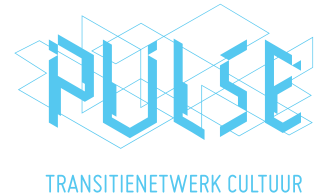


Culture as a driver of transition

Pulse – Cultural Network for Transition – June 2016



In 1972, the Club of Rome calculated that if we do not change our way of living we are heading for ecological and economic disaster by 2050. Following years of denial and business as usual, the risk now is that the ecological crisis has become too serious to cope with. At the same time, the awareness that the earth's resources are finite is greater than ever. Now, if our purpose is to establish a sustainable way of 'buen vivir' (living well) we have no choice but to respect ecological limits.

It is no longer possible today to imagine a world without global inter-dependence between societies. This means that the ecological crisis is not only a worldwide environmental crisis, but that it also creates more global social injustice than there has ever been. In order to give 10 billion people a worthwhile existence by 2050 and also respect our ecological limits, we shall have to change our social, moral and cultural frameworks.

In other words, developing a viable and just society involves more than working on a balanced ecosystem; it also includes social justice. There must be an intensive process of transition in which everyone helps build up a new, sustainable local-global model of society, and the development of 'ecological citizenship' is an essential component of this.

The cultural sector has huge potential when it comes to making a contribution to this transition and developing ecological citizenship, which gives everyone the opportunity to commit on both a local and global level. The imagination, shared vision and common set of values found in culture give meaning to our individual actions and the systematic underpinning of our society. Culture helps citizens to deal with the increasing complexity and uncertainty in our society and makes people think about the future, in dialogue with their fellow citizens. The cultural sector has an essential role to play in the task of involving people in thinking about how we want to live together and about how we want to relate to our surroundings, and in translating this thinking into actual action.

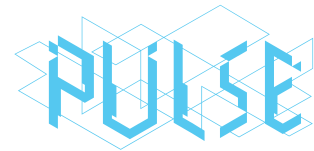
The role of culture: creating a space

Fundamental changes – a transition – in a society, in a way of thinking and living, require more than a rational, management-driven approach: they also have to be embodied and embedded, and must literally be given room. A process of change can only succeed if as many people as possible are involved in the process.

The cultural sector considers the transition towards a sustainable society to be the main challenge for 2020. To make this transition possible, we are aiming not only for a change in individual lifestyles, but also to encourage new practices in research, education, economics and political decision-making. Our goal is a societal and cultural 'mindshift'.

The sector will use its powers to involve both civil society and policy-makers in devising and shaping this sustainable and just future. The power that the sector possesses lies in its ability to create a range of places within society where people, groups and the players in civil society can meet and inspire each other, and where processes of reflection and action can be linked together. In this vision statement we highlight three particular areas that are intrinsically bound up with the cultural sector: space for the imagination, space for experiments in and practices of transition, and space for

reflection and public dialogue. It is with these spaces, created through cultural activities, that culture can fulfil its role as a driver of transition.



TRANSITIE NETWERK CULTUUR

Creative space for the imagination

Imagination, inspiration and creativity are important keys to the achievement of change. The cultural sector is, more than most, a creative space in which social change can be imagined. What visions of the world, man and life do we want to take as the basis for the development of a resilient society? Art and culture are realms for reflection on such major issues in relation to sustainability.

Space for the imagination creates a shared outlook. It gives meaning to human activity. It enables new ideas to be envisioned and new lifestyles and prospects for action to be explored. It embeds sustainability in everyday life. But for artists, imagination also means claiming freedom and experimenting, making room for critique and provocation, embracing heterogeneity and wanting the impossible. Space to question existing conventions and to repeatedly revise them in complete openness.

This freedom to think creatively about the ordering of society is a laboratory of the imagination, and autonomous art plays a pioneering role in this. Art makes it possible to experiment with the meanings, images and stories on which a society lives and to explore its possibilities and limits, all this with relative independence from prevailing values and norms. In the arts, fundamental reflection is developed on a number of themes that we associate with ecology and sustainability (refuse, economics, social inequality, the landscape, transport, wastage etc.).

Artistic creation is driven by the complexity of our society and surroundings and by critical reflection, not by notions of efficiency founded on economics. In the discussion of a transition to a sustainable society, the space for the imagination would appear to run counter to the extreme urgency of and drive for efficiency. A creative process can however give rise to surprising alternatives precisely by detaching itself from goal-oriented thinking.

Imagination would appear to be linked a priori to the arts sector, but in fact it applies to all areas of culture. So the space for imagination is an important part of the whole cultural sector. The creative process that takes place there fuels the thoughts and actions of this cultural sector.

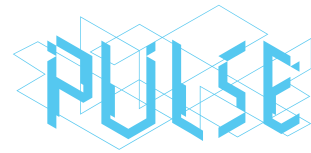
Space for learning, experimenting and experience

A transition to a sustainable society requires that citizens have as much and as relevant knowledge as possible. It is a positive trend that a huge amount of information on sustainable alternatives for organising society is currently in circulation. At the same time, for many citizens it is too great a challenge to distinguish from this rampant growth of complex information those parts that they can make use of.

In the near future it will be essential to gain a more profound knowledge of the fundamental causes (where is our system failing?), possible alternatives (being able – and daring – to conceive of another world) and successful experiments and practices. This sort of knowledge engages citizens and inspires them to take action.

Alternative and inspiring learning and experimentation spaces are essential in order to achieve this 'deeper' and complex form of knowledge. The cultural sector can create this sort of laboratory space in civil society in order to set up, repeat and scale-up experiments. Our tradition of individual

learning and acquiring knowledge has to be supplemented with processes of social and collective learning: gaining experience together, experimenting with alternatives and sharing knowledge.



TRANSITIE NETWERK CULTUUR

The cultural sector, with all its experience of learning processes (techniques drawn from socio-cultural education, community development, socio-artistic practices) can undoubtedly make a fundamental contribution to creating these collective learning and experiential spaces and to the development of prospects of concrete action, which would make a more sustainable lifestyle attractive. Special attention is hereby paid to the involvement of all the stakeholders, and especially to increasing the resilience of special target groups. Only then can we call it a just transition into sustainability.

These learning spaces can be created, stimulated and supported in both a local and a supra-local setting. Local community-forming initiatives close to people's daily lives make change concrete, attractive and feasible. Supra-local initiatives create a greater global consciousness and the prospect of justice.

Political space for public reflection and dialogue

In order to make a transition to a just sustainable society realistic, intense and ongoing public dialogue will be essential. The cultural sector has the role and the possibility of creating spaces for public reflection and dialogue where new connections are created between one citizen and another and between citizens and policy-makers. Issues are turned into a public matter and in other words are also politicised: they lead to public and political debate, where opposing arguments take shape – thus 'political' in its most original sense.

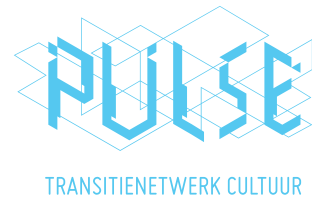
The essence of a living democracy is after all precisely that there are lasting conflicts and tensions between players who give shape to society on the basis of differing views and interests. In this political space, the starting point is no longer consensus as an ideal to be pursued, but an openness to complexity and difference. 'Transition' and 'sustainable development' are after all not concepts set in stone over which there is any consensus.

There are nuances that are repeatedly shifting, advocates and opponents of particular emphases. Furthermore, the concept of sustainable development itself is a principle to be aimed for and which has to be constantly repositioned depending on its context. But the differences between the players in this political space are also considered worthwhile. One of the concerns that is high up the agenda of the cultural sector is that all population groups can have their ways of life, needs and interests represented in the public space, and also that nature and 'things' are given a voice in the debate. It is only in this way that a basis is created that will enable the change in the social structures and systems to take place.

As a productive sector, culture also acts as an example in this public space. The sector will itself pursue a sustainable policy in various fields. The sector is making pioneering choices in terms of programming, organisation, staffing, HR policy, infrastructure, production and transport. Socially-Responsible Entrepreneurship is a clear choice in the cultural sector too. Working towards sustainability implies consistent choices.

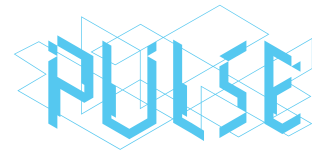
In short, the cultural sector as a whole reaches a lot of people, draws its vigour from these people's involvement and itself has the capacity to mobilise large groups of people. A sector that has

'encounters' at its heart is perfectly suited to intensifying public dialogue, fuelling debate and urging people to let their voice be heard and so bring about change.



The sector-wide network behind Pulse has formulated a number of ambitions for the cultural sector so as to be able to fulfil its role as the driver of transition. They have been noted down in 'a sustainability agenda for the cultural sector for the 2017-2020 period'.

A sustainability agenda for the cultural sector (2017-2020)



TRANSITIENETWERK CULTUUR

As a cultural sector we want to contribute to the transition to a just and sustainable society. To this end we are expressing a number of aims that we would like to take up with the whole of the heterogeneous cultural sector. These aims should be seen in the light of the vision outlined above. To achieve these aims, it is necessary to have a framework for recognition and support.

1. We endorse the UN Sustainable Development Goals (2015). On the basis of a critical-reflective position, we translate the SDGs, use them as guidelines, express clearly our contribution to their achievement, and communicate this to society.

We are systematically reducing our ecological footprint and therefore also the CO2 emissions resulting from our work. We are integrating the SDGs into our missions and operations and making our contribution visible.

We are working on the politicisation of sustainability issues: we are increasing awareness, putting sustainability issues on the social agenda and making them the subject of public discussion.

2. We are cooperating within the sector to reinforce the transition to a just and sustainable society.

We are making time, room and expertise available to work together on transition; we are organising sector-wide initiatives.

3. By means of co-creation we are working with other sectors on the transition to a just and sustainable society. In this way, culture, ecology and the social and economic realms form important pillars of this transition.

We offer inspiration by sharing cultural practices that critically question social developments and imagine a sustainable future. Together with other sectors we are developing broadly supported images of the futures and implementing them in projects. We bring several sectors and the scientific research community together, stimulate cooperation and experiment and thereby reinforce the transition on local, regional and international levels.