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ARTICLE

Advancing culture's role in sustainable development: social change through cultural policy

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the potential for cultural policy to shape sustainable development in the context of expectations arising from research and policy work on development. We use, as the basis of a critique, the categorisation of the relationship between culture and sustainable development proposed by a major study funded by the European Union, being emblematical of how researchers and policymakers understand this relationship. The critique highlights a need for multiscalar social change, towards revaluing relations with the natural world, and reforming social relations between producers and consumers. This paper locates cultural policy as an arm of governance, with the capacity to lead social change across several interdependent pathways (revaluing technological change; fostering an aesthetic appreciation and environmental ethical consciousness; and prosocial behaviour) alongside the development of more sophisticated governance frameworks. The paper further proposes that through (re)education, cultural policy can and should play a more active role in shaping social change.

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Consumption; culture; environment; social change; sustainable development

Introduction

During the last two decades, UNESCO and other multilateral institutions have been focusing on the role of culture and sustainable development. The 2003 UNESCO Convention emphasises the importance of intangible cultural heritage as a guarantee of sustainable development. This emphasis reflects an intellectual movement initiated with Perez de Cuellar's report *Our Creative Diversity* (WCCD 1996), underlining linkages between cultural diversity and sustainable development. Sustainable development was thereafter proclaimed to be closely linked to culture in numerous UN policies, including the Stockholm Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies for Development, committed to making cultural policies ' … [a] key component of endogenous and sustainable development' (UNESCO 1998). Subsequently, the 2005 Convention for the Protection and Promotion of Diversity of Cultural Expressions calls on signatory states to develop strategies to integrate culture and sustainable development in policy-making routines at all levels of governance (national, regional, international). In a further development, the UN proposes seeing culture as *driver* and *enabler* of sustainable development (United Nations 2013). In addition, the World Bank (2000) hosted a conference to explore mechanisms for securing financial and multilateral support for enhancing cultural assets and expressions. At the same time, a significant amount of research has been examining the policy links between culture and sustainable development, much of which has been synthesised in Dessein et al. (2015) [1] three roles of culture (in, for, as sustainable development). However, neither policy propositions nor research

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prescriptions highlight that achieving sustainable development through culture requires purposeful social change. Undoubtedly there is no uniform development pattern across societies, and intended change is accompanied by random unintended change (Irwin 2005; Vago 2003; Harper 1993; Eisenstadt 1973).

The culture concept defies definition, and is understood and valued differently within intellectual specialisms and among policymakers and beneficiaries. Writers (e.g. Williams 1977; Hawkes 2001; Nurse 2006; Radcliffe and Laurie 2006) variously refer to the social generation and expression of values and identity, structures of feelings, signifiers, a way of life, and cultural artefacts (embodying meanings and socio-economic organization). Culture is increasingly seen as more than a commodity, rather as a *resource* for development (Radcliffe and Laurie 2006; Yúdice 2003; Wilson 2003). As Yúdice (2003, 3) argues, culture attracts investment, is inclusive, and is 'inexhaustible kindling'. He sees implications for the governance of populations, where cultural policy could help enrol culture in the regulation of economic development, address social inequality and promote cultural diversity. However, as Sahlins (WCCD 1996, 13) notes, the understanding of culture is confused, as 'float[ing]' (Isar 2017 154) between humanistic and anthropological understandings, as 'binomial' (Maraña 2010, 2), and as simultaneously *means* to achieving economic development and *ends* when seen as the exercise of capabilities and freedoms (Sen 1999).

The notion of development, even with the currently fashionable qualifier of 'sustainable', is no less confused and confusing (see Isar 2017). Hopwood and O'Brien (2005) usefully highlights an array of understandings of sustainable development, from those seeing it as achievable within the 'status quo', to others that see societal 'reform' as necessary, and yet others, calling for societal 'transformation'. Those in the first group see social and environmental change as possible within existing structures of decision-making. They believe in enlightened consumers informed about sustainability, responsible business and 'green' capital, rather than more regulation. The reformers believe that policy intervention which informs government, science and technology, and market reforms, can over time achieve a desired change. The transformers see fundamental societal change as essential because existing power structures 'are [insufficiently] concerned about human well-being and environmental sustainability' (Hopwood and O'Brien 2005, 45).

Researchers have been scrutinising the connections between culture and sustainability, producing diverse normative and descriptive insights. For example, Nassauer (1997) argues that 'landscape ecology must be supported by cultural sustainability', with ecological quality being best achieved through cultivating our aesthetic experience and a sense of care for the environment. Garcia-Mira, Sabucedo, and Romay (2003) see culture as a mediator between human behaviour and the environment, and in turn sustainable development. Some propose culture as an additional pillar of the sustainability matrix, alongside social, economic, and environment (e.g. Hawkes 2001; Nurse 2006), while others argue it is 'the fundamental element of sustainability, which supports, interconnects and overarches the traditional three pillars (Auclair and Fairclough 2015, 7). Critically, Isar's (2017) observation of culture's ambiguous 'relationship with 'sustainability' and with 'development' highlights the malleability of these concepts. Difficulty in disentangling these concepts reflects complex and intricate patterns of interconnection, whereby everyday behaviour and norms are constitutive of culture (Sen 1999), shaping how diverse communities evaluate the past, act in the present, and imagine the future (Hawkes 2001). As Radcliffe and Laurie (2006, 231) note, 'cultural assumptions and hierarchies have always underpinned ideas of progress and development interventions'.

If developmental interventions are attempts at achieving broad positive social change, then further insight into what culture means, and understanding the role that culture plays in the pursuit of development goals are both critical to achieving that change. Indeed, following earlier work by Throsby (1997, 2012), there seems a surge of interest in exploring how cultural policy might contribute to sustainable development, as reflected in a relatively recent special edition of the *International Journal of Cultural Policy* (Duxbury, Kangas, and De Beukelaer 2017).

The conclusions of Dessein et al. (2015) four-year study of published works can be seen as a proxy for a broad range of perspectives on the relationship between culture and sustainable development. They

find three distinct roles for culture in pursuing sustainable development: supportive, connecting, and transformational. Unhelpfully, we are not told what intellectual logic or methodology generates these roles. The supportive role reflects a tendency to interpret culture as an artefact *in* sustainable development, as the arts and creative industries. The connecting role (culture *for* sustainable development) emphasises culture's policy potential for connecting or bridging the three pillars of sustainable development (social, environment, economic). The third role (culture *as* sustainable development) posits the transformational capacity of culture for achieving sustainable development. They adopt a managerialist perspective, where culture is seen as subject to policy control through rational assessment, measurement and accountability. This perspective is common currency within policy making, seeking to make culture work for development. For example, Radcliffe and Laurie (2006, 1) report that culture is '[increasingly seen] as a significant variable explaining the success of development interventions'. While Dessein et al. do advance understanding, they fail to engage with several critical and contentious social, political, technological, and ethical issues, all of which shape and reflect the culture – sustainable development relationship, including tensions between: consumption, population growth, and resource scarcity; international business interests and divergent national ideological commitments; economic growth and environmental degradation. Sustainable development calls for social and technological change, and this invites an interdisciplinary approach, reflexivity, attention to everyday practices (Berger and Luckmann 1967; Rayman-Bacchus 1996) and context in both sociological and technological senses (the mundane and taken-for-granted, the inertia of recipe knowledge and methods of working), and on ways of understanding the long-run dynamics of change if cultural policy is to challenge existing conceptual frameworks and insights. Dessein et al. do see policy development approaches as needing to be context-dependent, allowing for top down or bottom up, participatory or mandatory implementation. However, we argue that a managerialist perspective represents an exaggerated faith in both hierarchical control and emergent purposeful processes. We agree with Bennett (2001, para 2) who, following Horkheimer and Adorno, argue that 'we live in a political economy system where the commodification of culture, in all its forms, has become resistant to all but the most relentless strains of critical reflection'.

Our aim is, first, to add fresh insight to the relationship between culture and sustainable development. In particular, we seek to expose [1] epistemological assumptions about what counts as culture in terms of differentiated understandings, [2] underlying currents that shape culture's relationship with the natural environment, and [3] competing ideological economic cultures and their rationalities. Second, we propose pathways where cultural policy has the potential to shape social change. Just as Dubois (2011) and Bennett and Savage (2004) see a critical role in the cultural policy addressing social inequality, we suggest cultural policy has a critical role in shaping social change, fostering in everyday culture a commitment to sustainable development values and behaviour.

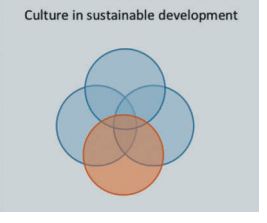
The rest of this paper is organised as four sections. *Methodological lens (culture in, as, for)* adapts Dessein et al.'s categorisation as a lens for understanding both similarities and differences, in particular, culture's tradability, alongside its instrumental utility and catalytic potential for social change. *Discussion* follows, proffering three critiques: *Critique 1* exposes epistemological assumptions about what counts as culture; *Critique 2* highlights humanity's estrangement from the natural environment and *Critique 3* shows that divergent ideological commitments around the world give rise to irreconcilable perspectives on what is important in (economic) development. These critiques are presented as discrete, but they overlap, highlighting the place of everyday behaviour, differing valuations of culture and attitudes to the environment, and differing perspectives on development. This discussion introduces the need for social change, taken up in *Toward achieving social change*, where governance and various pathways are suggested. *Conclusions* follow.

Methodological lens: culture <in, as, for>

Dessein et al. acknowledge that their three cultural roles 'overlap' but this observation remains unexamined: 'we settle on a usage of the term culture that encompasses all these perspectives,

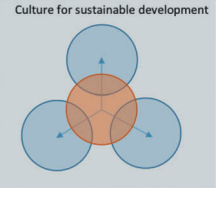
whilst recognising the possibility, indeed necessity, of both subdivision and overlap' (2015, 21). Unpacking this 'overlap' helps structure both understanding and policy approaches for social change. Reflection on their categorisation suggests its value as a methodological lens, conveying both similarity and difference within, and multiscalar interdependence across, categories or spheres, in the sense of Jensen and Jacobsen (2017) and Knowles (2015). The three categories or spheres (Jensen and Jacobsen 2017, 432) saturate each other, yet no individual category is privileged. The nature and scope of influence of each may be empirically established in particular contexts, yet their [inter]relationship is 'fragile and shifting, generating multiple forms of uncertainty in the lives and landscapes [they inform and reflect]' (Knowles 2015, 2).

Culture in sustainable development



Here Dessein et al. recognise Culture as a fourth pillar, reflecting a notion that 'culture counts' (WB 2000). This view epitomises the ascent of the cultural and creative industries as a separate and worthy human activity 'deserving its own domain in public policy' (Dessein et al. 2015, 30), contributing substantial value to economic development for both developed and developing economies (UNCTAD 2008, 2015), while helping to deliver the 2030 Agenda (SDGF). Thus, the cultural and creative industries contribute to sustainability, meeting economic and social objectives including GDP growth (Nurse 2006, 46), employment creation, regional development, urban revitalisation, the creation of social capital (Throsby 1999, 1997), and the promotion of social cohesion (Throsby 2012). Culture is 'valuable social capital … essential for human happiness … and … an engine for [economic] growth' (Park Geun-hye, President of Korea, in Koržinek 2015, 59). Consistently, the United Nations notion of *culture as driver of sustainability* similarly refers to culture's '[contribution] to a strong and viable economic sector, generating income, [and] creating decent jobs' (UN 2013, 6). However, as Dessein et al. acknowledge, this view of culture also encourages a limited perspective around art and creative industries, and cultural heritage.

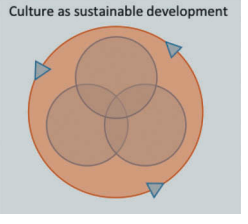
Culture for sustainable development



The second role of culture identified by Dessein et al.'s study is as 'driver of sustainability processes' (2015, 30), whereby culture is used to shape the aims of other public policies, for example, on livelihoods, industries, social and environmental policies. This view reflects Hawkes's (2001) proposition that the addition of culture to the original three principles (economic, environmental, and social) is essential for informing public planning; a view reaffirmed a decade later by the United

Cities and Local Government World Congress (2010). This view stresses the instrumental value of culture to policymakers seeking to direct or change social behaviour. From here, culture also provides the necessary contextual understanding for any proposed development. This view of culture is manifest in the UN discourse, *culture as enabler for sustainability*, developed in Road to Dignity by 2030, which emphasizes the need to 'mobilize the power of culture in the transformative change we seek.' (UN 2014, 36). This enabling role of culture is explained in one of the four UN General Assembly Resolutions on culture and sustainability as '[providing] peoples and communities with a strong sense of identity and social cohesion [that] contributes to more effective and sustainable development policies and measures at all level' (UN 2013, para. 5).

Culture as sustainable development



Dessein et al. identify a third stream where 'culture [is] the necessary … foundation … for achieving the aims of sustainable development' (2015, 32). This view seems both descriptive and prescriptive: culture seen as a 'matrix for particular ways of life' (2015, 32), wherein individual and collective values and actions strive always to sustain life but not at the expense of either environment or people. That the natural environment is critical to any assessment of sustainable development is not in question (Ahmed 1998).

Whereas in the second stream culture provides the necessary contextual understanding for any proposed development, here the understanding of any given culture does not straightforwardly inform policy, but is itself the target of policy ambition for social change. One of the most pressing arguments for continued economic growth is that it is essential to meet the needs of the very poor, a burgeoning world population, and (consequentially) to protecting the environment, and that this must be done within a sustainable development framework (Smith 1993). Failure to reduce poverty exposes the earth's natural resource to unbridled exploitation and destruction (MacNeill 1989). However, as Hawkes (2001) notes, there is a recognition that economic frameworks alone are not enough for planning and evaluating societal development, and that culture's potential for performing this role has been overlooked. Dessein et al. wonder whether it is utopian to conceive a society whose 'worldview' is fully oriented toward maintaining a sustainable way of life (2015, 32).

Discussion

Dessein et al.'s generalised notion of 'culture' ignores both important distinctions accompanying particular forms of culture, and the political significance of culture *in*. Each manifestation and interpretation of culture has a particular relationship with sustainable development, and these differences invoke particular policy implications and prescriptions for everyday practices *(Critique 1)*.

Dessein et al. (2015, 25) also see the culture–society relationship as a 'reciprocal relationship, in which culture constructs society but society also shapes culture'. This suggests a dualism that unwittingly underscores separateness between culture and ecology (*Critique 2*). Dessein et al. also pay no attention to the possibility of differing ideological perspectives, which carry implications for how we understand sustainable development (*Critique 3*).

Critique 1: what counts as culture?

Cultural referents

While the World Bank (2000) recognises diverse manifestations, Dessein et al. fail to account for the diversity of cultural categories. First, culture as an artefact is bound up with culture as everyday practices, both constituted of social and environmental relations, and which varies with economic development, for example, *consumer* culture in the developed and industrialising world and *survival* culture in subsistence economies. The culture of everyday life is imbued with symbolism and matching discourse and rhetoric (Kapitány and Kapitány 2012). For example, in many regions, we may speak of the consumption of everyday life (possessions, brands, advertising, wealth, public holidays, lifestyles, national identity), while in other states the militarisation of everyday life is evident in its discourse and practices. Second, cultural manifestations matter in any association with sustainable development. Consider three cultural referents of the past, present, and future: *cultural heritage, consumer culture*, and *culture and creative industries*. While they overlap, each refers to a particular social and aesthetic construction and reflection of everyday life, carrying significances for economic analysis, and particular valuations for sustainable development policy (UNESCO 2013).

While there is much encouraging rhetoric around the value of applying sustainable development principles to cultural heritage, evidence suggests that economic valuation matters most. For example, Nocca's (2017) examination of 40 case studies of the role of cultural heritage in sustainable development reveals that by far tourism carries the biggest impact. In most of these cases economic impacts stand out, with environmental and social impacts being disregarded; the conclusion being that *economic*, rather than *sustainable*, development is demonstrated. This evidence suggests the elasticity of the principle of sustainable development facilitates expediency, as entrenched political and business interests harness it to a *business as usual* strategy for development, wrapped in the language of ecological conservation and social development.

Consumer culture involves a fundamentally different challenge to sustainable development. Indeed, current global patterns of consumption are not sustainable, in terms of a growing population and its demand, growing inequality, and growing environmental harm (Worldwatch Institute). Consumer culture is mediated through markets, establishing a particular relationship between consumer and the products/services they consume (Arnould 2006). Consumers' relationship with what they purchase ' … is meaningful and reflects, and … reproduces, particular values and forms of status' (Miles 2017), and is less about the inequalities associated with ownership or access to particular products/services. Consumer acquisition and consumption facilitates the expression of the desired identity and helps orient interpersonal relationships; a process that simultaneously reinforces an economic system that, ironically, constrains individual choice.

Consumer culture is not incidental to everyday life, nor do consumers choose to participate. Rather, consumer culture envelopes and influences a significant part of our everyday preoccupations and experiences; it shapes our lived experience. Much anxiety about humanity's readiness to follow a sustainable lifestyle is rooted in doubts about how to reform an unsustainable cycle of consumption and production. Reducing production might have positive impacts on natural resources, but would have harmful consequences for employment and income, even facilitate a slide into poverty (Schnaiberg and Gould 1994); yet consumer culture does not simply tolerate, but thrives on, inequality. As Bennett (2001 para 9) observes, 'the issue is not *whether* to live with commodities but *how* to participate in commodity culture … [and] … how to reform commodity culture to render it more just and more compatible with ecological integrity'. Consumer culture is a core challenge to achieving a sustainable society, yet as Schouten (2012) observes, social science theoretical development and potential solutions around sustainable production and consumption seem seriously undeveloped.

The *culture and creative industries* had its genesis in 1997 when the newly elected UK Blair (New Labour) government created the Department for Culture Media and Sport ('Digital' was added in 2017), as an important plank for a post-industrial knowledge economy (Pratt 2005). Widely adopted

by other economies, its creation represents a deliberate cultural policy goal of harnessing (then) seemingly disparate creative activities to economic ends (UNCTAD 2008; Flew and Cunningham 2010; Hesmondhalgh 2007; Garnham 2005), seeing their production and consumption less a publicly funded good and more an economic generator. In his critique of the achievements of creative economies, Banks (2018) highlights attendant social inequalities in the distribution of economic benefits generated (i.e. exploitation of labour). He also exposes the assumption of an intrinsically ecologically clean sector as a fallacy, pointing out its intensive energy usage and associated pollution, and limited recycling. With him, we lament the limited space afforded to cultural ontological development, in the face of economic growth priorities.

Interpretive flexibility

The interpretive flexibility afforded by culture opens the door to its (mis)appropriation for political or ideological ends. An ambiguous global commitment to preserving intangible heritage creates a pretext for states to pursue projects of national identity building, often at the expense of fostering (global) sustainable development. For example, arguably 'art, architecture, literature, theatre, dance and music also provide some of the most translatable, tangible and permanent media for the expression of national identity' (Radbourne and Fraser 1996, 9), allowing governments to harness cultural reproduction as part of pursuing a national cohesion project (Radcliffe and Westwood 2005, 18). China's Law on Intangible Cultural Heritage sets forth that protection of intangible cultural heritage 'shall be conducive to strengthening the recognition of the culture of the Chinese nation, maintaining the unity of the nation and promoting social harmony and sustainable development' (Article 4). Such nationalist identity reinforcing projects act against cultural diversity within the nation state, and at the same time against globalism, insofar as the latter relies on a shared desire among nation state authorities to prioritise and support a broader collective sentiment towards protecting the global commons.

The UN proposes *motivation* as a mechanism for achieving desired social change, encouraging lawmakers to exploit a sense of social cohesion among its citizenry noted above (UN 2013, 2014). However, the motivation of this sort is double-edged, bringing us again to the dangerous fields of forged mono-culturalism. For example, governments seeking citizenry acceptance of policies of any type often exploit unifying rhetoric, such as patriotism, in order to create a sharper sense of national identity (e.g. Nielsen 1996). Such cultural nationalism promotes convergence toward a dominant culture, and thus fosters attitudes contrary to liberal values and cultural diversity (Ariely 2011).

Nussbaum's (1995) criteria of objectification usefully highlight culture's *instrumentality* (as a political tool) and *violability* (subject to control). Dessein et al.'s framing of culture as a policy tool (culture *as*) values this instrumental quality and violability. Two authors from Dessein et al. subsequently elaborate that ' … culture can be considered not only as a *structural component* [emphasis added], but as *a necessary agency* [emphasis added] in the transformation towards a more sustainable society' (Soini and Dessein 2016, 173).

Handler et al (1984) study of the cultivation of Quebecois nationalism shows that Western cultural logic imagines nonmaterial phenomena, such as culture, as embodied and tangible. This (Western) tendency to objectify or embody culture (Whorf 1956, in Handler et al. 1984), commonly reflected in cultural theory and anthropological theory (Handler et al. 1984), masks its complex processual and semiotic nature, comprising both persistent imagined patterns (traditions) and continual change (reinterpretation), objectively apprehended and subjectively experienced (identity). Guided by our unreflective inner logic, we create (objectify) our culture informed by some ideology (e.g. nationalist), continually reinterpreting our milieu. As Handler et al (1984, 61) explains,

> … culture is not continuously exist[ing] natural objects or bounded traits, but … invented semiotic objectifications … created when one set of cultural representations … is reinterpreted …, thereby becoming … new … representations which, nonetheless, can refer to … prior [representations].

Merlan, like Handler et al., sees links between the politics of tradition and the objectification of culture. The dominant European-Australian society tends to equate Aboriginal demands for cultural recognition as demands for political self-determination, and tends to expect Aborigines to accept a Western conservationist view of culture, 'which emphasises finished artefacts [as separate to] their processes of social reproduction' (Merlan 1989, 1). In his study of the Melanesians, Harrison (2000) argues that societies have always been conscious of the instrumental value of culture, and that how culture is valued may change over time with the emergence of new identities. These studies highlight not only the objectification of culture, but also its political significance.

Critique 2: loss of intimacy with our natural environment?

In emphasising culture's artefactual interpretation (culture *in*), Dessein et al. unwittingly take for granted its objectification (translating subjective value into objective value), reification (projecting permanence, hypostatization, materiality), naturalisation (as somehow natural) and mystification (market mechanism obscuring the lived experience and social relations that constitute our world). The treatment of culture resonates with Marx's 'commodity fetishism', where producer–consumer relations amount to prioritising economic valuations over valuing social relations between people (Rubin 1990, 5). The subjective and abstract qualities of culture are ascribed objectivity, tangibility and economic value people see as having intrinsic value.

Commodity fetishism is accompanied by alienation, detachment between subject and object, nature and culture, and the abandonment of a relational stance (Muecke 2017; Hornborg 2006; Latour 1993; Krutch 1954); paradoxically a detachment that is itself cultural. Taking a social ontological perspective on humanity's social practices, Lukacs (1968), following Marx, holds the capitalist system responsible for the 'laws of society' (Lukacs 1968, 54), unconsciously held as 'natural' by all, and involving 'reification of all human relations, … rational analysis [and abstracted assessment], … without regard to human potentialities transforming the phenomena of society' (Lukacs 1968, 6). Honneth (2005, 93) sees the continued significance of reification in contemporary everyday life, as an 'aesthetic aura of … creeping [pathological] commercialization'. This reification 'of social life processes' is not a moral failure but a natural product of everyday practices (Honneth 2005, 7), which Feenberg (1986, 2014) reinterprets as the anthropological equivalent of culture as everyday practices. Through the everyday performing of economic transactions, we have developed an attitude of detachment and calculus toward others and nature, overshadowing our innate care and affective attachment to our world. This detachment induces a contemplative stance of casual indifference, emotionally unaffected by our environment (Lukacs 1968, 38), and fatalistically discounting our capacity to reform our predicament. Through routine unselfconscious practice this attitude has become natural (Lukacs 1968), and a 'habit of perceiving [ourselves] and the world around us as mere … objects' (Honneth 2005, 98). This is not a failure in moral principles but a social pathology (Boyd 2013), a general condition of human estrangement from nature, and a manifestation of Marx's alienation, rooted in social hierarchical relations. Critically, as Bookchin (1993, 1) observes, 'the way human beings deal with each other as social beings is crucial to addressing the ecological crisis'. These intersubjective relationships underpin 'the hierarchical mentality and class relationships that … permeate society [giving] rise to the habit of dominating the natural world' (Bookchin 2007, 1). Social and ecological problems are inseparable; indeed, crises in one are commonly rooted in the other.

The notion that societies wedded to the capitalist economic system possess such a social pathology is being voiced among bloggers, but seems undeveloped within mainstream research into humanity's failure to fully engage with sustainable development. While policymakers, activist groups, business leaders and other elites acknowledge the need to pursue sustainable development strategies, an engrained anthropocentric and pathological commitment to economic valuation continue to drive our understanding of the challenge and appropriate strategic response to achieving sustainable development. This anthropocentrism underpins the principles of the SDGs

(Ganowicz-Baczyk 2015; Adelman 2017). We need to address the root causes of the pathology itself (our economic system, the growth imperative, industrial expansion, corporate self-interest) rather than its symptoms, e.g. technology or trade imbalances (Bookchin 1993).

To suggest there is a failure to understand either culture or the nature of sustainable development is to invest mankind's relationship with the inhabited world with unwarranted objective intelligibility (Pacelli 2017, 5). Dessein et al (2015) ideas represent a widely held belief in humanity's separateness from, and control over, the natural world. This understanding misses the unity and dissolubility, the inter-subjective nature of our existence, not only in its social sense (a context of shared human experience) but also in our relationship with the natural environment, such that according to Abram (1996, 33), '[t]he world and I reciprocate one another. The landscape as I directly experience it is hardly a determinate object; it is an ambiguous realm that responds to my emotions and calls forth feelings from me in turn'. As Pacelli (2017, 1) points out, the (scientific) anthropological view considers humanity as objectively unique, ignoring humanity's unity with the inhabited world. Our self-consciousness and capacity for propositional thinking provides us 'unremitting angst about being in the world, and an abiding sense of moral obligation'; characteristics that raise hope for humanity's prospects of salvation, not only economic but also environmental and social.

These philosophical arguments add valuable insight to the relationship between culture and the natural environment, and by extension to humanity's challenge of how to live sustainably. Culture shapes, and is shaped by, the natural environment, and by social and historical settings of communities. Indeed, communities draw their sense of identity and belonging from their relationship with their natural environment. Reitan (2005) argues that from a deep ecology perspective, humans are failing to understand their intrinsic interdependence with all other entities constituting our shared ecology, and we therefore continue to undermine any prospect of a sustainable future. For Plumwood (2002) the reigning western philosophical and anthropocentric arrogance is leading to ecological collapse, and the notion of sustainable development encourages an *out of sight out of mind* attitude toward future generations, undermining any sense of urgency. Critical of what she sees as a persistent and harmful ethical human/nature dualism, Plumwood (2003, 3) argues that western culture is 'facing a major challenge' unable to ' … re-envisage ourselves as ecologically embodied beings akin to, rather than superior to, other animals … '.

Critique 3: whose (sustainable development) utopia?

Dessein et al (2015) culture *as* sustainable development presumes progress towards some utopian vision of sustainable development, set in a universal ideological context, but there is no discussion of what constitutes such a world view. From a global perspective, we should acknowledge the existence of at least two interdependent political-economic ideological worlds (Manno 2004): the largest industrial and post-industrial economies, and their partner newly-industrialised and emerging economies. There is near-universal acknowledgement that both worlds need to curb their polluting practices and voracious appetite for natural resources. The first world – largely Western – is caught for decades now in a political ideological struggle between conservatives for whom free market economics is paramount, and ecologically informed liberals who embrace environmental protection and regulation. The second world comprises societies in a different ideological struggle, between would-be modernisers (westernisers), seeing industrial development as progressive change, and jurisdictions where political institutions cling to traditional grids of power and ways of life and development.

As Radcliffe and Laurie (2006) observe, many of these processes are rooted in shared beliefs about the supremacy of Western culture and modernisation. Global growth of the cultural and creative industries (Flew and Cunningham 2010) suggests an opportunity for developing economies to benefit economically and socially from their own cultural resources (Garewal 2005). UNESCO and UNCTAD (2013, 26) recognise the developed economies carry 'first mover' advantages

over developing economies, but see the 'idiom[atic] and 'idiosyncratic' nature of culture as equally valuable for the latter. However, as Crane's (2014) study of the USA film industry highlights, such developmental aspirations are too easily undermined by the naked determination of developed economy industries to grow globally, with scant interest in the survival of local developing economy alternatives. Using Free Trade Agreements with individual countries and support from the USA government, plus storylines likely to appeal globally, Hollywood was able to sidestep UNESCO and its aim of preserving diverse cultural resources (Jin 2008, 2011). The almost universal belief in 'neoliberal globalization' (Flew and Cunningham 2010) – the valuing of competition, open markets, and ideas about opportunities born of new technologies – crowds out alternative developmental approaches.

Dessein et al.'s conclusions seem to privilege bottom-up policy approaches: 'Sustainability exists as a process of community-based thinking that is pluralistic where culture represents both problem and possibility, form and process . . . ' (2015, 32). While this would satisfy post-development thinkers (e.g Escobar 1995; Ferguson 1994), valorisation of the local has been discredited (Kiely 1999). Post-development thinking overgeneralises the relationship of Western-initiated development with the global South, understating the capacity of Western-driven development to adapt its approach to a cultural context, and at the same time overstating the extent to which local traditional communities are better placed to conceive and execute culturally appropriate development (Radcliffe and Laurie 2006). As Kiely (1999) argues, local initiatives are not necessarily progressive, and by privileging grass-roots movements, post-development thinking empowers traditionalism at the expense of enlightened socio-economic development.

Cultures are multiple, diverse, and interwoven, wherein what counts as sustainable development reflects particular geographies, technological practices, traditions, histories, and ideologies, and differing social ontologies (Verco and Brinkmann 2012). Dessein et al.'s generalisations also ignore important global contours, where there is a complex and multiscalar interdependence between culture and sustainable development, as Radcliffe and Laurie (2006) reveal in their study of development in Bolivia and Ecuador. Their work reveals that within a global frame of reference, development strategies may comprise several levels of interaction between international, national and regional policies and local histories, institutions and geographies. This is a multiscalar relationship between (Western) development ideologies and local (non-Western) culture and not simply a clash between top-down policy prescriptions and bottom-up locally cultivated solutions, as post-development thinkers would suggest. We inhabit a culturally diverse and interconnected world (economic, social, political, ecological), overlaid with competing ontologies, and ideologies of development, none of which Dessein et al.'s assessment of culture and attendant policy scripts reflect.

Moreover, there is no universal understanding of sustainability or sustainable development; such understanding is rooted in differing socio-economic ideologies, differing assumptions and assessments of the risks to humanity, and differing technological solutions. Dessein et al.'s underplaying (if not dismissal) of the difference between sustainability and sustainable development ignores the confusion surrounding the sustainability notion (e.g. Isar 2017), and unavoidably weakens their assessment of the role of culture. Further, there is disagreement about what should be the scope and scale of humanity's ambition, reflected in notions of *strong* or *weak, broad* or *narrow* sustainable development. There is also both confusion and disagreement over whether our vision should be for sustainable development or sustainability, the former being anthropocentric and requiring economic growth, while the latter imagines the unrealistic maintenance of some state of equilibrium for all living organisms therein (Lovelock 1972; Schwartzman 2002; Turney 2003).

Further, while focusing on the contextual role of culture, they ignore fundamental challenges to achieving sustainable living, common to all cultures. First, humanity's addiction to hydrocarbons is so strong that breaking this dependency requires 'a collective realisation that the survival of our species depends on how effectively we keep human nature in check, and heed Mother Nature's warnings', and multilateral efforts 'sustained in perpetuity' (*The Atlantic*, 12 November 2015).

However, the evidence shows oil and gas remains by far the main source of energy, and likely to remain so for the foreseeable future (IEA 2018).

Harnessing culture to the universal goals of sustainable development seems doomed to fail, if it relies on the willingness of individuals and their communities to discount (perceived) higher order economic imperatives in favour of a less tangible (sustainable) common good. Evidence shows communities tend to abandon their commitment to sustainable development when presented with a less onerous path to economic survival, as shown by the failure of a conservation project financed by the Asian Development Bank in Indonesia:

> … achieving the project's goals proved extremely difficult … because the target group was keen on improving their livelihoods but not in the sustainable manner envisioned by the experts. Instead of planting economically useful native tree species, they resorted to monocropping cacao and recolting rattan within the park and protested against the attempted enforcement of its boundaries (Ziai 2009, 191).

This readiness to prioritise economic advantage without recourse to sustainability principles exists in communities across the globe, regardless of the level of development (e.g. the ongoing search for hydrocarbons, the practice of monocropping).

Toward social change

The preceding discussion alludes to the need for both broad social change and change in everyday practices in consumption and production. It suggests a loss of intimacy and aesthetic sensitivity towards nature, and that existing and competing ideological perspectives on development do not adequately appreciate the fragility of the natural environment, or of humanity's relationship with it, as we continue to prioritise economic value thereto. It also suggests that culture and sustainable development are at the same time divisible and inseparable, so that social change projects must be both targeted and multiscalar. The differences within and between roles may suggest complexities that frustrate unifying patterns of explanation, but their interrelations also invite novel insights and potential for social change. As Sen (1999) observes, addressing the complexities of behavioural patterns and everyday practices must recognise the presence of conflicting interests, valuations, and perspectives. Within any democratic framework, citizens must assess and work out how to reconcile these conflicts while safeguarding inclusiveness in potential development goals and strategies.

Pursuing sustainable development goals, however understood, requires an understanding that social change (in social interaction, social process, and social organization), as part of cultural change, is an evolving reality, the causes and consequences of which are poorly understood. It involves the gradual transformation of everyday practices, values, norms, attitudes, traditions, social structures, institutions, slowly shaping both the understanding of and the political conditions for sustainable development. At the same time, the understanding of the 'culture-sustainable development' relationship is both culturally grounded and socially negotiated, evolving as society develops, and driven by many factors, including crises, stakeholder activism, and innovation (social and technical). Directing social change toward sustainability principles is already active globally, but there is no global understanding of their diversity and efficacy.

How is social change to be conceived and achieved? Simply advocating or producing policy frameworks, or entering international agreements and conventions will not suffice. The hegemonic ideological chains of neo-liberal globalization and its preoccupation with economic growth need to be challenged by alternative governmentality and pastoral power mechanisms (i.e. mentalities, institutions, policies and practices of governance) (Martin and Waring 2018; Hursh and Henderson 2011).

Cultural policy and strategies could harness culture's motive potential through social change and action, where social change is 'the occurrence of an alteration in the form or functioning of a significant group, institution, or social order' and social action 'the undertaking of collective action to mitigate or resolve a social problem' such as environmental degradation (Kotler 1971,

693). Cultural policy has the potential to play a critical role in leading and shaping social change, by widening its gaze beyond cultural production, to also helping catalyse everyday cultural practices and perspectives. We locate cultural policy as a critical arm of governance, where it is well positioned (i.e. access to institutional resources, to multilateral and national policy arenas, and to public attention) to shape thinking and practices along particular pathways.

Governance

Initiatives that motivate and guide sustainable behaviour should form part of every governance regimes (whether hierarchical, collaborative, or otherwise), informing every level (global and national, to local and individual), but as Norström (2013) notes in referring to achieving the SDGs, we 'should take into account ideologies, religious beliefs and institutions, including formal and informal rules and customs'. We remain critically aware that national histories and interests determine practices (in, as, for). Nevertheless, these differing perspectives can no longer legitimately provide the only reference point for social change in light of the global collective challenge to sustainable development. Our world is a kaleidoscope of historical, political, economic, ethnic, and cultural groupings, comprising Western capitalist countries, developing and undeveloped countries. Governments of stable and democratic capitalist countries are in principle willing and able to regulate, to varying degrees, *homo economicus* through strong legal frameworks and multilateral agreements. Many states fall outside this, including failed states, weak states, and strong but repressive states. While most nations may embrace the Washington consensus (democracy and free market economics), their diversity presents policy makers seeking to promote sustainable development with inestimable challenges. Neither national nor multilateral institutions alone are able to provide global governance and to provide global public goods (Kaul 2013). While national governments may legitimately enforce regulations within their jurisdiction, global governance requires voluntary engagement, and weak or even absent enforcement mechanisms. This is not a call for a Hobbesian leviathan authority over a commonwealth of nations, but for a polycentric and multilateral process to which governments, international institutions, civil society groups, and business contribute knowledge and resources (Braithwaite and Drahos 2000; Detomasi 2007). Whether protection of the global commons is even possible is not settled (Hardin 1968; Ostrom 1990), but there is optimism (Hardin 1994; Dietz, Ostrom, and Stern 2003), and cultural policy can make a difference through collaboration with other policy spheres, and (re)education strategies.

Much social change requires reimagining deeply embedded principles and assumptions, both macro (economics) and individual (ethical compass). To this end, the human agent is reflexive, and therefore open to goal setting influences. Further, culture is a public good, and given the SDG commitments noted above, governments (democratic and non-democratic) have a duty to consciously drive cultural policy strategies rooted in sustainable development philosophies, encouraging the development of some form of cultural democracy (e.g., Duelund 2001; Mulcahy 2017). In addition, if culture is to support governance through its potential to contribute to contemporary problems of social relations (Yúdice 2003), then it needs to be not only a resource, but also a site for ontological reflection and action involving 'the potential for examining life' (Banks 2018, 370). Here democratic cultural policy would focus on the social educational development of the citizenry, providing equal opportunity for all to participate in the creation and experience of aesthetic cultural activities rooted in ideas and practices contributing to sustainable development. We lack a collective consciousness of our intimacy with nature, which – to borrow from Luckacs on 'class consciousness' – 'is concerned neither with the thoughts of individuals … nor with the state of scientific knowledge' (Luckacs 1968, 53). Cultural policy can facilitate the development of an appropriate *collective will*, in consort with both government sanction (essential) (deHaven-Smith 1998) and educational frameworks. Together these strategies shape how we may overcome our numerous crises before they lead to some ecological and social failure (Beddoe et al. 2009).

Pathways

The above discussion suggests cultural policy may focus on particular pathways of influence, alongside other governance strategies (e.g. tax and (re)educational): directing technological innovation for social and environmental good; developing an aesthetic valuation of the environment, as well as an acknowledgement of a moral obligation thereto; and promoting pro-social behaviour.

Technological innovation is fundamental to all cultures (Custer 1995), involving the creative application of knowledge, and organised methods of working and everyday practices. Adapting Percival and Ellington's (1988) deconstruction of technology (*in* and *of*) to sustainable development shows that investment in developing technologies *in* sustainable development (i.e. renewable energy) look set to remain marginal compared with a continued global commitment to hydrocarbons (IEA 2018). Similarly, while there is attention to developing new methods and repertoires in technologies *of* sustainable development (e.g. the Natural Step), these methodologies remain marginal to everyday practices everywhere (at home and work). More broadly, the UN General Assembly of the SCESC (UNGA 2017, 2) finds 'public response lagging technological progress [and] governments widely seen as being behind the curve on many of these technological changes'. Nevertheless, technological innovation is critical to progressing social change, even as its intended and unintended impacts cannot be predicted (UNGA 2017, 3). The challenge for cultural policy is to guide technological change that promotes human well-being and development while protecting the natural environment.

Additionally, social change requires a renewed aesthetic appreciation of nature. According to Brady (2006), an aesthetic, though instrumental, valuing of nature already informs everyday practices, for example, Volvo Australia (unashamedly) seeking to harness an environmental concern to its marketing campaign (*The Drum*, 3 July 2018). Cultural policy could encourage an aesthetic rather than utilitarian valuation of the environment; a perspective fundamental to developing an environmental ethic (Eaton 2001; Irvin 2010; Loftis 2003). Following Beddoe et al. (2009, 1), there needs to be a 'focus on a sustainable quality of life rather than the proxy of unlimited material growth', which requires developing stronger environmental aesthetics and ethics. This demands an approach involving multiple scales and time: educating peoples in all spheres of life and subsequent generations, including multilateral policymakers, investors, government, local community leaders, and families. Individual areas of life demand particular strategies so the prescriptions can be only general.

Achieving meaningful social change often requires communities to be forced to act (out of self-interest), supported by raising awareness and persuasion (via cultural mediation and motivation). Additional strategies may be necessary; persuasion, for instance, should be complemented with coercion and re-education (Kotler 1971). But even then, social change may be unsuccessful. In the Asian Development Bank conservation project cited, government efforts to 'coerce' the local community into sustainability were unsuccessful, as was the effort of NGOs employed to 'educate the farmers, introduce participatory monitoring and facilitate their signing of community conservation agreements' (Ziai 2009, 191). Positive change in the face of such resistance calls for more inventive governance strategies, involving subtle changes in policy over time encouraging people to act in their own self-interest (Thaler and Sunstein 2008; O'Hanlon and Wilk 1987).

Research into social change tends to focus on either the macro or micro level (Hansen and Postmes 2013). Both levels matter. Economic structures exert strong influences on people's behaviours and attitudes towards sustainability (Dobson 2007). At the same time, individual behaviour may be manipulated, for example, by financial incentives, to produce a desired behavioural change in the short term, but this approach is less effective in changing underlying attitudes. Still, given enough social momentum and regulatory sanction, behaviour change that promotes 'pro-social' attitudes could overcome or redefine self-interest (Dobson 2007, 279). Achieving pro-social attitudes requires both endogenous (voluntary reflexivity) and exogenous effort (regulatory sanction).

Conclusions

This paper explores the relationship between culture and sustainable development through three differing but interdependent lenses: in, as, for. We highlight [1] an unexamined and unjustified assumption about the nature of culture, that fails to acknowledge its differing manifestations, each of which carries particular cultural policy considerations; [2] a general attitude of separating and privileging economic over social and environment principles, with an anthropocentric understanding of humanity's place in the natural world; and [3] divergent understandings of, and ideological commitment to, sustainable development.

Adapting Dessein et al. into a methodological lens, we highlight that rationalistic assessments of the culture – sustainable development relationship hide epistemological confusion, ontological effects and the significance of competing world views of our evolving understanding of sustainable development. *Critiques 1, 2*, and *3* highlight these effects, and suggest there is need for much greater reflexivity not only among policymakers, but also greater individual exposure (through social education) to aesthetic valuation and environmental ethics, leading to reformed everyday practice.

First, we find that culture *in* sustainability is more accurately concerned with improving sustainability *in* culture, highlighting the commodification of culture and cultural products and traits of particular communities or nations. This privileging of the economic valuation of culture (in both practice and policy propositions for sustainable development) contributes to economic development, but do not support the matrix of sustainability values. Second, in culture *for* sustainability, we highlight the instrumentalist value invested in culture and the importance of recognising the cultural context in pursuing sustainable development work. There seems a presumption that culture can straightforwardly be enlisted by policymakers in pursuit of social change. However, cultural malleability allows resistance to a policy prescription, as nations and communities may suspend commitments, and hold in tension many potentially competing imperatives, in particular, economic and environmental priorities, nationalism, progressivism, and traditionalism. Culture *for* sustainability encourages the unrealistic expectation that particular societies will be able to put their differences to work for the global (sustainable) good. Third, in culture *as* sustainability, we highlight the potency of competing political economic ideologies, set in a context of near universal agreement on the need for action on sustainability issues, ratified in several treaties and trade agreements. However, these competing ideologies harbour significantly different attitudes to environmental sustainability and social justice.

Contradicting Yúdice (2003), the forms of culture examined here can hardly be accepted as inexhaustible or inclusive. Material heritage is irreplaceable, the creative industries exploit finite natural resources, as does consumer culture, and it is the exploitation of labour and disregard for human rights that unwittingly attracts investment. Indeed, culture as a resource needs to be qualified. Here we highlight its economic and political value, to which cultural identity is bound if not subsumed.

While most states recognise culture as being significant to sustainable development, there remain many economies, both industrial and industrialising, whose everyday practices stubbornly remain antithetical to the spirit of any understanding of sustainable development. There are many reasons for this (e.g., financial, technological, institutional), yet there is a constant danger of judging such states as simply behaving irresponsibly thereby undermining any potential for cooperation. National policy statements that culture is fundamental to sustainable development will not of themselves lead to social change. These public commitments need to be translated into social change strategies and actions that are both effective globally and respectful of cultural diversity. There is global recognition of our shared socio-environmental challenge and the need for collective action, but such action needs to be directed (at sustainable development), be appropriate to local technological capabilities and financial resources, while acknowledging traditions, institutions, and collective aspirations. Further, overcoming resistance to change while fostering sustainable attitudes and behaviour needs to be evolutionary yet directed, with an integrated yet

differentiated approach. We propose that cultural policy, in consort with multilateral and national governance regimes and (re)educational frameworks, is well positioned to drive social change along a number of pathways: directing technological innovation for social and environmental good; developing an aesthetic valuation of the environment, alongside acknowledgement of a moral obligation thereto; and promoting pro-social behaviour.

Note

1. Dessein et al. (2015) is the outcome of COST, a comprehensive survey of published works 2011–2015, funded by the European Union. It involved around 100 researchers from 25 EU countries, plus Israel, New Zealand and Australia.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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