



REPORT

**Green European Foundation, with
the support of Green Foundation Ireland,
hosted a Symposium**

"Art, Food Security and Climate Change"

**as part of The Burren Annual 2015
*"Beyond Sustainability"***

Burren College of Art, Ballyvaughan, Co. Clare

Friday 14 and Saturday 15 August 2015



***The Burren Annual 2015: Beyond Sustainability
addressed the question of sustainability and culture by presenting
a combination of art exhibition, seminar and workshop,
plus a field trip and tasting event.***

Culture, the fourth pillar of sustainability, was first introduced in a joint policy statement by Agenda 21 for culture and United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) in 2010. Since then it has become more widely accepted as an integral component of sustainable development. Sustainability almost always includes implicit and explicit qualitative elements such as moral and ideological perspectives. The arts play a vital role in challenging ways of thinking. They allow us to make sense of our existence and the environment we inhabit. They allow us to explore various perspectives, belief systems and new ways of being, while simultaneously enabling us to find and share common expressions of our values and needs.

Jon Hawkes wrote in the paper "*The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability*" that the arts are the paramount language through which shifting social meanings are presented. Adaptability is a hallmark of sustainability, and is fostered through an open and participatory process. Enriching communities through shared artistic and cultural expression assists them in expanding their ideas, learning new practices and becoming more diverse and thus more sustainable.

Importantly this provides a platform that can allow us to meet challenges we face as stewards of the planet in the changing climate; to make sense of our existence and the environment we inhabit; to find common expressions of our values and needs; and to meet the challenges presented by our continued stewardship of the planet.

FRIDAY 14 AUGUST 2015

POTATO/BATATA Exhibition, Burren College of Art Gallery

Environmentalist, Broadcaster and Chair of Green Foundation Ireland, **Duncan Stewart** opened the Exhibition POTATO/BATATA, which is a collaborative project between artist **Deirdre O'Mahony** and Chicago-based artist **Frances Whitehead**, in the Burren College of Art Gallery and made an impassioned plea for action on Climate Change. Deirdre outlined her vision of the Exhibition, which investigates and reflects upon sustainability, food security and rural/urban relationships, with reference to projects in Ireland, the USA, Spain and the UK.

The Exhibition is a thoughtful and elegant example of relational art and a challenging socially engaged practice. The Exhibition featured pods of sweet potato plus learning hubs, thematic ceramic plates used to host the dinner and form part of the Exhibition, as well as potato related artworks, maps and displays of literature, tuber specimens and libraries.

POTATO/BATATA is based on the pan-Atlantic diaspora of new world tubers, the potato (*Solanum tuberosum*) and the sweet potato (*Ipomoea batatas*), and reflects the on-going movement of plants and people that have shaped and continue to shape world agri+culture, the food system and the landscape. The project consists of a mirrored pair of tuber plantings in the US Midwest and in the Burren.

SATURDAY 15 AUGUST 2015

Seminar and Workshop: ART, FOOD SECURITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

The morning Seminar "*Art, Food Security and Climate Change*" addressed the themes of the Exhibition and their broader social and societal impact in the current climate of environmental crisis. The President of the Burren College of Art, **Mary Hawkes-Greene** welcomed participants to the event, and **Nuala Ahern** outlined the inspiration behind the event which, as Deirdre O'Mahony had suggested, was that artists could make visible the uncomfortable changes that we know are happening to our world, but are not visible to us in a way that impels us to action. **Conor McGrady**, the Dean of Academic Affairs at the Burren College of Art, introduced the theme of the morning seminar, after which **Deirdre O'Mahony** led participants in a tour of the Exhibition and spoke about the inspiration behind it.

The Seminar was chaired by **Seamus Sheridan**, who is a Galway cheesemonger and the Irish Green Party Spokesperson for Food.

The first presentation was by **Cristian Bettini** (*FoodCultura, Barcelona*) who introduced a video of a potato festival in Lima, Peru and spoke about the importance of food in the everyday experience of nature for people of every type and location. Cristian outlined his ideas on the relationships between art and culture, new media and the environment, food chain and conscious approach to nature. These are all combined in a creative activity together with an additional experience garnered in the fields of activism, travelling and the studies in philosophy and observation of the primary processes concerning human being and territory, with his walking projects offering a more tactile and symbolic storytelling of the landscapes, an aesthetic tool for collective memory and knowledge. Cristian has been a member of FoodCultura as researcher since 2013.

Eileen Hutton (*Artist and Lecturer in Art and Ecology, Burren College of Art*) gave a presentation on sustainability and art, aimed at generating a reciprocal relationship with the natural environment. Her work aims to create new ways of understanding landscape representation and is a model for engaged and informed interaction with the environment. She addressed the topic of Environmental Art, a sweeping term which varies greatly in definition, purpose and execution. It can refer to art that raises awareness of ecological issues or tries to restore balance within a depleted or damaged environment.

Environmental art can range in overtones from the overtly political, critically activist, feminine and socially engaged to the romantic and neo-romantic. It can range in its chosen media from photography, installation, sculpture, painting and drawing. Should environmental work strive to be socially engaged? Does it need to be? Is there room for non-quantifiable ecological art? Is it enough for work to be symbolic or must it be functional? Can work be a model or does it become merely symbolic and is that enough? These are some of the questions she raised during a beautiful visual presentation of her work.

Oscar Rando (*Fundació Nous Horitzons, Catalonia*) gave a rousing description of the local social and environmental movements around the El Prat airport in Barcelona, and how they had retained land there for cultivation in the face of attempts to locate Euro Vegas on this rich agricultural land. Oscar is a social educator and social entrepreneur who works with the hope that collective construction, the social economy and the awakening of the social movements are creating another possible world.

Duncan Stewart (*Environmentalism, Broadcaster and Chair of Green Foundation Ireland*). Duncan's *Eco Eye* is Ireland's longest running environmental series and one of the most popular shows on Irish television – there have been thirteen series so far. A firm believer in the power of local community co-operatives, Duncan actively engages with the 'Get Involved' sustainable community initiative, which promotes local, voluntary, community-led projects nationwide.

This 'bottom up' movement sets out to inspire and enable innovative local collaborative enterprises to flourish, which stimulate rewarding new livelihoods in sustainable energy, local food produce, biodiversity enhancement, water catchment protection and eco-tourism.

The panel speakers were followed by a **Round Table Discussion "Generating Change? Arts Practice and Rural Sustainability"** which was chaired by Conor McGrady.

Lunch was followed by an **Afternoon Workshop** entitled *De Smaak te Pakken* ("Getting a Taste for It"). **Esther Boukema**, who introduced the Workshop, is an artist, designer, food and nature lover who develops and teaches Experiential Food Education. Her mission is to develop a food education method that will change children's perspectives and behaviour towards food, nature, the world and even themselves. In her workshop Esther created a series of unique moments where visual and sound scapes interacted with tasting without knowing.

After the Workshop a **Field Trip** was undertaken and included visits to *Celtic Salads* and *Linnalla Ice Cream*, two local enterprises that are part of the Burren Food Trail, and which recently won the prestigious European EDEN award for innovation and sustainability in the food industry. These Burren farmers spoke of their decision to farm differently and to create added value by dealing directly with customers. Tasting of the ice cream while looking at the cows which produced the milk was followed by a short walk on the wild Atlantic shore.

A live Skype conversation between Deirdre O'Mahony in the Burren and Frances Whitehead in Chicago and a **simultaneous pan-Atlantic potato tasting** consisting of regional potato/sweet potato culinary specialities in the Burren and the US was followed by a dinner featuring Irish stew and a vegetarian curry served on the thematic ceramic plates from the POTATO/BATATA Exhibition.



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At the end of the Round Table Discussion between the panel and participants, it was agreed the conversation on the theme of sustainability and culture was worthwhile and needed to be continued. The idea of an event in Barcelona in 2016 was unanimously agreed, and Nuala Ahern, Cristian Bettini and Oscar Rando said they would try to make progress on organising such an event there next year.

Nuala Ahern
Green Foundation Ireland

24 August 2015

Green European Foundation and Green Foundation Ireland wish to acknowledge with thanks the financial support of the **European Parliament** for the hosting of this event.

Our other event partners included:



Burren College of Art



Clare County Council "Creating Space" initiative