



Cultural sustainability

The Fourth Pillar or a Transformative Power

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Photo: K. Siivonen



Starting point: the need to address ecological problems

- Ecological problems are decreasing resilience of various living environments and destroying prerequisites for well-being (Steffen et al. 2015)
- Already decades ago, there has been an understanding of several levels of leverage points for systemic sustainability transformation, and the need to operate on the deepest levels of them in order to reach the transformation (Abson et al. 2017; Meadows 1999)
- It has been pointed out that policy interventions typically does not address the deep level leverage points, and thus fails in its target of sustainability transformation (Abson et al. 2017)
- The deepest level of leverage points consists of multiple worldviews, human-nature relationships, and from them arising goals and actions (see Abson et al. 2017), in other words of basic cultural expressions



Intentionality

- Cultural sustainability is in my definition different intentional actions towards sustainability
 - It has an impact on e.g. culture
- It is possible to critically study the sustainability of culture as such and the impact of cultural sustainability actions on human beings, culture, and nature
 - What should sustain in culture(s)?
 - What kind of impacts are there?
 - Are these impacts sustainable, and if, in what way?



Framework and river

- Two basically different definitions of culture (Goody 1994)
 - Relatively stable, contextual structure which gives a framework to social activities (framework, Geertz 1957)
 - Sustainability is preservation and safeguarding of cultures and cultural elements
 - A global social process, in which culture is constantly renewed and co-created in interaction
 - between human beings and
 - between human beings and their tangible and intangible, cultivated and non-cultivated as well as culturalized and non-culturalized surroundings (river, Hannerz 1992; Boudes 2011; Simmel 1988)
 - Sustainability is safeguarding of the living process of culture (e.g. Siivonen 2017)



Ethics in ethnological research and normativity

- Ethics in ethnological research: Respect for the diversity of human beings and different cultural expressions, and for rights of human beings to their own cultural expressions
- Respect for human rights: “Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as [...] political or other opinion” (United Nations 1948)
- A normative goal: Ecological reconstruction – or construction of a new, ecologically sustainable world

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Inclusion and participation

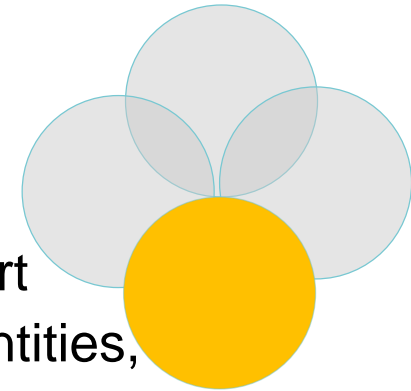
- The core of cultural sustainability can be seen as the right of people to take part in and have an impact on the own culture – culture as framework – or on the cultural change in the own cultural environment – culture as river – together with other people
- However, this does not guarantee the direction of the cultural change towards sustainability of any dimension
- In spite of this, the possibility to take part and have an impact can be seen as a condition of cultural transformation towards sustainability
- Siivonen 2002; 2003; 2017; 2008.

Photo: K. Siivonen

Culture *in* sustainable development

Dessein et al. 2015, 29-30

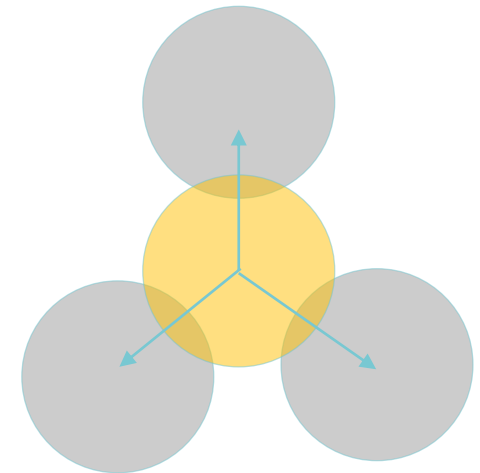
- Culture as fourth "pillar" (in the picture represented in orange)
- E.g. culture as art; creative activities; tangible and intangible cultural heritage
- Follow principles of cultural policy
 - Culture as absolute value; cultural rights
 - Preservation / safeguarding / conservation of heritage and art
 - Safeguarded culture seen as support for economy, local identities, local communities, regions, nations, natural environment
- Focus in human made tangible and intangible cultural items
- Primarily focus is neither in human beings nor in nature



Culture **for** sustainable development

Dessein et al. 2015, 29-31

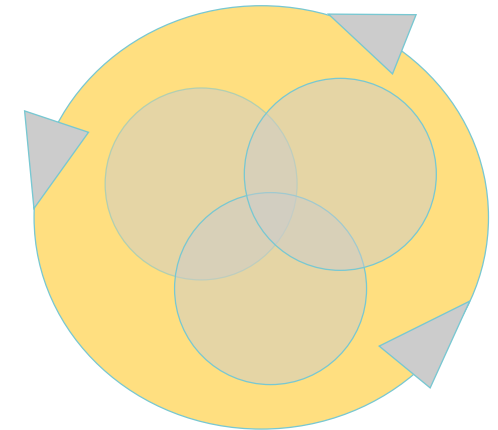
- Culture (orange) as driver of or instrument for sustainable development – connecting and mediating
- "culture can be the way to balance competing or conflicting demands and work through communication to give human and social meaning to sustainable development"
- Landscape services
- Ecosystem services
- Creative economy
- Green care
- Etc.



Culture as sustainable development

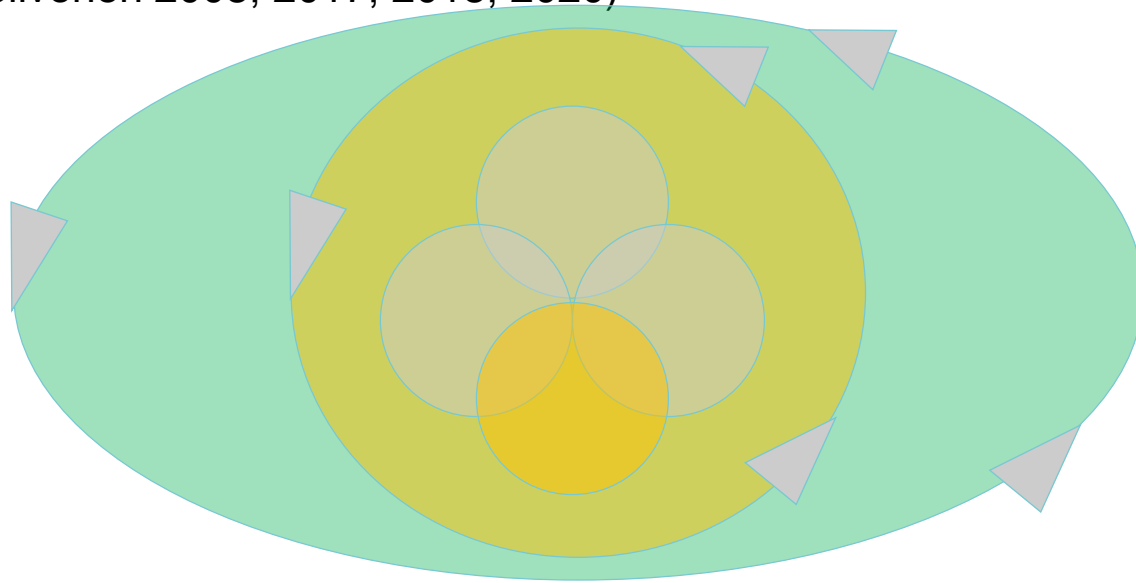
Dessein et al. 2015, 29-31


- "Culture (orange) takes on its evolutionary, holistic and transformative role, providing a new paradigm to the question of sustainable development"
- Evolutionary culture, eco-cultural civilization
- Culture as a "fundamental new processes of social learning that are nourishing, healing, and restorative"
- Global ecological citizenship has hardly been realized (Duxbury et al. 2017)
 - There is a need for cultural means to target cultural transformation
 - However, it is not easy to implement global cultural citizenship and transformation to be a part of national or regional cultural policies



Cultural sustainability transformation as a part of nature

- Care of the transformative power of the interactive, interconnected, and changing process of culture and nature, including both tangible and intangible elements of the world, and care of everyone's possibilities to have an impact on this process without harming others and compromising possible and preferable futures
- Culture (orange, anthroposemiosis) and nature (green, semiosis) including four dimensions of sustainability, (Siivonen 2008; 2017; 2018; 2020)



A close-up photograph of a dark, textured tree branch. A small, reddish-brown bud is visible near the top left. Below it, several young, bright green leaves with serrated edges are emerging. The background is a soft-focus blur of green foliage and brown branches.

Thank you
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Photo: K. Siivonen

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