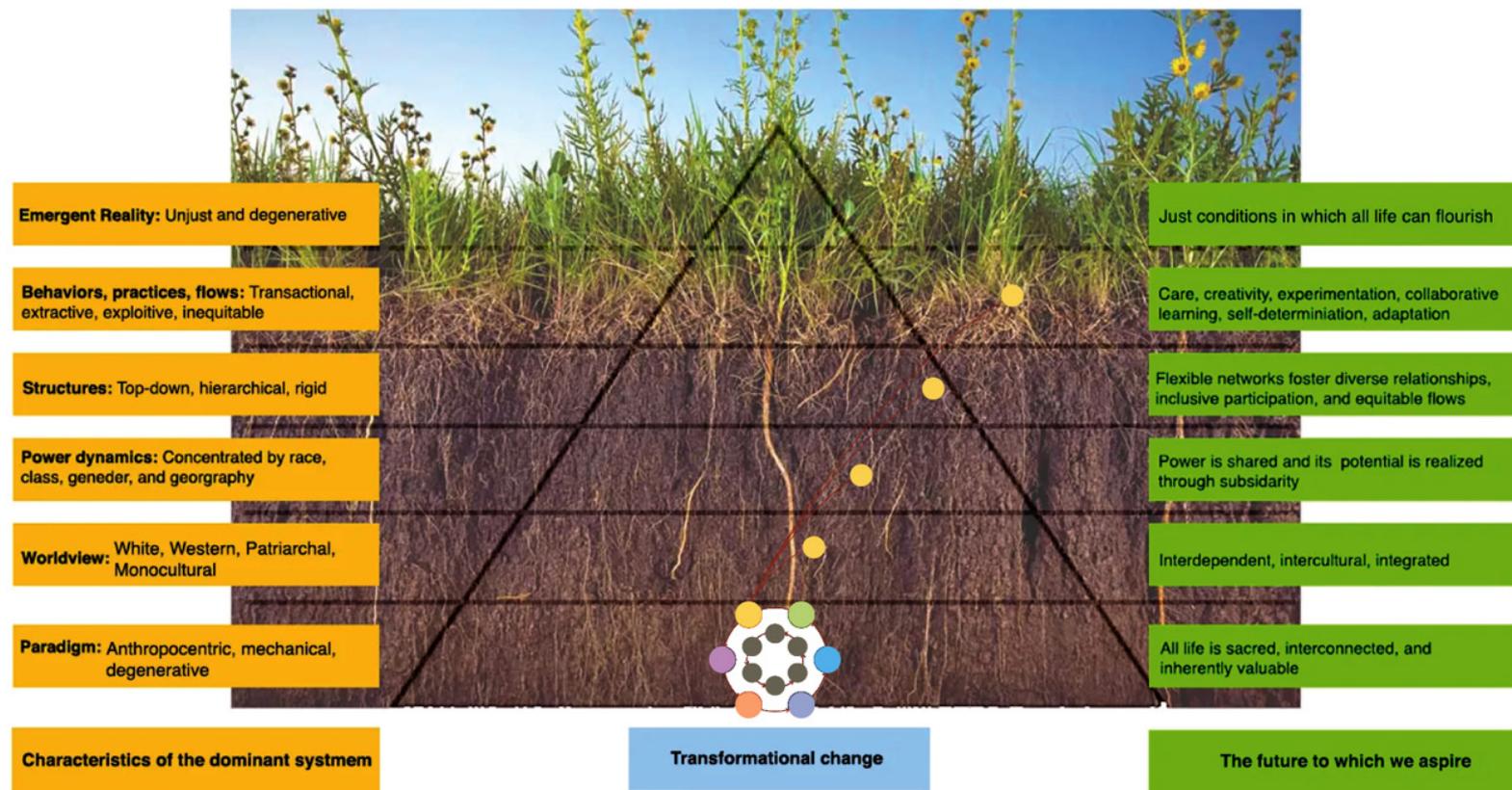
Throughout 2021, an extraordinary group of colleagues gathered, spanning diverse cultural identities, geographies, lived experiences, and professional disciplines. As a global community, we hear the call to work in relationship. In doing so, we can mobilize our collective commitment to nourishing the transformative potential of this moment so that we can emerge in ways that enable all life to flourish.

We know half measures are not acceptable, nor can truly transformational change unfold within the same paradigm that necessitates its need. Instead, by situating this work within fundamentally different logics, we can begin to inhabit the future to which we aspire, and access new ways of seeing the world, each other, and ourselves. No longer bound by fixed notions, we can develop a shared understanding of how change happens in all living systems and how we are each uniquely positioned to participate.

Many believe a coordinated ecosystem of actions is needed to realize a just society globally. However, most organizations and initiatives tend to work in isolation from one another and, at times, cross-purposes. Well-intentioned as they may be, these measures often stop short of realizing their potential to mobilize transformational change. This fractured landscape is a byproduct of an obsolete worldview that separates systemic elements rather than leveraging the strength of the whole. Severing the world in this fashion contradicts everything we know about how meaningful change happens in all living systems. And, if an outdated paradigm sits at the base of the issues we aim to address, then that's precisely where our work must begin. Fortunately, nature, of which humanity is an intrinsic part, offers another story to guide us.

Nature provides an elegant blueprint to envision, design, and practice the kind of transformational change this moment demands. Vibrant ecosystems demonstrate collective action at scale, including the shared principles, relationships, structures, and processes that enable life to flourish over time. These characteristics map to the levers commonly found in many systems change frameworks, particularly those rooted in a deep understanding of emergence.

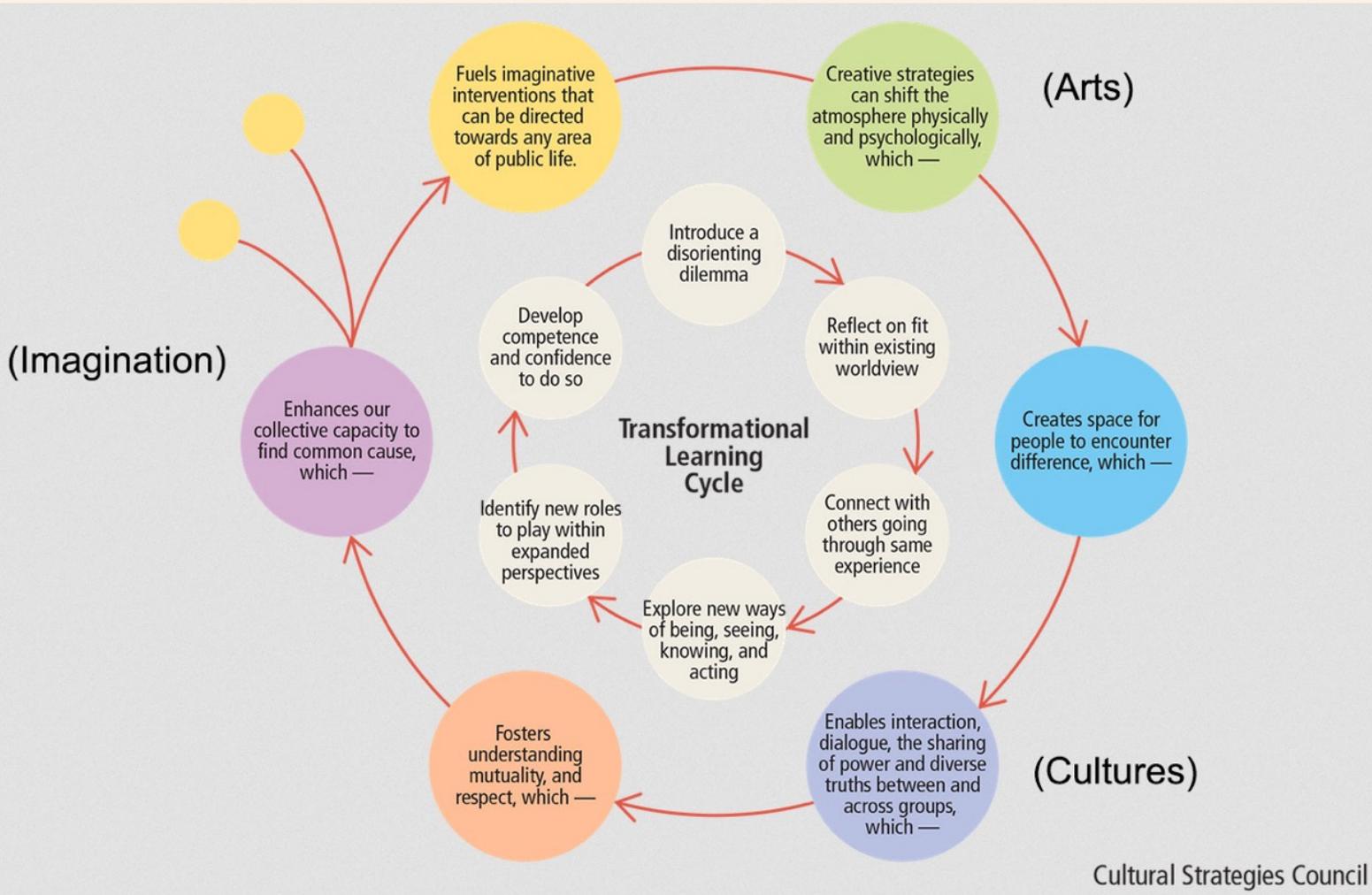
Have you ever sat in a forest and marveled at the beauty of its self-sufficiency? No one waters the trees or fertilizes the soil, yet abundance is everywhere. Like all living systems, forests are intrinsically relational; they maintain their vitality through diverse collaboration and great cycles of regeneration. Working in relationship allows living systems to build



broad-based power, wealth, and wellbeing. The fertility this generates fuels the process of emergence, which is how all living systems, from forests to the human body, continually adapt in response to shifting conditions in order to maintain conditions in which life can thrive.

Nature teaches us that maintaining conditions in which all life can flourish is not a static goal but a dynamic process that requires tremendous cooperation. In vibrant ecosystems, diverse elements seek out novel relationships in order to share and access the vital benefits they are each able to offer, particularly at the edge of systems where dominant patterns are weakest and opportunities for learning greatest. Nature abhors monocultures, which rob their environments of the fertility generated when diverse entities enjoy shared prosperity. Leveraging diversity in this way empowers these communities to access limitless capabilities, combinations, and possible ways to adapt – rendering the whole far more than the sum of its parts.

A common set of simple rules allows various elements to interact freely while collectively



contributing to a common goal. Their exchanges fuel experimentation and enable living systems to continually discover new ways to adapt and care for the whole. The “solutions” found are inherently impermanent and evolve as resource availability changes. This ongoing cycle of renewal prompts regular assessment of past arrangements and creates space to transcend outdated solutions. Insights gained in one locale are broadcast across the interdependent web of relationships that hold ecosystems together.

As we can see in Nature, change never happens due to top-down interventions; instead, it begins as local actions spring up simultaneously. When these pools of activities are connected, they emerge as more powerful systems, able to learn from each other, develop new capabilities and exercise more significant influence. Emergence contradicts many Western assumptions about how change happens, and perhaps, that should be no surprise since it is this same worldview that sits at the base of the systems we aspire to transform.

All systems arise from paradigms that tell stories describing who and what is valued and empowered to thrive. Many trace the origins of myriad injustices back to colonization,

not only in terms of the social production of wealth but, more insidiously, as an imposed worldview. A system that privileges a singular worldview fosters a culture of supremacy and normative conditions that enact and extend colonial histories of domination, extraction, exploitation, and accumulation. These patterns of harm contribute to disparities in power, wealth, and wellbeing in all living systems. Interestingly, a deeper look at the root of this term can reveal new healing pathways.

The term colonization comes from the Latin words *colere*, meaning “to till,” and *colonia*, “the soil.” The Western imagination tends to associate tilling by mechanical plows as the hallmark of industrial progress and evidence of cultural superiority. However, a growing movement of Indigenous land stewards, natural farming advocates, and environmental justice activists know that tilling soil destroys the very source of its power and regenerative capacity. By tearing soil’s social fabric, tilling disrupts the life-supporting process of emergence described previously, causing vital resources to become concentrated and setting a destructive spiral into motion.

By tilling the soil of communities, colonization has had an equally damaging effect severing sacred relationships between people and Nature, its lessons, and across diverse groups. This separation limits our perceptions of what is possible and restricts access to other imaginaries, knowledge, and world-building – in short, the diversity that empowers transformational change. This phenomenon demonstrates the depths to which colonization, as an imposed worldview, permeates our inner and outer worlds, bending our behaviors and normalizing inequitable arrangements.

If another world is to emerge, it cannot be built on the same logic. Instead, we must remediate the grounds from which unjust systems grow. By learning from and with a more expansive array of worldviews and lived experiences, we can transcend Western ‘rationality’ and center an intrinsically relational view of humanity’s place within the web of life. Celebrating ways of being marginalized by the dominant logic of our times can begin to facilitate the profound social and ecological healing that lies at the very heart of our desire for transformational change.

HOW CAN WE BRING A NEW WORLD INTO BEING?

As we have explored, transformational change begins deep beneath that which we can see. Our beliefs shape our identities, just as soil health shapes plant life, and paradigms shape societal systems and structures. Genuine change involves reparative work and reweaving relationships across each of these nested domains, but what does this entail exactly? Fortunately, living systems and those who draw lessons from them illuminate our path.

A suite of restorative principles is used worldwide to heal lands harmed by colonization’s

attendant practices and rebuild their regenerative capacity to support emergence. A growing movement of future-facing leaders in fields ranging from racial justice to corporate finance is integrating these lessons to profound effect. In doing so, they are demonstrating how drawing lessons from living systems can help to cultivate fertile conditions, internally and collectively, in which new relationships, ideas, identities, and actions can grow. These practices are rooted in a shared appreciation for the essential role of rest, without which we will lack the energy needed to dream, act with compassion and accountability, and sustain our vision with pleasure over time.

INNER WORK

This framing paper proposes that a new paradigm is a prerequisite to realizing transformational change, making some of us feel disoriented. Many of us are not fully conscious of the worldviews we operate within, let alone how to embrace a new one. Fortunately, much is known about how mindfulness and transformational learning experiences can empower individuals to become aware of their deepest held beliefs, challenge these views, and support their reconstruction. Consequently, space must be preserved, both physically and psychologically, for this virtuous cycle to occur.

The transformational learning theory proposes that a mental model can evolve when an individual is presented with a disorienting dilemma that conflicts with their existing frame of reference. This dissonance sparks critical reflection and invites an exploration of new ways of seeing. Working with others moving through similar experiences provides the psychological safety necessary to let go of seemingly fixed notions. From there, individuals can begin to imagine their roles in this alternative future and the competencies needed to move forward confidently and with relational responsibility. This process prepares us for collective work by building inner strength, emotional maturity, personal accountability, and compassion for other truths.



COLLECTIVE WORK

Nature's capacity to continually adapt in ways that support the whole's health relies on diverse relationships and extraordinary collaboration. Fertility, like justice, is a dynamic condition that enables life to thrive. In our work to advance transformational change, we must learn to act like the living systems we are by forging new connections across multiple lines of difference. The resulting networks become the channels through which power, vital resources (ideas, capital, etc.), and wellbeing flow.

Creative interventions support emergence by shifting the atmosphere, creating space for individuals to encounter differences with curiosity and care. Proximity enables meaningful dialogue and the sharing of truths from and with perspectives most impacted by injustices. Deep listening and accountability foster mutual understanding and allow new partners to find a common cause – the foundation of collective action. Now bound in shared purpose, groups can develop imaginative interventions that engage any systems to change lever, ensuring a more expansive range of perspectives and lived experiences inform what emerges in our world. Nourishing those actions and broadcasting insights empowers broader networks to learn from each other and adapt, generating more significant global influence.

This process mimics how living systems forge new relationships to access novel resources, experiment and discover new ways to maintain conditions in which all life can flourish – and isn't that what we are after? Rejoining this dance allows us to move with, rather than against, the life force of all beings.

Humanity is on the cusp of unlearning the harmful logic of separability and recreating how we live in relationship with all life. Our fates are intertwined today and across generations. This liminal space we are moving through invites us to make peace with change. Impermanence illuminates what has been lost but also what wants to be found. Transcending outdated notions invites us to reimagine our relationship with vulnerability, not as a weakness, but as a malleable space where we can reconstruct how we want to show up in the world. As we enter into these conversations together and explore how we can heal, nourish, and regenerate our world, I invite you to consider:

What can *You* do? What do *You* need?

What can *We* do? What do *We* need?

Bridging Divides

MODERATOR

Kiley Arroyo *Executive Director, Cultural Strategies Council, US*

PANELISTS

David Fakunle *CEO, DiscoverME/RecoverME: Enrichment Through the African Oral Tradition, US*

Abid Hussain, *Director, Diversity, Arts Council England, UK*

Brandie Macdonald *Director of Decolonizing Initiatives, Museum of Us, US*

The first panel of the online session focused on “Bridging Divides.” Reflections on the online discussions ensued offline in the Collaboratory meeting in Salzburg. The participants shared their thoughts about how bridging divides and working in relationships are essential to transforming systems.

They discussed: What kind of divides need to be bridged? How are they best bridged? What can help us and what is getting in the way to bridge them? The speakers on the “Bridging Divides” panel spoke from their personal and professional “mosaics” to reflect on those questions.

Conveying one’s mosaic or tapestry through the power of storytelling is the guiding principle for David Fakunle in bridging divides. By telling our own stories in a space of trust, understanding and appreciation, and by exchanging our truths based on our lived experiences, divides of tribalism can dissipate.

Our common denominator is our humanity. Being able to share our stories, and get appreciation, love and respect, are universal qualities that go deep beyond policies. We need to be able to see and hear each other before we can be in a genuine relationship. Especially now, we see resistance against voices being silenced. David Fakunle’s experience as a Black American artist and public health professional shows that arts and culture in public health through storytelling allows for different knowledge and wisdom to shine through, for Black epistemology to find voices against Eurocentric approaches about knowledge, and leads to more epistemic justice.

Abid Hussain's story from the perspective of a British Muslim of Pakistani heritage, focused on shared and opposing values in the cultural sector in the UK and how our viewpoint and perspective influences our interaction with those whose values align or differ from our own. Questions he posed to the group included: How can we be better prepared to navigate increased political polarization, nationalism (within a global context) and protectionism? Do we run the risk of limiting cultural exchange and international collaboration? How do we respond to disruption and increased turbulence as global narratives shift to culture wars and their implications for creativity, academia and cultural policy? Is there space for personal beliefs and values that may run counter to popular political opinion both nationally and internationally? What are the catalysts for creating greater agency to speak truth to power and shift the dial on inequity?

Additionally, he suggested that we need to develop more neutral spaces where we can meet to have difficult conversations and listen to different perspectives. How can we better organize, galvanize and work with each other whilst not having to agree with each other on everything? The impact of the murder of George Floyd, a global pandemic and increasing inequity have created opportunities to do things differently. How can we navigate uncomfortable elements of our history and respond to the more challenging legacies of colonialization? What is the role of a generation of creatives who are dispersed globally as a consequence of colonialism and what is the role we can play to bridge divides and heal wounds? How can we ensure change is meaningful and not just words?

Brandie Macdonald spoke from her position as an indigenous American museum professional who identifies patterns of colonization within society and organizations, specifically in museums and non-profits to address colonial harm, make the present better and work towards a better future. The divide created by the legacy of colonialism is still very present in communities today where power is maintained, and white supremacy is still part of policies and practice in museums, as they can be resistant to change. Decolonizing is not about turning back time, but looking at it as a non-linear process. As a catalyst for change, Brandie Macdonald holds space to apply decolonizing guiding principles to institutions, urge organizations to give back resources that have been stolen from communities and build or rebuild trust. She does this from a place of radical love, exposing vulnerability, but also by being accountable and transparent as part of individual transformation. The micro is what the macro is built on. Only through deep listening and truth-telling, can there be healing and trust.

Across conversations, the importance of embracing vulnerability and creating space and agency for building trust across divides came through as a recurring theme. Yet it was also felt that vulnerability and transparency need to include accountability and responsibility to be useful. Overcoming fear and building authentic cross-cultural reciprocity are key in

building spaces and places that teach us how to deal with differences in a productive way.

In the ensuing in-person Collaboratory discussion, the group shared reflections on what emerged as common themes through the preceding panel conversations, what they felt different about, and what emerged as points of connection for what is needed in “Bridging Divides.”

The discussions kicked off with an invitation to Mercy Nabirye, Jordi Albareda, Pavlos Georgiadis and Khaled Barakeh to share their perspectives with the group. Mercy Nabirye talked about her experience as often the only black person in the room and how this raises awareness about the importance of diverse voices. She also reflected on power redistribution and the need to have language for difficult conversations.

Jordi Albareda reflected on how our systems are failing and on the six gaps he identified in the discussions: economic, social, environmental, knowledge, cultural and generational. He



shared how the Fair Saturday initiative he set up is a way to bridge these identified gaps.

Pavlos Georgiadis stressed how we need a new vocabulary that reflects our values, as our ethical systems are broken. Not only have humans colonized other humans, but also nature.

Khaled Barakeh shared how arts are about changing perspectives through storytelling. He shared his work “The Shake”, an installation drawn from Maurice Harron’s iconic public sculpture “Hands across the Divide”, symbolizing the division between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. His four-part installation creates a literal bridge between the two hands, two communities, two histories and ideologies. He stressed the importance of celebrating differences rather than similarities.

Vulnerability was again a key value discussed by the group, expressing the necessity when bridging divides to see, hear and weave other truths. This concept was discussed in relation to fragility, which was shared through a metaphor of “kintsugi,” the Japanese art of mending something with gold leaf, which is based on the idea that embracing and emphasizing imperfections can create an even stronger, more beautiful object. These values connect to the concept of cultural safety, which is necessary for community intervention when bridging divides.

Authenticity was raised as another key value, connected to the need for agency and self-awareness. The need for a shared language in bridging divides was juxtaposed to the limitation and potential harms of language. This could be transcended by using arts as a language. The complexity of bridging divides shows the need for learning and unlearning, for leveraging and acknowledging privilege, and for creating spaces to physically or psychologically exchange truths and find common cause. While storytelling can facilitate authentic connections, it can, as reflected in the group, also cause harm if intentions are not clear. The group felt the need for places that are dynamic and liminal for encounters across differences and sectors, where difficult conversations can be held. The web of diverse relations between people and nature needs to be rewoven, based on sustained reciprocity, care and learning and in a context that enables decolonization and diverse forms of knowledge, where nested inequities can be remediated.

David Fakunle – The Heart of The Matter

Arts and culture have always been ideal vessels for expressing our humanity. When we want to conjure up the most appropriate ways to convey feelings about this thing called life (shout out to Prince, peace be upon him), we play music. We paint. We dance. We sing. We sculpt. We practice our rituals. Ultimately, we tell our story of navigating existence...and it makes us feel good in our hearts, our minds, our spirits and our bodies. Creative energy is explicitly tied to health and wellbeing.

What do we find in the stories told through arts and culture? Well, we find much diversity in thought, perspective, philosophy and experience. The characters and settings are as vast as this planet, and they remind us that every person's journey is unique to them. Like snowflakes falling in the winter, no two people's lives are the same. However, amongst the near-infinite spectrum of existential paths, we identify common themes. I'll go so far as to say these themes are more than common, they are omnipresent. The desire for



acknowledgement, appreciation, respect, understanding and love is engrained in every life story, and therefore in every artistic and cultural manifestation. Those desires, and our pursuit of them, are what make us human.

So why, given the ties that bind us together, are so many convinced that some of our fellow human beings are fundamentally different? How have generations of people been compelled to demonstrate the worst of humanity, under the premise that those subject to suffering are not even human? It goes to show how powerful storytelling is as an art, science and strategy because it speaks to one of our critical elements. Humanity craves connection, and whether it is a person, image, or ideology, we gravitate towards that which makes us feel like we belong. As past and present history teaches us, that is problematic when connections are grounded in the dehumanization of others. The manifestations of stories based on dehumanizing women, People of Color, the differently-abled, LGBTQIA+ communities, and people with lesser means result in inequitable policies, programs, resources, infrastructure and support that are detrimental to the entire world. The voices of the people, and Earth itself, are growing and they cry out, “where are our stories, where are our truths?” We must reject the myth of the zero-sum game because it only expedites the deterioration of all life.

Salzburg Global Seminar has been a platform for storytelling on a worldwide platform for over 70 years, and I am honored that our narratives are forever intertwined. The first moment I encountered Salzburg Global was in 2015 when I was a third-year Johns Hopkins doctoral student. I was unsure of my purpose for being there, especially considering I was focusing more on public health research than arts and culture at the time. But once I was in the space of excellence, joy, curiosity and compassion, I knew it was meant to reveal myself to this international collective. Perhaps then I was able to show someone that a young Black man from Baltimore was more than what the prevailing narratives suggested. I know that is what I do now, and this latest moment with Salzburg Global during our program Reimagining Human and Planetary Flourishing was an opportunity to continue empowering others to elevate themselves for personal and societal growth. I am grateful that I was again elevated, and my health is better for it. Who we are is exactly what the world needs right now, and we already have the perfect language to use. Arts and culture bridge divides, re-humanize and remind us of the heart of the matter: the world changes with love. Evolve and revolutionize with love.

Vulnerability is at the heart of developing spaces where trust can be built to share stories. Creating spaces for healing, for people who normally do not come together, is not easy but is necessary to bridge divides and to show the oppressor what they lack in their own lives. The art of storytelling brings us in a space of common humanity and imagination, and bridges our perceived differences.

Exploring Collaboration

MODERATOR

Kiley Arroyo *Executive Director, Cultural Strategies Council, US*

PANELISTS

Susan Magsamen *Executive Director, Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, International Arts + Mind Lab, US*

Ke Leng *Programme Coordinator, UNESCO, France*

Lydia Ruprecht *Team Leader for Global Citizenship Education, UNESCO, France*

Anasuya Sengupta *Co-Director and Co-Founder, Whose Knowledge?, UK*

Pedro Ivo Franco *Independent Consultant, Germany*

The second online panel elaborated on what happens once bridges are made and divides are crossed. How can we expand collaboration with and beyond our areas of work and what is standing in the way? The panelists shared their thoughts and expanded on their strategies to overcome existing silos. The participants of the Collaboratory meeting followed up on the conversation with face-to-face discussions on key topics discussed in the online session.

“OUT BEYOND IDEAS OF WRONGDOING AND RIGHT DOING, THERE IS A FIELD. I’LL MEET YOU THERE. WHEN THE SOUL LIES DOWN IN THAT GRASS, THE WORLD IS TOO FULL TO TALK ABOUT”

Susan Magsamen shared examples from her practice of collaboration across arts and health in the service of humanity. She stressed the importance of not leaving anyone behind in research by involving affected people outside of academic institutions. Some institutes are by design impenetrable, which needs to change. She expanded on the importance of equity and sustainability in collaborations. She experienced a neuro-arts blueprint collaborative research project, where ideas are endless once the walls come down and bridges go up. However, putting energy into how you solidify research so that it can be translated into policy will benefit more people in the long term. She referenced the WHO Healing Arts Project as another excellent example of how bridges are built across government, grass roots organizations and artists at different levels. The key in collaborations for her is the

importance of building bridges with intention, correcting the course if necessary and allowing ourselves to be respectful of vulnerability.

Anasuya Sengupta brought in the importance of recognizing our situated contexts and positions of power and privilege when entering collaborations. How can we have meaningful collaborations without acknowledging the different powers in action, the grief, and the rage?

Collaborating should not be a process of flattening differences or leading to homogenization, but a way to celebrate difference, as it is that richness that we are trying to amplify in the cultural and knowledge sector. In collaborations we do not need a common language but a connective language as a carrier of our culture, values and perceptions, and that allows for different ways of expressing ourselves.

When using the word “decolonizing”, we need to go beyond co-opting the word and do the work, such as acknowledging the histories of oppression, and the practices around transforming power. We also simultaneously need the language and action that is of the re-imagining, alongside the de-constructing. In collaborations, bringing unusual or unlikely allies with different expertise together is important in order to not claim one type of expertise as superior to another, including the expertise of lived experience.



Ke Leng and Lydia Ruprecht expanded on the enabling role of UNESCO to advance synergies between the culture and education sectors to advance the UN 2030 Agenda by sharing the policy mechanisms and international legal instruments that federate voices and expand collaborations between different stakeholders, from policymakers, academia and artists to cultural professionals.

Increased transversal collaboration is forming across UN organizations. Since 2019, the efforts to bridge culture and education have been renewed to look at innovative approaches to bolster the cultural sector. Especially given the impact of COVID-19, there is an urgency for intercultural sectoral cooperation on curriculum reform, science and cultural collaborations, culture and wellbeing in connection to traditional practices, and culture and social inclusion.

Pedro Ivo Franco took us to Brazil by sharing a powerful example of a lived experience and the strategies he has used at the Cambinda Estrela Cultural Center in Chao de Estrelas to influence and transform vulnerable communities through the arts. While the arts can do a lot to build more self-esteem in the community, Ivo Franco realized that the overall reality of the community was not really changing.

Breaking through the silo of the arts to work with collaborators from other sectors on sustainable solutions was the only way forward. This meant being open and stepping out of his comfort zone, working with unusual allies, and looking holistically at fundamental problems to find a more secure environment for young people through education and jobs. Bridging these divides requires real vulnerability but also allows for healing in the community from the hierarchical, divisive system.

The participants' reflections on the topic of collaboration revolved a lot around the need to expand understanding of education in view of the current challenges we are facing. More collaborations are needed to overcome the disconnect between education and what communities need, while informal education needs to be valued. Arts should however be a driver of educational reform, not a victim of it. What we consider as knowledge in education needs to be reviewed holistically. How can it be that when the Global North says something it is called "knowledge" and when the Global South says something, it is called "culture." A powerful story was told about how by having to switch from school-based to experiential learning during the pandemic in the UK, kids learned so many different skills. This is strong evidence not only of how learning could be reconceived, but also how much resistance there is against new ways of learning. There is a lot we need to unlearn to be able to see the value of things from a radically different perspective. How can nature be a powerful blueprint for the kind of collaboration we are seeking?

During the subsequent in-person Collaboratory discussion in Salzburg, five participants

were asked to share their reflections and experiences in collaborations. Katelijn Verstraete mentioned that before you start working together, it is critical to discuss each other's values and intentions. She referred to the 'Fair Collaboration for Cultural Relations' toolkit she is working on for EUNIC. How can we step away from our egos and from competition and explore that "third space" where one can collaborate in true mutuality?

Stephania Xydia referred to the principles of Non-Violent Communication (NVC) and stressed their importance in co-creation settings. Particularly in highly polarized contexts, identifying the needs of the person behind the feelings that may be expressed is essential in order to respond to concrete needs and advance collaboration. She urged us to think of artists as producers rather than products, and emphasized the need for transparency regarding resources, as this can be a major stumbling block in collaboration. Her questioning of the use of the word "co-creation" versus "collaboration" opened a discussion around the use of language in collaboration, which Werner Binnenstein-Bachstein reminded us of as well. He urged us to keep the power dynamics in mind when collaborating. Common experiences are also important, as well as having a dimension of joy, as joy is the emotion we need for solidarity.

Andrew Manning touched upon how meaningful collaboration is defined, and stressed the importance of lived experiences and the need for unlikely allies. He believes that 360-degree systemic interventions, such as the one described by Pedro Ivo Franco, are the best way to go.

Elena Mavromichali talked about the need for soft cultural infrastructure, as so much funding is going into new buildings but not enough into developing skills for people to flourish.

There was great resonance with the idea expressed in the online discussion that the cultural sector is not unified enough with other sectors, often working too much in its own silo or echo chamber. The group further touched upon the questions raised on evidence of the value of culture for other sectors and the need to acknowledge the value of anecdotal evidence and lived experience. Culture is at the heart of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and holds an important responsibility to build holistic collaborations with other sectors. Hence, it is important to bring down the walls and work on genuine, equitable collaborations, while remaining aware of positionality and privilege. Prerequisites for collaborations are awareness about space and time, use of language, curiosity, patience, care, and mutuality, but also authenticity, clear purpose and higher aim.

Pedro Ivo Franco – Breaking the Silo: Towards Collaborations and Systemic Problem Solving

It has been proven through observation, experience and research that culture is able to resolve or at least mitigate many global challenges. Passionate about the sector in which I work, I tend to romanticize the belief that culture is THE or at least one of the main avenues that can lead us towards a more sustainable world.

This belief is unshakable until the point when I talk with friends from the technology sector who come up with incredible ideas and data to prove how technology has improved the world, and when I then imagine my tech friends' beliefs getting shaken when a friend from the education sector affirms education to be the way. Everybody is right, and intersections are needed.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are indeed a super intersectional glue bringing different domains together. Despite the absence of its own SDG, culture is present in many ways with typical partners being education, innovation, city planning, well-being and climate. The systemic problems of this world need multifaceted responses. For this reason, I see with enthusiasm the growing interest of institutions from the cultural sector in taking



part in events from other knowledge areas. Beyond that, it is great to see programs in the cultural sector encompassing other development priorities. However, is the cultural sector doing enough to get closer to other sectors? It is common to see the same faces at cultural events organized around Europe. This makes me wonder if we are in fact still working in silos with the “usual suspects”.

The cultural sector is the one that is typically left behind in basically all government budgets worldwide. Nonetheless, the cultural sector does a lot with very little to make this world a more livable place, especially in vulnerable territories.

Referring back to my own roots, the community of Chao de Estrelas, located in the suburbs of Recife, has approximately 25,000 inhabitants, of whom 56% are self-declared Black. Recife is considered the 7th most dangerous capital in Brazil and the 22nd most violent city in the world. In the city, the risk of death for a young black man (including those self-declared brown and black) is considered to be 11.5 times greater than that of a young white man. The community has been neglected by the government and until 2005, social problems that require 360 degrees systemic interventions – such as drug trafficking, violence, homophobia, misogyny to name but a few – have dominated the local scenario.

Based in Chao de Estrelas for the last 83 years, the Cultural Center Cambinda Estrela has witnessed drastic changes in the community. Initially created in 1999 as a carnival group to preserve the Brazilian cultural heritage of Maracatu, Cambinda Estrela became an institution dedicated to solving and mitigating social problems. Since then, the Cultural Center has always had the direct and indirect objective to improve living conditions in the area. The first initiative was to raise the self-esteem of the local people by simply painting the walls of the neighborhood with references to afro-indigenous Brazilian heroes along with messages of love and acceptance. The second was to use the headquarters – which is around 90sqm – to develop a wide range of courses, debates and lectures for youth and adults and to offer extra-curricular support for elementary and secondary students.

After some years, members of the Center could feel that things were improving through the initiatives. Nonetheless, more needed to be done to definitively bring peace to the community and consequently improve socio-economic and educational conditions in the area. To achieve this, cultural activities alone were not enough.

The strategy adopted by the Center, therefore, was to break the silos and start working with other actors who could contribute to the development of the community. Interestingly enough, the first actor to be approached by the Center was the police – considered to be the “oppressor” by many in the community. The second group of actors was the nearby schools. Perceiving the need to learn from other sectors, the Center also invited NGOs dealing with

psychology and other pressing issues in the area to collaborate with them. Through opening our own doors, partner institutions also opened their doors to us, and the expertise we co-developed could then be transferred to other communities in the city.

Whenever I forget that culture can't do it alone, I look back to this example and look around to check: whom can I partner with? Whom can I learn from and exchange with? To create more synergies that lead to shared systemic solutions, Cambinda Estrela's Recipe was basically based on opening its doors, developing multidisciplinary events, and inviting others to be invited ourselves.

Let's not forget that other domains also need to drink from the powerful source of culture to gain energy and lead us towards a more sustainable world.



Transforming Systems

MODERATOR

Karima Grant *Founder and Executive Director, ImagiNation Afrika, Senegal*

PANELISTS

Julia Lipton *Director, Climate Action and Planning, C40 Cities, Denmark*

Karima Kadaoui *Co-Founder and Executive President, Tamkeen Community Foundation for Human Development, Morocco*

Pireeni Sundaralingam *Behavior change scientist: Center for Humane Technology, US*

The third and final online session built on the exchanges in the previous session, going deeper into how these collaborations across sectors, languages and cultures and with unusual partners can help transform systems.

The third panel explored what the foundational principles of true systems change are. How can we apply them and work together to accelerate processes of systems transformation? Three speakers expanded on their views and experiences concerning “Transforming Systems” and the ensuing Collaboratory participants subsequently explored what, from their perspectives, just collaboration involves.

Pireeni Sundaralingam noted that cognitive resilience – the potential to problem-solve creatively during continuously shifting condition – lies at the core of any successful systems transformation. She highlighted two major phenomena currently downgrading such resilience.

Firstly, the proliferation of surveillance capitalism and an extractive digital economy that boosts false information across mainstream digital spaces, from search engines and social media to texting and video channels, is diminishing personal agency, promoting threat and outrage, and dismantling trust in democratic tools from journalism to elections. At an individual level, sustained use of such spaces keeps our nervous systems in a state of high alert, hampering our ability to address complex, abstract problems, find innovative solutions, or embrace deep systems change.

Secondly, climate anxiety is also contributing to the downgrading of human resilience and a diminished sense of agency. Going forward, our arts and cultural spaces provide our best hope to promote resilience. It is vital to design such spaces, whether digital or analog, in ways that harness rather than exploit, our neuro-cognitive vulnerabilities. If cultural spaces

are to contribute seriously to transforming systems, they need to place greater emphasis on dismantling cognitive tunnel vision, hyperpolarization, and ongoing states of threat. At the same time, they need to focus on more than just simple user engagement, but instead embrace programs (and metrics) that prioritize resilience processes, including long-term mindset change, trust-building, and supporting younger generations to re-establish their sense of agency.

Julia Lipton works on systems change in cities. The density and diversity of cities can be drivers for change. Nature-based solutions would need to be integrated into city planning systems to build resilient cities and make urban areas more livable, which would require rethinking, restructuring, redesigning our systems governance, and redirecting financial flows. This is not easy in the face of predominating neoliberal ideology. A combination of community-lead approaches and top-down leadership with compelling narratives is needed as well as infrastructure for collaboration and partnership, an ecosystem of new governance and a commitment to support and monitor programs showcasing success but learning from failure.

Karima Kadaoui is Co-Founder and Executive President of Tamkeen Community Foundation for Human Development in Morocco. Her work in profound systems transformation focuses on the co-creation process of enquiry, learning and understanding embedded in deeply human relationships and epistemic humility. The Tamkeen approach is the process of working with partners to jointly ask new questions, discover the places “in between”, and grow a shared understanding. The work of Tamkeen is based on a co-creation process where the future emerges from the courage that grows through the process itself and through an embodied understanding of the human potential. This process is based on a deep awareness of trust in humanity and not being afraid of speaking the language of love, which inspires action from shared understanding. It is a silent process of a system transforming itself, like when a seed grows, it grows out of itself into itself. It creates the conditions for its own emergence.

**“IF WE ARE THE GARDENER, WE ARE ALSO THE GARDEN.
WE ARE THE GARDENER AND THE GARDEN.”**

The participants in the online session reflected further on the notion of resilience. What helps resilience the most is unconditional love and empathy. But why is love so much out of the discourse of education, society and transformation, when it is essential to the ecology

of human beings? There is very little we need to feel a deep connection. Yet the systems we live in are colonial capitalists. Love and solidarity are not the systems we are inhabiting. If you have a deep emotional connection to your environment, you can grow to be a resilient person, yet a lot of people are simply connected to their devices these days. In the context of a pandemic, proposing drastic change is very hard, and is finding a lot of opposition. If we are not naming the things that undermine our systems or changing the language that is used, how can we find the agency to question how power and resources are used, and how can we measure the change we are seeking? For transformation to happen, self-love, appreciation, respect and compassion are needed to connect to our essence as human beings and to the suffering of others.

In the ensuing Collaboratory discussions in Salzburg, Gry Worre Hallberg, Jordi Balta, Yolanda Lopez-Maldonado and Alexandra Uzelac shared how transforming systems reflects in their practice.

Gry Worre Hallberg shared how the Sisters Hope initiative is a place for permanent inhabitation of arts, and works towards a more sensuous, poetic education system and a new world arising from the post-economic and ecology crises.

Jordi Balta reflected on the notion of human development and the need for individual capabilities to be combined with effective agency and values, as well as the importance of revising governance models to better connect local knowledge and work on the ground with decision-making processes. He also explored the balance between the individual and the collective as well as the need for the cultural sector to work with and not just in parallel to other sectors.

Yolanda Lopez-Maldonado pointed to an important distinction between transition and transformation, with transition being the consistent change of a state without modification, while transformation involves true overall systems change. We cannot ask for systems change if we do not change ourselves, as we are part of the system.

Aleksandra Uzelac shared an example of a participative model for research and policymaking related to heritage impact assessment, which addresses complex challenges involving networks of players at different levels as a systems approach. The Collaboratory participants further discussed that genuine systems change only happens from the bottom up and that it requires a balance between the individual and the collective (the “Commons”) and a re-evaluation of our relationship to nature. Thinking further about co-creation, the participants believed that it needs to be built on trust, reciprocity, and respect. A new vocabulary around leadership is necessary as well as a definition of what leadership truly means in the context of systems change.

The session concluded with facilitator Kiley Arroyo offering reflections on her framing piece *An Invitation towards Healing*, which informed the Reimagining Human and Planetary Flourishing discussions on systems transformation. She described a pathway towards ecosystem stewardship, exploring how a soil-keeping ethos can advance reparative justice and transformational change. She put forward that just societies cannot grow in toxic soil. To realize a more just and regenerative world, we need only look at how life flourishes in the natural world.

Maintaining an equitable global society in which all life can thrive is not a static goal but a dynamic condition that benefits from a rigorous understanding of how systems change. This understanding includes a core set of time-tested principles: systems are transformed through coordinated collective action; no one entity or sector can achieve this goal independently; systems are dynamic and change in response to local contexts; we cannot control how systems change, but we can cultivate fertile conditions characterized by broad-based power, wealth, and wellbeing; and fertile conditions enable diverse relationships, exchanges, experiments, and solutions to emerge. A new framework is therefore needed to





guide meaningful change that recognizes the necessity of a more inclusive and intercultural paradigm. Where can we look for an example of this vision in action? To Nature and vibrant ecosystems, of which we are an inherent part.

Arroyo pointed to the fact that living systems are superb organizers that build and distribute power across flexible networks, united by a shared purpose: to ensure all life thrives. Consequently, the principles and patterns found in healthy soil offer practical lessons in reparative justice, systems transformation, and, as such, an elegant blueprint for a regenerative society. An increasing number of disciplines are adopting an ecological paradigm as a more effective way to influence change. From philanthropy to human rights, climate change to economics, many sectors demonstrate how this ethos can catalyze systemic change by creating space for people with varying worldviews to encounter differences, engage in meaningful dialogue, and discover new ways to care for the common good. By embracing a more expansive perspective that recognizes the power of diverse ways of knowing and being, embracing this ethos begins to remediate the mindsets that hold injustice in place, allowing equitable access to new tools and techniques.

Karima Grant – Believing is Seeing: Imagining African Futures through Play

Walking down the streets of a soon-to-be inhabitable Dakar, I am reminded of what our lives have become because of a lack of imagination. The lack of imagination by the colonial powers and their neo-colonial inheritors have laid an unsustainable architecture to this desperate state of affairs now known as urban space: poor air quality, too many cars, the destruction of decades-old trees and green spaces, the continuing lack of meaningful infrastructure and the frenzy of unregulated construction on nearly every block.

When confronted with this visual reality, it would seem that systems change is impossible to achieve. As so many of the conversations during our program captured, alongside the glimmers of hope and pockets of change looms the shadow of much deeper and more rigorous despair, whispering that even our innermost dreaming will not be realized in this lifetime.

I founded ImagiNation Afrika in 2011 because of the desire and passion to support African children's re-imagining of themselves, their communities, and their futures. As most entrepreneurial adventures go, the path from 2011 to our present (COVID-19 included) has been filled with hard, miserable lessons, but yes, inspiration enough to continue, because it would seem that within every child, never mind their condition or circumstance, the instinct



and processes of play are always reminders that it is through our believing – not seeing – that we will flourish.

At the foundation of play is the idea that believing is seeing. Children believe in an idea – I am a footballer, a monster, or a singer or artist – and they bend the world, if only momentarily, to fit this belief. The magic of their imaginative muscles transforms the present to their will. The more children play, the more they strengthen this capacity to make what they believe become their reality. Believing literally is how empowered children see and shape their worlds.

Think of a not-quite-two-year-old, unsteady on their feet, but believing they can walk. Willing themselves to put one foot in front of another to not only walk but run seemingly before their legs are ready. They will walk, as surely as they will fall over and over again. And the falls may become lifelong scars of the effort they made, but will never become deterrent enough against the inherent will to triumph.

This is why playing is so important for children in general, but for us at Imagination Afrika, African children in particular. Developing this self-esteem, self-confidence and resilience are qualities absolutely essential for this present still composed of equal parts horror, injustice, and inequities. Now add the problem solving ('how do I get down the stairs? Aha... I know... sitting!'), the creative thinking, hypothesizing, testing that play demands and watching our children, believing, nurturing and encouraging their play, we can imagine a new Africa led by future scientists, artists and mathematicians fashioning more sustainable futures for us all.

Marieme Kaba, in *We Do This 'Til We Free Us: Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice*, a seminal work on abolition, states "We have to try things, knowing that many experiments will fail. We can build containers for collective action, and trust in the collective to figure it out and learn important lessons as we go. We're not trying to find the solution, but rather a constellation of solutions."

This knowledge that the experiment will fail, the sand cake will not rise, the blocks will fall down, the ball will not make the goal is part of the risk of play, the risk that young children confront and navigate every day. Yet belief pushes children onward, toward, as Marieme Kaba states so powerfully, "a constellation of solutions," each an opportunity to re-imagine, to look upon the city and know that yes, even though this experiment has failed, we have in our very beings, the opportunity to begin again, with our collective imaginations, another stronger attempt at flourishing.

Pireeni Sundaralignam – Designing for Resilience: Transforming Systems With Mind in Mind

As we set out to build back better, it becomes vital not only to consider the type of structures we wish to build in this new landscape but also to pay close attention to the nature of the tools we are using, in terms of both the external devices we choose, as well as our own internal neuropsychological instruments.

Research into human resilience — our ability to adapt and flourish in uncertain, volatile times — points to the importance of cognitive flexibility, communication, trust, agency, and an ability to think about the future. Yet, these core components of resilience are undermined both by our ongoing climate anxiety as well as by many of the tools of our current digital information infrastructure: from search engines that distort the availability of information to social media platforms that amplify messages of fake news, fear, and outrage.

We are exposed to negatively reinforcing spirals of threat which keep us neurologically hooked while fragmenting our attention and decision-making. They also trigger our “System 1” neural networks¹, which are systems that exploit mental short-cuts (rapid reactions, bias, stereotyping, and a reliance on comfortable cognitive habits) at the cost of the type of “System 2” thinking (slow, abstract, “open” complex decision-making) that supports more sustainable change.

Bearing this in mind, arts and cultural spaces have the potential to offer safe spaces for open-ended, non-polarized discussion, for relaxed curiosity and exploration — places that allow our “System 2” brain to strengthen and flourish. As cognitive science has shown, the more we juggle different scales and perspectives, the better we become at solving complex, spatial problems. The more that we practice alternative poetic forms of observation, the better we become at solving unusual engineering tasks². And the more we dialogue slowly and respectfully with other cultures – in true exchange – the more cognitively fluid and innovative we become in many walks of life³.

¹ Gronchi Giorgio, & Fabio, G. (2018). Dual Process Theory of Thought and Default Mode Network: A Possible Neural Foundation of Fast Thinking *Frontiers in Psychology*, 1237.

² McCaffrey, T. (2012). Innovation Relies on the Obscure: A Key to Overcoming the Classic Problem of Functional Fixedness. *Psychological Science*, 23(3), 215-218.

³ Maddux, W. W., Adam, H., & Galinsky, A. D. (2010). When in Rome ... Learn why the Romans do what they do: How multicultural learning experiences facilitate creativity *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin*, 36(6), 731-741.

In contrast, the design of our existing digital spaces for public interaction are all too often driven by design methodologies (such as dopamine-focused gamification) and user-engagement metrics that prioritize speed and social status signaling, reward shallow reactions, and champion hyper-individualism and celebrity.

As sociologist Paolo Gerbaudo noted, the design of our digital public spaces rapidly influences the dynamics of our physical spaces of gathering: even in real life, there is an increasing tendency for short-term performative posturing, a “choreography of assembly” rather than the type of deeper dialogue that leads to systemic transformation⁴. In addition, the cultural production of ignorance has never been stronger as politically motivated agents from multiple countries manipulate the information landscape. Furthermore, the exponential rate of spread and mutation of digital technologies means that it is extremely challenging to combat specific digital malpractice, and regulatory policy and monitoring are destined to always lag far behind.

In response, we must embrace counter-tactics that leverage our understanding of cognitive and neural mechanisms to help inform the design of arts and cultural practices and spaces, strengthening their role as incubators of emotional and cognitive resilience. Emerging experimental data indicates that techniques, including “digital inoculation” (such as carefully curated spaces where people can playfully explore fake news items) and “boosting” (such as fostering people’s skills at balancing different political perspectives by addressing specific neurocognitive blocks⁵) can support deep transformation.

It is time to harness the wealth of neurocognitive data on behavior change and integrate it with the richness of our data on designing arts and cultural spaces so that we can create more robust, biologically and sociologically relevant tools for building back better.

⁴ Gerbaudo, P. (2012). *Tweets and the Streets: Social Media and Contemporary Activism*.

⁵ One prime example is the nascent news platform Onesub.io which aims to present multiple perspectives from different news media. It also provides feedback to the reader regarding the level of political balance in their daily reading and how to improve it.

WHERE TO BEGIN? I PROPOSE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AS A STARTING POINT FOR INQUIRY:

- How do we create art and cultural spaces/ policies/ funding initiatives that recognize the neuro-cognitive nature of the blocks that stand in the way of our resilience? How do we design to counter cognitive shut-down?
- Do our metrics (in cultural engagement, in city resilience, in educational achievement, etc.) include cognitive flexibility and other neurocognitive measures of resilience? Given that change starts from within, do we commit to assessing the cognitive flexibility of our own institutions and workplaces?
- Do our theories of change include training cognitive flexibility acknowledging it as an essential requirement for human resilience?



Kiley Arroyo – Towards Ecosystem Stewardship: How A Soil Keeping Ethos Can Advance Reparative Justice and Transformational Change

Just societies cannot grow in toxic soil. To realize a more just and regenerative world, we need only look at how life flourishes in the natural world, of which we are an inherent part.

Why? Because maintaining an equitable global society in which all life can thrive is not a static goal but a dynamic condition that benefits from a rigorous understanding of how systems change. This understanding includes a core set of time-tested principles:

In 2019, the international journal of social change work Alliance magazine published the piece, “Systems change—are we already doing it?” Its authors discuss the depth of current social transformation efforts and suggest, “Secondary and third levels are oftentimes ignored or gilded over, and not given the attention they deserve when analyzing the systems that we work in.”

These levels refer to those described in the Causal Layered Analysis framework. This systems thinking tool demonstrates how the status quo emerges from human behaviors that reflect worldviews about who and what has value and the underlying paradigm from which entire systems grow. Ignoring these deeper levels renders change efforts incomplete and fails to take advantage of what we now know about how complex systems change from diverse cultural perspectives.

Systems scholar Donella Meadows identified leverage points with varying capacity to affect transformational change. Because systems arise from paradigms, the soil remediating these is necessary to ignite lasting change. However, Meadows takes this suggestion one step further, urging humanity to transcend the idea that one paradigm or view on who and what has value and how society will be subsequently organized can represent every culture. #

Therefore, a new framework is needed to guide meaningful change work that recognizes the necessity of a more inclusive and intercultural paradigm. Enacting transformational efforts on a more expansive foundation of values and insights can foster new relationships, democratize power, redistribute wealth, and inspire new patterns of behavior this moment in history demands. Where can we look for an example of this vision in action? To Nature and vibrant ecosystems, of which we are an inherent part.

Living systems are superb organizers that build and distribute power across flexible networks, united by a shared purpose—to ensure all life thrives. These diverse communities adapt dynamically in dialogue with place and time. Living systems sustain their vitality by working in solidarity across differences, enabling them to continually discover novel ways to circulate vital resources. Fertile soil demonstrates these characteristics exquisitely. Consequently, the principles and patterns found in healthy soil offer practical lessons in reparative justice, systems transformation, and, as such, an elegant blueprint for a regenerative society.

A suite of restorative principles can heal soil and enhance its regenerative capacity by ensuring power, wealth, and wellbeing increase over time. The resulting fertility is the energy that enables complex systems to experiment, learn, adapt, and continually discover how to care for the common good. This aliveness can only be created through diverse cooperation and collective willingness to evolve.

I've mapped the various roles, relationships, flows, and structures that enable ecosystems to adapt to the levers found in Western systems change frameworks. In doing so, I've come to believe that soil keeping ethos provides a compelling metaphor and practical lessons in how we can evolve our approach to transformational change, drawing upon Nature's time-tested brilliance and the knowledge held by diverse cultures.

An increasing number of disciplines are adopting an ecological paradigm as a more effective way to influence change. From philanthropy to human rights, climate change to economics, many sectors demonstrate how this ethos can catalyze systemic change by creating space for people with varying worldviews to encounter differences, engage in meaningful dialogue, and discover new ways to care for the common good. Entering into dialogue with nature insights, those committed to actualizing justice-seeking.

Many Indigenous cultures and wisdom traditions embody this knowledge, suggesting that a soil-keeping ethos can facilitate the deep social and ecological healing essential to meaningful change. By embracing a more expansive perspective that recognizes the power of diverse ways of knowing and being, embracing this ethos begins to remediate the mindsets that hold injustice in place, allowing equitable access to new tools and techniques.

Mobilize! Platform

As part of the Humanizing the Power of the Arts: Reimagining Human and Planetary Flourishing program, Salzburg Global is also piloting an online platform for program participants called “Mobilize!”

It is a closed online platform that serves as a space for Fellows to continue the discussions of the Forum and to share relevant resources and materials over the coming months. The four sub-groups of the Forum each have their own space to connect, which mirror the Focus Groups in which the Fellows participated. The sub-groups are curated by four Salzburg Global Fellows and participants can join discussions via the platform.

Mobilize! Platform Groups and Curators

REIMAGINING A GREENER PLANET:

MITIGATING CLIMATE CHANGE AND FURTHERING SUSTAINABLE DESIGN

Curator: Pavlos Georgiadis, Research Associate, University of Hohenheim, Stuttgart, Germany

REIMAGINING A HEALTHIER PLANET:

PROMOTING HEALTH AND WELL-BEING THROUGH THE ARTS

Curator: Jasmine Blanks Jones, Researcher, Founder & Executive Director, University of Pennsylvania/B4 Youth Theatre, US

REIMAGINING A SMARTER PLANET:

FOSTERING CREATIVITY IN EDUCATION AND LEARNING

Curator: Anna Abraham, Director of the Torrance Center for Creativity & Talent Development, Mary Frances Early College of Education in the University of Georgia, US

REIMAGINING A FAIRER PLANET:

ADVANCING SOCIAL JUSTICE AND PROCESSES OF DECOLONIZATION

Curator: Litha Sokutu, Cultural Analyst; Director, SLC Associates, Cape Town, South Africa

Conclusion

Over the course of a year and against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate emergency, and pervasive structural injustice, a global, diverse and engaged group of Salzburg Global Fellows came together to discuss the mutual challenges they face at the intersections of arts and culture with climate, health, education and justice, with a view to true systems change.

This joint inquiry, comprised of four Focus Groups meetings, three online Forums and the Collaboratory meeting in Salzburg, provided powerful opportunities to pause and consider: What divides exist and how do we bridge them? How can we improve and expand collaboration both within and outside of the cultural sector? What do we mean by systemic change and how do we really transform systems in a just, imaginative, and sustainable way? How can we imagine human and planetary flourishing and how can the arts and cultural sector play a role in this process?

In the process of inquiry, key themes and conditions for bridging divides, expanding collaborations, and transforming systems emerged across the various sessions:

- Create safe spaces for holding uncomfortable and dangerous discussions to build trust across divides
- For collaborations in those spaces to be meaningful, step outside of the silos and partner with unusual allies
- Create a new vocabulary but stay aware that language has its own limitations and potential harms
- Allow for vulnerability and enter the Kintsugi mindset: rejoin broken pieces with gold to allow for transformation with purpose
- Be aware who holds power and resources, and question privilege
- Radical love, trust, joy and empathy must overcome fear, rage and threat
- Deconstruct, decolonize, and redefine what knowledge is
- Focus on children as our future and our shared humanity
- Co-create in the spirit of reciprocity and equity with authenticity
- The creative power of the arts imagines new ways of seeing our shared humanity

Questions lead to new questions to consider going forward:

- How can we prepare ourselves to be comfortable with being in a room with people we do not necessarily see eye-to-eye with?

- Where do you meet those unusual and unexpected allies?
- What language and vocabulary should we use?
- How can we become more vulnerable and authentic in collaborations?
- How can we practice deeper listening?
- Why do we talk so little about love as a key condition for systems change?
- How can we move beyond the optics of wanting change?
- If children are the future, how do we create conditions for learning fit for the future?
- What do we need to unlearn to be able to co-create?
- How can the arts be a driver and not a victim of change?

It is with the power of joint reflection and inquiry that spaces are co-created with a new vocabulary, that new ways of collaborating to find solutions are discovered, and that systems can be transformed in a holistic way.



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