



Fig. 1. "The big bambu" sculpture, MACRO, Rome. Image by Mike and Doug Starn.

## BEYOND SUSTAINABILITY: INCORPORATING ENVIRONMENTAL CRITERIA IN PLANIFICATION, IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION OF CULTURAL PROJECTS

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*This article reflects on the concept of cultural sustainability, paying special attention to the environmental impact of cultural projects and how cultural managers are slowly beginning to include immaterial values and social context linked to tangible cultural heritage.*

*The essential role of culture for sustainable development has been more and more recognized at an international level and its global vision as a driver of sustainability is slowly being adopted in artistic practices which involve a high level connection with community.*

*From local to global, from community projects to profit-making cultural businesses: all stages and all types of projects are beginning to incorporate this emerging vision. Furthermore, green certifications appear and projects deeply rooted in their territories and which explicitly recognize their ties with the land and the environment, become role models.*

*New proposals often have such an integral vision that are hard to classify as artistic, social, or local revitalization projects. Yet, despite this fact, all of them convey some common aspects which have a great difference with previous practices, such as the notions of sustainability and environmental values, or the community and environment surrounding the project as key factors.*

*Despite these positive developments, there is still a lot of work to be done.*

### **Keywords:**

cultural sustainability – environment – immaterial value – community – green certification – local – territory – Integral vision – social – regulation – quality standard – Interdisciplinary

### **1. CULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY?**

The availability of a large number of literature on cultural sustainability and the role of culture for sustainable development reveals both the relevance of such concepts and the complexity of defining them<sup>1</sup>. But beyond these complex discussions, in this article we will reflect on the concept of cultural sustainability giving special attention to one of its aspects: the environmental impact of cultural projects and how cultural managers are slowly beginning to incorporate its practices.

Although sustainability does not yet hold a primary role in cultural management, in most countries there is a growing number of examples of cultural practices

which consider environmental issues a priority. We are fortunately witnessing how the ecologic impact is increasingly being taken into account at all stages of work as well as how specific measures are implemented on a diversity of cultural projects.

Some organizations have already incorporated the figure of the Sustainability Manager and, most importantly, in some countries spontaneous professional networks are emerging as a consequence of the genuine growing concern over this subject. Besides, local governments have already been working towards the development of more sustainable cultural policies for some time now, as the Agenda 21 for culture<sup>2</sup> [<http://www.agenda21culture.net/>] (2004) reveals.

<sup>1</sup> We would not even think of adding to the ever growing debate of defining these terms, but we shall make it clear from the start that we will be using the term 'cultural sustainability' based on the meanings of the 'Conclusions from the COST Action IS1007 Investigating Cultural Sustainability' (2015). It takes as main starting-point the definition of 'Sustainable Development' from the 'Brundtland's report' ('World Commission on Environment and Development', 1987): "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs", but it also introduces an interesting hint by suggesting that 'Sustainability', in contrast, might be less associated with further development (related also -but not only- to economic growth) and more linked to social equity, environmental and justice goals.

<sup>2</sup> 'The Agenda 21 for culture' claims to be the first worldwide document promoting policies and actions by cities and local governments for cultural development. It was approved in 2004 by cities and local governments from all over the world to consolidate their commitment to human rights, cultural diversity, sustainability, participatory democracy and creating conditions for peace. It is the founding document of the world organization of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG).



Fig. 2. "The big bambu" sculpture, MACRO, Rome. Image by Mike and Doug Starn.

All these activities indicate, regardless of the length or the impact of each, the growing importance of the subject. From museographical low-impact approaches, to socially responsible private initiative, music festivals, heritage preservation, sustainable cultural routes or recycled art events, this trend keeps growing. Thus, elements such as the CO<sub>2</sub> generated by an event, the involvement of local communities or the use of biodegradable material are progressively taken into consideration not only in project planning but in its development and final evaluation too. These aspects, traditionally considered 'politically correct', are gradually becoming truly crucial, not only for the obvious positive perception that an increasingly aware audience especially sensitive to those subjects might have, but for its multiple benefits for people and environment.

With regards to public policy and international recognition of culture in sustainable development, Hawkes, in *The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability* (2001),

was the first scholar to place culture in the same level with economy, society and environment, as having equal dimensions of public policy. Furthermore, the essential role of culture for sustainable development has been more and more recognized at an international level. The resolution of the Rio+20 summit *The future we want* [<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/futurewewant.html>] (2012) mentions culture in a number of paragraphs, recognizes the relationship between people, their ecosystems and their cultural heritage, and claims the links between culture and biodiversity. Besides, the UNESCO Hangzhou Declaration Placing culture at the heart of sustainable development policies (2013) represents a major step towards the acknowledgement of culture as a key factor in global sustainability, as it is the first time that the international development agenda clearly refers to the role of culture as a driver and enabler of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development<sup>3</sup>. This recognition integrates culture in the majority of goals from a

<sup>3</sup> UNESCO. 2013. *The Hangzhou Declaration. Placing Culture at the Heart of Sustainable Development Policies*. Hangzhou.

cross-cutting approach, including those referring to the environment, sustainable consumption and production patterns, sustainable cities or food security, inter alia.

Through this article, we will briefly expose how culture and environment are inextricably interlinked to other dimensions of public policy related to sustainable development and how culture professionals are becoming gradually committed in their practices to respond to these emerging demands. We will also overview the huge challenges that culture faces in the adoption of this perspective.

## 2. A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH FOR AN UNATTAINABLE SECTOR

Culture is an extraordinary, broad and diverse ecosystem and, in such a complex field, it is not an easy task to tackle the very wide-ranging diversity of projects that, from heritage to creative industries, forms the cultural sector. It is consequently impossible to establish universal environmental standards for such a diversity of cultural projects, especially when the issues we deal with are often also constrained by other aspects, linked to social and economic circumstances.

With this in mind, throughout the article we will briefly mention some examples and initiatives which will illustrate the gradual introduction of sustainability criteria in different types of cultural projects. We will also identify key factors when implementing cultural schemes from a sustainable perspective, concluding with a brief overview of the multiple challenges that incorporating environmental criteria involve.

From a heritage point of view, the notion of conservation has also progressively broadened its meaning to include immaterial values and social contexts linked to tangible cultural heritage<sup>4</sup>. The conservation of 'living historical areas' has long been approached taking into account their human dimension, and certainly not only from strictly

museum-oriented perspectives. Thus, although challenges and complexity increase, maintaining this new dimension of conservation gains efficiency and sustainability. This approach is also present -and probably most obvious- in cultural trails creation projects, naturally focused on historical, cultural and natural assets<sup>5</sup>. The emphasis in publications such as Culture Routes Guide (2016) illustrates the importance of this point in a broad spectrum of project typologies and reveals the direct effect that it has on the planned results. In other words, in any cultural project, engaging local communities has an immediate effect on the project results and sustainability. Furthermore, in those communities with deep ties to the area where such projects are being developed (especially but not exclusively rural areas) they have a major and direct significant impact, not only in the expected cultural output but also in their environment conservation.

Back to the museologic perspective, examples worth mentioning are 'Operation Green Museums' [<https://sustainabilityofheritage.wordpress.com/>] (2012, UK) or 'Museo, go green' [<https://museogogreen.com/>] (2012, Spain) both of them unfortunately not working any more, but they still provide interesting resources on museums, sustainability and innovative community engagement practices (the latter containing a significative collection of good practices and reflections).

## 3. SUSTAINABILITY 'PIONEERS'

The earliest references to sustainability, applied to several cultural manifestations, are in the late sixties and early seventies, probably due to the global raising awareness of the times, concerning ecological and social problems<sup>6</sup>. The emergence of ecomuseums and the scepticism about the art system at the time, led to the current global vision of culture as an instigator of sustainability with a high community connection, which is now being adopted in artistic practices.

Nowadays more and more projects are tackling these issues<sup>7</sup>, but there are certain types of projects that do

<sup>4</sup> Especially regarding urban conservation in historic towns: "The concept of heritage has evolved. It's no longer just about beautiful buildings, but also about what people value and treasure" (Jacques Dalibard, International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) Canada) in 'Sources' [<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0011/001144/114490e.pdf>].

<sup>5</sup> UNESCO ratified the Cultural Routes Charter in 2008. They have had a steady growth in recent years, due to the increase of sustainable tourism projects.

<sup>6</sup> Associated to the end of the Cold War, sustainable art concept appears as a critical position towards some key practitioners in the land art movement of the 1960s.

<sup>7</sup> Although there are differentiated approaches to environmental sustainability between developed and developing economies, this is a global phenomenon. The report *The arts and environmental sustainability: an international overview* (Moore, S and Tickell, A. , 2014) gives an idea of the sustainability concept implementation worldwide.

Fig. 3. Dugnad exercise, TANDEM cultural manager exchange programme, 2013, Berlin, Germany. Image by the authors.



not need to implement this idea because they were devised to this end from the very beginning. Those many unknown local projects have a lot to say in this new context. For years, local small-scale cultural projects have been developed, taking into account their environment ecologically, socially and culturally because it was its nature to do so. For this same reason they often did not emphasize environmental issues initially; they were naturally integrated.

Those pioneer projects followed cultural sustainability rules 'only' by applying common-sense on their immediate context. They were being environmentally responsible not merely -but also- as a result of working in connection to the places and communities where they were located, most commonly rural areas. The survival of the project itself was linked to this inherent sustainability, making it a conscious choice. In most cases, ecomuseums, cultural routes or artistic residencies located in rural settings, for instance, took

care of these aspects and articulated their projects in accordance to them naturally<sup>8</sup>. One of these examples is the *Centre d'Art i Natura de Farrera* [<http://www.farreracan.cat/>]. Established in the nineties in the Catalan Pyrenees, it is a recognized work residence project for artists and researchers. And certainly, National Parks conservation and interpretation projects rooted in the theories set by Freeman Tilden<sup>9</sup>, would be an obvious but essential example of this case, often including a cultural heritage dimension in its developments.

From another perspective, within a sector where environmental actions were harder to find until much later, Julie's Bicycle is a leading example. Now a reference organization, it was created in 2009 within the musical industry but rapidly expanded to a theater scene as well. Now they work side by side with the English Arts Council to implement sustainable standards for creative industries across the country.

<sup>8</sup> ... and quite often with great difficulties due to the lack of investment and support from the administrations, mostly in quite remote areas. The isolation of some of these projects was partially offset by the creation of networks that were later strengthened thanks to the Internet. Sharing common local challenges, exchanging knowledge and increasing their visibility through the net is now a must and for many of them crucial for their -still often compromised- survival.

<sup>9</sup> Tilden inspired the principles and theories of heritage interpretation in his book *Interpreting our Heritage* (1957) together with his following books.

This effort to achieve common reference systems, networking and training has led the trend to its current scenario.

Recognizing and learning from these experiences should be a great asset for new projects with a sustainable approach. These generally carry a most open intention towards sustainability and master better specific terminology and communication tools, but they might lack the necessary experience.

#### 4. THE NEW APPROACHES: COOPERATION

In recent years, as a consequence of aspects such as society's greater environmental awareness, the growth of the commons notion or the increasing involvement of civil societies, social and environmental aspects had regained centrality when designing cultural projects. Incorporating ethical and environmental criteria now becomes essential not only for people but, as mentioned above, it is also being more and more fostered by public administrations. These aspects are, therefore, considered of general interest for society as a whole (and often represent potential savings too).

This shift in perspective leads to the comprehensive incorporation of good practices and new proposals like awareness-raising campaigns, km 0 caterings in cultural events, creation of recycle-centered initiatives or the appearance of new 'green' grants towards this global commitment. Some recent examples are the #OneLess campaign<sup>10</sup> [<http://happymuseumproject.org/can-museums-help-reduce-plastic-waste/>] (2016) to reduce plastic waste, adopted by some London museums, or the CCCB Cultural Innovation International Prize [<http://www.cccb.org/en/framework/file/climate-change/224133>] (2014) to innovative cultural projects which, in the last edition (2016-17), raised awareness about climate change through empowerment and active society involvement in environmental responsibility. At the same time, the number of calls on sustainable artistic projects continues to grow.

The ecological print, for instance, is adopted in well-known cultural mobility programs<sup>11</sup>. Other initiatives also emerge, even in the so-called 'creative industries', more focused on business, such as the audiovisual. We have for instance *Ecoprod* [<http://www.ecoprod.com/en/>], a group of six big French audiovisual industry companies, who since 2009 develop and provide professional resources to reduce the environmental footprint of their business. But not all is about big players in the socially responsible audiovisual sector. A lot of small organizations such as *Band Films* [<http://bandfilms.co.uk/>], a small production company based in Bristol, is providing an eco-friendly option for filmmakers.

Professional networks are also emerging as a result of these concerns. *The Happy Museum Project*<sup>12</sup> [<http://happymuseumproject.org/about/>] (2011, UK) or 'IMAGINE 2020 – Art and Climate Change network'<sup>13</sup> [<http://www.imagine2020.eu/about-us/>] (2015, EU) are two interesting examples of this phenomenon, who provide good practices, tools and training for art and culture professionals. In Spain networks like *Arte Sostenible* [<http://www.artesostenible.org/>] (Barcelona, 2008), a non-profit association of culture art professionals set an early example, still going on.

Collaborative work becomes central and mapping initiatives becomes a usual resource for organising this collective work. The 2010 *MMM's Sustainable Ability map* ([www.sustainableability.com](http://www.sustainableability.com) currently inactive) was an interesting experience that mapped best practices and initiatives in response to climate change across the cultural sector in the UK<sup>14</sup>.

Collective actions make complete sense in a context where community-based proposals and collaborative dynamics are crucial, as mentioned above. From the UK, comes yet another example, *Transition Town Tooting* [<http://transitiontowntooting.blogspot.com.es/>], a collective creative response to peak oil and climate change at grass roots level, looking at

<sup>10</sup> #OneLess, is a local campaign that aims to reduce single-use plastic water bottles in London.

<sup>11</sup> See 'Green Mobility – A guide to environmentally sustainable mobility for performing arts' [<http://on-the-move.org/files/Green-Mobility-Guide.pdf>].

<sup>12</sup> *The Happy Museum Project provides a leadership framework for museums to develop a holistic approach to wellbeing and sustainability. The project re-imagines the museum's purpose as a steward of people, place and planet, supporting institutional and community resilience in the face of global financial and environmental challenges.*

<sup>13</sup> *The IMAGINE2020 network consists of 10 EU based arts organisations which bring together performing arts venues and festivals across Europe. It is funded by Creative Europe, with a focus on raising awareness in the cultural field and in a broader civil society context around the issues of the socio-ecological crisis.*

<sup>14</sup> *Although no longer on-line, the following document explaining the project is still available: <http://www.emergence-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/Sustainable-Ability.pdf> (2010).*



Fig. 4. Roman aqueduct and pelicans nesting, Selcuk Municipality, Turkey. Image by the authors.

resilience building and practical activism. From local to global, from community projects to profit-making cultural businesses, all stages and all types of projects are beginning to incorporate this emerging vision.

Professional networks multiply while environmental festivals based on this system have become a reality. *Cape Farewell* [<http://www.capefarewell.com/about.html>] project (2001, UK/USA) is another example of extensive collaborative network-based artistic organizations. It works internationally, bringing together artists, economists and climate scientists to deliver measurable engaging initiatives for change and communicating them in an inspiring way. The festival *ArtCop21* [<http://www.artcop21.com/>] (2015,

Paris), with an extensive global programme of over 550 major events across Paris and in 54 total countries worldwide, is another example of the global approach of these actions and the extent of the engagement of civil society to put pressure on public administrations.

At the same time, international green certifications appear (i.e. ISO 20121 for sustainable events) and environmental assessments are increasingly common in cultural contexts<sup>15</sup>, while art-activists<sup>16</sup> or local artistic residences are growing in importance. Projects and centers deeply rooted in their territory<sup>17</sup> and which explicitly recognize their bonds with the land and the environment, become role models, and new proposals often have such an integral vision that it becomes

<sup>15</sup> *Julie's Bicycle* [<http://www.juliesbicycle.com/>], is one of the benchmarks for success also in this context.

<sup>16</sup> *The works of Isaac Cordal* [<http://cementeclipses.com/>] (i.e. 'Waiting for Climate Change' series, 2013) and *Ellie Harrison based in Glasgow* (Radical Renewable Art + Activism Fund [<http://www.rraafund.org/>], 2015) are specially interesting.

<sup>17</sup> *Addend* [[http://addend.comissariat.cat/?page\\_id=216](http://addend.comissariat.cat/?page_id=216)] (2014) is a contemporary art center based in a rural area of southern Catalonia, that aims to establish a dialogue with its immediate natural and human environment through visual contemporary arts, taking into account an eco-friendly approach from its construction to the artistic projects developed.



Fig. 5. Ancient marbles and nature, Sounion, Greece. Image by the authors.

hard to classify as artistic, social, or local dynamisation projects<sup>18</sup>. In this regard, the above mentioned vision of culture as a pillar of local policy-making, is being increasingly adopted by local governments<sup>19</sup>.

There are, indeed, countless initiatives of all kinds, but the truth is that most of these cultural projects are small, often led by non-profit organizations with a limited scope of action<sup>20</sup>. Even when we focus on 'cultural industry' we usually talk about micro-businesses and free-lancers<sup>21</sup>. They still face significant problems to ensure continuity and they

are confronted with huge complex challenges that require multidisciplinary approaches.

But despite this great diversity and speaking very generally, all the examples brought here convey some common aspects that make a big difference with previous practices and are key factors in any sustainable project:

- Values as a major focus: despite having one or two main goals, the notions of sustainability and environmental values are central or very important for these projects, whether based on rural or urban areas.

<sup>18</sup> The Xisqueta project [<http://www.xisqueta.cat/en/sostenibilitat/>] is a perfect example of that: a local revitalization project undertaken by Xisqueta Obrador, a non-profit organization (High Pyrenees) established in 2009 in order to pay a fair price for the wool sheep Xisqueta to a number of shepherds and shepherdesses who still grow this breed.

<sup>19</sup> In 2002 a working group of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), the largest international top body for local government, was formed to prioritize action around the role of culture in local development.

<sup>20</sup> See 'Priority Sector Report: Creative and Cultural Industries' [[http://ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-databases/newsroom/cf/itemdetail.cfm?item\\_type=254&lang=en&item\\_id=5654](http://ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-databases/newsroom/cf/itemdetail.cfm?item_type=254&lang=en&item_id=5654)] (The European Cluster Observatory, 2014).

<sup>21</sup> *Creating growth. Measuring cultural and creative markets in the EU. (EY, 2014)/ Cultural maps. The first global map of cultural and creative industries. (EY, 2015).*



Fig. 6. Ancient Vravra, Archaeological site and Natura 2000 European network of protected areas, Eastern Attica, Greece. Image by the authors.

- Transparency: they are aware of the ‘audience’ values and, most importantly, always communicate choices and processes that are aligned with them
- Local actors: the community and environment surrounding the project become key assets.
- Global actors: sectorial networks are central
- Communication: the use of the Internet to spread and replicate practices is crucial and carefully considered in the whole process (planning, implementation, evaluation).

## 5. A LONG WAY TO GO

Despite these positive developments, much remains to be done and we are still far from a broad

standardization of sustainability in cultural practices for all fields. The international demand for an open inclusion of culture as a specific goal or as a transversal aspect on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development [<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>] of the United Nations<sup>22</sup> did not succeed. However, it set the scene for a continued collaboration among several international networks, and a number of working documents remain and are ready to be used when working out cultural sustainability in the future<sup>23</sup>. Other public policies and international declarations, as the Culture21: actions<sup>24</sup>, are ready to be used in the implementation of long-term local cultural policies.

Cultural managers need to insist on incorporating sustainable measures in their projects, but at the same time international ‘green’ standards for

<sup>22</sup> The Special Summit on Sustainable Development, held in September 2015 at the UN, approved the final outcome document ‘Transforming Our World’, which set out the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets that make up the 2030 Agenda. For several years in the run-up towards the adoption of the new SDGs, several global networks campaigned, under the banner ‘The Future We Want Includes Culture’ [<http://culture2015goal.net/>], for culture to be explicitly included in the final document.

<sup>23</sup> The UCLG Committee on Culture, is planning the publication *Culture in the Sustainable Development Goals: A Guide for Local Action* for late 2017. It is based on the work of the UCLG Committee on Culture, as well as on contributions made by several other organisations.

<sup>24</sup> The document *Culture 21: Actions* was approved on 18-20 March 2015 in Bilbao, within the framework of the first Culture Summit of UCLG.

cultural organisations should be supportive and widespread and a comprehensive vision of project planning should be adopted. Thus, regardless of any cultural project's form, making a significant change cannot rely only on each cultural practitioner's own responsibility. It is therefore of great importance to regulate, and elaborate guidelines and to establish quality standards. And better regulation is not just about making proposals but also about implementing

them later on. So, as in sustainable cultural projects, a balanced global-local scheme supporting sustainable policies is essential here as well for the success of these huge challenges.

In conclusion, cultural managers, artists, specialists, curators, art practitioners, researchers, cultural organizations, festivals and public institutions but also private stakeholders, law-makers and politicians, we

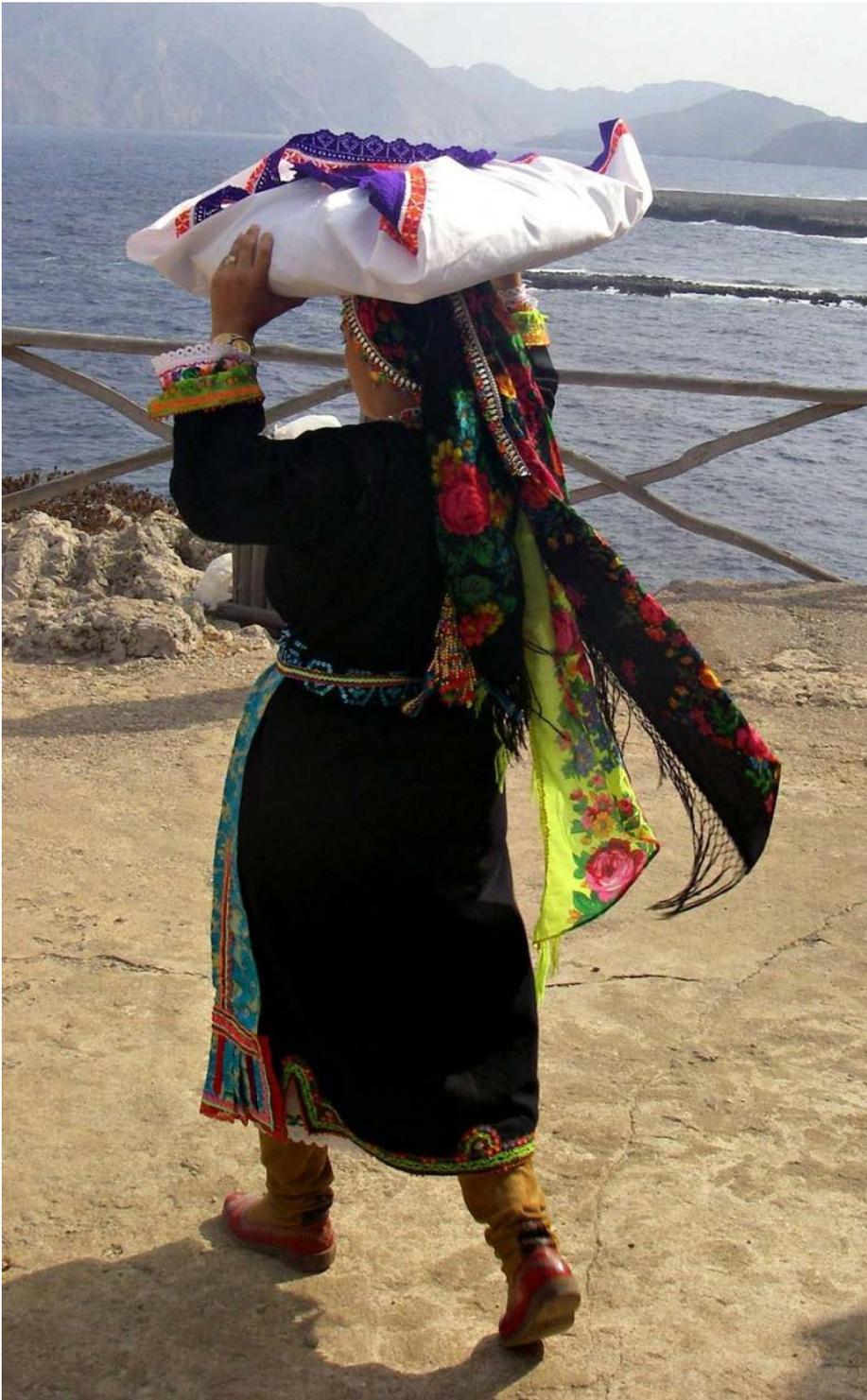


Fig. 7. Vroukounta, Walking to the "Panyiri of Ai Yianni" celebration, Karpathos, Greece. Image by <http://www.arpatheavillas.com>.



Fig. 8. Vroukounta, Walking to the “Panyiri of Ai Yianni’ celebration, Karpathos, Greece. Image by <http://www.arpatheavillas.com>.

must all rise to this challenge and take responsibility. An interdisciplinary approach based on building networks and values is now the most important tool to deal with this new context. We are going through a

new phase with huge challenges and goals to achieve in our profession, and we should therefore be able to create new opportunities and take responsibilities in making this indispensable difference.

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