

ART AS A SOURCE OF LEARNING FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

**Making meaning, multiple knowledges and
navigating open-endedness**

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Abstract

This research is a practice-based inquiry into the contribution of art to processes in which communities explore, design and proceed on sustainable ways forward. In rejecting an overly technocratic approach, this thesis follows a learning-based conception of sustainable development. Rather than transmitting predetermined solutions, *social learning* is about establishing a prolific framework of conditions in which people can explore for themselves what is 'right', sustainable and desired. Such learning shows important overlaps with art, in that it does not set out to transmit a predetermined message; instead the meaning of something is collectively made throughout the process.

Where the shift from instrumental, technocratic approaches to participatory, intersubjective and open-ended approaches to sustainable development is relatively new in the social sciences, artists arguably have a longer legacy working in non-instrumental and 'goal-searching' ways. Subsequently, this thesis proposes a range of artful approaches that would allow educators to create spaces in which meaning is mutually created. These are the result of three research activities: the researcher interviewed artists, she participated in practices of artists, and reflected upon her own making process in which she conceived social learning as a contextual arts practice.

Where this thesis takes social learning into new areas of knowledge is in the way that it conceives the meaning of sustainable development as *continuously coming out of the present*. Despite a professed action-oriented and experiential rendition of sustainable development, academics in the field of learning for sustainability present the concept as theoretical and abstract: it exists separated from the lived world of practice that it draws meaning from. This thesis argues that the key potential of art lies in counteracting such excessive objectification of socio-environmental issues. Through *locative meaning-making*, for example, meanings are derived from the here and now rather than from abstracted terms.

Consequently, social learning should not strive for sustainable development as an objective, general goal in itself. Instead the learning should be conceived as an emergent process that is driven by an active vehicle, score or invitation that generates an interaction-rich environment in which meaning-making can happen. Sustainable development then *threads through* the fabric of whatever is happening, rather than being a focus on its own.

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1

Introduction

The study ensues from the idea that as a researcher 'it is not enough to understand the world, but that one has to change it for the better' (Reason cited in Kindon et al. 2007: 13). Subsequently, it is firmly rooted in practice. The urge to catalyse change stems from the assumption that considering the extensive depletion of natural resources, destruction of habitats and our impact on physiological systems such as the climate, we need to shift *something* in order to sustain our existence and that of other species on this earth. Hence, rather than merely observing a state of affairs or trends in the arena of sustainable development and socio-environmental change the research itself was conceived as an instrument for action and transformation.

My entire professional and a large part of my personal life thus far have revolved around finding out what that change is and how it can be generated. After having tried different avenues (direct action, rainforest protection, sustainable agriculture, consumer awareness raising, environmental education) this study explores an *artistic* pathway.

While noticing overlaps between the realms of sustainable development and the arts I grew ever more dissatisfied with the lack of imaginative, creative and embodied approaches in the former. I became increasingly sceptical about the presumed division between these two fields of practice, as well as the assumption prevailing especially in academia and education that the arts are something 'other': a nice decoration or addition, but expendable when researching, practicing and learning (how to) change towards a more sustainable world. Through my experience with community theatre and creative teaching methods, I realised that that there *is* a fruitful interface between these two seemingly separated realms; that similar approaches, values and ideas circulate in both fields. And, more importantly, that some of the conundrums in the field of sustainable development might be solved through the arts. Consequently, this research aspired to establish this interface, by creating, exploring and describing it, and finding devices through which others (artists, educators, community workers, academics) can do the same. Thereby catalysing positive change on a community, village, national and/or global level.

My initial research question thus read:

How does/can art contribute to social learning processes in which communities¹ explore, design and bring forth sustainable ways forward?

In bringing together the fields of art and learning, this thesis is interdisciplinary. While completed with the performance department at an arts university the contribution to knowledge is firmly rooted in the discipline of (social) learning for sustainable development. To do so the researcher conducted a practice-based research that generated the results presented in this writing.

Albeit increasingly widespread, positioning the research on the crossroads between art and social science raises some problems with regards to how the research is to be conducted and how the resulting knowledge should be presented. This introduction deals with these queries and thereby positions this thesis epistemologically. Before that it will give a brief overview of the existing perspectives on the interface of science, socio-environmental action and artistic practice.

Art-Science collaborations

John Law argues that social science is in need of innovation. In his book *After Method: Mess in Social Science Research* he convincingly argues that traditional methods 'are badly adapted to the study of the ephemeral, the indefinite and the irregular' (Law 2004: 4). He challenges the usability of simple, clear-cut and linear truths in social science. In his view the world is 'vague, diffuse or unspecific, slippery, emotional, ephemeral, elusive or indistinct [and] changes like a kaleidoscope' (ibid. 2). And he thus seeks to find an approach that catches some of the realities that social research currently fails to capture. He is not alone in his quest; there is an increasing acknowledgement that the assumptions that form the basis of our sciences and understanding of knowledge as a whole should be questioned (see for example Latour and Woolgar 1979; Haraway 1988).

¹ Although I recognize that the concept of community is concealed by a multiplicity of meanings (cf. Hoggert 1997: 1), this thesis was not written with the intention to further problematize its definition or notion. With 'community' I refer to a *geographic* community: a group of people that is connected in more or lesser extent because they live in the same geographical area. They might have nothing else in common but their location; however, because they share the place – a neighborhood, village, city or the world as a whole – they are a community (Poplin 1979).

Others specifically point to the limitations of existing epistemologies and methodologies to address what is regarded as an increasingly complex world. They emphasize the need for a different sort of science that may be more capable of tackling contemporary 'wicked problems', i.e. global complex socio-environmental challenges (Cherry 2005; Seeley and Reason 2008; Funtowicz and Ravetz 1993; Gray et al. 2011). Chadhuri and Enelow argue that 'the peculiar temporalities involved in climate change pose a challenge not only to our ways of life but also to deeply ingrained disciplinary habits and strongly established frameworks for knowledge production in humanities and social sciences' (Chadhuri and Enelow 2013: 25). In this context the arts are often raised as a viable alternative.

Biologist Everden for example reminds us that 'environmentalism involves the perception of values, and values are the coin of arts' (Everden quoted in Arons and May 2012: 2). Ede argues that artistic qualities, such as visualizing, imagining, inventing, story-telling and re-presenting, are as vital to science as presumable scientific characteristics such as empirical evidence (Ede 2005: 2). Szerszynski et al. make the case that the world, life and human-nature relationships are essentially fluctuating, complex and improvised (Szerszynski et al. 2004: 11 and Szerszynski 2004). Subsequently, the social sciences are poorly understood through a 'positivist version of the world' (ibid. 12). Such realities, they argue, are better captured through a *performative* approach in which knowledge exists within processes of agency with and in the world.

Opinions are divided as to the extent to which the arts and sciences are indeed opposing ontologies. Latour argues that both the sciences and the arts have aesthetic qualities, as 'science is not a 'realist painting' ... nor an exact copy of the world, but both science and painting link us to an aligned, transformed, constructed world' (Latour in Nicholson 2011: 185). The difference being however, that an artist will recognize that their work is one of an infinite amount of representations of the world, while a (positivist) scientist will present her construction as an objective and therefore unique and definite truth.

Ede refers to a 'rift' between the sciences and the arts, which in her view stems from 'radical differences in two epistemological traditions concerned with the nature of knowledge itself' (Ede 2005: 5). She describes the sciences as 'dispassionate and objective', while art 'is always related to the way we experience life'; hence presenting a more engaged and subjective way of knowing (ibid. 11).

However big the difference, any interdisciplinary approach should or will affect the epistemological and ontological building blocks of one or both of the disciplines.

Nicholson states that 'engaging in productive interdisciplinary conversations ... involves more than superficial knowledge about another discipline, it requires openness to a different world-view and a willingness to change deeply felt perceptions' (Nicholson 2011: 183). It is doubtful however that such a level of integration is indeed achieved in many contemporary science-art collaborations. An interdisciplinary approach often does not exceed the level of the art being used to explain certain scientific results to an audience. They are seen as 'prettification' to enhance the public understanding of science (Ede 2005: 3), rather than a different way of knowing that could render alternative ways of seeing the world. Similarly, the influence of the sciences on the arts is often restricted to the artist using certain scientific data or ideas as inspiration or content for the creation of her artwork, which is subsequently displayed in an 'arts environment', such as a gallery. Such collaborations are useful in their own right, but do not necessarily require 'uncomfortable' conversations through which artists and/or scientists shift their epistemological and ontological presumptions.

Despite a growing interest within both the sciences and the arts to collaborate, I have detected a peculiar mix of animosity and awe with which each 'camp' regards the other. The sciences often talk about the arts as 'wooly and not rigorous', but at the same time seem to feel that they are lacking something that artists do have (e.g. the ability to depict and communicate ideas, to think 'out of the box', etc.). The arts perceive the sciences as 'instrumental and rigid', but are also eager to work with scientists to give their work more content, depth, status and credibility.

This thesis has resulted from an interdisciplinary process in which the researcher, coming from a social scientific background, submerged herself in an artistic epistemology to generate new ideas that would apply to the social sciences. The main goal of the thesis was not to produce an artwork based on scientific ideas, but to use art to present a new way of thinking in the field of social learning. It thereby aims to contribute to the progress of learning by using insights from the arts and as such challenges especially scientific conceptions.

Problems with interdisciplinary

Looking back at the research process that produced this thesis, I can distinguish various elements that could compromise the success of the interdisciplinary approach. First of all, it is almost impossible to be an expert in all involved disciplines. As a consequence, the interdisciplinary researcher might be accused of being 'naïve', since

she seems to lack certain – often basic - knowledge in the field in question. The risk of omitting relevant aspects is definitely present, but at the same time the relative ‘naivety’ of the researcher also gives her a useful outsider position. Bateson states that it is good to get an amateur in sometimes because they bring in a fresh perspective (Bottoms and Goulsh 2007: 11). Furthermore, as Latour’s (1979) work shows, their outside position allows them to question disciplinary routines and assumptions that are taken for granted by ‘insiders’ but might have lost their relevance or function.

Due to its relative novice position the researcher also risks ‘reinventing the wheel’. This in turn has implications for the evaluation as to whether a piece of research holds a new contribution to knowledge. Applying one discipline to the other (as this research does) might imply that the resulting insight is not necessarily new in the first discipline, while being innovative in the latter. So, when is an idea new? Is a concept only a ‘new contribution to knowledge’ when it has not been uttered before *anywhere*, or when it is new in a specific field of knowledge or area of practice? I would argue that it is enough for an idea to be original when existing knowledge from one discipline finds a new application in another, because this transfer often involves a change of language, vocabulary and epistemology.

The strength of interdisciplinary approaches, I would argue, is not necessary the invention of an idea that is new, but rather where it is positioned. Bottoms argues after Bateson that ‘new thoughts may be less the product of pioneering journeys into uncharted territory ... than of looking afresh at the connections between knowledges that we already possess’ (Bottoms and Goulsh 2007: 17). That is, applying a concept from one discipline to existing knowledge in another is just as relevant’, as developing one specific specialization. The result might be a concept that is fairly common knowledge in one discipline, but due to its *new application*, i.e. it being positioning in the other discipline, it is nevertheless original. Whether the wheel is indeed reinvented or not thus depends on the ability of the researcher to translate and position the wheel in its new context.

There are major differences in the language that disciplines use in order to describe their findings. Their idiom (e.g. textual, numerical or performative) essentially determines what they regard as knowledge. A qualitative scholar for example will find knowledge in the narratives that respondents share, whilst a quantitative researcher will only regard something as ‘true’ when it is tested against statistics. What is accepted in one is regarded as ‘woolly’ in another. Thus, deliberately positioning the concept as part of the interdisciplinary research involves finding the right language to describe it.

This is problematic because language and knowledge are so closely implicated: describing an idea in a certain way might actually change the nature of the knowledge to the extent that it becomes something else. For example, as Szerszynski et al. argue, certain dynamic relationships are only represented through performance. If one would try to translate these ideas into a language that is more accepted among qualitative researchers (e.g. text) it loses its performative quality, and also ceases to transfer the knowledge that one tried to transmit in the first place (Szerszynski et al. 2004). Certain knowledge can only exist in that particular language, and hence the idea *plus* idiom should be transposed to the other discipline. Hence, it is important to be aware of the linguistic differences and everything that gets lost in translation.

Arguably, artists have to work harder to convince scientists that the performance or painting they produced holds as much knowledge as a numerical dataset or transcribed interview. And I would argue that a lot of art-science collaborations result in pieces of (art) work that fail to convince. They are valuable pieces of work, but often positioned in the art world and overlooked by the other 'camp', thereby not demonstrating interdisciplinary value. The arts might use concepts and methods from the sciences, but when the results are still only communicated, presented and located in the realm of the arts, it fails to make an impact in the sciences. In interdisciplinary research it is therefore crucial to ask oneself where the knowledge 'is' or where one aims to make an impact, and find the appropriate language to do so.

The goal of this thesis is to tell the story of the arts in such a way that it is applicable to the discipline of social learning for sustainable development. Not having a curatorial or art historical background, or formal education in performance, as a researcher I took the role of an amateur. Unconstrained by potentially restricting conventions and routines, I took whatever seemed useful, and applied these ideas to the field of social learning, thereby creating new applications for concepts that might seem more familiar in the art world.

The benefit of the arts

Before this thesis dives into an account of *how* art contributes to social learning for sustainable development, I should first explain why this research focused on the arts in the first place. Art is often mentioned in relation to social and personal transformation, and is generally regarded as 'doing good' for society (Carey 2005). In fact, looking at the extensive (Western) literature describing its transformative

potential, it is strange that the arts are not imbued in everything we do. Despite the evidence, artists have to (increasingly?) persuade others, e.g. public services, scientists, politicians, that the arts are indeed beneficial.

This thesis is an additional manuscript that underwrites the necessity and importance of the arts. It aims to contribute to the acknowledgement of the arts as a social transformational force that is as yet underestimated and underused outside galleries, theatres, museums, concert halls and charities that aim to further participants creativity. Chapter 2 will give a more detailed overview of contemporary practices in the field of ecology, sustainable development and education, here I will briefly describe why the arts are indeed thought to 'do good' in general.

Carey (2005) argues that the conception that art makes us better people goes back to classical times, when Aristotle believed that listening to music was character forming and aroused moral qualities. These ideas were reinforced during the Enlightenment, when a range of philosophers endowed art with spiritual, moral and civilizing qualities. During the 19th century such views became a widespread cultural assumption as they were applied to poorer, working class echelons of society. As Nicholson describes: 'The arts provided an optimistic space that promised social cohesion and personal freedom' (Nicholson 2011: 23). They were seen as a means of integrating soul, mind and body that would lead to 'an organic society that would be free to exist without class divide' (ibid. 26).

Dewey was an important driver of these ideas. He advocated arts as part of his educational philosophy. Not as a way to educate children to become professional artists but as a way to encourage 'growth of perception' (ibid. 43). He believed that in order to enable people to solve societal problems, they should first and foremost be in touch with their bodies and their experience of the world. In order to avoid 'disembodied idealism' the evocation of emotion through the arts, theatre, music and narrative would reground people in their bodies and help them develop genuine solutions for existing problems (McConachie 2012: 96-98). These ideas informed the main premise of this thesis that the arts are crucial in addressing the socio-environmental challenges and form the foundation of the range of environmental, socially-engaged practices that I will describe in section 2.2.

In line with the prevailing doctrine of economic growth, art is increasingly regarded to be beneficial as an economic asset (Nicholson 2011, Bishop 2004). Where in foregoing centuries a 'better' human being was spiritually, morally and intellectually

developed, at present we are good citizens when we effectively contribute to a nation's economic capital, i.e. when we are more productive employers, employees and consumers. Correspondingly, there is an increased interest in the arts as drivers of economic and entrepreneurial capacities. The arts are associated with creativity and innovation, which in turn are regarded as important drivers of economy and globalization. Nowadays, creativity very much equals profitability (Nicholson 2011: 95), and as a consequence, there is a renewed interest from governments to develop student's creative capacity. Certain presumably artistic skills, such as the ability to produce creative solutions, address complex problems, think independently and work flexibly, have become core to education in order to produce successful employees that can compete on a globalized marketplace. Nicholson, Bishop and many others, rightly question what is lost when the arts are re-branded to creativity. Will the arts lose their subversive and transformative potential (i.e. their promise to 'do good') as they are co-opted by governments and businesses that employ them to advance whatever they are critical of?

From this we can conclude that the arts do not necessarily and inherently 'do good'; they might support developments that reinforce the ecologically destructive nature of our society. Furthermore, as Carey (2005) demonstrates, claims that the arts are beneficial are unsubstantiated.

So before I make an elaborate case *for* the arts in the rest of this thesis, I need to stress that I do not regard art as a panacea to socio-environmental challenges. Although often portrayed as free, flexible and radical, the arts bring their own set of restraints and restrictions. Kuppens and Robertson (2013) give various examples of how socially engaged, situational arts practices that take place outside specialized zones of art, such as galleries are often regarded as inferior to other contemporary conceptual art (see also Bottoms et al. 2012). The process-based and situational practices that happen in and with communities, are subjects of endless debates among art historians, curators and artists themselves as to whether they can indeed be deemed as art (see for example Bishop 2012). Due to the absence of an object and the fact that the art consists in an ephemeral situation outside of galleries, the practices are hard to be grasped and assessed as art. Artists become artists because they gain their reputation by being evaluated in the art world. They consequently spend a lot of time and effort to make sure that their works are indeed valued as art, and not 'just' community work: time that arguably would have been better spend on increasing the socio-environmental impact of their activity. Calling something art is not always beneficial.

Furthermore, the recent rise in artists' involvement in community work and sustainability issues, also demonstrates a certain degree of conceit on the side of the artist. Participation, community development, citizen engagement, natural resource management, all have a long legacy, executed by people that were trained to do so. As the example in 2.2 of this thesis will show, some artists enter this field untrained in the socio-political and environmental aspects of the work, but do assume themselves capable of generating participation and change, and propose complex environmental solutions. Echoing an earlier made point about interdisciplinary practices, we might ask ourselves whether artists working with and in communities are reinventing the wheel of social practice and wrongly assuming that they do not need the disciplinary expertise to do so effectively.

Hence, underlying questions addressed in this thesis refer to what the arts do that non-artistic practices do not do already. What methods and corresponding outcomes that the arts produce are significantly different from what is already done?

Structure of this thesis

These questions are addressed in a thesis that is structured into two parts, with eight consecutive chapters. Part I explains the foundations of the research, whilst Part II deals with the results.

Chapter 2 describes the methodology of this research, discussing praxis-oriented research, action research and practice-as-research. As the arts form the practice of this research, the methodology subsequently leads into a discussion of the arts practices that relate to my area of interest. Herein I will introduce the concept of contextual practice that this research focuses on. This is an extended form of site-specific art and performance, which grows from a specific context or the overall situation in which the piece takes place (a place or the interaction with other people), and is dependent on the context at the moment of performance that to a large degree influences the eventual shape of the piece. Furthermore, I will argue that I am not necessarily interested in how objects of art created by artists might contribute to the fields of sustainable development and learning, but rather, that this thesis aims to unpick the elements that constitute contextual practice and how they might become part of sustainable development and learning. I am interested in what I call 'artful elements' that underpin artistic processes.

Chapter 3 discusses different contesting conceptions of sustainable development, thereby arguing that the concept is ambiguous, as people operating in the sustainable development arena debate over what exactly needs to be done and how. Based on a discussion of post-normal science and related theories I will renounce a technocratic approach and instead argue for a learning-based operationalization of sustainable development: social learning for sustainable development. Herein sustainable development is an 'essentially contested' (Jacobs 1999) or fuzzy concept (Zadeh 1965), as its meaning and operationalization are time and place specific while incorporating a plurality of views, which renders the concept ambiguous and open-ended. I will then argue that the operationalization of sustainable development as social learning equals the conception of art as a meaning-making process, in which participants generate their own interpretation of an issue at hand, rather than being 'fed' a meaning or message predetermined by the educator or artist. From the premise that such learning is essentially and artful process, I was interested to find what mechanisms underlying such meaning-making can be transposed to the field of sustainable development and social learning.

Chapter 4 then returns to the methodology applied in this study, by describing in more detail how the research was executed. I will present what methods were used and why, and give a chronological overview of the different steps that I followed. Here I will also present the notions of partial, situated, embodied and embedded knowing, which underlie the way in which this thesis perceives the process of knowledge production. It will explain how to regard the validity and transferability of the research results, and it concludes that there is no such thing as objective, universal knowledge that can be directly transposed from one context to another.

Part II discusses the findings of this research. Instead of looking at and discussing each case, form of practice, research activity or dataset individually, I will treat the data as an integrated whole, which I draw from as I unravel my argument. Subsequently, while reading, expect to encounter: descriptions of (my) practice; excerpts from my research diary describing an experience or the research process; quotes from interviews with participants or artists; documentation in visual or audio form; and material from the contextual/literature review. Each chapter introduces a group of related elements that constitutes one leg of the argument: a way in which art contributes to the realm of social learning for sustainable development.

Chapter 5 describes how people get involved in processes of meaning-making in the first place, by looking at how artful means generate civil engagement and increase meaningful participation of people in social learning. Furthermore, it will pose a set of 'inconvenient questions' that emerged from my practice and I will return to these in the later chapters.

Chapter 6 further unpacks the proposition that (my) art practices are indeed meaning-making and learning processes, by describing various elements that generate the meaning-making among the participants. I will demonstrate that Rancière concept of 'dissensus' is key to the success of such meaning-making processes and thus to social learning in communities; and I will argue that contextual practice is especially well placed to generate dissensus as it successfully unearths and represents different types of knowledge. The final section of chapter six will describe a range of 'dramaturgical configurations' and elements that generate dissensus and can be transposed to social learning.

As social learning is open-ended, Chapter 7 deals with ways in which artful elements help to facilitate and navigate open-endedness. I will mainly draw from interviews that I did with artists working contextually, drawing out different strategies to, or manifestations of, open-endedness.

Gathering together the different artful elements that have featured in the previous chapters chapter 8, the conclusion, summarizes how in this case art contributes to social learning processes in which communities explore, design and proceed on sustainable practices.

PART I

2

Research, practice and the arts

As the research evolved from a desire to instigate change towards a more sustainable world, the applied methodology is situated on the crossroads between praxis-oriented and practice-based research. These two approaches stem from a similar mainspring, but are rooted in different disciplines and hence have a different focus. This chapter first discusses the main characteristics of such research approach and then focuses on the nature of the practice itself. By describing different kinds of art-making that this research is associated with, I will draw a distinction between *art* on the one hand and *artful* on the other. This research is interested in the latter: elements and ways of doing that are particular to the making of art and might be usefully transposed to other processes or used by people that do not generally call themselves artists.

2.1 Research and praxis

The term 'praxis' was coined by Aristotle who divided human activity in three types: *theoria*, the production of truth; *poiesis*, the production of 'universal' or theoretical knowledge through the use of tools such as analytical reasoning; and *praxis*, knowledge produced through action or 'in practice' (Given 2008). In contrast to *poiesis*, the knowledge that can be universalized across situations, 'knowledge produced through praxis is concerned with the local and the particular' (ibid. 676). Various scholars, educators and activists have since built on this idea, which has resulted in a range of approaches to knowledge production and transfer that are connected by an emphasis on doing, making and experiencing.

Social psychologist Kurt Lewin for example states: 'Research that produces nothing but books will not suffice' (Lewin 1946: 35). He argues for 'research which will help the practitioner' (ibid. 34) and in his research on the empowerment of minority groups in the United States, he coins the term *Action Research*: 'a comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action and research leading to social action' (ibid. 35). The process is based upon repetitive cycles of (a) Developing a plan of action to improve what is already happening; (b) Acting to implement the plan; (c) Observing the effects of action in the context in which it occurs; and (d) Reflecting on these effects as a basis for further planning and subsequent action. In line with

Aristotle's notion of praxis he advocates the importance of generating knowledge *through* action *for* action.

Subsequently, Lewin became one of the first scholars to question the gap between the researcher and researched. In order to generate research results of use to practitioners, action research necessarily lies in a 'cooperation between practitioners and social scientist' (Lewin 1946: 39). Subsequently, the presumed expert-researcher has to step down from his pedestal and engage in the real world, with 'real' problems through an egalitarian relationship with 'normal' people.

Three decades later (1970) and south from Lewin (Brazil), educator Paulo Freire develops an approach to knowledge production and transfer along the same values. His *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* likewise links praxis (action) to reflection (Freire 1996/1970). In his view, change only comes about through reflective action, i.e. mere doing is not enough, in order to transform one's situation (of oppression) it is necessary to understand one's position and from there engage in informed action.

His philosophy is strongly influenced by Karl Marx in that he discerns various dichotomies in society: between oppressors and the oppressed, between colonizers and colonized, and between teacher and student. He argues that traditional education sustains and reinforces these existing dichotomies instead of empowering an assumed minority, because it follows a 'banking model of education'. In this pedagogy the supposed (often external) expert 'fills' the learner with (abstract) knowledge as if she were an empty vessel, thereby disregarding the knowledge the learner already holds (ibid. 70-73).

Like Lewin, Freire argues for a more egalitarian and collaborative epistemology in which there is no hierarchical relationship between so-called experts and presumed non-experts. Instead, both parties participate in a search for knowledge through an active engagement with the surrounding world. The knowledge that they find is simultaneously directly derived from and re-applicable to this engagement. This notion mirrors the feature of praxis as described by Aristotle and mentioned above: knowledge produced through praxis is concerned with the local and the particular and is therefore not necessarily universal.

Although the term praxis is used more broadly, the explicit empowering objective of Freire's pedagogy dominates the contemporary definition of praxis-oriented research, thereby separating it from other action-oriented methodologies. Sage Encyclopaedia for example writes: 'like action researchers, those who engage in praxis-oriented research involve the community or group under study in the research process. However, praxis is distinct in that its explicit goal is to empower marginalized peoples and help them

challenge their oppression' (Given 2008: 675). After thinker-practitioners in a wide range of disciplines² I understand praxis as knowledge that originates from theory being imbricated within practice (Nelson 2013: 5). It implies a dialogue between theory and practice, as the former is derived from and applied to the latter. The methodology applied in this research does not have a strong empowering motive, and hence – following the Sage Encyclopaedia – this would be where my thesis diverges from praxis-oriented research and starts blending with other approaches; namely, action research as described above and *practice-as-research*.

2.1.1 Practice-as-research

In contrast to what scholars traditionally might think about the arts, Graeme Sullivan argues that 'artists have the capacity to explore and explain complex theoretical issues that can have significance across broad areas of knowledge' (Sullivan 2010: 42). Fuelled by this notion there has been an increasing number of artists that engage in research. They do not just do research *on* the arts as has been a traditionally accepted exercise, but research any issue *through* the arts. In doing so, artist-researchers follow a path that is significantly different from the existing (qualitative and quantitative) research approaches. Practice-as-research signifies an evolving *new* paradigm.

The methodologies constituting this emerging paradigm are generally designated by means of four confusingly similar terms that are often wrongly used interchangeably. These concern: practice-as-research, practice-led research, practice-based research and arts-based research. For the purpose of generating a clear articulation of my methodology I will make a distinction between these concepts.

The first three have in common that they concern research projects 'in which practice is a key method of inquiry' (Nelson 2013: 9). Although this bears similarities with the praxis-oriented approach in that it consists in 'action-based investigations oriented towards practical engagement in the world' (Kershaw 2010: 107), the characterizing feature of these approaches is the fact that they place *arts-practice* at the heart of the research (ibid. 123).

The difference between the three concepts is subsequently dependent on the extent to which the (arts) *practice* replaces what is traditionally seen as the research. In

² E.g. Robin Nelson (2013) in the field of performance; Dwight Conquergood in the discipline of ethnography (Johnson 2013); and Hannah Arendt in the philosophical realm (1998/1958).

both practice-as-research and practice-led research the entire knowing resides in the doing; arts practice *is* the research and ‘a practice (creative writing, dance, musical score/performance, theatre/performance, visual exhibition, film or other cultural practice) is submitted as substantial evidence of a research inquiry’, without the further requirement to explain, represent or interpret the practice in a piece of *academic* writing (Nelson 2013: 10). However, according to Nelson, practice-led research ‘may bear a residual sense that knowledge follows after, is secondary to, the practice’ (ibid.). Lastly, practice-based research concerns research that ‘draws from, or is about, practice but which still is articulated in traditional word-based forms’ (ibid.).

The difference between the first three terms and the last methodology is more distinctive. As the difference in name suggests, art-based research does not stress practice to the degree that the other approaches do. It is more concerned with the use of art-based methods than the application of *making/doing*. Furthermore, arts-based research as developed by researchers such as Elliot Eisner, Rita Irwin and Patricia Leavy, is described as ‘a set of methodological tools used by *qualitative* researchers across the disciplines during all phases of *social* research’ (Leavy 2009: ix, emphasis added). Although the distinction is by no means very strict and clear, one could say that art-based research concerns the use of arts *within* the qualitative paradigm (although ‘disrupting and extending it’ (ibid. 9)), whereas practitioner-researchers claim to be working *outside* this traditional research realm. They do not merely and instrumentally apply art-based methods in their otherwise traditional research process; *the entire research essentially is art*.

Subsequently the question arises, where does my research project fit? As explained above, I regard practice as an essential means in the process of coming to know about the world; furthermore, it aims to generate knowledge that applies to practice; and lastly it employs creative doing as a methodology. However, as this lengthy written thesis demonstrates, the knowledge that the research has generated resides predominantly in an interpretation of the practice, not in the practice itself. Hence, this research should be termed as practice-based.

However, rooted in the ambition to produce praxis, I will attempt to integrate theory into practice, by evidencing the practice that has generated the theory as well as returning the theory to the practice. The evidence of practice will come in the form of short audio pieces that intersperse the writing in Part II: they serve as reminders to the reader that the possibly abstracted writing of this thesis originated through an engagement with the ‘real’ world, people and a context.

2.2 The nature of the practice

The distinguishing element of practice-as-research is the *form* of the practice, namely that the doing is essentially 'artistic'. Again, this overlaps with certain cases of praxis-oriented and action research. Discourses of action research (e.g. Reason and Bradbury 2001 and Kindon et al. 2007) show a propensity for the incorporation of art-based methods as part of their inquiry. This inclination partly emerges from the idea that action research is participatory. In order to make sure that all voices are heard, the researcher has to apply different ways of communicating and collaborating with the practitioners, as they might express themselves more proficiently and freely through other (non-textual or non-verbal) means. Tolia-Kelly for example applies drawing as 'a visual form [that] adds scope for unexpected or new grammars and vocabularies that are sometimes inexpressible in other contexts' (2007: 132). Mienczakowski and Morgan do a similar thing through what they call 'ethnodrama' (2001). Despite these methods being significantly different from other qualitative methods in social research, they should be seen as art-based methods applied instrumentally within a 'conventional' research process, whereas in PaR the *entire* research is conceived as an art practice.

This research project was a mix of action and practice-based research, as both the topic and the methodology of the research is 'art'. That is, I aimed to understand how art does something, therefore *testing* an art practice through action research, as well as using a practice-based approach to the research as a whole. Consequently, I followed a route in which the art practice *is* the action research.

The next question then logically is: what was the art in this research? There is no easy answer to this. Both because the term 'art' is broad and slippery in itself, and because through the research I came to realise that I was trying to understand not the products of art, but the processes that underlie the making of it. That is, this research does not concern the question as to how 'formal' products of art –i.e. pieces that are produced by artists within the realms of the art-world– contribute to social learning for sustainable development. Instead I am interested in those elements underlying the making process which render something 'art': ways of knowing or attending to the world that could be employed by anyone, irrespective of their aspiration to be an artist. These strategies that artists (unwittingly) deploy to make their art can be used to conduct something else (e.g. a learning process, social engagement, solution-finding, etc.) in an artful way.

What these processes consist of exactly will be developed throughout this entire thesis. As a prelude to that discussion, as well as a means to justify some of my choices with regards to the nature of the practice, this section will give an overview of a wide range of genres that address ecology, sustainable development and education. Thereby also introducing the distinction between *art* and *artful*.

2.2.1 Art and its environment

As also introduced in Chapter 1, there has been an increasing interest among artists to blur the boundaries between their art and other spheres in society such as science, learning and community development. From an art historical or curatorial perspective, my making is positioned in this realm; a field of practice that has one or more of the following characteristics:

- It takes place outside established specialized zones of art, e.g. galleries, museums, studios, theatres and auditoria.
- It takes the site, situation or context as a starting point for the making; it happens through a dialogue with these places, including environmental (geographical, physical traits) and human factors.
- The process and outcome deals with (larger) socio-environmental issues that affect a place or the world as a whole, thereby aiming to contribute to socio-environmental transformation.
- It has a strong participatory element, in which the outcome is a process or 'situation' of people coming together

Hereby, my practice can be said to fit the gradual surge of artists that have moved their practice from 'studio to situation' (Doherty 2004). There are various reasons for artists to make this shift. Since the sixties there has been a growing group of artists (in the West) that feel that art has become increasingly detached from every-day practice and non-artists. Hence they explore and advocate practices that bridge the gap between art and the rest of the world, aiming to integrate arts with the daily practice of living. Allan Kaprow, for example, moved his practice from specialized zones of art towards places and occasions of everyday life in the late 1950s and 1960s. He promoted a blurring of art and life by staging *Happenings* through which he aimed to 'approximate the spectacle of modern life' and generate 'participatory experiences' (Kaprow 2003:

xii). These took place on streets, in basements and at universities and involved participation of an invited audience, as well as passers-by.

In a similar vein, there was a growing recognition among artists that the arts should not merely focus on the creation of art for art's sake, but start playing a contribution to worldly matters: by identifying creative strategies and practices that adequately respond to the looming socio-ecological crises (Chadhuri and Enelow 2013: viii). Akin to modernist critique in other spheres of society (see the discussion on objectification in 3.2) these artists abhorred the detached, self-focussed elitist enterprise the art world had become, which placed artists on a pedestal and produced objects of consumption for a small self-selected segment of society. Suzi Gablik advocates a making of art 'as if the world mattered'. This in her view encompasses the following

Reenchantment, as I understand it, means stepping beyond the modern traditions of mechanism, positivism, empiricism, rationalism, materialism, secularism, and scientism – the whole objectifying consciousness of the Enlightenment – in a way that allows for a return of the soul (Gablik 1992: 11).

Another, more pragmatic, reason to move one's practices from studio to site, is through expediency. In areas where 'specialized zones of art' are simply not readily available, artists have resorted to making work in village halls, places of work, on the street, schools and community centres. Theatre maker Mike Pearson for example explains that the fact that Wales has a relatively large amount of theatre groups working site-specifically is partly because the country has a limited range of theatres. However, he continues, the use of different venues is also a way in which experimental theatre could challenge ideas and procedures prevalent in the established theatre world. Moving beyond specialized zones of art thus also allowed artists to break loose from the imposed conventions on what gallery art or theatre is or should be. The kind of experimental work that emerged from the necessity to make on site then became the distinguishing feature of the work, which led to a reinvention of for example spectator-actor relationships (Wilkie 2002).

A third motive to work on site rather than in conventional art venues, is because makers are specifically interested in issues of place, site, community and landscape – rural and urban. Attracted to the vernacular and the idiosyncrasies of the locale, they aim to represent narratives alternative to dominant culture. This often also incorporates an aspiration to reach out to so-called new audiences: people that are not normally interested in art exhibited in studios, galleries and theatre. Much of the work on site is

either developed in cooperation with non-artists and 'ordinary' people living in a place, or is staged in public spaces where the artist or company hopes to attract an 'accidental audience', e.g. passers-by, dog walkers, shoppers, etc.

The next three sections give a more detailed description of the art forms associated with the larger field of art practice as described above.

2.2.2 Art for the environment

Gablik's propositions resulted in what now is generally classified as Eco or Environmental art: artworks that specifically deal with environmental issues and aim to bring about a transformation. Many of these practices are inspired by the work and life of Joseph Beuys who, as an ecological and social activist as well as artist, introduced a conception of art as *Social Sculpture*. According to his 'expanded concept of art', artists have the capacity, as well as the responsibility, to apply their practice to socio-environmental transformation (Kagan 2011 and 2012). His work was built on the idea that 'every human being is an artist, a 'freedom being, called to participate in transforming and reshaping the conditions, thinking and structures that shape and condition our lives' (Beuys cited in Seeley 2010: 4). Thereby, everyone becomes a participant (actor) rather than a member of the audience (spectator), and thus a producer rather than a consumer of meaning (Solnit 2001: 216).

The term *environmental art* is generally used as an umbrella for all the arts that take place in or deal with the natural environment (Bower ca. 2012). It often encompasses 'ecological' concerns or more activist approaches, but is not specific to them. Ecological or *eco-art* does, and is in that sense more issue-oriented, or message-driven. It explicitly considers issues of sustainability, such as adaptability, resilience, interdependence, renewable resources, human-nature relations, environmental degradation and human impact on nature. So where environmental art can be said to use ecology to make art, *eco-art* addresses ecological issues through art.

I started my research with a clear propensity towards this field of practice, assuming that, since my practice deals with sustainable development, environmental issues and socio-political transformation, this is the niche I should associate my making with. Although I *technically* still fit that field of practice, I gradually found myself feeling more affiliated with practices that are less message-driven and more performative, such

as site-specific performance. There are two reasons why this thesis renounces (certain forms of) eco-art practice.

Although, there is a large degree of overlap between eco-art and site-specific performance (they both for example (often) take place outdoors), eco-art always has an environmental message at its heart (either subtly or prominently), whereas site-specific performance does not. The latter might want to make an audience aware of a place-related issue, but the focus is on the means, performance and place, rather than a message or its impact in a transformative sense. To illustrate this point I will give an example from a discussion of various environmental practices in the article 'Troubling practices: short responses' (Anderson et al. 2012). English practitioner David Haley describes how he is flown in to the Bulgarian countryside to create a piece of eco-art. After a brief email exchange 'to gain local knowledge' (ibid. 294) from the project co-organiser, who presumably lives locally, he decides to focus on the protection of the river Yanta. In a workshop he informs local people about the dangers of climate change and proposes an alternative scenario to their allegedly unsustainable practices, 'one based on the ecology of the river and self-sustained farming' (ibid. 297). When people are nodding but remain silent Haley decides to perform a poem that he wrote. It is translated in Bulgarian, and people join in with the line-by-line interpretation, 'as if this was their poem' (ibid. 297-298). Unfortunately, despite his efforts to educate them, Haley concludes that the 'ecological art walk failed to *enlighten* the Town Council in their unsustainable aspirations to embrace tourism at the expense of the river (ibid. 298, my emphasis). But, Haley continues, it did seem to touch their emotions and, he hopes, another day walking the river 'will focus the minds, bodies, and spirits of the people ... to value the ecology of art' (ibid.).

This represents a didactic model where Haley clearly assumes the authority to tell people what is right and what is wrong. Without a clear indication of any expertise that would grant him such authority (after all he was trained as an artist and not as an environmental engineer or ecologist), he has formulated a predetermined solution for what probably is a very complex socio-ecological problem. With what seems to be very little regard for the local people and the place he is in (he bases his artistic intervention on one email with 'local knowledge') he assumes that the poem (and most likely the solution that he proposes) is of the local people when they repeat the lines that he wrote. Finally, when they do not 'get' his message, he does not question the validity of his solution or the integrity of his means, but instead believes that, for his art to have an effect, they need to do it (walk) again.

This practice exemplifies the sort of eco-art this thesis resolutely distances itself from. Practices that are didactical; art which has little regard for place and people and where the artist assumes the role of a bringer of meaning, rather than a facilitator of a meaning-making process.³ I will come back to this point extensively in section 3.4.

Another reason to reject eco-art is because it seems to originate from an established, contemporary visual arts background. Although the movement encourages the creation of situations, often the art still resides in the creation of objects, presented in specialized zones of art. Eco-art often happens beyond the white cube of the gallery, but also includes pieces that were created without the interaction with a place or people. Site-specific practice on the other hand takes place outside the darkened room of the theatre, and the outcomes are place-dependent, generated through the artist's interaction with a specific context. In cases that the site-specific practice attracts passers-by and people that normally would not go to the trouble of visiting an art gallery, it could be said to be more inclusive than pieces of eco-art that have been conceived in an artist's studio, transferred to a gallery and only looked at by a gallery-going audience. Subsequently, I questioned the transformative potential of many eco-art pieces. The fact that a lot of eco-art is only witnessed by a limited audience of gallery-goers, made me wonder whether it is in fact mainly successful in changing the art world, and not so much society at large.

Hereby I do not mean to imply that eco-art is entirely unsuccessful in contributing to a more sustainable world. Changing the art-world is an important goal in itself, and Kagan (2011 and 2012) argues convincingly for the importance of such pieces of work in the realm of sustainability. However, I felt the need to focus on a different kind of practice in order to address the question I had posed myself, and I found that theatre and performance more successfully overlap with social and community learning for sustainability. In the following I will introduce the various 'genres' in performance that relate to this thesis.

³ James Marriott from art-activist collective Platform London, aptly describes this kind of practice as follows: 'somebody recognized in the art world goes, "Right we're going to do a piece of work, and here's the place we'll do it." And the paratroopers come in and make a piece of work and then fuck off again.' (Bottoms et al. 2012)

2.2.3 Site-specific performance and contextual practices

In line with the earlier mentioned blurring between art and its environment, site-specific performance is said to arise through ‘uncertainties over the borders and limits of work and site’ (Kaye 2000 quoted in Tompkins 2012: 1). The earlier site-specific theatre companies in the UK have emerged partly from a lack of access to formal establishments of theatre (e.g. Kneehigh in Cornwall, Brith Gof in Wales, see Wilkie 2002). Out of expediency, the companies performed in the context of ‘normal’ social and cultural village events, in village halls and barns. Site-specific theatre encouraged the emergence and use of new performance strategies (Tompkins 2012) that, as Mike Pearson puts it, allowed pieces to be ‘free from rules of decorum and prudence’ (Pearson 2010: 4). He defines such performance as follows:

Site-specific performances are conceived for, and conditioned by, the particulars of found spaces, (former) sites of work, play and worship. They make manifest, celebrate, confound or criticize location, history, function, architecture, microclimate. They are inseparable from their sites, the only contexts within which they are ‘readable’ (ibid.).

Hence site-specific performance is not just an ‘indoor’ theatre piece that is staged at a random site outside of the established theatre, remaining the same in shape and form. The piece reveals ‘layers of a site’ (Wilkie 2002: 150) through a range of references found at the site; e.g. historical documentation, myths, objects, texts, sounds, smells, and past/present usage. Pearson describes such devising process as archaeology: a process of excavating the contemporary past, whilst cultivating ‘a renewed sensitivity to the fabric of the present and attention to those details distinct and differentiated that signal our presence, but that we consciously disattend or casually ignore or commit to collective amnesia’ (Pearson 2010: 43). Excavating methods unearth, bring to the forefront and amplify layers of human narratives of a place.

Despite a clear affinity with site-specific performance, the kinds of practices that are included in this study extend beyond mere site-specificity. There are three related but distinct factors that determine the extent to which a practice interacts with or responds to its context. Each of which generates a different type of work.

Site-specific

The first is taken from Fiona Wilkie who differentiates ‘between types or levels of engagement with the performance space’ (2002: 149). This determines to what extent the performance has been generated from a site and whether it, for example, can be transposed to another space. She presents a continuum of ‘site-specificity’. On the one end are located performance that takes place in the theatre building⁴ and *outdoor theatre*. Both are based on pre-existing scripts; the only difference between the two being that the latter is performed outdoors (while not incorporating any changes in shape or content in congruence with the outdoors). On the other end of the spectrum sits *site-specific* performance, which refers to pieces that are entirely generated from/for one specific location. The space between is filled with *site-sympathetic* work, encompassing an existing performance with the text ‘physicalized in a selected site’ (ibid. 150); and performance that is *site-generic*: work that is specific to a certain type of site (e.g. the performance ‘works’ at all car parks or swimming pools).

People-specific

The second factor takes us away slightly from the definition of site-specific theatre as Wilkie and Pearson describe it. Where they refer to site-specific when a piece has emerged from engagement with a physical place (e.g. a landscape, building, village, etc.), I am also including pieces that are *people-specific*.⁵ That is to say, the pieces include an invitation for people to participate whereby whatever they bring or do shapes the work. This participation can take place during the devising phase, the final performance, or both.

I distinguish different levels of engagement with (a group of) people. The first I will term *red-plush*. This refers to traditional auditorium theatre, which is rooted in a strict division between spectators and actors. The former are seated in a darkened space and watch the performing latter on the illuminated stage. The spectator has no influence on whatever happens on the stage, and the performance shape is independent of the audience’s presence.

One level up the participation ladder, we might call *tokenistic participation*. These pieces do involve a certain degree of interaction between the devisers or performers and an audience or group of people, but the participation does not actually change the

⁴ Logically not including pieces that are produced by using the theatre building as a site of conception, i.e. performance that is site-specific to the theatre because it has emerged from a particular theatre or space in a theatre building.

⁵ Although ‘site’ in Pearson’s view also includes people, as they inhabit and use a place, thereby making influencing what it is (2010: 8).

shape, content or course of the piece. Such 'removal of the fourth wall' dates back to the agit-prop movement in 1920s, where for example actors were placed in the audience to encourage the engagement of the audience in the political discussion. Such tools were used to make sure messages were effectively transmitted to the audience (Nicholson 2011).

And finally, *spectator-driven* pieces entirely depend on the contribution of people other than the devising artist. The artist might devise a structure within which this participation happens or an artistic input that stimulates the engagement, but without the audience and their participation there is no piece at all. For example, the making of *The Boat Project* (2012) by Lone Twin involved the participation of 1200 people, who donated pieces of wood with a story. The wood was subsequently used to build a sailing boat and the stories were collected in a book. Although most of the donations came from Southeast UK, the piece was not necessarily specific to this part of the country; and yet the donations did generate the shape of the eventual boat. Without these contributions the piece would not have existed, hence it is inseparable from the people that donated.

In these kinds of works, the line between actors and spectators becomes blurry to the extent that theatre makers have found different ways of calling an audience. Augusto Boal, for example, refers to the active audience in Forum Theatre as *spectactors* (Boal 1992). Walking artist Misha Myers defined the term *percipient* to designate 'a particular kind of participant whose active, embodied and sensorial engagement alters and determines (an artistic) process and its outcomes' (Myers 2008: 172-173).

Specific to the time and place of the performance

The third factor that shapes the contextual work as interpreted in this research, is the notion that the piece is inseparable from the contingencies at the time and place of the actual performance. Site-specific performance is staged at and conceived for a place in the real world (Pavis 1998 in Pearson 2010: 7). Operating beyond the controllable environment of a theatre stage automatically implies that the process will be influenced by 'real world elements' that are less controllable: the eventual shape of the performance is thus dependent on the conditions prevailing at the moment of performance and how the performer responds to these environmental factors.

Again, there is a continuum in this factor, starting with theatre staged in the controlled environment of a stage. Next we might situate outdoor theatre: while still being in a relatively controllable environment because, it for example takes place in a confined place and uses lighting, its eventual shape might be under influence of for example the weather (even though that might imply that the show is cancelled). Site-

specific performance is yet more 'uncontrollable': the performance consists in the staging of a preconceived piece, while taking into account that the conditions at the time and place of the performance will influence its eventual shape. The contingencies include environmental factors as well as human elements, such as the presence of the audience.

The final group could be said to be *improvisation*. This practice consists in the actor not having a preconceived idea, but creating spontaneously and in response to the immediate stimuli of her environment (Frost and Yarrow 2007). Consequently, the devising and performance become one of the same process. Improvisation could therefore be regarded as the 'ultimate' form of site-specificity, as the artist creates *entirely* in response to what is on site.

Contextual practice

Based on the introduction of the two factors in addition to Wilkie's framework of site-specificity, I can conclude that the field of practice of interest to this research is broader than merely 'site-specific'. It grows from a specific context or the overall *situation* in which the piece takes place (a place or the interaction with other people), or is dependent on the context at the moment of performance, which to a large degree influences the eventual shape of the piece. I will refer to this field of practice as *contextual*.⁶

A few notes of importance with regard to my use of this concept. First of all, the term is not new. It has, for example, framed and driven the curriculum of former Dartington College of Art. Contextual was interpreted in various ways, which overlap with my use of the term. The location of the former college, a grand estate with pastures, woodland, the river Dart and sculpted gardens, almost automatically implied that the students' practice took place beyond and outside the studio and auditorium. The acknowledgement of context was also understood as the imperative to bring art closer to everyday life (Crickmay 2003 in Hall 2013: 175), thereby raising the students' awareness of the immediate and wider context in which their practice was situated, both physically and culturally. The curriculum stresses a 'disposition to understand phenomena never purely 'in themselves', but always as 'pervaded by the economic, historical, social and cultural worlds in which they were produced' (Hall 2013: 175).

⁶ Contextual practice does not only refer to pieces that are specific to a 'fixed' site. Like the different authors in the special issue 'Site-specificity and Mobility' (Contemporary Theatre Review) demonstrate, a piece that moves between sites can still be generated in response to these places or the journey between them (See Birch 2012 and Wylkie 2012).

A second note on my use of the terms 'site-specific' and 'contextual' is the fact that they apply to practices not only in the field of performance but visual art as well (see for example Doherty 2004, Kwon 2004, Kaye 2000). It is impossible and unnecessary to draw a strict line between these two fields of art by classifying pieces as either performance *or* visual art. Although drawing from literature on visual art (see the use of critics such as Bishop and Kester in the next sections of this chapter), and therefore acknowledging that the terms circulate across disciplines, this thesis approaches the concept of site-specific and contextual mainly through a performative lens.

2.2.4 Ecology and performance

Another set of performative practices that has to be mentioned in relation this thesis are those that 'perform nature'. The next three paragraphs present three different but interconnected interpretation of this term.

The first, also briefly mentioned in chapter 1, is rooted in the idea that nature-human relations are defined not by static structures but instead exist in process: 'a growing understanding of the dynamic quality of both nature and society' (Szerszynski et al. 2004: 1). Consequently, as Giannachi and Stewart also contend, 'the ontology of nature ... lies only in the performance of nature - in nature's capacity to appear as action, or in our capacity to act within it' (2005: 20). In their book *Nature Performed: Environment, Culture and Performance* Szerszynski et al. present a range of practices in which nature is understood through a performative way of knowing; one that, through being active and relational, allows for a more successful representation and understanding of nature as a 'process of endless exchange and interactivity between the human and the other-than-human' (ibid. 4). In this context performance shifts from being a product that has to be appreciated primarily as 'art', to a means through which one comes to know the world.

A second understanding of this field of practice is performance where nature, ecology or environmental issues somehow influence an indoor staged theatre piece. Giannachi and Stewart (2005) for example describe how 'nature' is brought onto the stage as a means to disrupt a piece -e.g. in the form of a dog being unleashed onto the stage- thereby bringing a sense of unpredictability to the work. Stewart (2005) describes a practice in which he translates the particulars of a place into dance. These 'logging techniques' produce mediated material that is then either represented at the place where it was sourced or on stage, functioning as a reminder of that place.

Chadhuri and Enelow present 'The ecocide project' in which climate change was explored through theatre and subsequently presented as a performance piece on stage (2013: ix). Besides regarding performance as an effective means to raise awareness among an audience, they state that contemporary alarming phenomena such as climate change are 'creatively productive' (Chadhuri and Enelow 2013: 3). I.e. engagement with nature or environmental issues is seen as an opportunity to create 'new' and exciting forms of performance. Giannachi & Stewart are of a similar view when they assert that it is 'in the interface between ecology and the arts that some of the most aesthetically inspiring and politically challenging works are found' (2005: 20; see also Arons and May 2012: 4).

A final example to give here is from Bottoms and Goulish's (2007) description of the work by the theatre company Goat Island, where there is not (only) an explicit acting out of environmental issues or nature on the stage, but where the making process and the final production are shaped by the idea of ecology. They draw from Bateson's ideas on systems theory and non-hierarchy, thereby for example ensuring 'that the elements and ideas that come in over the course of a long performance-making period are as interconnected as the elements in a complex eco-system' (Bottoms and Goulish 2007: 119).

Kershaw takes a similar approach. Referring to 'Theatre Ecology' he discusses 'how theatre behaves as an ecosystem' (2007: 16). He does not exclusively describe practices that make theatre in, about or for the natural environment (although he does not exclude them either), but discusses the theatre discipline as a whole, while using ecological principles as metaphors or routeways through which to understand theatre. He for example compares the relationship between actors and audience to an ecotone, i.e. as a transition where two ecological communities meet and their behavior is determined by so-called edge effects. He claims that thinking of it as such might also tell him something about 'the general health of theatre' (ibid. 186). Besides not being entirely convinced that explaining theatre as an ecosystem is at all useful (since Kershaw's comparison is in places far-fetched and produces a unnecessarily dense and complicated argument), I do not aim this thesis to be a discussion of theatre as a whole, and have therefore chosen to focus on other discourses that discuss certain more applicable practices in detail.

Furthermore, although this thesis is definitely influenced by the idea that certain aspects of life and knowing, such as nature, are better approached through a dynamic and interrelated way of knowing, I am less concerned with practices that are created with the purpose of representing nature through art. And although a lot of these

examples are site-specific, they mainly focus on the artist's relationship with a particular environment, or the staging of ecological elements on stage, and do not necessarily involve dialogue with the spectating audience. These practices are therefore not part of the scope of this thesis.

Furthermore, like Heddon and Mackey (2012) who criticize theatre that aims to didactically convey an environmental message, this thesis does not, for reasons explained in Chapter 3.4 focus on theatre that has the sole purpose of educating an audience.

2.2.5 Participation and conversation

An art genre that does primarily depend on dialogue and high levels of participation of audiences is a field of practice that curator and art historic Claire Bishop calls *participatory art* or *socially collaborative art*. She gives an insightful chronological overview of these participatory practices in her book *Artificial Hells* (2012), ranging from the mass spectacles during the Soviet era in which whole cities participated in the re-enactment of a historic event, to the Happenings in the 60s, community projects in the 70s-80s and more recent work. She defines participatory art as practice 'in which people constitute the central artistic medium and material' and

the artist is conceived less as an individual producer of discrete objects than as a collaborator and producer of *situations*; the work of art as a finite, portable, commodifiable product is reconceived as an ongoing or long-term *project* with an unclear beginning and end; while the audience, previously conceived as 'viewer' or 'beholder', is now repositioned as a co-producer or *participant*. Bishop 2012: 2, emphasis in original).

This kind of practice overlaps with what Grant Kester calls *conversational aesthetics* or *dialogic projects*, where the participation consists in a conversation or what he calls 'performative interaction' (Kester 2004: 10). He presents the work of, for example, artists group Wochenklausur, whose work lies in 'creating an open space where individuals can break free from pre-existing roles and obligations, reacting and interacting in new and unforeseeable ways' (ibid. 6). He further proposes that in such projects the role of the artist shifts from being a solitary creator, to somebody who is willing 'to accept a position of dependence and intersubjective vulnerability relative to the viewer or collaborator (ibid. 110). So, like in people-specific performance, the work becomes inseparable from the people that are involved.

Wallace Heim uses the term 'social art practice' to describe pieces that 'intend to induce a change in perception, and conversation is used as a method of persuasion however indirectly' (Heim 2005: 200). As an example of such dialogic work in the context of environmental action (Heim 2004) she describes the piece HOMELAND by Platform London, an art and campaigning collective, that creates projects to fight social and environmental injustice. The core of the piece was the artists inviting passers-by to converse and reflect on the connections between their consumption patterns and the places and people that produce the products we consume, thereby bringing participants to a new awareness about themselves, and their position in the globalized world of consumption. Heim emphasizes that the role of the artist was not to transmit a preconceived message or direct the conversation to a fixed outcome. She stresses that the meaning or message of the piece of art is not unequivocally preconceived by the artist and transmitted through the medium of art; rather art becomes a process through which meaning is generated. It is collaboratively created as a result of the dialogic process between artist and participant. As I will argue in more detail in chapter 3.4, the quality of meaning-making lies at the core of the practice that this thesis focuses on. By means of introduction I will describe another genre of performative art that demonstrates this quality.

2.2.6 Theatre and learning

Anthony Jackson discusses a wide range of practices in which theatre is used as a means of learning in different locations, ranging from prisons, schools to heritage centres. Practices of this type are explicitly not activities that teach people *about* theatre (i.e. how to do or appreciate it), but instead use theatre to produce a transformation in people's lives (Jackson 2007: 1-2). Theatre in education (TIE) originated in 1960s, but the use of theatre in informal, community and adult learning dates back to the Industrial Revolution, where theatre was brought to places of work to encourage the working class to become politically active (Nicholson 2011). Jackson argues that, rooted in Freire's 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' as well as Dewey's ideas around democratisation of education, TIE is characterized by 'a commitment to placing their audiences at the centre of their own learning' (Jackson and Vine 2013: 6). TIE does not follow a banking model of education (see page 24), nor does it aim to instrumentally transmit a predetermined message from a teacher to learner. He states that the power of theatre lies in its capacity to create a learning environment where people generate their own meaning, and become aware of their ability to think and act autonomously to find their

own solutions (Jackson 2007: 6). Consequently, TIE often involves high levels of audience engagement, before, during or after the performance.

These performative pedagogies (Nicholson 2012) spill over into other forms of applied and participative theatre, such as community theatre -see Van Erven (2002), O'Shea (2012)- and "Theatre for Development" (TfD), in which theatre is used as a means to explore a problem or issue. Building on Freire's ideas of praxis, Augusto Boal developed *Theatre of the Oppressed*, a method through which people fight their oppressed position through performative means: they explore, reflect on and practice for reality by standing up for themselves in staged situations (Boal 1992). These practices have in common that they focus on the stories and realities of 'largely silent (or silenced) groups of people' (Van Erven 2002: 3). Where TfD always has the imperative to empower marginalized people (Boon and Plastow 2004), community theatre is a broader term that covers practices in which local performers and amateur artists collectively shape a piece, alongside professional performers and/or director.

Heras and Tàbara (2014) describe the potential of performative methods as a participatory approach in learning for sustainability. Like Jackson they emphasize the potential of these practices not as means to instrumentally 'teach' something, but rather as means of exploration, questioning and solution-finding. They refer to practices that 'explicitly attempt to be goal searching instead of goal achieving': the goal is framed through(out) the process of doing the practice, not determined in advance (2014: 382), and therefore collectively created as an outcome of the interaction between artist and participant. Again, this interpretation of art as 'goal searching' applies to the practice of social learning, as I will argue in Chapter 3.4.

A final example to illustrate this field of applied theatre and its use in sustainability-oriented education is a project described by Davis and Tarrant (2014). In the practice, called Scientific Simulation Investigations, life-like scenarios are performed by characters that represent different perspectives on an issue. And the participants are encouraged to engage with the dilemma and propose solutions (2014: 192). The authors claim that the learning is made immediate and relevant to students when the perspectives are performed in situ, and that the method 'meets the twin demands of learning that is 'scientific' and rigorous, and also connected and empathetic' (2014: 194).

2.2.7 Art-based Environmental Education

Another example of art in learning that is relevant in the context of sustainable development, is the conception of *Art-based Environmental Education* (henceforward AEE). This term was first coined in the 1990s by Finnish art educator Meri-Helga Mantere and further developed in a recent doctoral study by Jan van Boeckel. He argues that Environmental Education, one of the learning pathways towards sustainable development⁷, is largely rooted in science education, which is dominated by logocentric approaches and what Dahlin, Østergaard and Hugo (2009) call 'cognitionism': 'the one-sided emphasis on abstract models and purely conceptual cognition' (Van Boeckel 2013: 23). Consequently, in an attempt to teach pupils how to care for the world, educators instruct a pre-established body of objective propositions *about* the world. This, Van Boeckel argues, only reinforces the learner's separation from their surroundings and the more-than-human world (Abram 1997), and so aggravates the ecological crisis rather than alleviates it.

He proposes that the practice of environmental education should be based on an experiential process through which the learner comes in relation to the world. It encourages learners to approach issues afresh and experientially, thereby immersing themselves in nature rather than becoming separated from it.

An example of an AEE activity is *wildpainting*. Here participants are asked to draw the nature scene in front of them 'as wrong as possible', i.e. if the sky is blue they paint it orange, and if the leaves are green they should use red. Later they apply the colours that they actually perceive on top of the 'wrong' ones. This example holds various elements that constitute an art-based process. Like the social art practice described by Heim the process is open-ended because the educator, facilitator or guide does not instruct a pre-determined body of knowledge (e.g. about the environment, how to regard it or behave in relation to it), but merely creates the conditions that allow the participants to come into a meaningful encounter with the world. The artful experience then teaches them things that the educator could not have predetermined.

Painting the scene 'wrong' at first leads to an *estrangement* or *wrong tracking*, which constitutes another feature of AEE. Instead of drawing what they think they

⁷ Discourses about the exact definition and shape of Environmental Education are vast and complex; they are beyond this research to discuss in detail. Therefore, I will pragmatically stick to the UNESCO definition of the term, as established in the Tbilisi Declaration, 1978: 'Environmental education is a learning process that increases people's knowledge and awareness about the environment and associated challenges, develops the necessary skills and expertise to address the challenges, and fosters attitudes, motivations, and commitments to make informed decisions and take responsible action'.

should be drawing (e.g. the conception of a tree as they think it should look), in this process of estrangement one is dramatically pulled out of one's habitual way of behaving. Being in this liminal space allows for certain things to happen that would normally not happen. Consequently, there is more likelihood for transformative experiences to occur' (Jan van Boeckel, personal communication, 5 October 2011). Through estrangement learners *re*-look, instead of just relying on the image they have in mind.

2.2.8 Art as a way of knowing

The seven sections above describe a progression in the extent to which the process of making the art overlaps the perception or experience of it. In studio-conceived and gallery-presented (eco) art the 'object' is preconceived by the artist and presented as a tool to transmit a message didactically to an audience. The one who makes the art, and the one who should observe it are clearly separated. In people-specific contextual practices and socially engaged art, the distinction between the one who is creating and the one who is experiencing the art starts to fade, as the input of the 'audience' shapes the eventual shape of the art product or situation. Although the art often resides in a situation, project, relationship, happening or conversation, and is thus not necessarily tangible as an object or framed piece to be watched, a lot of the pieces are still explicitly artistic because they were initiated, designed and created by an artist, rather than anyone else.

In TIE and community theatre as described by Jackson, the distinction between creator and spectator further disappears as the makers invite learners to engage in a collective meaning-making process propelled by an artful experience. Van Boeckel underlines that the art in AEE is not restricted to the artist, but that 'every human being can participate meaningfully in some form of artistic activity' (2013: 68). Herewith the art process becomes an intrinsic form of learning in itself in which everyone can equally engage. The artist only creates the framework in which the making happens, but the participants are the ones generating the art.

This thesis resolutely follows this interpretation of art. Something akin to Beuys' slogan that everyone is an artist, it contends that everyone can see things through an artistic lens, come to know the world through an artful manner or integrate artistic ways in one's doing. However, this does not mean that one has to become an artist. Nor does it necessarily have to involve the physical making of something by mastering a formal art

form such as painting or sculpting. What I am referring to are ways of knowing, doing and being that complement cognitive or logocentric ways of knowing that, as I will argue below, dominate our society.

Thus, although I am classing my practice in the field of contextual practice, this research explicitly did not aim to assess how the artist or an *object* of art contributes to sustainable development and learning. It aims to distil what artful elements that underlie this field can be usefully transposed to non-artistic processes in order to achieve certain aims. What I am interested in therefore is not so much the artist that deals with sustainability issues, but rather the other way round: how sustainability issues might be addressed in an artful manner.

The rest of this thesis will extensively deal with what 'artful' means exactly in the context of learning and sustainable development. To complete the current chapter, I will give two more examples, in addition to TIE and AEE that I also classify in this category. There are undoubtedly more –e.g. art therapy (cf. McNiff 2004)– but I shall focus on ones that are mentioned in relation to sustainable development.

Presentational knowing

Social scientists John Heron and Peter Reason propose that there are four ways of knowing, each of which is equally important in any research or learning process. They argue that every process of coming to know about the world is based on *experiential knowing*, which refers to 'the direct acquaintance with that which I meet in my lifeworld' (Heron and Reason 2008 online). This knowing is tacit, non-rational and pre-verbal. The knowing resides in the pure encounter with whatever one meets without trying to grasp it.

The second level in knowing is *presentational*. Herein experiential knowing is articulated into a communicable form. This form however is still non-rational and not abstracted; it is a presentation of the inchoate experience in an unmediated sense: 'nondiscursively through the visual arts, music, dance and movement, and discursively in poetry, drama and the continuously creative capacity of the human individual and social mind to tell stories' (ibid.). This notion echoes ideas around PaR presented in 2.1: the knowledge resides in the doing itself and does not need to be made explicit through a written interpretation of the practice.

In contrast, *propositional knowing* is knowing in a more mediated form: 'the knowing 'about' something in intellectual terms of ideas and theories.' It is a process of naming, labelling and expression in propositions, which are 'statements which use

language to assert facts about the world, laws that make generalizations about facts and theories that organise the laws' (ibid.). This level of knowing reflects the process of objectification, as described in Chapter 3.2.

The final epistemology that Heron and Reason present is that of *practical knowing*: 'a knowing how-to-do, how to engage in, some class of action or practice' (ibid.). It is the translation of propositional knowing into practice, which thereby also closes the cycle: the knowing returns to the experiential level. It moves back to an encounter with one's environment through a doing and being in the world, from which presentational knowing can emerge, and so forth (Seeley and Reason 2008).

One way of understanding 'artful', this thesis argues, is Reason and Seeley's description of presentational knowing. In their view, using art to build a more sustainable society, is not about artists devoting their art-making to address sustainability issues; nor do they state that we need art pieces to raise awareness and point out to solutions. Rather, they believe that if our *entire* society becomes more –what I would call– 'artful', by integrating presentational besides propositional knowing that dominates western society, we might be able to address issues more successfully.

They refer to three elements that such presentation knowing consists of. It starts with what they call a *sensuous encountering*: a direct experience of the world, through an engagement of all senses and appreciation for 'the wonderful stuff of everyday life' (ibid. 31). Subsequently, they argue, in order to remain in the presentational sphere, one has to *suspend*, or hold back 'the intellect from prematurely rushing in with a show of certainty, planning, and quick answers to dispel anxiety of dwelling in complexity and unknowing' (ibid. 35). So rather than allowing the rational mind to take over and label, name, theorize and objectify, Seeley and Reason propose to hold on to not-knowing and *pluralised knowing*, which allows 'multiple interpretations to proliferate, without collapsing meaning down to one 'right' answer or meaning' (ibid. 36).⁸

This diverse unmediated knowing is then made tangible through, what the authors call *bodying-forth*: 'inviting imaginative impulses to express themselves through the media of our bodies without our intellects throwing a spanner in the works and crushing those responses with misplaced rationality or premature editing and critique' (ibid. 31).

⁸ Van Boeckel refers to a similar process and call it 'rudimentary cognition' which he defines as 'a mode of coming to new knowledge that is essentially a form of groping and fumbling one's way forward, and is at this early stage necessarily still fragmentary, fuzzy and ambiguous' (2012: 4).

Knowing through the right hemisphere of the brain

Another example of artful knowing as I understand it in this thesis comes from the field of neuropsychology. Iain McGilchrist in his book *The Master and his Emissary* (2009) explains the evolution of our society on the basis of the way our brains work. His views are based on a wide range of neurological research, focussed mostly on the consequences of brain lesion; i.e. cases in which one half of the brain is permanently (through an accident or stroke) or temporally (artificially) inactivated, and observing how the patient's behaviour changes as a result of this trauma.

McGilchrist proposes a similar division between on the one hand propositional knowing and on the other experiential and presentational knowing. However, he sees it as two ways of perceiving the world caused by the separation between the left and right hemisphere of our brains, which by each having different faculties, relate to the world differently. Like Seeley and Reason, he contends that the Western world is dominated by a propositional and objectified way of knowing, which, in his view, is dangerous as it might lead to a complete ossification of society.

It is important to understand that his thesis goes beyond the popular notion that the right is responsible for creativity, and the left deals with more 'practical' matters like language and mathematics. He describes a much broader range of faculties that make the two parts differ from each other. And this difference does not lie in *what* each of the hemispheres engender (e.g. creativity vs. mathematics), but rather in *how* they do it: the way they dispose themselves in relation to the world.

In order to make sense of the world, the brain puts us in touch with our environment but what parts of the world around us come into being in our brains depends on the nature of our attention (McGilchrist 2009: 38). McGilchrist argues that the left and the right hemisphere each have a different way of attending to the world. In fact they create two different worlds, which are both necessary to function, and therefore are compatible but need to be kept apart. From an evolutionary perspective, the left hemisphere concentrates on focus and grasping: in order to be able to find food we needed to know how to extract it from the context in order to obtain and eat it. At the same time, however, we needed to be aware of our surroundings: predators lurking beyond our view, potential mates dwelling at the periphery of our vision, etc. This is a broad attention performed by the right. As a consequence there are two ways of attending to the world.

Furthermore, there is what he calls a 'hierarchy of attention' (ibid. 43). Because of its open attitude, the right hemisphere is the first to attend to the world. This is a broad,

messy, inchoate rendition because, as we do not know yet what to focus on, it basically captures everything. The information then gets passed to the left, which proceeds in taking it apart, categorizing and assembling it into a picture that is useful in order to function: a map that helps us get what we need in order to be alive. So where through the right hemisphere the world is *present* as it is, the left creates a *representation* of the world, focussing on certain aspects and excluding others that are not useful or do not tally with representations that are already existing in the brain. And for things to be 'usable' in a left hemisphere sort of way, they need to be fixed, static, distinct and separate. However, this is a mere representation of the world, not the world as it is and presented by the right hemisphere, which acknowledges the world as fluid, living, and fundamentally changing.

He thus argues that in order to not confuse the simplified rendition of the world (in which things are made static, fixed and separate for our convenience) with the real world, the represented version of the world as conceived by the left, has to 'be given back to the right hemisphere': i.e. continuously re-integrated with the living, moving, uncertain world. Like Heron and Reason in the previous paragraph, McGilchrist describes a cycle in which knowing moves from being a chaotic and incipient experience, to becoming a static, grasped abstraction, and then back into the practice of living.

Furthermore, since the left can only pick up on things that are already in its narrow beam of attention, it will never pick up on things that are of not-yet-known but potentially mighty importance; things it does not know it does not know. Consequently, a supremacy of the left, through which the world is predominantly attended to through the left hemisphere and 'knowing' is not passed back to the right, creates a closed cycle in which the left only refers to what it already knows. Only focussing with the left would allegorically imply a continuous restructuring and re-categorizing of existing material, without anything new coming in, comparable to a bureaucrat shifting piles of papers from one side of the desk to the other, endlessly reorganizing in an attempt to make more sense of them.

Hence, similar to Seeley, Heron and Reason, McGilchrist argues for a re-integration of a way of knowing that we seem to be losing. He describes them as right hemisphere qualities, which I argue is another interpretation of 'artful', in addition to the notion of presentational knowing. This way of coming to know about the world constitutes a nature of attention that is open to the new, attentive, exploratory; focuses on relationships, connection and the whole; sees things in context; has an eye for the

living, fluid and dynamic qualities of the world, as well as the idiosyncratic and the empathic; and allows for things to be ambiguous, non-linear, ever-changing and complex (McGilchrist 2009: 37-72).

It is important to understand that artful, as interpreted in this thesis, does not always exactly match pieces and practices that are 'officially' seen as art (i.e. within the realms of the art world). McGilchrist argues for example that modernism, as an emblem of a predominance of a left hemisphere outlook on the world, produced arts that were likewise largely directed by such overreliance on the left; pieces were fragmented, over-explicit, depersonalized, abstracted and conceptual.

This is akin to Gablik's observation (see page 29) that much of the art has become mechanistic, positivistic, overly rational, solipsistic, materialistic, secular, etc. And in a similar vein I argue that not every ecological and participatory piece of art, even if it claims to do 'good', is artful in the sense that I understand it. There is a lot of eco-art that is utilitarian, object-oriented, message-driven and therefore does not profess any of the elements that I argue to be artful when following the presentational or right hemisphere interpretation of artful.

Likewise something can be artful without necessarily being art. Science for example needs to incorporate right as well as left hemisphere faculties. Or as Heron and Reason would word: it needs to incorporate all four forms of knowing. Hence, this view goes beyond instrumentally using a few artistic methods (painting, sculpting) in a further conventional process, as this means that the way these artistic methods are used is still utilitarian.

2.3 Summary

This chapter described the general approach of this research that is rooted in the idea of praxis: it aims to research through doing and ensure that the theory that results from an analysis of the doing can be returned to and applied in practice. The methodology borrows from praxis-oriented research, action research and practice-based research. The latter is a term used in the field of the arts to designate research in which findings are generated through *creative* practice.

I designate between four fields of overlapping art-related research approaches: practice-as-research, practice-led research, practice-based research and arts-based

research. This sequence represents a continuum in the extent to which the arts practice replaces what is conventionally seen as research. The current research is practice-based. Although I do regard the entire research as a process of creative making, the knowledge that the research has generated resides predominantly in an *interpretation* of this practice, not in the practice itself. However, I do intend this thesis to be a piece of praxis, by reminding the reader of the practice that generated this writing and producing theory that can be re-integrated into practice.

Then this chapter discussed the nature of the practice developed as part of this research by describing the wide range of art forms that it is affiliated to. It draws from a lot of them, but two main relationships should be highlighted. First of all, this thesis distances itself from practices that are overly didactical; art in which the artist assumes the role of a bringer of meaning, rather than a facilitator of a meaning-making process. Second, the research draws from what I have called *contextual* performance, which concerns performance that is inseparable from the overall situation in which the piece takes place, and is dependent on the context at the moment of performance, which to a large degree influences the eventual shape of the piece.

However, I am not interested in how artists in the field of contextual practices might contribute to or deal with sustainability issues; instead I aim to explore what artful elements *underlying* such practices might be incorporated in other societal processes (such as learning). Such artful practices present an alternative to dominant rational ways of knowing by being presentational or experiential. Yet, what artful means exactly in the context of learning and sustainable development is the topic of this research and will therefore be discussed in more detail in part II of this writing. But before moving on to that, the next chapter will explain why this thesis focuses on the relation between art, learning and sustainable development in the first place.

3

Conceptions of sustainable development

This thesis is rooted in the notion and aspiration of ‘sustainable development,’ a concept coined by the Brundtland Commission as part of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) in 1987. Although this definition is generally accepted and commonly used by politicians, companies and citizens, it is also sharply criticized for being elusive.

In this chapter I will argue that sustainable development is indeed ambiguous, and that this ambiguity is manifested in two ways. First, because people operating in this realm simply cannot agree on *what* exactly should be sustained and *how* this should be done. From its very birth the term sustainable development has been seen as hopelessly messy. Norgaard, for example, commented in 1988 that with it meaning ‘something different to everyone, the quest for sustainable development is off to a cacophonous start’ (1988: 607). Since then, politicians, companies, citizens, activists and scholars have been trying to pin down a clear-cut, unequivocal and operative definition. In vein it appears.

Connelly observed: ‘There is still no general consensus over the societal goals that would count as sustainable development as a matter of definition, or would contribute to it in practice’ (2007: 259). Definitions of sustainable development are said to be vague (Gow 1992; Mozaffar 2001), contested and diverse (Connelly 2007; Van Zeijl-Rozema et al. 2008). Others argue that there are too many definitions but that there is also a lack of operative ones (Karvonen and Brand 2009; Manderson 2006). The notion is, in short, ‘shrouded in definitional haziness’ (Selby and Kagawa 2010:28). The first part of this chapter will give a general overview of the different conceptions of sustainable development that constitute this contestation.

The rest of the chapter will build the argument that the ambiguity obscuring the concept is in fact an *essential* contestation. This is the second manifestation of ambiguity in relation to sustainable development. In discussing the reasons that refute the acclaimed success of technocratic, expert-designed approaches to sustainable development, I will propose an alternative: a learning-based approach to sustainable development. I will introduce the term *social learning* in which citizens and experts alike collaboratively search for place and time specific solutions for contemporary challenges

that have no easy answers. These processes are rooted in the everyday life of people; they are open-ended and tolerant to differing (disciplinary) backgrounds and perceptions, thereby inviting a plurality of views. Because of the dynamic character of such processes and the involvement of a range of stakeholders, sustainable development is an 'essentially contested' (Jacobs 1995) and thus ambiguous concept.

The chapter will end with an explanation as to why this thesis builds on the premise that art can facilitate in generating such ambiguous learning processes. It thereby justifies the 'hunch' that drove this research and set the scene for the remainder of this thesis that deals with how the practice of arts might transpose onto social learning for sustainable development.

3.1 Opposing conceptions

The *International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources* first mentioned the term 'Sustainable Development' in their *World Conservation Strategy* in 1980. But it only gained popularity and political recognition in an adapted form seven years later through the report *Our Common Future* written by the Brundtland Commission (Dresner 2002; Jacobs 1999). Before Brundtland the focus was mainly on nature conservation in itself, perceived and conducted as an endeavour separated from people. Nature was protected from the supposedly main destructive factor –humans– by fencing it off, e.g. in the form of national parks. The World Conservation Strategy reflected this view and became sharply criticized by developing countries that felt that protecting the environment in such a manner would curtail their developmental aspirations, and was thus a luxury that only wealthy nations could afford (Dresner 2002). Hence, Brundtland established an approach in which economic development and environmental protection became compatible and not conflicting; a strong economy and a healthy environment became integrated goals based on the premise that worldwide environmental degradation is an issue that goes beyond the environmental realm, but involves social and economic factors as well. Besides befitting the developing countries, this approach also miraculously united groups that until then had been diametrically opposed to one another (Jacobs 1999). Environmentalists and economists suddenly used the same language and endorsed the same objective: sustainable development.

Susan Baker defines sustainable development on the basis of the Brundtland report as follows: 'It seeks to reconcile the ecological, social and economic dimensions of development, now and in the future, and adopts a global perspective in this task' (Baker 2006: 5). This definition neatly encompasses five interrelated premises that jointly form the foundation of sustainable development.

First of all, as the two most politically pressing issues at the time –poverty and environmental degradation– became a single matter, socio-economic and ecological imperatives came to be regarded as equally important and reciprocal. Following Indira Ghandi's suggestion that 'poverty is the worst pollution' (Dresner 2002: 28) the Brundtland Report states: 'A world in which poverty is endemic will always be prone to ecological and other catastrophes' (WCED 1987). As long as the latter live in poverty, the report reasons, with their livelihoods depending heavily on their surroundings, they will continue to degrade the local environment. Consequently, it was increasingly recognized that if natural resources are to be sustained and protected it must be done in a manner that involves people (Gow 1992: 50). The establishment of nature reserves to a large extent made way for the promotion of environmental protection through for example agroforestry, integrated resource management and Non-timber Forest Products.

This line of thought later led to the conception of sustainable development in the form of the 'Triple bottom line' or 'Three pillars of sustainability', in which sustainable development lies in the integration of social (people), economic (profit) and ecological (planet) factors. Images of this model are among the most well-known representations of sustainable development. A Google search renders the model pictured in many ways: as a three-legged stool of which each leg is a supporting component; as overlapping or concentric circles with sustainable development lying in the middle; pillars of a building; or as a triangle in which the three corners or sides form one element.

As much as the condition of the environment is dependent on economic health and social wellbeing as described above, the latter two factors also hinge on the wellbeing of the environment. This premise is encapsulated in the word 'future' of Baker's description of sustainable development. It refers to *intragenerational*: the notion that in order to be well in the future we need to take care of natural resources now (Jacobs 1991). This is reflected by the most quoted shorthand definition of sustainable development: 'sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (WCED 1987).

At the same time, the third element, as represented by the word 'now', promotes the value of *intergenerational equity*. This relates back to the recognition of the right of developing countries to protect their environment in a way that would not inhibit their economic development. Sustainable development is built on the value that everyone has an equal right to increase his/her standard of living and no one should inhibit someone else's ability to do so. This also implies that natural resources should be used in a manner that does not deprive somebody else's access.

The fourth component in the foundation of sustainable development definition as conceived by Brundtland is condensed in the word 'global'. As sustainability challenges transpire from a complex interaction of factors, in which often the causes and effects are separated spatially, it was recognized that environmental problems transgress national borders (WCED 1987). Hence, environmental protection became a global, political topic with the interpretation of sustainable development explored and established mostly at political summits, and its operationalization through top-down institutional measures.

A fifth element that is not explicitly mentioned in Brundtland's definition but has come to be increasingly important within the understanding of sustainable development is that of *participation* (Jacobs 1999; Baker 2006; Pearce et al. 1989; Lélé 1991). First mainly seen as a means to, but later more and more embraced as an objective in itself, sustainable development requires 'the political involvement of all groups or 'stakeholders' in society' (Jacobs 1991: 26). Or as stated in Brundtland: 'Making the difficult choices involved in achieving sustainable development will depend on the widespread support and involvement of informed public and non-governmental organizations, the scientific community and industry' (WCED 1987). This imperative is grounded in the belief that since in a liberal society people disagree about values and ideals, authorities that do not allow explicit discussion on these ideas would be undermining the democratic foundations of such a society and the process of policy making. Hence, participation helps society make decisions about the difficult issue of what is to be sustained and for whom (Baker 2006: 42).

The necessity of participation has led to 'bottom-up' or community-based approaches to sustainable development such as the formulation of Local Agenda 21, a non-binding directive for sustainable development action on national level (Blewitt 2008; Baker 2006). It also invited non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to the scene of policy-making, as representatives of 'the public voice'.

Although the Brundtland model provides a set of guidelines and has gained an authoritative status, it is not detailed enough to determine actual policies. These were to be worked out in practice by different stakeholders and through international negotiations (Baker 2006: 24). However, the chain of summits after the Earth Summit in 1992 to a large extent failed to do so: measures were downgraded, targets not achieved, summits were cancelled, nations refused to endorse agreements or walked out altogether. Although delegates often support the general ambition of sustainable development, when it comes to actually operationalizing the norms or values, what needs to be done exactly and how is unknown or contested. Hence there exists a wide array of different discourses that express the 'whats' and 'hows' of sustainable development in more detail. To highlight this diversity, the next sections will each cover one main point of contestation, forming four continuums of divergence against which the different conceptions of sustainable development are explained.

3.1.1 Anthropocentric vs. ecocentric

The first continuum holds an ecocentric or 'deep-green' notion of sustainable development at one end of the spectrum, and a shallow or anthropocentric conception at the other end. The former criticizes the latter for being primarily focused on people and profit, disregarding environmental imperatives. In the foundations of sustainable development as outlined in the previous section, the ecosystem is seen as *the bottom line*, because compromising environmental health undermines the wellbeing of the other factors (Baker 2006: 21). This is an anthropocentric viewpoint as nature becomes a capital: it ceases to be valuable in itself, but is referred to as a 'resource' with an instrumental value to human beings. As a consequence, nature is only conserved and sustained if it exhibits social and economic returns. A shallow approach consists in superficial changes to society and citizen's lives. These rely heavily on technology (such as renewable sources of energy) and behavioural adjustments (recycling of waste), without challenging our basic values vis-à-vis nature, which shape society.

At the other extreme lies an *ecocentric* approach as promoted by thinkers like Arne Naess, Stephan Harding, David Abram and Joanna Macy. These *deep ecologists* regard the natural world as an intricate system of balanced relationships, in which the existence of each organism is dependent on the presence of another. Humans are thus not positioned above or beside nature but part of it; non-human life has an equal and intrinsic value that surpasses the human desire to prosper and use nature as a resource

to fulfil that purpose (Blewitt 2008: 29-31). They therefore object to denoting nature in terms of 'capital' or 'resource' as these labels imply that nature can be utilized and depleted for mere human purpose.

An ecocentric operationalization of sustainable development rejects the notion that environmental problems can be solved within the existing capitalist, industrial society, by making shallow (technological) adjustments to the way we do things. The latter reflects a misconception of our position in and relation to the natural world, in that we fail to see our deeper connection to it. Hence, they argue, addressing current environmental challenges starts at a deep personal level, primarily changing the way we perceive ourselves in relation to the rest of the world. Harding (2009) describes a transformative process that starts with a *deep experience*, in which one identifies deeply with nature; followed by *deep questioning* through which one challenges the fundamental assumptions of our position in the world; which then leads to a *deep commitment* to pursue a way of living that reflects this position and inherent appraisal of the natural world. Macy developed the *Work That Reconnects*: a deep questioning method along the same lines (Macy 1998).

Although deep ecology is based on a similar premise as the notion of sustainable development (i.e. the idea that humans are overexploiting the natural world to the extent that we need to do something about it), we might question whether deep ecology falls within the realm of sustainable development (Connelly 2007). As mentioned in the first part of this chapter, the Brundtland Commission was one of the first to propose the notion that nature can (only) be protected by acknowledging the use it serves to humans. The foundations of sustainable development are therefore clearly anthropocentric. Moreover, the focus is –as the term indicates– on the development of the human species. *Deep green* positions however 'see any development paradigm as intrinsically incompatible with the protection of nature' and hence in essence reject the notion of sustainable development (ibid. 270). For that reason, although recognizing the value of deep ecology and the ecocentric approach, in aiming to remain in line with foundations of sustainable development as laid out by the WCED, this thesis follows a more anthropocentric approach.

At the same time however, the extremely anthropocentric conceptions of sustainable development, which place economic and industrial advancement above, before and central to the environmental imperative, can be equally considered to lie outside the boundaries of sustainable development, as they depict a rather unbalanced relation between the three imperatives. Following Connelly (2007) and Lélé (1991) this

thesis therefore deems such approaches not as sustainable development, and hence positions itself somewhere halfway the continuum, with a tendency towards the anthropocentric extreme.

3.1.2 Weak vs. strong sustainability

Overlapping with and related to the previous continuum is the often-employed separation between *weak* versus *strong* sustainability. The basis of this divergence lies in the extent to which one regards natural capital as substitutable by human capital. Both approaches acknowledge that certain critical natural processes are essential to life: particular 'natural assets' hold 'functions' that help us –humans– survive and thrive, e.g. the ozone layer protects us from damaging ultraviolet light, oceanic phytoplankton regulates the climate, and wetlands have pollution-cleaning properties. The approaches diverge on the point as to whether these natural assets can and should be entirely replaced by human assets, i.e. technology. Weak sustainability assumes almost infinite substitutability by technology, whereas strong sustainability assumes that there is such a thing as 'critical' natural capital, which cannot be replaced and should therefore be preserved absolutely (Dresner 2002; Baker 2006).

Moderate weak sustainability, a conceptualization as advocated in for example Pearce's *Blueprint for a Green Economy* (1989), acknowledges that some functions provided by natural assets are not substitutable, and should therefore be handled with care. As Pearce puts it: 'If man-made and natural capital are not so easily substituted, then we have a basic reason for protecting the natural assets we have' (ibid. 38). But, he continues: 'Technological advances could of course one day advance the degree of substitution between the two types of capital.' Meaning that with technological progress, humans might eventually find ways to entirely substitute nature's functions to the extent that we do not need the natural world anymore.

Weak sustainability is criticized for a number of reasons. Dresner argues that we cannot possibly know what an ecologically 'safe' level of a certain natural asset is in order to maintain its function. Thus, by following weak sustainability we might recognize too late that a certain resource that did not seem to hold a function and was therefore exhaustible actually did hold a vital purpose. By the time we have decided that we do need it, we have lost it forever. Furthermore, 'nature' has other less pragmatic functions that are irreplaceable and therefore legitimize its preservation. For example, it

holds emotional and spiritual value that contribute to our mental well-being. Pearce does not consider these values.

Although strong sustainability does advocate a much more prudent and conservationist approach to sustainable development, it is still founded on an anthropocentric view of the relation between human and the natural world. Both notions regard nature in terms of 'capital' and promote conservation primarily for its instrumental value: the 'functions' natural 'resources' hold for humans. On that basis both weak and strong sustainability would be unacceptable from an ecocentric point of view. Moreover, like Pearce's quote above demonstrates, speaking of substitutability of nature by human technology, points at human dominion over nature.

3.1.3 Instrumental vs. participatory

The third spectrum of divergence stretches between a sustainable development conception that is expert-designed, predetermined and imposed on the one hand, and a more process-based, collaborative approach on the other, in which solution-finding is conducted in a way that includes an entire society (not just experts).

Bob Jickling and Arjen Wals describe sustainable development in relation to citizen participation and propose two 'force fields' or opposing conceptualizations of sustainable development (Wals and Jickling 2008). They plot the level of citizen participation against the extent to which sustainable development is predetermined. On the one end lie sustainable development approaches in which participation is low, and sustainable development comes in the form of prescribed instructions imposed on citizens by the governmental apparatus. In this 'Big Brother Sustainable Development' national and global standards for sustainable development 'are used to create a consistent and unambiguous message and benchmarks that can be used [to] measure progress towards the pre-determined goals and objectives' (ibid. 12). Sustainable development is imposed 'through law and order, rewards and punishment, and conditioning of behaviour' (Jickling and Wals 2002: 225). Examples of such measures are the 'Polluter Pays Principle', or schemes that return cash for glass bottles.

On the other end of the spectrum lie 'sustainabilities' that are entirely shaped by actively engaged citizens. Sustainable development does not come in a prescribed shape or form, instead it is seen as a 'stepping-stone in the continuing emergence of environmental thought' (Wals and Jickling 2008: 18). Sustainable development in this conception is process-based, emergent and open-ended.

In between these two extremes lie conceptualizations of 'feel-good sustainable development', or tokenistic participation, where citizens are given the impression that they have a choice but still function within boundaries devised and pre-set by an authority: 'citizens are given a limited, or false, sense of control over their future and their ability to shape the future while in fact authorities of all kinds remain in control' (Wals and Jickling 2008: 11)

The instrumental approach manifests itself in various forms. Besides the examples given above, 'sustainability solutions' might be developed solely by experts in the technological realm. *Ecological modernization*, for example, promotes a technological fix: as 'environmental problems can be best solved through further advancement of technology and industrialization' (Fisher and Freudenburg 2001: 702). Hence, there is no need to limit economic growth. Instead, 'continual growth in a finite world is possible through the powers of technology, which will enable us to find new sources or provide alternatives if a particular resource appears to be running out' (Beder 1994: 14).

Underlying this technocratic view of sustainable development is the premise that there are straightforward universal solutions to current environmental problems: these can be developed in one place and subsequently rolled out over (or imposed on) an entire sector or geographical area. Consequently, society splits into two parts: an active or 'expert' segment that is trusted with the task to develop solutions, and an 'inexpert' and receptive sector that is expected to follow the established instructions. In the example of the technological fix, the active 'solution-bringing' party consists in the industry, where the citizens represent the passive element, in that they reap the benefits brought to them in the form of technology without having to think much for themselves.

Other examples of an instrumental approach to sustainable development are 'social-cognitive models' that aim to explain, predict and direct pro-environmental behaviour among citizens (Kollmuss and Agyeman 2002). Again, based on solutions generated by experts, the social-cognitive models decide what appropriate environmental behaviour is (e.g. recycle, reduce, do not pollute, etc.), to subsequently promote these eco-friendly practices through campaigns or a system of fines and rewards. Like the technological fix, the receptive part is not expected to reflect or develop their own solutions, but is simply to follow what has been determined elsewhere.

The first of such models was developed in the 1970s and assumed a direct connection and linear progression between environmental knowledge, awareness, attitude and behaviour. These early linear or (information) 'deficit' models of public

understanding and action (Burgess et al. 1998: 1447) reason that if people are aware of a certain environmental issue and cognizant about their role, they will change their attitudes and adapt their behaviour accordingly. Thus, all one needs to do in order to promote pro-environmental behaviour is inform people. Although this approach still underlies most (non-)governmental environmental campaigns, reality and human nature has proven to be more complex than this models depicts. Whether people change their behaviour or not depends on more factors than knowledge alone. Since then various scholars have devoted their careers to researching the elements that explain the discrepancy between attitude and behaviour, resulting in a range of different approaches to behaviour change. Ajzen and Fishbein, for example, developed the 'Theory of Reasoned Action' (Kollmuss and Agyeman 2002) that also takes into the equation social norms and people's calculated attitude towards certain behavioural patterns. Although scholars have come up with a range of plausible factors that explain and close the gap between attitude and behaviour, none of these models is able to incorporate the inherent irregularity, unpredictability and capriciousness of humans.

This instrumental operationalization of sustainable development has been criticized for various reasons. First of all, opponents (such as deep ecologists) argue that instrumental measures are too superficial. Just technology is not going to fix everything (or anything) (Blewitt 2006). Presenting the public with such vision is deceptive and obscures the need for the profound changes that have to take place on a system and individual level in order to really solve the issues our society faces. Infinite development and environmental well-being are two opposing goals.

Secondly, scholars and educators like Jickling and Wals (2008) and Mayer and Tschapka (2008) maintain that a government enforcing a certain environmental behaviour among its citizens resembles indoctrination. They liken it to an ecototalitarian regime that might be sustainable in ecological terms but is questionable for social reasons and therefore negates core principles of sustainable development, such as equality and participation.

Thirdly, as described above, the social-cognitive models prove to be oversimplified (Sheeran 2002; Hannigan 1995). Despite good intentions and attitudes, that what people *say* they will do and that what they actually *do* is more often than not inconsistent. Hence, the one-way delivery of persuasive messages that aim to change people's behaviour is regarded as ineffective (in many but not all instances).

And finally, whatever is the 'right' behaviour or solution that should be promoted is highly contested, often not so straightforward and not permanent. That is, the experts

that are supposed to develop the blueprints seem to increasingly fail to settle on clear-cut solutions to sustainability challenges. There are less and less certainties to impose and roll out. I will come back to this point later in this chapter, as I will reject an instrumental, technocratic approach to sustainable development.

The critics of an instrumental approach propose a process-based, open-ended and participatory alternative. Newman (2007), for example, argues that:

In a complex and changing system, sustainable development cannot be seen as a goal. Instead it can be best viewed as a constant process of adapting our interaction with natural ecosystems to ensure the survival of both ourselves and these ecosystems. Instead of being a final objective, sustainable development has to be understood as a continuous process of change. (Newman 2007: 268)

Bagheri and Hjorth (2006) similarly propose that sustainable development is an unending process. Sustainable development is not strictly defined or fixed, and solutions cannot be delivered as neat packages. Rather than installing universal solutions, they argue that governments, communities and companies should engage in perpetual explorations of what sustainable development means. Instead of being told what to do, people should explore for themselves what is 'right', sustainable and desired (Sterling 2001). These leads, according to Jickling and Wals to

a very transparent society, with action competent citizens, who actively and critically participate in problem solving and decision making, and value and respect alternative ways of thinking, valuing and doing. This society may not be so sustainable from a strictly ecological point of view as represented by the ecototalitarian society, but the people might be happier, and ultimately capable of better responding to emerging environmental issues. (Wals and Jickling 2002: 225)

An example of such process-based sustainable development is the *Transition Towns Model (TT)*. Partly sprung from a dissatisfaction with the speed at and depth with which governments tackle the (looming) ecological crisis, TT promotes a community-led process that helps a town, village, city or neighbourhood become 'stronger and happier' (Mitchell 2013). They do so through local, small-scale responses in different areas, such as food, transport, energy, education, housing and waste. Each of these initiatives aims to prepare a community for global challenges, such as climate change and peak oil by making the respective area more resilient, robust, independent and self-sufficient. The TT website declares: 'Really, it's the opposite of us sitting in our armchairs complaining about what's wrong, and instead, it's about getting up and doing something constructive

about it alongside our neighbours and fellow townfolk' (Transition Network 2012). This statement clearly promotes a participatory approach; it places a lot of power and responsibility in the hands of citizens, and is wary of solutions designed and provisioned by external agencies.

The notion of sustainable development as articulated in the Brundtland report seems to lean towards a participatory approach. Although incited on a governmental level, it emphasises participation and promotes sustainable development as a process: 'sustainable development is not a fixed state of harmony, but rather a process of change' (WCED 1987). In that line of thought the Local Agenda 21 denotes an aspiration to involve citizens and a wide range of stakeholders.

However, most of Brundtland's sustainable development is still done at high-level negotiations, in confined meetings and away from citizens. The foundations of sustainable development therefore sit somewhere halfway on the participation continuum: it rejects a conceptualization that consists of only expert-designed (technological) approaches, but it is not as participatory as the TT model would suggest.

For reasons described above and further elaborated below, this thesis resolutely sits at the participatory end of the spectrum. That is not to say that more instrumental measures are never effective or desirable (polluters *must* pay). The thesis contends that sustainable development is not fixed, nor universal or clear-cut. Hence the delivery, implementation and transmission of unequivocal, universal and expert-designed messages and programs is objectionable if not impossible. This leads us to a discussion of the final spectrum of divergence: a reflection on the ambiguity continuum.

3.1.4 Acceptance of ambiguity

As the multitude of interpretations described above has indicated, sustainable development is defined in many different ways. Not everyone thinks that this is a problem however; in fact some regard ambiguity as a necessary characteristic of the concept.

Jacobs discerns two main opponents of ambiguity. According to the technocratic view, sustainable development can only be made operational if a single and precise meaning can be agreed upon (1999: 24). In assuming that clear-cut solutions (i.e. technological inventions) exist, these logically have to be developed before being implemented. To do so, and *before* any actual actions towards sustainable development

can be taken, all the haze shrouding the term has to be lifted. Experts first and above all require unambiguous information and clear-cut knowledge that allows them to formulate a plan of action.

The second resistance against the term's elusiveness comes from the environmentalists' corner. They are concerned that if sustainable development means anything to anybody it can also mean the wrong thing to the wrong people (Blowers et al. 2012; Davis 2000). In their sense, Brundtland coined a dubious and impossible concept in the first place. Selby & Kagawa (2010) and Luke (2005), for example, argue that the WCED left many questions hanging and that Brundtland's definition is 'question-begging'. They and others also state that the 'Brundtland mantra' wrongly treats economic growth and sustainable development as largely consistent concepts (see for example Selby 2007; Jickling & Wals 2008; Sauve 1999), hence making sustainable development an oxymoron and therefore unattainable and undesirable in its current form. They argue that as a consequence the term sustainable development is simply too broad: 'so all-encompassing as to be virtually toothless' (Gow 1992: 51) or 'a catch-all term' that has lost credibility (Gunder 2006: 209).

This vagueness will lead to the concept being misinterpreted, distorted and co-opted (Lélé 1991: 607; Davison 2008: 191). Luke (2005) argues that the term is used and abused to support more efficient but still unsustainable consumption. And Gunder observes that the broadness of the term leads to an operationalization of the concept that has been watered down to literally that of business as usual (2006: 209). In short, according to this group of scholars the concept's ambiguity severely diminishes its usefulness (Baker 2006).

The school of thought situated on the other side of the continuum will argue for ambiguity for various reasons. Lélé (1991), for example, turns the aforementioned objection to Brundtland's vagueness into an asset as 'it allows people with hitherto irreconcilable positions in the environment-development debate to search for common ground without appearing to compromise their positions' (ibid. 607). The resulting controversy, according to some observers, has created a constructive dialogue (Newman 2005; Dale 2001). Furthermore, ambiguity advocates will say that the term has to be broad because of its economic, social and ecological imperatives. The strength of sustainable development lies in coupling these seemingly opposing fields into one movement.

Connelly describes three different responses to the problematic ambiguity of the concept. The first 'simply ignores the complexities in favour of presenting the concept as unproblematic in principle' (Connelly 2007: 260). Another approach notes the ambiguity and proceeds to resolve this by selecting one interpretation among the many. And a third response argues that 'sustainable development is not merely ambiguous but essentially contested' (Jacobs 1995 in Connelly 2007: 262). Similar to concepts like 'art' or 'democracy', 'it has a widely accepted but vague core meaning within which there are differing 'conceptions of the concept' – legitimate, yet incompatible and contested, interpretations of how the concept should be put into practice.' (ibid. 262) Thus in this view, ambiguity should not be eradicated but seen as inherent and essential to the concept of sustainable development.

Roughly we can say that the more anthropocentric, weak, instrumental and technocratic approaches to sustainability are less tolerant of ambiguity. As we have seen from the sections explaining these positions, they mostly work on the premise that there are straightforward, universal solutions to current environmental problems. Hence they expect to (eventually) arrive at a universally accepted understanding of what sustainable development entails exactly. The process-based conceptions of sustainable development are more accepting of ambiguity as the idea of an unending collaborative process of solution-finding implies that there is no strict definition of sustainable development at the beginning of that process, nor that it is fixed.⁹

The ecocentric approach to sustainable development is somewhat ambiguous in terms of its position along the ambiguity continuum. On first sight it might seem that deep ecologists impose clearly defined imperatives as to how people should be. Based on the three core values it proclaims that one *ought to* a) attribute equal value to all life forms, b) identify with non-human natural entities and systems, and c) conduct in harmony with nature (Baker 2006: 35). It thus could be said to veer to an ecototalitarian regime. However, on further inspection, deep ecologists reject shallow behavioural instructions as to how to behave but instead promote a general way of being in nature that has been brought about by a deep personal transformation. The focus herein then lies on the reflective *process* rather than the behavioural *outcome*,

⁹Confusingly however, one could argue that the fact that the process-based approach settles on a definition of sustainable development that rejects a clear-cut definition and instead claims: 'sustainable development *is* ambiguous', in itself rejects other non-ambiguous conceptions of sustainable development and thereby ceases to be an ambiguous conception in itself.

indicating a participatory approach to sustainable development in which the result is not prescribed and thus ambiguous.

Based on a discussion of the wide array of interpretations of how sustainable development could be operationalized, we can now conclude that –whether one agrees with it or not–sustainable development is (still) an ambiguous concept. This thesis however agrees with the proponents of ambiguity that sustainable development is ‘essentially contested’ or that it benefits from ‘constructive ambiguity’ (Robinson in Blewitt 2008: 2); i.e. in order to be what it is, it needs to be inherently indefinable and therefore necessarily ambiguous. The next sub-chapter will discuss this idea in more detail.

3.2 A learning-based approach

Fig. 1 depicts the above-mentioned four continuums. As you can see the contraries can be grouped into two ‘meta-opposites’. The ecocentric, participatory/ process-based and ambiguous conceptions can be characterized as ‘learning-based approaches to sustainable development’, whereas the more anthropocentric, both weak and strong, instrumental and unambiguous conceptions mostly fall within the technocratic realm. Although this thesis does not reject technology entirely, I will proceed to argue that an excessive reliance on technology (and the worldview that comes with it) is not the answer to the prevailing ecological crisis.

To support this argument, this section will first present a range of reasons that advocate against the technocratic school of thought. Subsequently I will introduce an alternative: a learning-based approach, which embraces the premise that ‘truth’ is plural rather than singular, and dynamic rather than static. This, I will argue, constitutes sustainable development as a ‘fuzzy concept’: it is inherently indefinable.

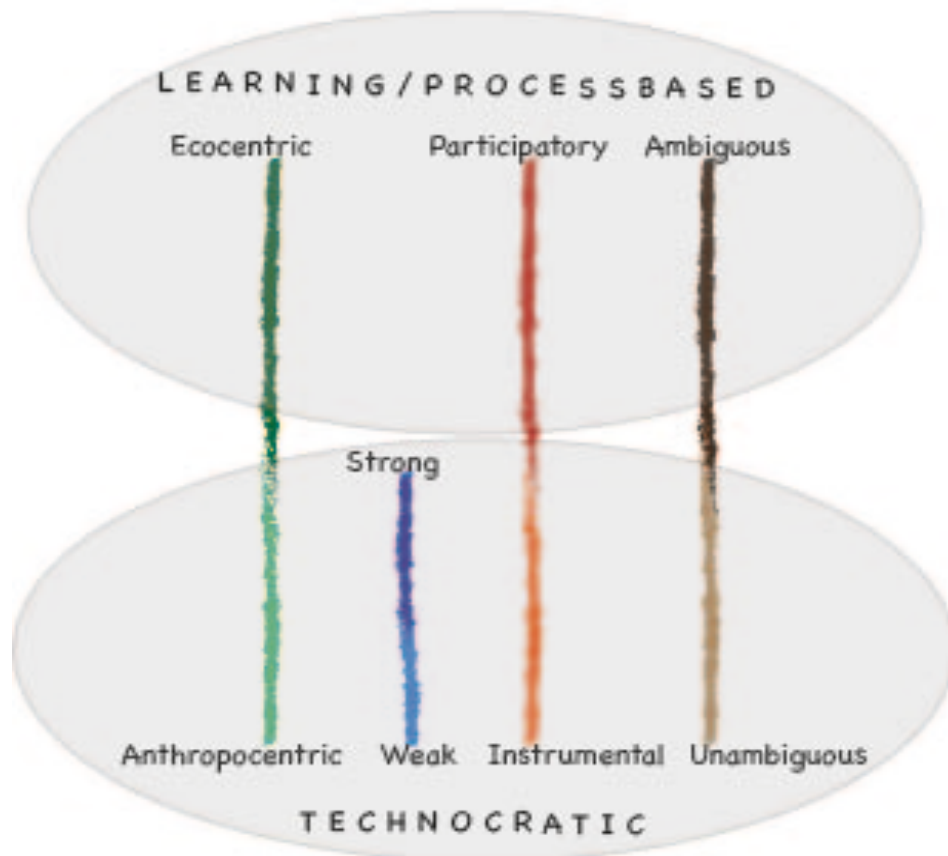


Fig. 1: Opposing conceptions of sustainable development

3.2.1 Renouncing the premise of universality

In the context of the current ecological crisis, education is regarded as both part of the problem and the solution. As Orr (2004), Sterling (1996) and others contend, the formal education system is teaching skills and values pertaining to a worldview that has to a large degree caused the ecological mess Western society finds itself in. So instead of preparing for and catalysing a different and 'better' society, education reinforces engrained patterns in society (See also Adams JR 2013: 289). In short, we are training students to become more effective exploiters of the planet (Sterling 2007).

At the same time education is promoted as the key to a more sustainable world. Considering the fact that formal education is a major formative force in peoples' lives, teaching them a certain set of skills, values and attitudes (rather than another), also means that this set will prevail in the society they come to operate in. Consequently, if we want to change the way things are going we should start by changing the nature of the set that is taught in schools. As Local Agenda 21 also suggests, we need to 'reorient education' (Blewitt 2006).

Apart from emphasising the importance of *formal* education in relation to sustainable development, there are various reasons that underline the value of learning in more general terms, encompassing informal, adult and lifelong learning. These basically come down to a renunciation of technocratic, instrumental conceptualizations of sustainable development in favour of process-based orientations. The first of these reasons was introduced in the previous subchapter, where I argued that technological fixes are necessary but not sufficient, as they in many cases merely promote doing the same thing in a slightly less destructive, polluting or resource-degrading manner. Sociologist Brian Wynne contends:

A more difficult broader question is whether environmentally sustainable futures are feasible even if we assume the most efficient systems of production to be universally in place tomorrow. Might not growing consumption and production simply swallow up the advances provided by those imagined technical utopias? It is striking how effectively environmental policy discourses manage to insulate the technical focus on clean production from the equally material social dimensions of ever-increasing resource use and waste (including discarded product) output. (Wynne 1992: 111)

As this quote highlights, it is not enough to keep on doing what we are doing even if done in 'greener' ways. In order to establish profound changes that last we will have to change the very nature of what we do. Hence, and in that following a deep ecologist perspective, sustainable development starts within us, transforming the way we see ourselves in relation to the world.

This position is not the same as instructing citizens how to change their behaviour from less to more environmentally friendly, as the social-cognitive models aim. As argued on page 59-60, these models to a large extent are not able to effectively predict and explain human behaviour. Moreover, recent research suggests that providing people with information, for example the disastrous effects of climate change, in fact works counter-productively (Wals 2010: 21). Overwhelming amounts of predominantly negative information might lead to what David Sobel has termed 'ecophobia' (Sobel 2008: 146): instead of jumping into action at the view of this information, people lapse into passive states of fear, anxiety and denial. So rather than instructing people what they can and cannot do based on the available information, 'people will need to develop capacities and qualities that will allow them to contribute to alternative behaviours, lifestyles and systems both individually and collectively' (Wals 2010: 21). In a word, we have to *learn our way out of unsustainability* (ibid.). What this approach hints at is not

instrumental instruction, but a more profound process of learning in which we question the way we live our everyday lives.

Another set of reasons to renounce an instrumental approach to sustainable development, as Andrew and Robottom (2005) argue, is the fact that a technocratic view of sustainable development wrongly assumes the idea of 'best practice' that is formulated by a centralist organization (e.g. government or industry) and compatible with all circumstances. It is built on the assumption of certainty and conceives knowledge as definite and open to generalisation. Once centrally derived and determined through a scientific process, it is applicable to all contexts, 'regardless of social, cultural, and geographical arrangements associated with local settings in which the knowledge is to be used' (ibid. 64). As a consequence, 'generalizable aspects appear to take precedence over context-dependent ones' (ibid. 66).

Wynne likewise questions the notion of scientific or expert certainty and states that the vernacular, informal, lay or local knowledge is often systematically under-recognized by authorities, academics and development agencies (1996: 59). He describes how scientific knowledge is regarded as objective, value-free and thus 'true' whereas lay knowledge is seen as subjective and therefore, from a positivist view, 'is assumed to have no real content or authority beyond the parochial, subjective and emotional world of its carriers' (ibid. 61-62). The non-expert world is regarded as 'epistemically vacuous' and thus not worth considering (ibid. 59).

However, assuming 'lay' knowledge to be trivial can be catastrophic as Wynne demonstrates on the basis of a case on sheep farming in the UK. Herein experts presumed that the knowledge based on particular conditions elsewhere was universal, and thus applicable to a new locality. However, in ignoring the sheep farmer's local knowledge about e.g. soil and geography, the experts proved to be grossly wrong about certain measures they enforced. As a consequence, the farmers suffered great economic losses (ibid.).

In a similar case described by Van der Ploeg (1993), externally developed anticipated 'improved' agricultural potato cultivars, failed to 'perform' in situ, as the local circumstances did not match the assumed universal conditions under which the cultivars were developed. In order to be successful for example, the developed cultivars needed certain soil conditions that the local situation did not 'deliver'. Consequently, the farmers had to change the local conditions in order to make the cultivars 'work', i.e. apply fertilizer. So ironically, in assuming universality, rather than the solution fitting

the context, the local, existent conditions have to be 'tweaked' to make the imported global solution work.

These cases demonstrate three things according to Wynne. First, had the expert engaged with the 'other' knowledge the damages could have been avoided and more effective solutions might have ensued. Second, much of the dichotomy between expert and lay epistemologies lies in opposing assumptions about agency and control. Where the scientific culture thrives on a taken-for-granted culture of certainty and prediction, the farmer's epistemology revolves around an acceptance of unpredictability and changeability of local conditions. The farmer's strategy therefore revolves around ability to adapt according to occurring site-specific conditions, rather than a strategy of formulaic control. The reality of the local is hence inherently more unpredictable and open-ended than the assumed universal representations of reality that science aims to employ.

The third conclusion that Wynne draws from the sheep farmer's case is that, since local knowledge shows not to be 'epistemologically vacuous' (as the cases proves it to be rich, sophisticated and useful), scientific knowledge likewise might not be as value-free as assumed by the experts. Just like the local epistemology, scientific expert knowledge embodies certain assumptions about social relationships, behaviour, values and perceptions upon the land. Subsequently, in taking the liberty to fill the vacuum with assumed neutral knowledge, it in fact proliferates and enforces 'particular cultural and epistemological principles', such as instrumentalism, control and alienation (Wynne 1996: 70). Hence, the emphasis on externally developed technology, might amount to what is called a 'paradigm of objectification'. This concept is further discussed by the authors of the book *Risk, Environment and Modernity* (Lash et al. 1996).

3.2.2 A paradigm of objectification

The argument of the book goes beyond the mere notion that context-dependent or local knowledge is important to incorporate in sustainable development solution-finding; the authors contend that the environmental crisis has largely come about and is reinforced by a persistent reliance on technocracy and objectification. Herewith they refer to the 'stripping away of human meanings on both inner and outer reality, and their replacement by alien ones, through the ever-expanding reach of science and technology' (Szerszynski et al. 1996: 13; see also Healy 2004). Or in Wynne's words: the

filling of the assumed vacuum with an objectified, technocratic, instrumental epistemology. As a result, they argue, the formalized and reductionist vocabularies employed and emanating from modern science have 'delegitimated and displaced many of the more situated understandings that people have of the world and their place in it' (ibid.). Objectification leads to a situation in which the human subject in knowledge is deleted and replaced by what Szerszynski et al. call an 'overarching superagent' (1996) that decrees measures and suitable behaviour, thereby robbing the individual human of its 'response ability' (Fisher 2006) regarding the environmental crisis. Consequently, rather than alleviating current sustainability challenges, an excessive reliance on technology leads to an aggravation of the problem.

Objectification manifests itself in various guises throughout society. Chapter 2 cites Gablik who argues that the arts should be re-enchanted, as they have grown increasingly detached and disengaged. McGilchrist argues that modernism is emblematic for what Heidegger called *unworlding*: a process of fragmentation, abstraction and deprivation of meaning through technology (2009: 395). In the context of environmental education I mentioned the concept of *cognitionism* (see page 42 of this thesis) that is comparable to *scientism*, referring to an over-reliance on abstract models and purely conceptual cognition.

Furthermore, this thesis contends that the process of objectification can be observed throughout the formal education system. Schools are constructed as discipline-based institutions separated from children's lived experience of the everyday. As early as 1938 John Dewey criticized traditional education for constituting 'the school is a kind of institution sharply marked off from other social institutions' (1938/1997: 18). In an environment (the classroom) that is artificially orderly and restrictive, with textbooks as the main containers of knowledge, a diet of 'pre-digested materials' (ibid. 46) is used to prepare pupils for the future. However, since the subject-matter is not connected to the lived experience of the children it becomes abstract and loses its relevance. Schooling conceptualizes and objectifies what we know to the extent that it is hardly applicable to living, as Dewey demonstrates:

One trouble is that the subject-matter in question was learned in isolation; it was put, as it were, in a water-tight compartment. When the question is asked, then, what has become of it, where has it gone to, the right answer is that it is still there in the special compartment in which it was originally stowed away. If exactly the same conditions recurred as those under which it was acquired, it would also recur and be available. But it was segregated when it was acquired

and hence is so disconnected from the rest of experience that is not available under the actual conditions of life. (Dewey 1938/1997: 48)

The mere fact that 'school' is a building or institution that one (physically) goes to in order to 'formally learn', draws a distinction between on the one hand superior objective knowledge acquired through books and instruction, and on the other the inferior subjective knowledge, experientially and organically attained through living and engaging with others and the environment in every-day life. This is the same disparity described by Wynne, Szerszynski and Lash (above).

One could argue that the conceptualization or objectification of knowledge originated with our culture moving from an oral to written one. Walter Ong (1982) argues that with the emergence of written word, our culture changed so fundamentally that we cannot conceive or describe the way things were without perceiving it from a literate worldview. The fact that through writing we are able to hold and thus develop thoughts has led to the birth of analytical thought, science and philosophy and has thus generated an invaluable part of contemporary culture. Literacy, however, has also led us to conceptualize and distance ourselves from the real, tangible, living world around us. Experiments conducted in the Soviet Union in 1976, where two groups of peasants –one literate, the other illiterate– were asked to assign names to geometrical figures revealed that illiterate people would term the figures by giving them names of real objects, never abstractedly; whereas the literate respondents were trained to give school-room answers instead of real-life responses, such as 'square'. Thus, Ong argues: 'oral cultures tend to use concepts in situational, operational frames of reference that are minimally abstract in the sense that they remain close to the living human lifeworld' (ibid. 49). What this quote seems to espouse is that formal education teaches one how to abstract, how to distance oneself from the real world and from direct experience. Herewith, pupils move from the (subjective) doing-world into the (objectified) thinking-world.

By bringing forward Ong's argument, I do not mean to do away with education all together or suggest that we should revert back to an oral culture. Rather, I see it as an explanation as to why the western education system and society as a whole, which are both predominantly based on written culture, are increasingly placing the universal, objectified and abstract above the situational, subjective and concrete (Sanger 1997). This is also reflected in the way politicians and academics aim to tackle the current sustainability challenges: through an objectified manner, which as I have argued above, might make things worse. The alternative, as this thesis thus proposes lies in a learning-based approach to sustainable development that takes place in the lived situation of every-day life.

3.2.3 Lifelong and lifewide learning

Renouncing a technocratic approach and embracing the view that local or contextual knowledge is important, implies that it is undesirable and impossible to find one way forward that can be universally instructed. As communities are faced with socio-environmental change that cannot be fixed by technology only, they will have to find other ways to build resilience. Hence, John Blewitt (inter alia) raises the importance of the everyday and learning in the operationalization of sustainable development. He proposes that sustainable development might most productively function as a heuristic device: 'as a method or system of education or learning by which a person is enabled to find things out for him/herself and to fully appreciate the contested nature of knowledge, nature, the environment and sustainability' (Blewitt 2006: 2). Subsequently, education or learning are not tools in achieving sustainable development (i.e. by transmitting the 'right' position, opinion or behaviour), but sustainable development essentially *is* constant learning. Blewitt describes this process as follows:

It [sustainable development] is fashioned, promoted, communicated, created, learned, produced and reproduced through what we do, how we work, and what we make, trade and create, ranging from the micro, the immediate, and the everyday, to the macro, the long term and the exceptional. Sustainable development and its objective sustainability, will come about through learning and reflecting on everyday assumptions, habits of behaviour, structures of feeling and expectation. This learning will take place in schools, colleges and universities. More importantly it will take place in the home, on the high street, at the workplace, when on holiday, watching television, in the garden, putting the rubbish out for recycling, getting the train, talking with friends, surfing the net and so on. (ibid. 3)

What this quote espouses is the operationalization of sustainable development as a lifelong learning process in which an entire society engages, constantly adapting what we do and how we do it according to the changing socio-environmental conditions. Learning how to adapt has become more important than being instructed on a set of particular adaptive skills. The necessity to do so gains even more weight if we consider the rate at which our society and environment are changing, as well as the uncertainty and unpredictability of these changes (cf. Wynne 1992; Wals & Corcoran 2012).

As our lives are part from environmental change (Heddon and Mackey 2012), and because learning is to take place continuously and everywhere then 'all learning really becomes meaningful when there is some resonance with the everyday lifeworld of the

learner' (Blewitt 2006: 10). Wals and van der Leij likewise contend that learning in the context of sustainability should be 'rooted in the life-world of people and the encounters that they have with each other' (2007: 19). Subsequently, the challenge of sustainable development becomes 'context-dependent' (Wals and Corcoran 2012). Many others corroborate this idea. Prugh et al. (2000: 7) for example argue that: 'sustainability is provisional; subject to multiple conceptions and continuous revision'. What seems sustainable now might not be so in the future, its form necessarily shifting endlessly. Lélé contends: 'given an ever-changing world, the specific forms of and priorities among objectives, and the requirements for achieving sustainability, would evolve continuously' (1991: 610). Similarly, Guy and Moore (2005: 1) note that 'the challenge of sustainability is more a matter of local interpretation than of the setting of objective or universal goals.' I.e. what is sustainable here might not be so elsewhere; the interpretation of the concept depends on the local geographical conditions, cultural characteristics, and the problems, needs and assets of a specific location.

The importance of (the learner's) context is confirmed by prominent educationalists such as Paulo Freire and Malcolm Knowles who contend that adult learners will only learn what seems relevant to and directly applicable in their daily lives. Freire's literacy programmes in the seventies demonstrated that peasants learned more effectively when they were taught to name and write words that were related and of importance to living their lives, rather than being fed random and abstract words selected by a central literacy body situated elsewhere (Freire 1996/1970). Knowles' theory of andragogy distinguishes the following key assumptions about the design of learning (adapted from Knowles 1973):

- a) Adults need to know why they need to learn something;
- b) They need to learn experientially,
- c) They approach learning as problem-solving
- d) They learn best when the topic is of immediate value.

These forms of learning are based on subjective, collaborative, situated, real-life learning, and therefore rooted in the same soil that grows *social learning*, a community practice that forms the core of the learning-based approach that this thesis adheres to.

Social learning has been used in many different forms and there is not one consistent interpretation. Keen et al. define social learning as 'the collective action and reflection that occurs among different individuals and groups as they work to improve the management of human and environmental interrelations' (2005: 4). Wals & van der Leij add to this definition that social learning 'brings together people of different backgrounds and with different values, perspectives, knowledge and experiences, in order to come to a creative quest for answers to questions for which no ready-made solutions are available' (2007: 11). Social learning happens involuntarily in communities that develop and shift with time and changes occurring in their environment. However, it is increasingly recognized as a process that can be 'formally facilitated' in the realms of natural resource management and sustainable development. It, therefore, encompasses a process in which governments, communities and companies engage in perpetual explorations of what sustainable development means in relation to their specific context and time. It is based on social constructivist principles, as the learning consists in people explore for themselves what is 'right', sustainable and desired, rather than consuming universal solutions or facts. Moreover, it moves between a knowing about environmental change with actually taking action and transforming habits and behaviour (Nicholson 2012).

Social learning in this sense is not entirely new; there are various related and preceding practices. It bears resemblance to Freire's ideas on praxis and his community-pedagogy as introduced in Chapter 2. It is similar to the action-reflection cycle used in action research (see page 23 of this thesis). And it echoes Dewey's call for 'education based upon living experience' (1938/1997: 39), which aspires to return education to a more situational form of learning.

Another Dewey inspired pedagogy akin to social learning is *Place-based Learning*. This pedagogy aims to 'ground learning in local phenomena and students' lived experience' (Smith 2002: 586; Sobel 2004). They do so by engaging pupils in real-world problems, i.e. issues taking place in the pupils' school and community. Sanger (1997) in a similar vein introduces *Sense of Place Education*. Herein pupils are taught the history of the place they live, thereby seeing themselves as part of the continuous line from the past to the present, and hence also understanding and valuing their role in shaping the future. Furthermore, it draws on the shape of oral culture, which is (as we saw above) situational, as well as participatory, communal, inter-subjective and physical. It foregrounds the importance of narrative and storytelling in reinforcing people's personal connection to the land.

A final likeminded form of learning is what Scott Cato and Myers (2010) call *education as re-embedding*. They argue that learning for sustainability through theory and texts (e.g. peer reviewed papers) generates a 'literary abstraction, [that] may actually have impaired our ability to directly experience it [the world], and hence to feel an affinity which may be the precursor to a sustainable stewardship approach' (Scott Cato and Myers 2010: 55). Instead they call for learning *in situ*, through which 'meaning is constructed at a local and immediate level where particular and individual experiences are included in a pluralist discussion of multiple realities' (ibid. 54). Subsequently, we can say that the process of learning, the context in which is learned and what is learned are inseparable. Inspired by the Songlines of Aboriginal peoples, they introduce *land-based knowing* in which what people know, and their relation to the land are entirely embedded in the geographical shape of the land. These ideas then inspire courses on sustainable development in British higher education that are facilitated *in situ*, out and away from the classroom. The education is re-embedded in the place to which it applies: society, communities and life.

To summarize, this section started with a renunciation of the technocratic school of thought in relation to sustainable development. Based on the argument that it objectifies environmental issues to the extent that 'normal' people feel alienated from them, it argues that an overreliance on technology and instrumental measures might not solve but aggravate the environmental crisis. Hence, this thesis advocates a learning-based approach, with a focus on social learning: collaborative processes that take place in communities, involving 'lay' people that aim to find contextual solutions for issues that affect the socio-environmental well-being of the place that they live in.

Social learning is part of a wider emerging conception of knowledge production that regards knowledge as situational, interactive, plural, open-ended, dynamic, uncertain and ambiguous. This has been coined as the 'post-normal paradigm' (Funtowicz and Ravetz 1993). The following section will explain this notion in more detail.

3.3 A post-normal world

Traditional forms of knowledge generation seem to have become inadequate in addressing today's global and complex socio-environmental challenges such as climate change, food shortages and biodiversity decline. Scholars are recognising the need for a different sort of science that may be more capable of tackling contemporary 'wicked problems' (Cherry 2005). This results in an approach to knowledge production that embraces uncertainty and participation and is therefore highly ambiguous, elastic and slippery. The next sections describe these standpoints and the science that emanates.

The book *Science, Society and Sustainability* (Gray et al. 2011) gives an accessible account of the changes in the scientific field in response to contemporary socio-environmental challenges. Benessia (2009) demonstrates this point with the example of 'technoscience', which has transformed the way science and society relate to each other. Technoscience is the agglomerate of research and development strategies that target the creation of products that increase our wealth and comfort within a globally competitive economy (ibid. 11). It also, in line with the technocratic approach to sustainable development as described above, claims to solve today's sustainability issues by, for example, developing methods that tackle food shortage (e.g. the development of genetically modified organisms) and climate change (carbon capture and storage). A major feature of contemporary technoscience is that the research and development are not taking place in confined, secured and controlled settings such as a laboratory, but in the real world and thereby directly experienced by the social and ecological systems (ibid. 12). To give an example: genetically modified corn species are tested outdoors on plots surrounded by woodlands and the products are sold to consumers.

Benessia describes four major implications of this development. First of all, because these 'experiments' are taking place in (natural and social) systems the *complexity* of this science increases: they are imbedded in and interacting with uncontrollable, diverse features of an unconfined system (the outside world). This in turn increases the *uncertainty* of the implicated science: how and when the science is going to react with these features is unclear and often uncontrollable once it starts happening.

Moreover –a third implication of this 'direct experimentation'– whatever the consequences might be they are often *not reversible*. That is, because the experiment is taking place in 'the real world' it is not a trial or rehearsal; it is 'the real thing' first time

round. The potential negative consequences that this sort of science ensues result in what scholars like Beck and Jasanoff define as 'risk society': 'risks are endemic in technoscience-oriented contemporary societies' (Benessia 2009: 13).

A fourth order of consequences is what Benessia calls *indeterminacy*, and refers to the fact that the kind of knowledge that is necessary to describe and deal with the consequences of direct experimentation 'does not depend on a set of disciplinary methodological choices, embedded in a specific experimental setting' (ibid. 13). Instead it is the result of 'a series of choices, of a negotiation and more often a competition between different disciplines'. That is, what type of knowledge is needed is largely undefined, but the fact that a variety of disciplines will be required is clear.

However, these arguments do not just apply to the technoscientific realm, but to *all* science and development involved in sustainable development. Even if not technological, any solution-finding for sustainability challenges has to take place in the complex reality of socio-environmental factors to a more or lesser extent in order to assess whether it is advantageous or not. Sustainable development in essence deals with life, living and society and therefore research executed in this field will essentially take place within the real and actual realm of life and living.

Hence, although this thesis does not support the technocratic approach to sustainable development, it still endorses the conclusions that Benessia draws from her analysis of technoscience. Social learning and studies of it fall within this paradigm as well, which Funtowicz and Ravetz (1993) have coined *Post-normal Science*. Herein, 'the complexity, irreversibility and indeterminacy in contemporary socio-environmental issues are fully acknowledged in all their consequences' and it arises when 'facts are uncertain, values are in dispute, decisions are urgent and stakes are high' (ibid. 16).

This paradigm, are characterized by two elements that form the core to this thesis. Firstly, as Benessia argues, the four features of post-normal science as described above (complexity, uncertainty, irreversibility and indeterminacy) 'radically undermine the idea that science can provide a single, certain, objective and exhaustive perspective from which straight-forward decisions can be taken on a political level'. Instead knowledge and the process that produces it are open-ended and uncertain. And second, the fact that the setting (from laboratory to 'the wild') and consequences (from 'pretend' and controllable to real and 'feral') of these direct experiments has changed implies that scientists have to review their approach and position vis-à-vis society. They are no longer practicing their profession away from the real world, but embedded in and interrelated with society and the natural world. Consequently, they have to deal with

these factors of the real world, such as other disciplines, as well as citizens or 'lay people', which in turn means that the research process has to incorporate an increased amount of different (disciplinary) views and perspectives.

3.3.1 Knowledge as plural and ambiguous

Post-normal science argues that in contemporary settings researchers can no longer ignore society because whatever they do stands in direct relation to citizens. This leads to a diffusion of the boundary between experts and non-experts and calls for new forms of public control of knowledge production, one that includes public dialogue and *extended peer-review*:

Inside the knowledge production process, citizens become both critics and creators. Their contribution has not to be defined as 'local', 'practical', 'ethical' or 'spiritual' knowledge, but it has to be considered and accepted as a plurality of rightful and coordinated perspectives with their own meaning and value structures. (Benessia 2009 in Tallachini 2005)

Acknowledging that environmental and sustainability issues are subjective, i.e. that they are situated in the every-day and lived lives of people, rather than on the higher (political and technocratic) echelons of society, implies that sustainability issues (and hence social learning) should be addressed by recognizing the involvement of multiple stakeholders. This argument is also endorsed by Wynne's highlighting of local knowledge (see 3.2.2). Each of the involved disciplines or stakeholders will bring along a different set of lenses through which it sees the world, with accompanying assumptions, biases, norms and ways of doing things. This generates a collection of disparate and often conflicting results; each of which is internally valid, making the resulting knowledge plural rather than singular: 'each [stakeholder] has an individual vision and interest in the issue, and there is generally only partial agreement on a common vision for resolving the issue' (Andrew and Robottom 2005).

Pluralism is regarded as both crucial to the learning process and problematic or detrimental. Wals, for example, argues that conflict and dissonance catalyse successful social learning: as 'people learn more from each other when they are different from one another than when they are like-minded'; pluralism thus engenders 'transformative disruptions' (2010: 23), which lead to deeper learning and hence 'better' solutions to prevailing problems. Subsequently, Wals and others with him such as Tilbury (2007),

define social learning by an emphasis on the presence, cultivation and utilization of such pluralism.

However, they also acknowledge that differences can become barriers in mutual learning. This view is endorsed by Brugnach et al. who in an article by the same name conclude, 'more is not always better'. They introduce the term 'ambiguity' as 'a distinct type of uncertainty that results from the simultaneous presence of multiple, valid, and sometimes conflicting, ways of framing a problem' (2011: 78). They state that the incompatibility in frames (the way people perceive and issue) may result from (among other things) 'differences between context-specific experiential knowledge and general expert knowledge' (Brugnach et al. 2008: 15-16).

However, instead of discussing how such plurality can be cultivated and utilized as Wals' view on social learning would advocate, they argue that the inclusion of multiple actors and thus a diversity in framing, demands 'effective approaches to *resolve* ambiguity' (Brugnach et al. 2011: 79, emphasis added). They propose five strategies to cope with ambiguity; four of which are geared towards removing ambiguity by condensing the existing variety of views into just one. Three of those strategies boil down to a situation in which a hegemonic view is enforced. In the first the frame of the expert or scientist obtained through factual or objective information is taken to be the right one. In the other the 'right' approach is instructed through persuasive communication. The third relies on more forceful means such as protests or veto power.

The final two approaches are more dialogic and participatory. One advocates negotiation, in which, although the aim is to settle on one frame, multiple perspectives are acknowledged and heard. The last is what the authors call 'dialogic learning', in which 'actors learn about each other's perspective and develop mutual understanding', because 'differences are conceived as an opportunity, since they can bring different perspectives, access to resources, skills and competencies that can be used to solve the problem more effectively (Brugnach et al. 2011: 80)'. This is, in a word, social learning as described by Wals, Keen et al. and others. The authors propose that ambiguity can be approached by exploring and connecting multiple frames; by using role-playing games for example, actors might learn to look at the world through another perspective.

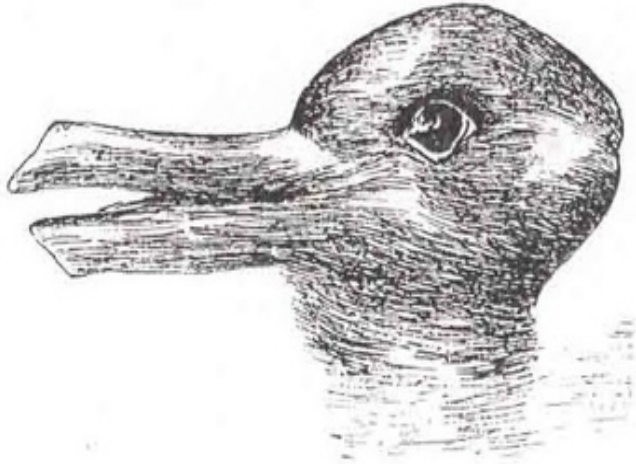


Fig. 2 Kuhn's Duck/Rabbit.

Such shifting of perspective and putting yourself in the shoes of the other is core to the idea of *Gestaltswitching*. Kuhn (1970) was the first to refer to the idea and necessity to switch gestalt (i.e. paradigm or mind-set), and it has been more recently –in an adapted form– applied to the field of learning

and sustainable development (Wals, 2010; Barth et al. 2007). In his explanation of gestalt switch, Kuhn refers to the ambiguous picture of what is at the same time a rabbit and a duck (see figure 2). One can see both, but never at the same time. For Kuhn the picture represents the shift from one scientific paradigm (the rabbit) to the other (the duck), and when adhering to the one, one is not able to perceive the world through the other. It demonstrates how the same information can be perceived in a different way.

The picture aptly represents the idea of ambiguity. There is no point in arguing whether the image is a duck or a rabbit, because it is always both. It is not one *or* the other (a rabbit *or* a duck); and it is not a combination of these two things either (a rabbitduck/duckrabbit). The concept is two different ways of seeing the same concept (although the picture aptly represents this idea, ambiguity of course can exist with more than two mind-sets existing side by side).

Taking this metaphor into the realm of sustainable development produces the following argument. Acknowledging that the operationalization of sustainable development is not pre-determined nor fixed, but contingent on the actor's vantage point, (cultural) 'glasses', discipline or (spatial and temporal) position, fixing or reducing its meaning to one valid definition and so ignoring the spectrum of perspectives, negates the core of the concept. This thesis thus adheres to an ambiguous conception of sustainable development.

Gestaltswitching in this context implies that the core of sustainable development relies on the process of alternating between different perspectives rather than reducing the plurality of views to just one acceptable one. The gestalts are categorized in five main headings:

- *Temporal Gestalt* (past, present, future and intergenerational mind-sets),
- *Disciplinary Gestalt* (a range of social science and natural science mind-sets),
- *Spatial gestalt* (local, regional, global and beyond global mind-sets) and
- *Cultural Gestalt* (multiple cultural mind-sets whereby culture is broadly understood)
- *Trans-human Gestalt* (the world from the perspective of the non or more than human world)

(Taken from Wals 2010)

3.2.3 Sustainable development as a fuzzy concept

Following a post-normal, learning-based approach to sustainable development thus, suggests that we should refrain from defining the term all together. Relying on a process-based operationalization of sustainable development implies that its meaning is generated collaboratively. The fact that sustainable development is not static in both temporal and spatial terms results in a process of ‘continuous revision’ in which one generates ‘local interpretations’ of sustainable development.

Sustainable development purposefully lacks a clear-cut definition and is ‘vague’ for a reason: its elusiveness offers a flexible framework from which context and time specific interpretations can arise. Hence, sustainable development is not just ambiguous because scholars cannot decide what it means (demonstrated in chapter 3.1), it is essentially ‘fuzzy’: pinning it down to one valid definition would discard the plurality of perspectives. As Gunder argues, it is this very fuzziness that gives sustainability its ideological power’ (2006: 211).

Zadeh (1965) coined the term fuzzy concept, referring to a concept that cannot be described accurately, either because its boundaries are unclear, or because its value and content vary according to conditions or context. He argues for multivalence above bivalence, since most things are a matter of degree, rather than one *or* the other. Their meaning lies somewhere in or moves between the two opposites, creating ‘infinite shades of grey between black and white’ (Kosko 1994: 19). Fuzzy logic contends that in complex systems the endeavour to be precise does not lead to more accuracy, but instead to more ambivalence. More information about an issue renders an aggregate of facts from various angles, which leads to a multivalued truth and more greyness.

Consequently, 'the very effort to be clear simply increases the mess' (Law 2004: 2). However, the fact that they are indefinable does not render them meaningless; their meaning instead lies in their inaccuracy and depends on the conditions under which they make sense.

But does labelling sustainable development as fuzzy help us to operationalize the term? Unfortunately, it appears not to. Karvonen and Brand (2009) and Peterson (2003) detect what is called 'paralysis by analysis'. Drowning in disagreement about the exact parameters, and lacking a clear and fixed conception of the term, politicians, scientists and NGOs, to a large extent, fail to formulate and execute concrete actions towards sustainable development. This leads us back to where this chapter started: there seems to be an insistent need to define something before anything can be done.

This trend is largely due to and further reinforced by our current education system. Maureen O'Hara (and many thinkers with her; e.g. Stephan Sterling, David Orr, Ken Robinson, Fritjof Capra) contends that, 'in the West, socializing institutions, especially our educational institutions are still mostly designed with the Enlightenment dream in mind' (2005: 5). Consequently:

The mental capacities aimed at in the Western canon reflect those which generations of academicians believe are necessary for success in the industrialized world--objectivity, reason and rationality, linear logic, critical thinking, radical scepticism, secularism, a focus and clarity, either/or dichotomies, sensitivity to difference, preference for fixed categories and sharp boundaries, empiricism, analysis, quantification, self-mastery, enough certainty for confident agency (ibid.).

Hence, the reliance on certainties is reinforced by an educational system that does not prepare us for a world that has moved beyond simplicity into complexity, certainty into uncertainty, beyond singularity into plurality. Schooling mainly relies on the delivery of unequivocal facts. This gives pupils the impression that the world indeed consists only of black-and-whites, truths-and-not-truths or that at least one should always strive towards an either/or understanding of something as the exemplar of truth.

This thesis argues that because of our strong inclination to establish certainties and avoid ambiguities, and our propensity to pin things down we are unable to tolerate the fuzz that surrounds sustainable development and hence eternally will try to fix it when it cannot be fixed. If we, like Law argues refuse to accept that the world is 'vague, diffuse or unspecific, slippery, emotional, ephemeral, elusive or indistinct' and fail to

translate this in the way we come to learn about the world, we might miss out on relevant answers to pertinent questions (see page 10 of this thesis).

As a way to break out of this 'catch-22', this thesis turns to the arts. It advocates the integration of art into the way we come to know about and be in this world, thus re-inventing the way we explore sustainability issues and design and realise responses. The next sub-chapter explains why and the rest of this thesis will describe *how*.

3.4 Learning as art and art as learning

As introduced in Chapter 2 there is a rapidly increasing amount of (academic literature on) practices that address ecology or sustainable development, that aims to raise awareness or change behaviour in order to create a 'better' world. Artists, curators, theatre-makers and academics highlight different reasons that explain why the arts are a powerful means to generate change towards a more ecologically sane world. The most recent sources in this field (in the UK) are the report *Culture Shift* (Allen et al. 2014) and the book *Playing for Time* (Neil 2015). Both give an insightful overview of practices and a multitude of examples that show how the arts contribute to a more sustainable world. Where the former mainly describes how artists are responding to sustainability in Wales, the latter presents art more as a means that can also be used by non-artists to, for example, facilitate community conversations as part of a Transition Town process.

This thesis acknowledges this existing literature and will not repeat what others have already said. Instead, the practice element of this research focused specifically on the contribution of art to social learning for sustainable development. The founding premise of that contribution lies in the notion that –based on my interpretation of both art and learning- these two processes essentially are the same. Consequently, it is in this overlap where art contributes to learning, and where educators benefit from applying artful methods. Jackson's ideas on the connection between theatre and education, and Rancière's writings on learning and art lie at the basis of this argument.

Section 2.2.6 briefly referred to Jackson (2007), who states that the power of theatre lies in its capacity to create an environment where the learning is not about transmitting a predetermined message from teacher to learner, but where the meaning of something is co-created between the learner and the artist, performer, or theatre-maker. According to him art is at root 'a meaning-making activity in which symbolic

forms are deployed to take us on some kind of a journey -psychological, emotional- the kind of journey we might not have taken otherwise' (Jackson 2007: 36). He argues that something can only be art when a spectator or participant is left space to create her own meaning:

A genuine work of art, it often said, cannot be didactic. The novel, play or poem that sets out to convey information or to preach a message risks surrendering those very qualities we usually value in art – complexity, ambiguity, multi-layered meanings, richness of imagination. (ibid. 180-181)

Clearly rooted in a plural conception of truth, the difference between good art and bad art (or art and not-art) is whether the meaning of the piece is unequivocal and premade, or multiple and co-created as part of the piece. In the former the work of art becomes a tool to transmit a meaning to an audience; in the latter the piece is an invitation or a set of enabling conditions that stimulates engagement with a chosen matter in such a way that there is rich meaning-making on the side of the spectator or participant. As spectators we are thus not expected to 'merely sit passively, deciphering the codes prepared for us by playwright and director, or unwrapping carefully prepackaged meanings' (ibid. 36).¹⁰

At the same time, Jackson argues, 'genuine learning' equally resides in learners becoming active producers of meaning, instead of meaning-consumers. Building on Freire he argues against the 'banking model of education' (see page 24), which 'anaesthetizes students and inhibits their creative power because the world is presented as something-that-is as opposed to something constantly changing; students are transformed into spectators rather than co-creators of the world and as a result must adapt and submit themselves to the world-that-is' (Adams JR 2013: 292).

Consequently, this thesis argues, if both art and learning are in the first place a meaning-making activity, then *art is learning and learning is art*. Or as Jackson duly notes:

¹⁰ Jackson refers to critics of Bertolt Brecht, who accuse his work of didacticism. They (Theodor Adorno among others) claim that the means he employed to activate an audience in fact worked counterproductively (Jackson 2011). It is beyond the scope of this research to study Brecht's to the extent that I can draw an informed conclusion whether his work was indeed overly didactic. But the fact that the efficacy of his work is called into question on the basis of it being too didactic, does endorse my argument that didacticism reduces both the artistic and social potential of a piece of work.

Only ... by offering opportunities for the audience to genuinely find their own ways of completing the imaginative and cognitive journey the play has taken them on, will we allow the aesthetic and the educative to coincide, the one feeding the other. Only then do we stand the chance of creating an artwork that can simultaneously challenge assumptions and develop understanding. (Jackson 2007: 181).

Philosopher Jacques Rancière has a similar argument. He also builds on the legacy of Freire and Dewey, and argues that we wrongly presume an unequal relationship between learner and teacher, based on an alleged gap in intelligence between the two. Subsequently, education is a process in which the learner strives to bridge the gap between her deficient knowledge and the superior intelligence of the teacher. Like Jackson, Rancière rejects this banking model and argues that instead education should be about bridging the distance between what the learner already knows and what she still does not, but *would like* to know. Akin to Jackson's idea of art and learning like a journey, he says that a teacher 'does not teach *his* [or her] knowledge to the student. He commands them to venture forth in the forest, to report what they see, what they think of what they have seen, to verify it, and so on.' (Rancière 2007, see also Heddon and Mackey 2012). As Jackson also advocates, learning becomes a process of collective meaning-making between the facilitator-artist-educator and a group of learners. Furthermore, Rancière, like Jackson, says that theatre and art are based on the same process (Rancière 2007).

His argument takes him to two interrelated conclusions. First, devising 'good' learning is not about finding the most effective way of transmitting bits of knowledge that the teacher holds and the learner presumably lacks; it is about finding ways in which this 'journey into the forest' can be most eventful and fertile so that it renders the most valuable learnings for the student. Being an educator or artist is about creating an environment and intervention that leads to rich meaning-making at the side of the participants.

Second, dissolving the gap between two intelligences also dissolves the gap between actors (teacher) and spectators (learners). By acknowledging that every 'spectator' of theatre (or education for that matter) already holds intelligence, and that the theatre (or learning process) is never about transmitting knowledge but always about meaning-making, spectators become 'active interpreters, who render their own translation, who appropriate the story for themselves, and who ultimately make their own story out of it' (ibid. 280).

Taking this line of thought to the field of sustainability and social learning generates the following argument. If social learning is rooted in the assumption that sustainable development is a fuzzy concept and the learning does not lie in transmitting one unequivocal interpretation but rather in the process of collectively finding context-based meanings, then this learning process is inherently an artistic one. Analysing how artists give shape to such meaning-making processes can thus help educators to facilitate social learning processes more successfully, ones that embrace a plural and ambiguous conception of knowledge.

Many corroborate this idea that arts can contribute to an expression of plural knowledge in a world that is dominated by static and singular conceptions of knowledge, thereby creating spaces of meaning-making. Nicholson for example refers to 'expressive gaps' or 'the blanks between the brushstrokes' that invite multiple interpretations and offer an 'aesthetic space in which meaning is made' (Nicholson 2012: 167)

O'Shea states that 'sustainability will be achieved only from an on-going conversation that connects multiple voices and experiences. It is a conversation fraught with ambiguity and uncertainty because sustainability is a fluid, dynamic, and highly complex state' (O'Shea 2012: 144-145). And she describes the power of performance to generate such conversations, by allowing 'what if situations' in which people can try on different roles.

After having made the argument that there is indeed a useful interface between learning and art, the rest of the thesis will show how the arts contribute exactly, thereby offering some artful parameters that enrich social learning.

3.5 Summary

After giving an overview of different opposing conceptions of sustainable development, this thesis argued against an overly technocratic approach to contemporary socio-environmental problems. Instead it follows a learning-based conceptualization of sustainable development. This means that it adheres to a plural conception of knowledge and a ‘fuzzy’ interpretation of sustainable development. I introduced the process of social learning, which invites a diversity of perspectives through collaborative learning in communities.

I then proposed that there is a useful interface between art and social learning as they are both meaning-making processes. Both practices should not aim to transmit predetermined messages from artist/educator to spectator/learner, as if the latter were an empty vessel to be filled, but instead should rely on spectators or learners creating their own meaning based upon an experience, intervention or invitation crafted by the artist/educator. It therefore proposes to frame social learning for sustainable development as an art project in order to establish artful qualities to enhance the learning.

Hence, the initial broad question of *‘how does/can art contribute to social learning processes in which communities explore, design and proceed on sustainable ways forward?’* is narrowed down into the following questions:

- How can we engage people in a meaning-making process?
- How can we elicit different meanings of sustainable development?
- What elements can incite ‘rich’ meaning-making?

Part II of this writing will present some answers to these questions. These results will be assembled in an expanded framework for social learning that can be used by practitioners working in communities dealing with sustainability issues. The next chapter will discuss the different research activities and corresponding methods through which I explored these questions.

4

Outline of the research process

Integrating the two preceding chapters, this chapter will discuss how the practice-based research methodology was applied to answer the questions concerning sustainable development and social learning. I will do so by zooming in on various characteristics of the practice-based research approach and describing how they were implemented in this research, thereby presenting the research methods used. Subsequently, the chapter will describe the different research activities that informed the results of this research, hereby also giving a chronological overview of the research process.

4.1 Methodology

As explained in Chapter 2, the methodology applied in this research was a combination between practice-based and action research, in that the art practice was the action research. To answer the questions posed at the end of Chapter 3, I engaged in *a first person inquiry into the creation of social learning for sustainable development as a contextual arts practice*.

Marshall and Reason (2008) distinguish between a first person and second person inquiry in action research. In the first the researcher studies herself or her practice; the latter is based upon the researcher working in collaboration with a group. The level of interaction between the researcher and that group differs: it ranges between the community being involved in the entire design and implementation of the research process, to the researcher making the main decisions but still researching with rather than on the community.

Initially I envisioned being engaged in two independent action research cycles, one reflecting on my individual actions, and the other involving a group of people engaged in an inquiry in the sustainable development of their community. As I describe in the research proposal:

The second person inquiry comprises of a collective art intervention in a Cornish community, creating an 'art-based learning processes' in which people come together to learn collaboratively to create context-based solutions and realistic-radical alternatives for current unsustainable patterns. Through these interventions the connection between art and social learning for sustainable development will be assessed.

We (the community and I) would –as I envisioned– move through a sequence of action research planning-action-observation-reflection cycles and I would apply arts-based methods to facilitate and catalyse this process, which would enable me to trace how art contributed to this process.

However, following the insight that the application of art-based methods applied instrumentally within a 'conventional' research process is not the same as an *entire* research conceived as an art practice (see page 27), I reasoned that integrating a few drawing and painting exercises as part of a workshop on sustainable development does not render the process artistic or 'artful'. If I was to really research art, my entire approach had to be a manifestation of art practice. As a result, the arts-based second person inquiry never materialized. The research is predominantly a first person inquiry, with a large collaborative component, but not to the extent that participants were 'co-researchers' in the sense that they actively decided on the direction, problem statement and questions of the research. The practice of my practice-led research thus lay in the creation of a social learning process towards sustainable development as contextual practice.

Figure 3 represents the different activities and corresponding methods that were applied in this research. The subsequent sections will explain the features of this model in more detail and explain why I chose to use certain methods.

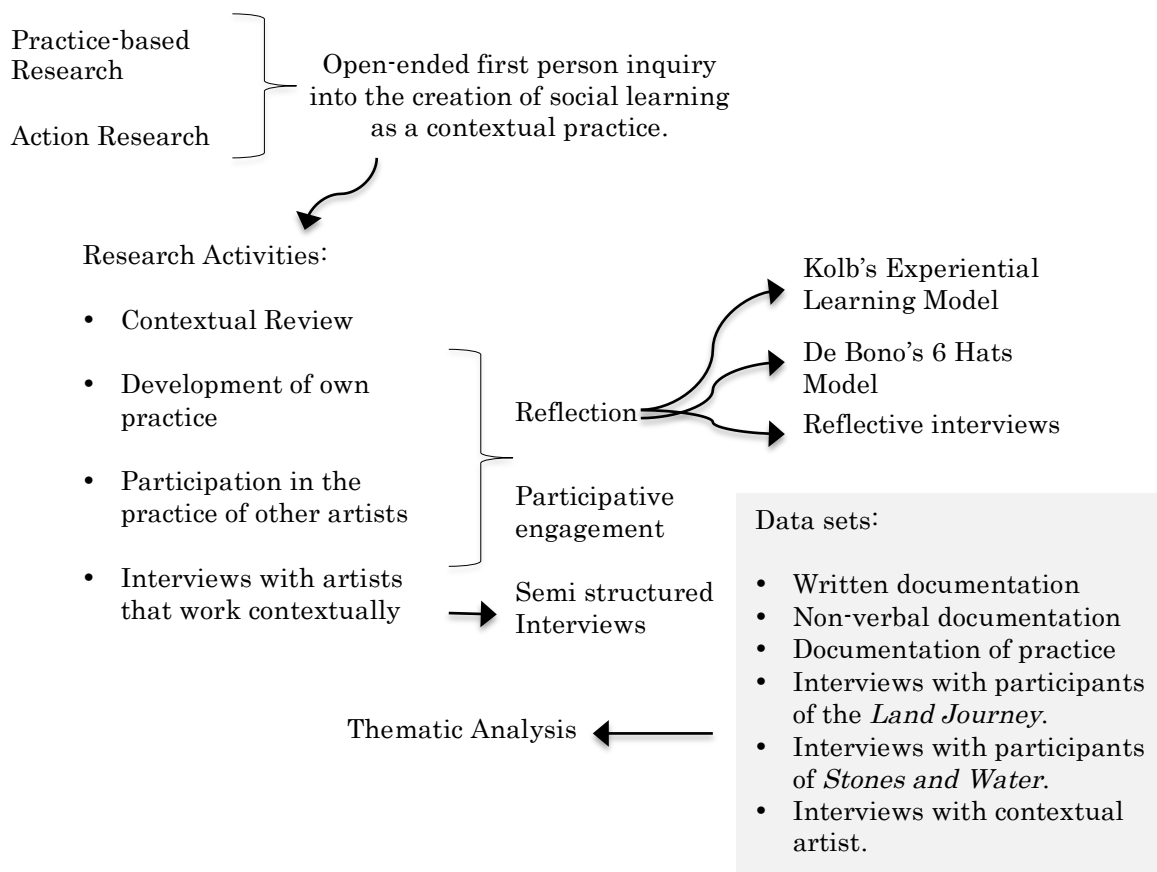


Fig. 3 Research Structure: methodology, activities and methods.

4.1.1 Open-endedness and reflexivity

The overarching feature of a practice-led research is the open-ended character of the methodology. Research in the scientific paradigm generally moves from the 'known to the unknown': it starts by theoretically mapping the existing knowledge on a particular issue (the known), in order to identify existing gaps within that knowledge. Subsequently, the researcher will plan how those gaps might be filled by formulating assumptions (presumed knowns) and hypothesis (potential knowns) that are to be tested, only then to embark on the action (the unknown). Practice-led research reverses that process: it resides mainly in and starts with 'carte blanche' doing, from which theory is derived and fitted into the existing body of knowledge. The practice-led researcher thus travels from an unknown to a known (Sullivan 2010)¹¹.

¹¹ And, in adhering to the premise that knowledge is plural, uncertain and unstable the research often also ends in the unknown: seemingly convenient straightforward outcomes are thwarted by contesting results and new (more complicated) questions. In this research I refer to these elements as 'inconvenient questions' (see for example 5.3).

Consequently, the research often does not start with framing a clear-cut question or imperative as this ‘significantly restricts the exploratory quality of research as all questions imply a limit to their potential answers’ (Kershaw 2010: 112). What results is a process that is ‘purposeful yet open-ended, clear-sighted yet exploratory’ (Sullivan 2010: 49), with the problem or questions being (re-)defined throughout the entire research process, rather than only at the beginning.¹²

This approach to a large degree corresponds to action research in which the researcher will not define the problem beforehand and externally. Instead the articulation of the question takes place *as part of* the research; researcher and practitioners (or co-researchers) jointly explore and decide on the issue that seems most useful to address, after which they will engage in a sequence of reflective cycles through which they constantly hone down and re-articulate the problem statement, progressively finding answers.

The initial and overarching question that I set myself (see page 9) was broad and explorative, chosen with the intention to understand a process rather than establishing and proving whether something is true or not, and to what (measured) extent. I found that the posing of an explorative ‘how’ question generated an inquiry wide enough to be flexible and non-restrictive, whilst also providing enough direction to begin the process. By answering certain aspects of the wider inquiry, as well as (often instinctively) shifting my attention to some elements rather than others, I discovered the precise questions within this larger field I was focusing on. Hence, the exact questions emerged only *after* I found certain answers.

Yet my research was based on a framing and theoretical knowing of things: a body of academic knowledge that I developed over the years preceding my PhD, as well as the review of the existing field of knowledge as set out in Chapters 2 and 3. So, whereas the general inquiry emerged from a theoretical engagement, the focal points within this explorative framework did arise through open-ended practice.

As a consequence of the open-ended nature of the process, much of the outcomes are generated through complexity and emergence. Although these elements are not entirely absent from conventional research, Haseman and Mafe argue that ‘while

¹² Kershaw (2010) rightfully asks what determines the direction of research if it is not the strict articulation of a problem or research imperative. If there are no boundaries one might as well be researching everything, which renders the research useless. He proposes that besides questions or problem definition, a ‘hunch’ might be an appropriate starting-point. Others propose ‘passion’: a fervent drive to develop a certain piece of practice and see what questions and answers arise from it (Smith and Dean, 2010).

traditional methods are designed to manage and contain complexity by seeking control, limit and even deny ambiguity, practice-led researchers must take these qualities into the heart of their research enterprise' (2010: 220). This implies that the artist-researcher purposefully invites contingencies inherent to the reality of making to 'muddle up' the research, which then opens up unexpected avenues. Art therapist McNiff likewise argues that one should cherish and incorporate voids or consciously unplanned spaces in art: 'art-based inquiry, like art itself, may often include carefully calculated studies but the truly distinguishing feature of creative discovery is the embrace of the unknown' (McNiff 1998: 15).

The role of reflexivity in the research is where practice-led research significantly challenges and differs from traditional research approaches. Sage's Encyclopaedia on qualitative research describes reflexivity as a 'qualitative researcher's engagement of continuous examination and explanation of how they have influenced a research project' (Given 2008: 748). According to traditional research approaches the researcher's impact on the research matter should be minimized, as that would weaken the objectivity of the research and hence reduce the validity of the resulting knowledge. Conversely, practice-led research acknowledges the innate reciprocal nature of the relationship between the researchers and her actions on the one hand, and the context, subject and findings of the research, on the other (Gray 1996). Sullivan (2010) states that the practitioner-researcher adopts the dual role of researcher and the researched, which in itself is a reflexive process.

But instead of regarding this as a fallacy in the research design that has to be patched up through a reflexive attitude of the researcher, reflexivity becomes the driving mechanism of the research. Haseman and Mafe propose that to deal with and encourage elements of complexity, emergence and open-endedness the researcher should develop a 'heightened sense of reflexivity', which they define as 'an artist-like process which occurs when a creative practitioner acts upon the requisite research material to generate new material which immediately acts back upon the practitioner who is in turn stimulated to make a subsequent response' (2010: 219). This shows that the practice-led research process is powered by a reciprocal relationship between researcher and researched: the researcher does something that influences what she is looking at; she then reflects on how her actions affect the subject matter, which then informs her what to do next. Where traditionally a sense of reflexivity is regarded as a means to control the research situation, in practice-led research the reflexive process

–Gray describes– ‘allows the project to grow and particular avenues to be pursued. It hence drives the open-ended process and invites emergence’ (1996: 10).

Again, these features of practice-led research bear similarities with the way action researchers proceed. Both practice-led and action researchers speak of iterative cycles of reflective doing that inform a body of theory. Smith and Dean (2010) speak of a practice-led research model that constitutes iterative cycles of doing and reflection, in which each iteration is a repetition of what you did before with an added variation based on what you learned through the previous cycles. I would argue however that action research takes place in conditions that are more emergent than a practice-led research developed in an artist’s studio, where the level of contingency and complexity can to a certain degree be managed. Repeating a process is fairly straightforward in the relatively controlled environment of a studio: one can start the iteration entirely anew by taking a fresh canvas, a new lump of clay or by starting a music/dance piece from the beginning. When dealing with people one cannot, for both ethical and practical reasons, start completely afresh. In the action research model, whatever has gone before will influence what comes after, even if that is not the kind of variation or ‘variable’ you want your iteration to have. So rather than being independent iterations of the same process (or a ‘start-end-start’ as Smith and Dean define) the cycles of action-reflection in action research are consecutive; they build on each other and are part of a more continuous sequence of actions and reflection.

Although, as a described above, my research was essentially delimited by a question and corresponding objectives, I still followed an open-ended research process. I ended up doing things that I had not planned; opportunities that I had not known existed when I started my research, emerged along the way. I shaped the consecutive steps of my research according to what presented itself and seemed to hold potential, thereby plotting my path as I went along and certain ways presented themselves. As Sullivan describes: ‘creative options and new associations occur ... within an open landscape of free-ranging possibility rather than a closed geography of well-trodden pathways’ 2010: 48). This implies however, that the results of this research are specific to the pathways that emerged: what knowledge was generated depends to a large degree on the routes that were taken, and since it was an open-ended process it is impossible to repeat and therefore verify the research. Re-running the research process in a different time and context will generate different avenues which will render different results. This does not necessarily mean that the knowledge described in this thesis is not true or cannot be

extrapolated elsewhere; it is just that it is specific to the 'world' in which the research took place, and should therefore be transferred with care and creativity.

4.1.2 Reflection as a source of coming to know

As the previous section explains, *reflective* doing is the driving factor in both practice-led and action research. Donald Schön's theories are among the most referenced in literature concerning these two research methodologies. In his work he distinguishes between knowledge-in-action, reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action (Schön 1991). The first might be Aristotle's praxis in its purest sense: a knowing that is *in* the doing; i.e. it is not separable from the action and cannot be explained through or represented in other forms than the execution of it. It is as Schön describes 'ordinarily tacit, implicit in our patterns of action and in our feel for the stuff with which we are dealing. ... Often we cannot say what it is that we know. When we try to describe it we find ourselves at loss, or we produce descriptions that are obviously inappropriate' (Schön 1991: 49). However, if we come up against a surprise, if something happens that is outside of our knowing-in-action, the practitioner will unconsciously turn to reflection-in-action. The anomaly causes the practitioner to question the knowing-in-action that she unwittingly applied. This reflection takes place during the action and its results are directly incorporated in the doing.

The third form of knowing, reflection-on-action, is the act of consciously reflecting *after* and *away from* the action. It is the attempt to draw tangible knowing from the doing, to transform knowing-in-action into a body of knowledge representable through a form other than just the doing, i.e. verbally and textually. The practitioner 'turn[s] thought back on action and on the knowing which is implicit in action.' (ibid. 50) Hence, it is a more analytical, distanced mode of engaging with an experience whereby it also becomes a more universal kind of knowing: the reflection-on-action draws out traits and patterns from the doing that might be applicable to that type of action in general.

I will illustrate a crucial difference in the *kind* of knowing that these three types produce through the example of cycling. Knowledge-in-action is our ability to ride a bike once we have mastered the skill to the extent that we are able to keep our balance, peddle, use the handlebars and manage our speed without thinking about it. Our knowledge of how to cycle is situated in our bodies, in the act of doing it; in fact it only exists when it is bodied forth through the act of cycling. If something unexpected happens, like our gear system fails while cycling up a steep hill, we turn from a mere

doing, to a 'thinking about doing' by consciously reflecting on what is going wrong and how it can be solved in order re-establish a process of doing only. This is reflection-in-action that takes place while we are on a bike and cycling. If somebody asks us 'what is cycling?' or 'what do you do when your gear system fails?' we turn to reflection-on-action. We sit down after a cycle ride and play the act of cycling *in our mind* in order to find verbal means to describe it. We might extract some key features by writing down a step-by-step description of how we solved the gear problem, which then results in a *representation* of the act of cycling on paper and allows us to extrapolate that knowledge to other situations of cycling.

This example shows that the knowing moves on a continuum between body and mind. Knowing-in-action takes place entirely in and through the body; reflection-in-action is situated simultaneously in body and mind (in doing and thinking); whilst reflection-on-action happens mostly in the mind to be re-applied in practice. So the fact that there is ineffable, tacit, bodily knowing-in-action does not mean that there is no knowledge, it is just that it has not been made explicit, like the knowing through reflection-on-action. Extracting, abstracting representing and making explicit through reflection-on-action then also produces a type of knowing that is less situational or personal that can be applied more universally.

All practice-based research is engaged in the latter: drawing out bits of knowing (from intuitive doing) that are subsequently represented in other, more graspable forms (mostly language), in order to be meaningful in other situations as well.¹³ Thus reflection-on-action is employed in both practice-based research and action research to generate research findings and develop understanding.

Brown and Sorensen confirm the above when they state the following in referring to practice-led research:

knowledge embedded in practice is often personal and ineffable. In order to make this personal knowledge more generally useful a process of reflection and contextualisation is often required. Reflection can help to find patterns that make this personal knowledge more generally applicable and contextualisation helps to place those findings within a broader history of accumulated knowledge. These processes are important because they are essential to transforming personal knowledge into communal knowledge. (Brown and Sorensen 2010: 163)

¹³ However, one might argue that PaR also resides knowledge-in-action, where the knowledge is not made explicit through verbal means but resides purely in the arts practice, and is represented as such.

Mäkelä and Nimkulrat concur with this view and say: 'the reflection conducted in different stages of the [artistic] project provides primary material for communicating and sharing of the experiences related to the project' (2011: 2). In order to do so, they argue that documentation is crucial:

documentation makes reflection explicitly articulated in a form available for the practitioner-researcher to revisit and analyse in order to develop and construct design knowledge ... Without the documentation of the artistic process, artworks produced in the process may not be adequate to provide data for analysis and to generate reflection (ibid. 7).

This implies that the documentation of the making process, through whichever means (e.g. writing, sketching, photographing, recording) is the 'research data' which are subsequently used in an analytical reflection-on-action that produces the 'research findings'.

Where the reflection-on-action produces the research findings in PaR and action research as described above, reflection-*in*-action is the mechanism that drives the research forward. As I said earlier this research followed an open-ended process of iterative cycles in which each step followed from and was generated by the previous one. The continuous reflection in this (research-as-) practice helps the researcher to make decisions regarding subsequent steps in the doing/making. Reflection-in-action is thus used as the bridge between the previous step and the next: the means through which a next step comes into being and the basis on which the practitioner-researcher decides to focus on some elements and leave others behind. To do so, I used Kolb's experiential learning cycle.

David Kolb is another praxis-oriented thinker, and his Experiential Learning Model (ELM) is yet another cycle of action, observation and reflection, similar to the ones pertaining to PaR and action research. But where these designate the whole of a sequence of such cycles, Kolb's model is a method through which the reflection within one iterative cycle can be established. ELM provides straightforward steps that allow one to reflect on one's practice and generate a next. It creates a bridge between the different iterative cycles within PaR and action research. ELM consists of four consecutive steps, each with corresponding activities or questions. I traced my research process through reflective writing using the questions pertaining to step 2-3 of the ELM (see appendix 1). That is, I aimed to document and describe each step in the research

process and piece of practice in a journal. This writing formed the first set of 'data' that I used in the analysis.

4.1.3 Partial and situated knowledge

Although the previous section presents three seemingly separated processes (action, documentation of action, and reflection-on-action using the documentation), the act of documenting itself often forms the first layer of reflection: by documenting away from, after and out of the experience the documentation is inherently a representation, rather than the actual experience, action or practice itself. Especially if it is done through a written verbal account as was the case in this research. Nelson (2013) points to the danger of mistaking the documentation for the actual practice or experience; particularly in performing arts where the practice only leaves traces, rather than the tangible objects that other visual arts practices might. This poses four interrelated problems, the discussion of which leads us into the field of feminist post-structuralist science and geography.

First of all, returning to a point made in chapter 2 –the idea that a written verbal expression is only one among many ways in which something (a piece of practice or knowledge) might be represented– one should take into account that the means used to document an experience in itself determines the shape of the experience. Consequently, no form of documentation is ever comprehensive and it always represents just one view among many possible ones. Furthermore, the act of writing is a way of thinking through an experience, as well as merely ('objectively') describing 'all that' happened. As a result, this representation is inherently 'tainted'; it is fundamentally impossible to textually describe an *entire* experience: the researcher is bound to write certain things down but omit others.

In documenting some aspects of the process and not others, the content of the research data and hence the results of the reflective process are shaped by the researcher's (unconscious) decisions. Thirdly, documentation conducted by one person is always just one view. The researcher can only describe things from her perspective which is not necessarily a view shared by the other people involved. Even in guessing how they might have experienced it and documenting *that*, she is giving *her* account of how they saw it. And lastly, the moment that she describes the experience also determines what gets documented; over time some features of the action might become

more salient or instead recede in relevance. The 'true' representation of the experience therefore changes depending upon when the researcher decides to document it.

These four points all indicate that the image produced through documentation is not neutral: the research findings are highly dependent on the researcher's position and the subsequent interference with the 'research subject'; i.e. how the experience is documented, what is documented, by whom and when, all influence the image that is generated through the documentation. This reciprocal relationship between researcher and the research findings leads to what conventional science would refer to as 'a lack of objectivity', which would render PaR and action research 'unscientific'. However, in both research approaches, the researcher and researched are one and the same, subjectivity therefore is inherent to the reflective process. In fact, without reflexivity and a high degree of involvement of the researcher in her research, the practice would not move into full swing and therefore not be worth researching. Consequently, we might say that the presence of subjectivity, rather than absolute objectivity, is a token of quality in this type of research.

Moreover, as Donna Haraway (and many others) points out, objectivity is an unattainable position: *all* research is essentially situational and partial (Haraway 1988). A researcher always looks at something from a position. As a consequence her perspective is always biased (as viewed from that position) and incomplete, since it is simply (logistically, physically and philosophically) impossible to render a view of the research object from all possible sides. Even the choice to be distanced, detached and neutral, as an objective stance decrees, is in itself a position (namely, the choice to be distanced, detached and neutral) and therefore situated and partial. McGilchrist describes this notion as follows:

the relationship ... brought to bear through the scientific method ... is not *no* relationship – merely a disengaged relationship, implying incorrectly, that the observer does not have an impact on the observed (and is not altered by what he or she observes). The betweenness [with which he refers to a reciprocity between object and subject] is not absent, just denied, and therefore of a particular –particularly 'cold'– kind. ... When science adopts a view of its object from which everything 'human' has as far as possible been removed, bringing a focused, but utterly detached attention to bear, it is merely exercising another human faculty, that of standing back from something and seeing it in his detached, in some way important sense denatured, way. There is no reason to see that particular way as privileged, except that it enables us to do certain things more easily, to use things, to have power over things (2010: 166).

This position echoes the notion of objectification as brought forward by Wynne (see 3.2.2). And it has been referred to as 'the god trick' (Haraway 1988: 581) or 'God's eye view' (Nagel cited in McGilchrist 2009: 141), which stands for the obstinate illusion that it is possible to 'see everything from nowhere', which then alludes to equate 'a view from everywhere'. However, instead of rendering the supposed 'validity' of research results, the attempt to be objective and the blind insistence that this will direct us to the one-and-only-truth leads a researcher to ignore the multiplicity of truths that lay outside, beside and beyond the positions that she unconsciously chose to inhabit. This thesis therefore argues that an insistence on objectivity produces *less* truth, rather than a validity of truth.

In acknowledging the shortcomings (or fallacy) of the objective imperative, Haraway calls for an alternative, feminist objectivity that embraces *situated knowledges*. A range of feminist geographers, like Gillian Rose, Dolores Hayden and Andrea Nightingale, adopted this idea, and through their dealings with landscapes, places, and people, have given the notion of 'situatedness' a helpful tangible connotation, besides the mere epistemological and philosophical one.

Following Haraway they argue that situatedness is not a given, it must be actively developed and they propose different techniques to do so. Rose for example states: 'In order to situate ourselves, it is necessary to make one's position vis-à-vis research *known* rather than invisible' (Mattingly and Falconer-Al-Hindi cited in Rose 1997: 308). Herein reflexivity serves as a means of avoiding the false neutrality and universality of so much academic knowledge, by questioning and disclosing one's position (ibid. 306). This is achieved by simply shedding (more) light on the research process, rather than blatantly assuming that the applied objective methods are irrefutably neutral.

As a means to (partly) overcoming partiality and thereby rendering a fuller view of a subject, Rocheleau (1995) and Nightingale (2003) propose the use of 'mixed methods'. By combining qualitative (e.g. in-depth interviews, ecological oral histories) and quantitative (surveys, remote sensing), the researcher looks at something from different positions ('situatednesses') thereby producing 'narratives that are sensitive to gender, power and context and incorporate alternative knowledges' (Nightingale 2003: 79). This, they explain, is different from the conventional 'triangulation' of methods in which two or three methods might be used in order to corroborate the data found through the methods. That is, if the methods produce a similar dataset, the results can be said to be true. Conversely, in the triangulation that the feminist geographers

propose, the different data sets are used to complement each other and thereby create a multifaceted view of reality: a plural and therefore more whole conception of truth.

Peluso (1995) introduces a similar idea through 'counter-mapping', which presents multiple and overlapping views of a place, constructed on the basis of a plurality of voices and views, rather than just one hegemonic perspective. Whereas a conventionally objective approach, the view from nowhere, produces an image of reality that is one-dimensional, flat, remote and static, devoid of (local and rich) meaning, the idea of feminist objectivity generates a view that is multi-layered; it has more depth or 'betweenness' (Nightingale 2003: 81). These notions clearly overlap with the ideas espoused in Chapter 3, where I stressed the importance of local knowledge, multiple stakeholder involvement and thus the rejection of truth as singular.

A further technique to develop situatedness is by acknowledging that 'all knowledge is produced in specific circumstances and those circumstances shape it in some way' (Rose 1997: 305). Therefore, 'as a researcher one should *limit* one's conclusions rather than making grand claims about their universal applicability' (Mattingly and Falconer-Al-Hindi cited in Rose 1997: 308). This takes us back to Aristotle's understanding of praxis, which refers to knowledge that is true in and applicable to the location of experience. However, following feminist objectivity that renounces the existence of 'pure' objectivity would imply that there is no such thing as *theoria* or *poiesis* as Aristotle defined it, because *all* knowledge is location and situation specific. There is no production of 'truth', only a disclosure of multiple truths some of which apply to some occasions and not to others. 'Knowledge thus positioned, or situated, can no longer claim universality' (Rose 1997: 308).

To incorporate the ideas of situated knowledges and partiality in my research I attempted to follow the various recommendations made above. First of all, as stated earlier, I do not expect my results to be *directly* transferrable to another context and time. They are specific to the conditions and emergent properties of this research and therefore not verifiable. This does not mean that they are useless, however. It is up to the user of this knowledge to apply it thoughtfully and creatively: adapting it to fit the conditions of that specific context.

Furthermore, I realised that the mere documentation of my practice through reflective writing, based on the Kolb's ELM, was not sufficient. I initially planned to expand the process of documentation through representing experiences through more creative means such as drawing, modelling in clay and writing poetry. However, as I felt that I was unable to effectively express myself through these means I failed to execute

this idea. (In retrospect I regret this decision, as I believe that my uneasiness regarding these more artful means manifests the misconception that written, explicit, verbal representations are the 'truest' ones.) Instead I expanded my methodology through three more verbal and written methods.

First of all, to generate a more multi-faceted documentation of the practice, I developed a model that encouraged me to look at the experience from different perspectives. To do so, I integrated the steps of Kolb's ELM with Edward de Bono's 'Six Thinking Hats' (1985). This technique is developed to look at issues from a number of perspectives and forces one to move outside the habitual thinking style. I reflected on my practice by following a set of questions that pertain to the different perspectives symbolized by the 6 hats (appendix 2).

Secondly, to (partly) overcome the partiality of the data, I did not want to rely exclusively on *my* account of events, I aimed to invite more perspectives into the mix by interviewing other people that had been either participants in my practice, or that I worked closely with over the course of the research. The semi-structured interviews were also organised according to 'Six Thinking Hats' (see appendix 2 and appendix 6).

Thirdly, in order to gain some distance on my practice and research as a whole, I asked a colleague to interview me. She used the same set of questions that I employed in the conversations with the participants, and extended the questions based on whatever emerged in that conversation and seemed relevant to tease out. Treating this interview as the interviews I did with participants, allowed me to see my personal experience as just one view among many others.

4.1.4 Embodied and embedded knowing

Another aspect core to the idea of situated knowledge is 'embodiment'. Again, drawing from Haraway, I will now explain the meaning and relevance of what she calls 'embodied accounts of truth' (Haraway 1988: 578), which provides the final piece of methodological scaffolding according to which this research was constructed.

The concept of embodiment in relation to feminist objectivity is most easily explained by its literal interpretation: 'embodiment refers to the biological and physical presence of our bodies' (Macdonald et al. 2002), i.e. being physically positioned. Situated knowledge implies that we take into account the location from which we perceive, and by doing so we automatically refer to where our actual body is located. With that

conscious positioning of the body and perceiving an issue from that location, the gaze and hence the way we come to know about the world shifts. The researcher moves from being on the side-line to the heart of whatever she is investigating. Haraway explains: 'I am arguing for the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity' (Haraway 1988: 589). In this quote she distinguishes between two ways of knowing: the former is a bodily view from *within*, 'immersed in', which renders a more messy, visceral and ever-becoming knowledge; whereas the latter, the gaze from above, the objective stance, looks *from the outside in*, thereby producing a more analytical, simplistic and distilled view upon things.¹⁴

The dichotomy between the immersed position versus the side-line gaze also points to something else. Haraway again: 'I would like to insist on the embodied nature of all vision and so reclaim the sensory system that has been used to signify a leap out of the marked body and into a conquering gaze from nowhere' (ibid. 581). What Haraway alludes to here, in my interpretation, is the dominance of the visual sense, an observatory stance, which is quintessential of the Cartesian outlook upon the world, and which forms the source of the illusory God's eye view that dominates Western Science. Descartes called sight 'the most comprehensive and the noblest of these [senses]' and claimed 'that there is no doubt that the inventions which serve to augment its power are among the most useful that there can be' (Descartes in Jay 1995: 71). This claim was based on the assumption that vision rendered him a view on the world 'as it is'. He believed that vision above all other senses allowed him to perceive the world as we now watch a television screen: detached from ourselves, neatly framed, and unaffected by our position (McGilchrist 2009).

This notion, that it is possible to look at something in a way that is not influenced by the watcher, gave rise to the conception that there is a division between the watcher and the watched, i.e. between object and subject. Which in turn, led to the widespread belief that in order to see things 'right', we have to objectify, watch from a distance, with a detached gaze. Following Descartes one becomes, as he resolved himself to be, a spectator rather than actor in the events of the world (ibid.). It is exactly this stance that Haraway criticizes when she argues for a view from the body that places the researcher in the midst of whatever she is investigating – i.e. as an actor) rather than at the side-line (spectator).

¹⁴ Schön makes a similar distinction between the high hard ground and a swamp: 'on the high ground, manageable problems lend themselves to solution through the application of research-based theory and technique. In the swampy lowland, messy, confusing problems defy technical solution.' (Schön 1987: 3)

Haraway' criticism of the Cartesian worldview echoes much of what has gone before in this thesis. In Chapter 2 I described a range of practitioner-thinkers who argue that researchers and scholars should engage in the activities of everyday life or fostering change, beyond gaining a mere understanding of it. That is, they encourage scholars to be actors rather than spectators. Haraway's ideas on 'the view from the body' through which our knowledge is generated from an immersed position rather than a distanced one are core to PaR, Schön's reflective practice and Kolb's Experiential Learning model. In each the knowing itself as well as the medium of investigation reside first and foremost in the embodied doing of something. This generates 'embodied accounts of truth' that are complex, contradictory, ambiguous and ever-becoming, rather than the more solid and fixed ('hard') conceptions of knowledge, to which positivistic (Cartesian) science aspires.

These embodied notions underpin the final method applied to the second strand of my research, which concerns the exploration of other artists' practices. Exploring in this case means participating, as the art pieces were essentially 'participatory'. Here I took the role of researcher, observer, interpreter, and participant simultaneously; a position that goes beyond the traditional ethnographic method of 'participant observation'.

In a piece of writing from the medical field Jan Savage discusses the different understandings of participant observation. He first quotes Tonkin (1984) who pointed out that 'within sociology, participant observation can refer both to a positivist tradition of observing a social field with the minimum of interference (the sociologist as a fly on the wall) and a contrary view in which observers have to totally participate in the social field if they are to gain shared meanings' (Savage 2000: 326). However, the fact that Tonkin uses the word *observation* to term the activity, reflects a Cartesian visualist bias, which assumes that sight is the ultimate key to understanding. However, in fields where the practice under investigation is highly reliant on physical involvement and experiential knowledge (such as nursing), such a position and methodology is deficient. Savage thus argues for methods that 'attempt to incorporate data provided by the lived body of the researcher into ethnographic description to reach aspects of experience that (visual) observation alone would overlook' (ibid. 330).

In a similar manner, I realised that in order to fully understand the practices that I was taking part in, it was not enough to *observe* the activity or other participants. Instead the 'data collection' consisted in the experience and my active engagement with

other people and place. While trying to understand the participants' reflections triggered by the experience, I was also experiencing the phenomenon myself. Creating a social connection and building a good rapport with the other participants is essential in creating an atmosphere of trust, safety and comfort which will increase the likelihood of participants to open-up and search a little deeper to provide more meaningful responses. Such an atmosphere is necessary to allow for dialogue to occur in a relatively undistorted fashion without issues of power, status, prestige, etc. getting in the way. Hence, to fully experience the practice and everything it engendered I had to be immersed in it myself as an active co-creator of the situation. To have meaningful conversations with other participants in order to understand what the practice 'did', I had to speak from a fellow participant's point of view. So again, for the research to come into full swing, I had to be emotionally engaged with whatever I was trying to understand. Or in other words, for certain 'data' to be generated the research process had to embrace subjectivity. The label of 'participant observation' does not cover what I aimed to do. To endorse the reciprocal embodied nature of the research method I have chosen to call it *participative engagement*

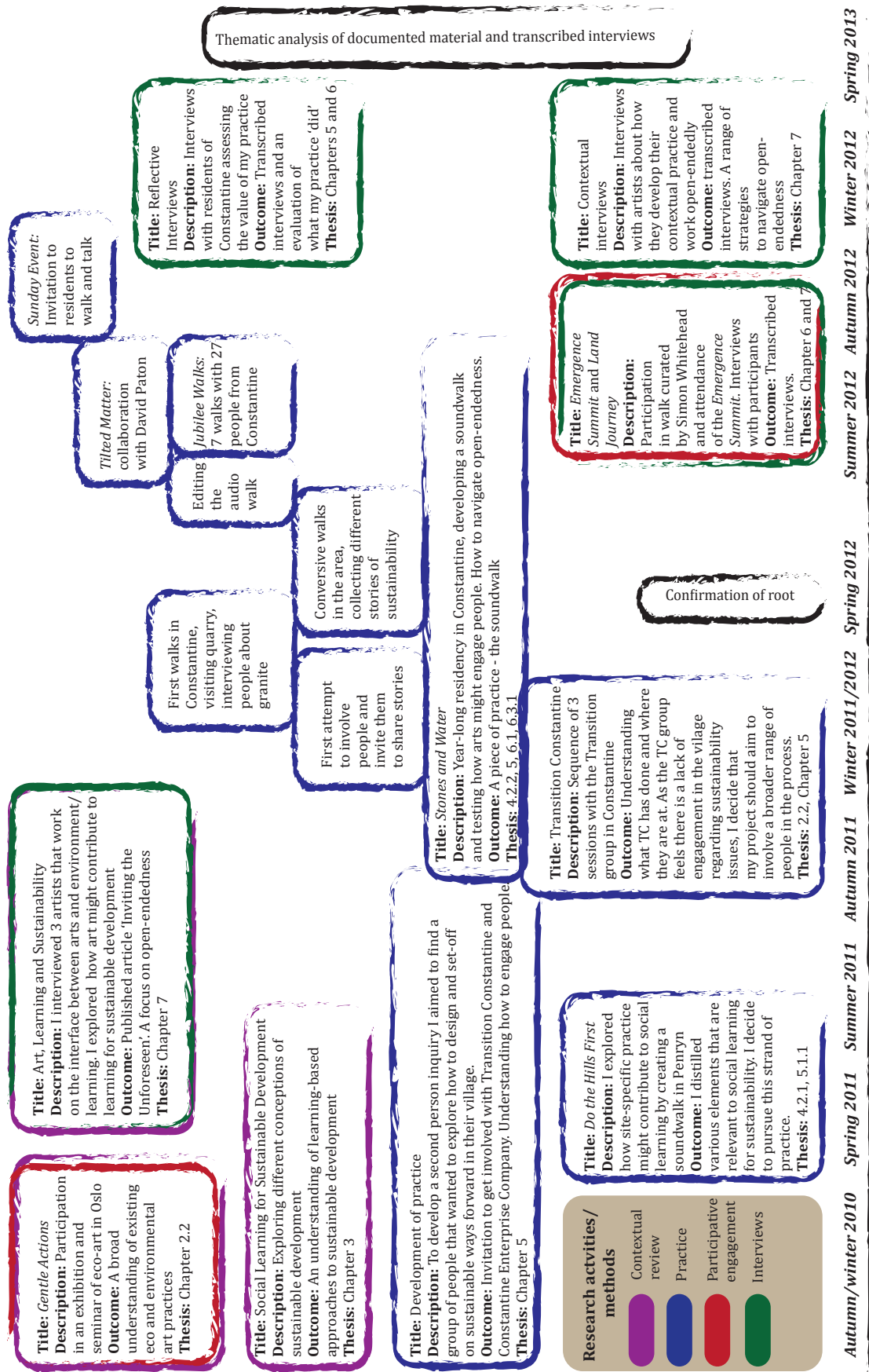


Fig. 4 Chronological overview of the research process

4.2 Research overview

With reference to figure 4 this section gives a chronological overview of my research.

4.2.1 Do the Hills First

While conducting the contextual/literature review I also started to develop my practice. This initially consisted of two groups of activities. Firstly, I was aiming to find a group of people that was willing to take part in a second person inquiry (see objective on page 9). Secondly, I developed the piece *Do the Hills First* (2011).

This contextual soundwalk, which I created with colleague and friend Helena Korpela, revolved around postman Paul and mail recipients in the town of Penryn. Helena and I followed Paul on his daily mailing route, while recording his life as a postman, and

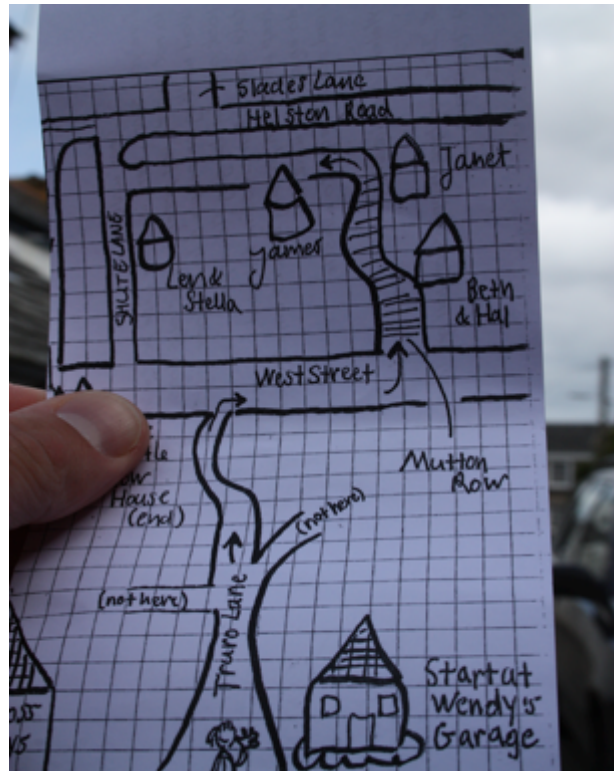


Fig. 5 Map of the soundwalk

used the walking as a means to interact with the people along his route. These activities culminated in a soundwalk featuring Paul and excerpts from recordings of the people we talked to (see figures 5 and 6, appendix 4 and audiotracks 1-4).

The making of this piece started with the seemingly superficial topic of postmen and mail, but the resulting soundwalk dealt with more profound issues around the connection between people, and the increase of economic efficiency at the expense of human interaction.



Fig. 6 On the way of the soundwalk: Mutton Row

Through a comparison between *Do the Hills First* and social learning, I realised that there are many overlaps between the two processes that make the former a useful source of inspiration for the latter. They are both context-based; they both involve the bringing together of people; they both generate conversation and the sharing of thoughts; they both enable a space for reflection on complex issues, such as socio-environmental change.

Based on the perceived overlaps between the arts practice and community learning, I concluded that such creative structure could be used to initiate social learning. Subsequently, I resolved to find

a similar structure in a different setting and direct that practice along a more environmental theme.

4.2.2 Stones & Water

The latter resolution resulted in the core practice of this research: a year-long project in Constantine, a village South-West of Falmouth in Cornwall, UK. Located between woods and a windy tidal estuary, it is a popular residential spot (see figure 7). While lots of villages lose a big part of their population in autumn when holidaymakers and second homeowners move back to their 'first homes', Constantine is peopled all year round and has a good selection of local businesses installed in its high street. The parish of Constantine houses a total of two thousand residents; half of those live in Constantine village (cornwall.opc.org 2004-2014).



Fig. 7 Map of Constantine; featuring the village, Bosahan Quarry, the path through the woods and Polwheveral.

Situated on the granite plateau that covers most of central Cornwall, the area is dotted with quarries, which were active from the 1700s (Stanier 1999). Once bustling with activity, now empty and often overgrown they are evidence of an industrial age that used to sustain the area (see figure 8). With the industry fading and farming dwindling, most residents now work outside the village; this results in a long line of cars leaving the village every morning.

Through initial conversations with some citizens, I realised that the village consists of a wide variety of active groups. Members are passionately engaged in their respective interests. Transition Constantine for example deals with the environmental sustainability and future of the village, while the history society is interested in its past and the preservation of local heritage. The village is active and heterogeneous, with a very wide variety of views and strong opinions about how it should be.



Fig. 8 Remnants of the mining history in the landscape.

Two groups in the village, 'Transition Constantine' (TC) and the 'Constantine Enterprise Company' (CEC), endeavour to make the village socially, environmentally and economically sustainable. Where the first has a more environmental focus by developing schemes of renewable energy and local food provision, the latter is more economically and socially oriented, aiming to expand local employment and sustain the social cohesion of the

village. The CEC has recently taken up the plan to reinvigorate one of the deserted quarries, called Bosahan (Figure 9). They do not intend to reinstall it as a site of granite extraction, but reimagine it as a place that brings heritage and the current needs of Constantinians together in a way that would provide employment whilst also preserving wildlife. I was invited to contribute to the endeavours of both the TC and the CEC as part of my PhD, and decided to develop a project that would combine both.

TC was formed after the results of a parish plan in 2008 showed an interest in 'green issues', i.e. to develop ways in which the village could become more sustainable (Robin Curtis, personal communication, September 13 2011). However, what is thought to be sustainable or 'good' for the village is largely contested. When I met the group in September 2011 I felt there was a sense of collective disappointment with regards to their achievements. A pivotal event in their existence as a group was the large opposition they received to the idea to construct a solar plant¹⁵. Various members of TC expressed their frustration regarding this matter, explaining that an international company had been willing to invest in building a solar farm near a hamlet adjacent to Constantine, called Brill. The revenues of the plant would, as TC reasoned, benefit the community and create local employment, as well as providing a green form of energy. After they had repeatedly and without avail asked for the community's input as to how to organise renewables in the village, they organised a public meeting to pass the plan

¹⁵ It is unclear as to who introduced this idea. TC says it was not their idea, but most people I talked to clearly associate the solar plant with TC's activities.

for the solar plant. This suggestion incited public outrage and filled the church hall with opposing residents: “Brill went bezerk” as Curtis put it (Robin Curtis, personal communication, September 13 2011).

Initial conversations with the active members of TC and attendance of their meetings revealed that the members seemed to be suffering from what Curtis called “Transition burn-



Fig. 9 Bosahan Quarry

out”: people join a TT group enthusiastically, wanting to do something, but faced with a lack of engagement from the larger community they become frustrated. Hence they stop coming to the meetings.¹⁶ After the solar drawback TC started to lose active members. Working in accordance with the TT method of installing different working groups that initiate projects in different areas, they saw a decline in membership in each of these committees. This finally resulted in the development and execution of initiatives coming to a halt. What remained were conversations about potential sources and locations of renewable energy schemes (hydropower and small wind turbines), and the management of the monthly farmers market, which all TC members regarded as their only tangible achievement in the village.

With this in the back of my mind I organised and facilitated three sessions that aimed to engage the TC members in a collective reflection on their group and personal motivations to be part of it, in order to reinvigorate their aspirations. These sessions showed that the group felt that, first and foremost, they had to reach out to more people, thereby engaging the wider community in the Transition vision, and generating a greater sense of community in general, which, they felt, is the foundation for a resilient village.

Having first thought I would work solely with the members of TC, I decided to open my practice to a wider audience. I resolved to do so by using the *CEC Quarry Project* as a starting point. In line with the ideas around meaning-making that direct this

¹⁶ See also Transitionculture.org 2010

research (as discussed in Chapter 3) I wanted to avoid prematurely pinning down a definition of sustainable development and instead run a community-wide exploration of what sustainable development means to Constantinians. Furthermore, I felt that in order to transcend the existing boundaries between groups and biases that might exist surrounding sustainability issues, I should associate myself with more than one group, thereby aiming to engage a larger portion of Constantine in the social learning process towards the sustainable development of the village.

I therefore took the plans for Bosahan Quarry as an opportunity and context to develop an artistic practice as a means to find local interpretations of sustainable development. The aim was to do so through a process of collecting a range of diverse perspectives on the issue that would serve as a starting point for a wider community dialogue on the possible futures of Bosahan Quarry.

My practice consisted of two parts. During the first 6 months I gathered perspectives, first by collecting stories about the granite history of the community, in interviews mostly with elderly residents. After that I moved on to talking with younger residents, to discuss a wider range of topics concerning the village. These conversations were recorded and subsequently used in the second part of my practice that used this aggregate of views to stimulate a community conversation on sustainable development issues in the village.

The practice was driven by three artful elements (i.e. ingredients inspired by existing contextual practice, see 2.2) that I aimed to test. These propelled the open-ended process of iterative cycles and thereby generated the results. I will discuss them in more detail in part II of this thesis, but will briefly describe their background in the following paragraphs.

Narratives of place

The first element that inspired my practices was the use of narratives of place. Daniels and Lorimer propose that landscapes are a narrative medium, and, conversely, that narratives can help one to understand the past, as well as framing the present and future of a place (2012: 3). The authors contend that 'as a form of place-based performance and public engagement storytelling is being deployed as a practice to propel cross-generational interest in local, community-centred initiatives and as a way to re-learn forms of civic attachment' (ibid. 5). This suggests that the collection of

narratives, as contained in this research, can be used to explore local issues, thereby firmly rooting a process in the lifeworld of participants.

The Orion Society in the USA presents a similar focus on narrative in relation to sustainable development. As part of *place-based education* or *pedagogy of place* (see page 75), they suggest that ‘the path to a sane, sustainable existence must start with a fundamental re-imagination of the ethical, economic, political, and spiritual foundations upon which society is based, and [that] this process needs to occur within the context of a deep knowledge of place’ (Lane-Zucker in Sobel 2004: i). Furthermore, it employs a process of *re-storying*, whereby learners are asked to respond creatively to stories of their homeground so that, in time, they are able to position themselves, imaginatively and actually, within the continuum of nature and culture in that place (ibid. iii).

In a similar manner I assumed ‘narratives of place’ as means and material to explore issues of sustainability, past, present and future on a local level: using people’s stories to make the general personal, the abstract concrete and the remote every day. These then constituted the different perspectives that creatively would feed an social learning process, by ‘using narrative as paint on the canvas that is the landscape’ (research diary, 26th of January 2012).

Conversive Wayfinding

I envisioned walking as a medium to move between those stories that are captured in places, thereby mapping the village, its past, present and future, narratively.¹⁷Hence, the second element I aimed to test was the embodied practice of walking as an alternative to linear and rational or propositional ways of knowing. Performance artist Misha Myers maintains: ‘Instead of sitting and talking, or ... ‘computing answers’ beforehand, you try to find other ways to deal with an issue. I always think “how can I do something with these ideas, how can I immediately get working on a problem?” (Misha Myers, personal communication, 17 October 2011). In this context, and based on a study of soundwalks (see below), she introduces the concept of *conversive wayfinding*, which she describes as ‘a way of knowing and expressing people’s perceptions and experiences of places through a sociable, conversational or dialogic mode of interaction’ (Myers 2010: 59).

Myers’ original understanding of wayfinding refers back to Ingold’s interpretation of the term (or the synonym ‘wayfaring’), which I understand as the opposite to

¹⁷ There is a considerable number of artists and performers whose practice is walking, and who use performative walking as a means to address sustainability issues (see for example Allen and Jones 2012)

navigating. The latter implies the act of purposefully travelling from one point to the next, where one assumes to know where that point lies, and the focus of the journey is on those points of arrival, rather than the movement between them. Mobility in this sense implies a sequence of stops and starts, with the territory becoming a collection of separated nodes, connected only through a line of travel. In wayfaring there are no 'preknown' points; as a result there are no goals or points of arrival. There are no stops and starts; the travel is a continuous line, with the knowing not being in the nodes, but along the line of travel and in movement. 'We know *as we go*, not *before we go*' (Ingold 2000: 229, emphasis in original). Hence, this is can be described as an open-ended process because meaning, direction and destination emerge through the movement, not before.

This approach of conversive wayfinding inspired the first step in the Constantine Project. I invited residents from Constantine to take me for a walk, one that lead from their house to a location that held a significance of some kind for them (see figure 10). I envisioned these walks as moments of mobile reflection for my conversive walking partner and an opportunity for me to see the world through their eyes. I was taken to places that kept childhood memories, hilltops that revealed a particular view, e.g. of the village or the walker's farm; or guided along 'routine routes', connecting their home to their place of work for example. While traversing the landscape we would talk about the past, present and future of the community and its surroundings: childhood memories, what they most cherished about the place, how they thought the village and their lives were affected by external (global) events such a climate change, whether and what they feared for the future and how they thought the community could meet any changes to



Fig. 10 On a conversive walk

come. I conducted a total of fifteen walks over a period of five months, each of which took me somewhere different and revealed another view. I tried to attract a diverse range of people, not just the ones that already had an interest in the history or future of the village (e.g. the history society or Transition Constantine).

The soundwalk

Following on from *Do the Hills First*, the third element that drove my practice was a combination of walking and audio. In soundwalks the audience or participants are invited to wear a headset and simply wander or follow a more structured guided route, while listening to an audiotrack that distorts, amplifies or overlays the visual world. Artists might for example use binaural recording devices to create a realistic immersive experience, thereby connecting the percipient to the surroundings or complicating what she sees (Myers 2011: 78).

Geographer Toby Butler refers to the potential of soundwalks to create 'nuanced, embodied, complex, multi-sensory ways of experiencing and representing surroundings' (2006: 895). Myers points to the value of soundwalks in creating a shared viewpoint and 'earpoint': through the aural experience the percipients are invited to see places from multiple vantage points or persuasively perceive the world through the eyes of the character on the audiotrack (Myers 2010). In *Cysgod* (2002), for example, artist Simon Whitehead attached microphones to a horse's ears. The horse is taken for a stroll and the recordings are played back to an audience that 'is invited to retrace her [the horse's] steps, listening, as it were, through her ears. ... Through the act of walking and listening they assume the presence of the animal, inhabiting her breath, pauses and footfalls' (Whitehead 2006: 34).

Janet Cardiff, one of the first to use soundwalks as a form of art, generates deep, visceral, theatrical experiences. In her pieces she guides an audience over 'an invisible stage' – the street, a park or woods – by whispering gentle directions in their ear (Schaub 2005: 14). While walking in step with her recorded footsteps, the percipient is guided through an experience informed by Cardiff's own walking through that place: whispers, sounds, dreams, and images trickle from the audiotrack into the listeners mind and body.

Reflecting on my experience in *The Missing Voice: Case Study B* (Cardiff 1999) I draw the following conclusions about the strength of Cardiff's work and potential of soundwalks in general:

Because your attention is guided and modified by what you hear, the visual world around you transforms. She [Cardiff] anticipates occurrences that create wonderful synchronicities between the imaginary or past recorded world and the actual or present world around you. Thereby the imagined world that you hear becomes true in the real visual world around you. She narrates thoughts as if they are flowing from within your own head. There is an overwhelming sense of walking in the shoes of the voices on the audiotrack. What you hear starts to mingle with your own life - what you see around you, your memories. Through

the addition of sounds and music on the track you are transposed to a place different from the one you see around you, things are added to it, or its features are amplified. (Reflective journal, 1 December 2011)

Subsequently, we can say that the main strength of the soundwalk lies in engaging an audience (percipients) in the *experience* of a situation or concept: to be in it –or in fact *be* it– rather than merely observing it from a distance. Soundartist Duncan Speakman confirms this aspect. He explains: ‘You are not watching somebody else embody it and then having empathy, you are not kind of reading about something, it is actually happening to *you*’ (Duncan Speakman, personal communication, 4 March 2013).

As mentioned earlier, extensive research in the field of education shows that experiential knowing of what one learns about fosters a deeper understanding of issues (see page 74-75 of this thesis; Kolb 1975; Dewey 1938). Thus, the (multi-) sensorial experience of certain issues through a soundwalk could be, I assumed, of value in the context of social learning and sustainable development; e.g. undergoing someone else’s perception by listening to different voices can stimulate a ‘deep’ understanding of the multitude of perspectives.

Inspired by Cardiff’s soundwalks I decided to use walking in combination with sound to create an embodied experience of the topic of sustainable development. I aimed to apply various artful elements that I discerned to be ‘effective’ in Cardiff’s work. On 26th of January 2012 I described my intentions as follows:

- Layer the landscape with what was, is and could/should be.
 - Representing the memories, imaginations and views of people (that I recorded during the conversive walks)
 - And stimulating the imaginations among the percipients (that walk the soundwalk)
- Creating a space for ‘suspension’: making tangible all the different perspectives upon the place and what it could be, thereby refraining the mind to rush into quick conclusions about what should be but dwell in a ‘grey’, fuzzy zone of multiple truths and perspectives upon the environment, what it was and what it could/should be.
- Make all this experiential through an embodied and intimate experience,
- which generates dialogue about the future of the village.



Fig. 11 Soundwalkers during the Jubilee walks, June 2012

To do so I recorded the fifteen conversive walks I conducted with residents from Constantine, which I then edited into two different soundwalks. One (*Stones*) lead into Bosahan woods and to the quarry; the other (*Water*) passed through fields and ended at a little beach (Polwheveral) along the estuary. (See audiotrack 5-8)

Instead of aiming to produce ‘clean’ recordings of each of these conversations, I wanted the conditions under which the walk was taken to seep through. (With limitations of course as windy circumstances would make recording impossible.) I chose not to feature in the soundwalk; the piece was constructed only of excerpts, stories, thoughts and observations from my walking partners. The residents became the protagonists in a ‘theatrical auditory space’ (Myers 2011: 70), which used the surroundings of the village as a stage. Sometimes what you heard was where you were (e.g. at some points the track synchronized with the surroundings. Sometimes what you heard was from somewhere else, but still made sense in that place.)

After collecting and editing the material, the next phase in the practice consisted of using the soundwalk as a dialogical means in itself. This occurred through a series of walks where people listened to the audio and were triggered, as I assumed, to reflect upon the topic of sustainable development and form their own interpretation of it in relation to the context they were in. On various occasions residents were invited to walk, listen and respond to the collection of views as expressed by their fellow villagers. I organised three sets of walks. In June 2011 I organised group walks from the village to the quarry during the Queen’s Jubilee Festivities¹⁸ that were organised in the village;

¹⁸ The walks as such did not hold any relevance in relation to the Queen’s Jubilee; the occasion was merely chosen because in this way the walk became part of a larger program of activities.



Fig. 12 Sharing tea, biscuits and opinions.

each taking out a small group to the woods, where walkers would pause before going back, have tea and converse about what they heard and what they thought (see figures 11 and 12). Immediately following that I organised *Tilted Matter* in cooperation with David Paton¹⁹, an evening event in which we connected my work about an abandoned quarry with his practice that was situated in a

working quarry. Two groups of around (10 and 20 people respectively) walked and listened, and were asked to give feedback on the soundwalk. This was directed to a broader audience, and involved mainly 'external' participants, i.e. university associates, students, friends and PhD colleagues.

And lastly, in November 2012 I organised a final walk in collaboration with the Constantine Enterprise Company (CEC), which was followed by a conversation in the local community centre (The Tolmen Centre), during which the CEC expanded on their visions for the quarry and participants were invited to express their views. In the writing that follows I will refer to these events as *Jubilee Walks*, *Tilted Matter* and *Sunday Event* respectively.

Hereafter I interviewed 11 people that had been present at this final walk; some of which were active within CEC, others that were members of TC, and a few that did not belong to any of these groups. The objective of these conversations was to understand how they had experienced the walk or 'piece', and my presence in the village over a course of a year in general. Furthermore I wanted to find out whether (and how) they perceived it as 'art' and how that informed the topic of sustainable development (see appendix 6 for the questions). The results of these interviews, as well as the feedback

¹⁹ David Paton is a sculptor and stone carver, currently doing a PhD with the geography department at Exeter University. His interest is in creating a geographical reading of the production and reception of carved stone sculpture in the mutable time-spaces of the built environment, evidenced by a sustained period of research in Trenoweth Dimension Granite quarry near Penryn, in Cornwall.

collected after the *Jubilee Walks* and *Tilted Matter* form the basis for Chapter 5 and 6 in Part II of this thesis.

4.2.3 Participation in *The Land Journey*

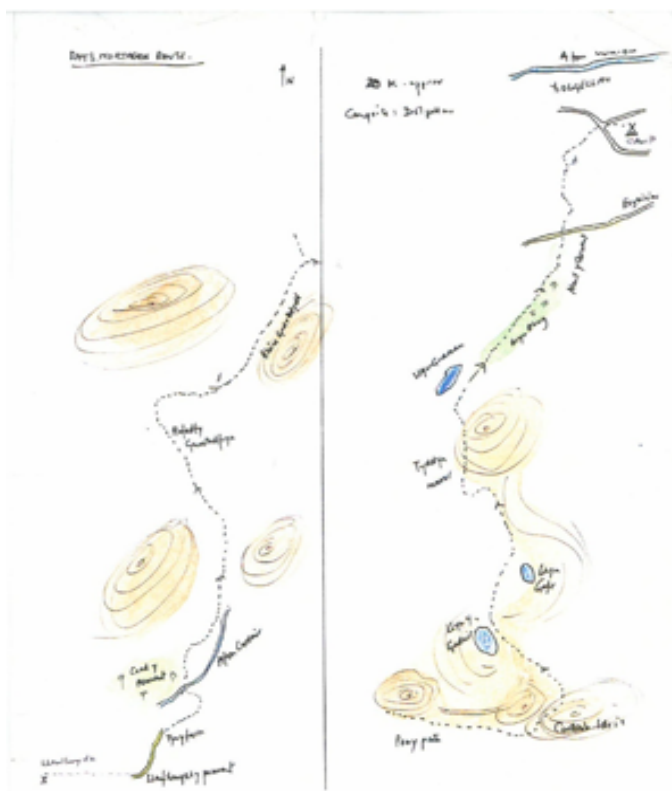


Fig. 13 A map of day 3 of *The Land Journey*, which took us up mountain Cadair Idris.

To further deepen my understanding of the interconnections between art and learning for sustainable development I participated in contextual practices developed by other artists. The main one which has informed this thesis concerned the *Emergence Land Journey* (2012) as part of the *Emergence Summit* organised by the Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT) and Volcano, a theatre company from Swansea. The Summit aimed to reinforce the role of the arts in envisioning a sustainable society and brought together a large range of artists, thinkers and practitioners over a

two-day conference at CAT. *The Land Journey* was a preamble to this event: two groups set out from CAT and walked two ellipses, one going North and the other South, reuniting at CAT after 5 days. Artist Simon Whitehead curated the walk and a sequence of what he called 'visitations'. He explains:

an invitation to have one person a day who would come and tell a story in whatever medium that might reveal something of the invisible narratives of the place, human narratives I guess. So it was not just kind of a walking holiday through generic beautiful landscapes. It was also encountering the realities of experiences of that place, of the people who had kind of a deep relationship to the place (Simon Whitehead, personal communication, 7 September 2012).

I was a participant during three days of the walk, following the 'North Route' through Snowdonia. We went up the mountain Cadair Idris (see figure 13), passed through residential areas, farm land (meadows), (former) industrial areas as well as woods, while repeatedly encountering the construction of a gas pipe that cut through the land. Some visitations were performative, like a poetry reading, dance or a musician playing a tuba; others were more informative: a sheep farmer passionately describing the beauty and perils of farming, or a writer telling us how communities and farmsteads made way for state enforced timber production. After the walk I held conversations with nine participants of *The Land Journey*, Simon Whitehead and the mountain leader, to understand how they had experienced the walk, what the 'art' was and how that informed the topic of sustainable development. Furthermore, having participated in the walk as well, I took the position as interviewer and interlocutor; asking questions, as well as concurring with views or challenging perspectives.

4.2.4 Interviews with contextual artists

In the last phase of my research I conducted eleven semi-structured interviews with artists that work contextually. These interviews aimed to gather a broader understanding of strategies that artists use to create their work. I selected artists on the basis of my understanding of contextual practice as presented in section 2.2. The conversations were informal, although I did follow a list of questions/topics.

4.2.5 Data analysis

The research activities rendered the following 5 'data sets' (see figure 3):

- Written documentation: a reflexive journal with my day-to-day scribbles, reflecting on my research as a whole and experiences during research activities, including my practice and the participation in practices of other artists.
- Non-verbal documentation of my practice: audio recordings, photographic material, etc.
- Seven audio-recorded interviews including a total of eleven participants and Simon Whitehead, the creator of *The Land Journey*.

- Eleven audio-recorded interviews with participants of *Stones & Water* (including myself).
- Eleven interviews with a total of fourteen artists that work contextually.

To analyse the different data sets I followed a method based on thematic analysis, a common method of data analysis in qualitative research (Bryman 2012). The purpose of this method is to create a catalogue of the central themes, which then help the researcher to structure the data and extract meaningful insights on which theory is based. The selection of particular themes is done through recognising recurring motifs or categories that relate to the research focus (i.e. the research questions or objectives). These are ‘the product of thorough reading and rereading’ of the data (Bryman 2012: 579). Based on the model as described by Braun and Victoria (2006) I analysed my data through the following steps:

1. I started the thematic analysis by familiarizing myself with the data. To do so I transcribed all the 29 interviews myself. I read my reflective journals once through. And created a folder, presenting the non-verbal documentation in chronological order.
2. I generated some first themes by loosely labelling all the material that seemed (remotely) relevant to my research.
3. I then proceeded to keep these labelled pieces and discard the rest. To do so I printed those elements from the transcripts; and entered the bits of interest from my hand written diaries into a computer and likewise printed these texts.
4. Subsequently I reread these transcripts while starting to discern themes and thus labelling the text.
5. I then made three visual and tangible mind maps, by distilling the themes moving them around to create groups of themes and relations between these groups.
6. By studying the three maps at the same time I was then able to distil overarching themes that have informed the insight that part II of this thesis describes.

4.2.6 Ethics

I gained consent from all the respondents to use their interviews in this thesis. They agreed to have their full names listed in relation to excerpts and conclusions drawn on the basis of the interviews, but I decided to anonymise two out of the three sets of interviews. All the artists that were interviewed are referred to by surname; whilst the participants of both my own practice in Constantine and *The Land Journey* have been anonymised (to a certain degree).

I chose to do so because I realised that although initially the material did not appear to be confidential, it did become personal through the process of selection, juxtaposition and connection. That is, by highlighting and isolating certain statements and contrasting them with quotes from other interviews, I might have created a narrative in which some seemingly innocuous statements might be taken as offensive. Subsequently, in order to avoid embarrassment and harm to their reputations, I aimed not to disclose the respondents. However, this proved harder than expected. First of all, it was difficult to find the right way to anonymise the respondents. I considered giving them pseudonyms, but subsequently felt that by choosing certain names I was making them into something that they were not, thereby giving a false rendition of reality. I thought about changing the name of the village in which my practice had occurred, but then concluded that this was a useless measure. It would indeed anonymise the respondents in the wider academic arena, yet where it mattered most, on the ground and in relation to the people that had been involved, everyone of course knew where my practice had taken place and that I was referring to Constantine.

Furthermore, anthropologist Van der Geest (2003) argues that in cases that pseudonyms indeed effectively anonymise people, the researcher also in effect deprives them of the ability to respond to whatever conclusions the research has drawn (as what is written is apparently not about them). This becomes even more problematic in the light of the collaborative and praxis-oriented imperative of my research: in order to learn from or apply whatever was found, the research had to remain in close contact with the people in question and can therefore not be anonymised.

Another problem I encountered was the fact that it proved simply impossible and undesirable to effectively and entirely anonymise, as some of the conclusions that I draw are dependent upon knowing exactly *who* the respondent is, e.g. what community group she belongs to.

To solve the issue I chose to partially anonymise them by referring to them by their initials. Furthermore, I have discussed the main potentially 'volatile' conclusions

with them. And lastly, by giving the reader access to the transcripts of the interviews, and allowing her to read the context in which certain statements were uttered, I hope to show that none of what the respondents have said was meant maliciously. Appendix 6 lists the transcripts of the interviews. Each quotation will be accompanied by a page number between brackets, which refers to the page number(s) of appendix 6 where the citation in question appears.

Besides posing difficulties regarding the confidentiality of data, the process of doing research in a village, has also raised interesting questions regarding the validity of 'truth' on an ontological level, and the role of the researcher within this matter. The interviews took place in a rather informal manner, with respondents freely sharing their thoughts about the village and people living in it. Had these conversations not taken place as part of a research, whatever was uttered might well have been regarded as 'gossip': the conveyed views are (isolated) personal opinions of one person, and not necessarily generalisable truths. They are fleeting perspectives, changeable and only existent in the moment of utterance. However, the fact that I, the researcher, decided to distil and document these views in this thesis, suddenly turns 'gossip' into fixed affirmations.

Subsequently, a researcher creates as much as records reality by choosing to represent and include certain views and allow others to remain ephemeral by *not* documenting them. Moreover, by creating this specific representation and as such explicitly expressing certain intangible undercurrents, she might *affect* reality as whatever was meant to stay as gossip, suddenly becomes a 'fixed' truth, thereby causing or reinforcing certain realities. This might result, for example, in tensions manifesting themselves (more) prominently. Hence, a researcher working in a community setting should be vigilant of her role in *making* truth; in making things happen that might not have happened without her, whether it be welcome or not.

I encourage the reader to be aware of this tension between gossip and stated conclusion throughout the rest of this thesis.

4.3 Summary

This chapter has presented a range of methods that have been applied in this research. The methodology is characterized by open-endedness, reflective doing, and the assertion that knowledge is partial, situated and embodied. Furthermore, it relies on subjectivity, as it argues that a passionate involvement of the researcher in the process produces 'more truth' than an objective stance would do; it drives the research activities and allows the researcher to fully experience every part of the process, not as a distanced spectator but as an engaged actor. As a consequence this thesis produces knowledge that cannot be applied universally, but has to be transferred to another context creatively.

The following range of methods allowed the documentation of the executed research activities. First of all I documented my practice through reflective writing (using Kolb's Experiential Learning Model, and de Bono's 6 hats reflection). Secondly, I used semi-structured interviews through which I asked others (participants) to reflect on the outcomes of practice (mine and other artists' work). And thirdly, I engaged in participative engagement to experience and assess the value of other artist's work in relation to learning for sustainable development.

The final part of this chapter gave a chronological overview of the research activities (see figure 4 for a summary).

Having discussed the activities and methods executed as part of the research, Part II will discuss the results of the practice.

PART II

5

Engaging citizens in processes of meaning-making

Collaborative solution-finding through the engagement of lay people has been mentioned as a crucial ingredient in both social learning and the post-normal research paradigm. The Transition Town (TT) movement was presented as the embodiment of such participatory approaches in that it aims to be community-led and grass-roots, with solutions designed and implemented collaboratively by people living in towns, villages and neighbourhoods. This approach demands high levels of engagement of 'ordinary' people living in a particular place; the success of TT and social learning thus largely depends on civic engagement. Such voluntary participation is, as the case of Transition Constantine (TC) also shows, not easy to come by.

The previous chapter explained that TC has not been entirely successful in engaging a larger part of the population of Constantine in sustainability issues. When I talked to the group in autumn 2011 they seemed to be frustrated, experiencing –what appeared to be– active *disengagement* of other residents. The unexpectedly violent village reaction to the proposition to build a solar farm in Brill made TC realise that not everyone supports what to them appear to be green and thus 'good' solutions; and, more importantly, it showed that 'community participation' is a complex phenomenon. Based on the assumption that if people have an idea for or opinion about something they will come forward when invited to do so, TC felt that they had sufficiently encouraged people to give their feedback on ideas they proposed. The group therefore could not understand the sudden backlash; why had these people not stepped forward earlier with constructive criticism? Why had they not joined TC to conceive alternatives?

The complexity of civic engagement also became painfully clear during the first stages of my research practice. I was expecting to find a community group eagerly awaiting a facilitator like myself to appear and employ artistic means to catalyse a process of solution-finding towards sustainable development. As it turned out, such communities of interest hardly readily exist but evolve along the way; they congregate around an issue or activity when invited in a way that appeals to them. When I finally did find 'my group' of sustainability-oriented villagers (TC) they turned out to be

grappling with the same problem: ‘how on earth do we involve people actively in sustainability issues?’

Although I wanted to run a social learning, before I could do anything I first had to address issues of participation. This chapter therefore tries to unpick how one engages people in such processes of meaning-making and what artful elements might enhance such civic engagement.

To do so, I will focus on *Do The Hills First* and *Stones & Water*. On the basis of an analysis of the documentation and interviews conducted with participants, this chapter describes what the practices *did* in the relation to the topic of civic engagement. What did I learn about community participation through these two cycles of practice? And what does that tell me about how processes of collaborative meaning-making come into being? The answer includes a set of strategies that catalyse civic engagement, as well as series of critical questions and contradictions with regards to this theme.

In my discussion of the result of these practices I distinguish between getting people involved in the first place, on the one hand, and the *quality* of their engagement throughout the process on the other. The first is the focus of section 5.1, the second of 5.2. The third section then deals with the drawbacks of my practice, formulated as a series of ‘inconvenient questions’ regarding the theme of community participation, which came to light through my practice.

5.1 Stimulating involvement



Fig. 14: Hal and Beth writing letters at the café.

Do The Hills First and *Stones & Water* are both contextual practices that used walking and conversation to create a soundwalk, which was performed on location to a wider audience. Stories of residents were collected and edited into an audiotrack that a group of people then listened to. They walked the same route and were encouraged to reflect on a particular issue. In *Do The Hills*

First people wrote a letter individually, but congregated in a café, thereby opening a space for further informal conversation (see figure 14). And as part of the soundwalk in Constantine, walkers either shared tea and thoughts in the woods, or exchanged opinions in a more formalized fashion with a seated conversation. Both practices experimented with how one might engage people that live in a certain geographical area; the next two sub-sections will discuss to what extent such engagement happened and what artful factors catalysed this.

5.1.1 Walking with a postman

Do the Hills First started from the simple and sole interest of joining a postman on his daily mail delivery route, record his stories and create a soundwalk. The topic of interest was everything related to mail: the life of a postman, mechanics of mail delivery, his daily routine, the route, special letters he



Fig. 15 Door hanger that invited people to tell about an important letter that they had received or sent. People hung it on their door to show that we could knock for a chat.

had delivered, letters he received himself, etc. Before long Paul, the postman that we followed, was also telling us about the people he knew on his route, who had a dog to watch out for, gossip about mail received (houses that received prison letters and ones that had witnessed a murder) and changes he had witnessed in the streets during his time as a postman.

From there we conceived the idea of also involving the residents along Paul's mail delivery route; the act of walking with a postman became a pretext to connect to people living on his route. We created a door hanger that invited people to share their stories about letters they had received in the past. If people wished to speak with us they could leave the hanger on the door to notify us (see figure 15). We received two invitations to come in. These people subsequently introduced us to their neighbours. And eventually, in addition to Paul, six different people feature on the audiotrack.

Although we did not reach a large number of people (we never intended to), the pretext of walking with a postman and the door hanger formed non-threatening and playful ways to reach people and ask them to share a bit of their life with us. Reflecting on the practice, I came to the conclusion that ‘walking with a postman’ functioned as a model for participation. It represents a set of elements that can encourage fruitful engagement of people in the following manner:

- a) Postmen have a good reputation; they are generally regarded as friendly, trustworthy, non-threatening people. Everyone seemed very positive to our idea of wanting to find out about him and involve them in this quest. Walking with a postman literally opened doors.
- b) The practice of mail delivery reaches everywhere, irrespective of social class, neighbourhood, profession or interest. This would allow one to attract a diverse group of people and avoid only engaging a group of people that is already interested.
- c) Postmen are mobile; they come to you rather than you having to go to them.
- d) The door hanger was a simple invitation that could be easily refused.

Having taken these learning points from this first cycle of practice, I was looking to repeat a similar kind of interaction somewhere else and more directed towards the topic of environmental sustainability. This then became the starting point for my practice in Constantine. The next section describes how this practice succeeded in engaging people.

5.1.2 Cutting across village groups

As explained in the previous chapter Constantine is divided in fairly distinct interest groups. Although there are some crossovers between certain groups, the boundaries are rather strict (Robin Curtis, personal communication, September 13 2011). One part of the village regularly goes to the Tolmen Centre with its cultural programme, heritage centre and lunch café, whereas another part avoids the community centre and hangs out at the Social Club at the other end of the village. There is a division between the ‘proper Cornish’ residents²⁰ and ‘incomers’, people who moved to the

²⁰ What ‘proper’ means is not very clear; some say you have to be born in Cornwall to be Cornish, others maintain that you are only Cornish if your family has been here for many generations. It is beyond the topic of this thesis to tease out the complexities shrouding the meaning of Cornish

village more recently. The history group is interested in the past, while Transition Constantine focuses on the future of the village. One part of the village goes to church, another part does not. Furthermore, there are some political disputes between residents, which means that if you are associated with one you lose access to the other. And finally, a large section of residents does not engage in any of these groups. These divisions complicate the engagement of 'the' community, because essentially the geographical community of Constantine consists of various intersecting sub-communities, based on interests, age and origin.

To engage a cross-section of the village community I experimented with different approaches. First of all, to avoid being associated only with 'the eco people' (i.e. Transition Constantine) I used the Quarry Project as a starting point. As the latter is an initiative of the Heritage Centre and Constantine Enterprise Company, my practice, I assumed, would also attract people interested in history and the economic well-being of the village, thereby automatically reaching a broader segment of the village. Furthermore, in this way I could pitch my walks as more 'neutral': I was not necessarily 'green', or only interested in history.

Another strategy I employed was to get involved with the Girl Guides (girl scouts). This, I assumed, would grant me access to their parents as well. Thirdly, I took the conscious decision not to live in the village. Although that did mean that I was less involved in the everyday life of Constantine, it also meant I avoided getting entangled in village politics about who is 'proper Cornish' and who is not. By not pretending or aspiring to being part of it, I tried to avoid the stigma of 'incomer', because I was something different altogether.

Finally, in an attempt to cut across any group associations, I used the *Who's Where*, a booklet listing all business in Constantine, including self-employed plumbers, construction workers, gardeners, etc. I picked fifteen people at random and sent them a letter explaining about my project and inviting them to take me out for a walk. Two people, which are not normally associated with any of the village groups, responded and walked with me.

My own observations and the comments of participants show that I have been relatively successful in involving a broad cross-section of the village. However, my selected strategies also excluded some groups. The rest of this section describes both the advantages and drawbacks of my approach.

identity; here I will refer to it only to point out to differences between people as they are perceived by residents of Constantine.

Let me start with some numbers. I involved 15 people in my conversive walks. From those, seven were female. Only 1 was younger than 20 years of age, about 7 were aged between 20 and 40; with the majority being older than 40 but younger than 60. (I interviewed 10 elderly people about the history of the village.) Eight could be categorized as being 'Cornish', while the others all moved to Constantine recently. Two are involved with TC; one is on the parish council; three are farmers; three are young parents; two are part of the church community (one of which is the vicar); five regularly go to the Tolmen Centre; and two said they were not part of any of these groups.²¹

Through the *Jubilee Walks* I reached 25 people, 3 that I recorded before; most living in the village, and a few that came from elsewhere especially to do the walk. I would say that the vast majority of these people are associated with the Tolmen Centre, either as volunteer or regular visitor. *Tilted Matter* reached another 43 people, the vast majority of whom do not live in the village. And the *Sunday Event* attracted 30 people, all from the village and its direct surroundings. With approximately 1000 people living in the village of Constantine (see 4.2.2), my practice directly reached about 7% of the population.

Although this is not a very large proportion, based on the description of participants we can say that I did reach a diverse group of people. This was also confirmed by comments from various participants. When asked what she thought my project had achieved, respondent SB answers that by “collecting the stories and accessing all the different networks and groups within the community, rather than focusing on the middle-class educated TC one, you opened up that project [Quarry Project] to a different perspective” (App. 6: 22). This quote indicates that I successfully reached out beyond the mere TC segment into other pockets of the village. It thereby cut across at least two interest groups - i.e. TC and the CEC or history group- seeding ideas from the one to the other. My practice therefore functioned as a bridge between these two interest groups.

In response to the *Sunday Event*, respondents RC and CH also comment that the event featured a cross-section of the village with no group particularly dominating. RC calls it “a very mixed bunch”, but rightfully highlights the absence of young people (App. 6: 14). Of the Guides that I invited none turned up, there were no teenagers, and only three people under thirty attended the event.

²¹ These numbers are not based on very strict facts. That is, I did not ask people to list their age, interests, etc. by means of a questionnaire. The categorization is based on informal remarks of participants and my own observations as to where in the village they turned up and how they described themselves.

I do not have the data to draw any sound conclusions as to why my project did not attract any young people. Apparently, they move in circles beyond the ones that I targeted. Most village groups (TC, History Society, Women's Institute, Silver Band, etc.) are attended by people in their middle age. Furthermore, the choice to apply walking, audio and (simple) technology in the process, also determined who got involved. Naturally walking is not for everyone. The method excludes people that do not like or are not able to walk. And apparently the practice of walking mainly engages middle-aged people. The nature of the means did not automatically attract a younger segment of the village, while it also excluded less mobile people.

The use of technology, albeit simple, complicated matters in a similar manner. Although I assumed audio devices such as a MP3 players to be common knowledge, a significant number of walkers had difficulties using the device. To get an idea of the confusion that preceded every walk refer to *Digital Confusion*, track 9.

Although I have heard people express the view that with current technological progress, digitally illiterate people will soon be a thing of the past, I do not think it is fair to assume that everyone automatically has access to and knows how to use technology. Student AM who tested my walk also expressed this. After he lent his audio device to his colleague and ended up not having one for himself, he commented that he had been annoyed by my blatant assumption that everyone has access to MP3 players (App. 6: 12). I agree that we should not see technology as a first and last resort.

To summarize, I can conclude that I did manage to reach across at least a few village groups that normally exist and function separately. I united the CEC and the TC to the extent that the chair of TC is now sitting in on meetings about the development of the quarry, and thereby opened up the Quarry Project to environmental scrutiny from TC. My walks involved various people that would normally not get involved in matters concerning the village, but targeting certain groups automatically meant that others were left out.

In that respect, the strategies I used to engage people paid off. Aiming to be neutral and not directly associate myself with one field of interest or objective, but 'hover between' groups allowed me to reach a broader echelon of the village. However, comparing the two practices I feel that the elements in the postman project formed a more enticing and accessible invitation for people to get involved.

5.2 Making participation meaningful

To term a process participatory, it is not just enough that people merely show up to an event. For collaborative meaning-making and thus (social) learning to happen, participation has to imply that people actually contribute by sharing their perspective with others. As TC experienced, one might think one has sufficiently encouraged people to engage, and then find that people feel they have not been invited to do so. My practice in Constantine shows various factors that determined how 'well' people participated; i.e. the structure of the practice encouraged people to actually express their views and thus generate meaning, once they joined. This section will discuss these elements and thereby demonstrate how people can participate meaningfully. It will argue that such meaningful participation depends on the extent to which a process is open-ended or beyond the control of an authority, such as a facilitator. The more uncontrolled or consciously unplanned the process, the more space there is for people to express what they think or feel about a matter.

5.2.1 Space to express views

The main 'function' that my practice appears to have fulfilled is that it served as a space for reflection on various levels. Different respondents commented that the *Sunday Event* provided a space for people to gain an insight in a whole range of perspectives, which then encouraged them to formulate their own position regarding the topic at hand. Participant CN summarizes the event as follows: "a reflective time for people to think and talk amongst themselves about how they really felt". She explains that:

It wasn't like there was a fact being pointed out, or a series of facts that was pointed out that people sort of had to pay attention to. It was more about 'stimulus'. ... I think it was an event that stimulated people to think about these things. (App. 6: 18)

Participant LM likewise says that it was "making more people look at it [the Quarry Project] and think about it" (App. 6: 26).

The fact that people felt that they were encouraged to reflect and express their views, suggests that my practice supported their meaningful participation during the process. This in turn implies that it generated a learning process as I have defined it in section 3.4 of this thesis: as a fruitful interface between learning and art, in which participants are encouraged to produce their own meaning of the issue at hand, instead

of being fed a message by the facilitator/ artist. The following analysis will propose a range of factors that allowed for this to happen.

5.2.2 Landscape as mnemonic

Taking Daniels and Lorimer's reading of narratives as ways to understand the past, and frame the present and future of a place (see 4.2.2), my invitation to residents of Constantine was 'to share stories about the past, present and future of the place'. However, I soon noticed that people mostly consider themselves unable to contribute. Rejecting the invitation on the basis that they 'did not know any stories' they would eagerly point me in the direction of someone 'who does know a lot about the local history'. This reluctance to talk originates from and demonstrates at least two things.

First of all, the meaning of 'stories' is generally misunderstood. Akin to the prevailing notion that 'I am not an artist because I cannot draw', telling stories seems to be regarded as something that is formally done by people that have a special aptitude for it (e.g. storytellers, history guides, novelists). It is not seen as something that one constantly does in order to form a worldview; i.e. as the presentational stage in meaning-making that an experience passes through in order to become formed and thus more propositional (See 2.2.8). Consequently, I was unable to explain that by 'stories' I did not mean entertaining, well-articulated narrative structures (preferably with a bit of suspense and humour), but rather, little tales about a person's life that serve as an opening into her worldview, revealing how she perceives something and the knowledge she holds.

Second, the fact that people usually referred me to a specialist in local history (e.g. a person that could tell about the mining past of the area and knew the former function of the various crumbling remnants from that time, still visible in the woods) seems to indicate that formal 'schoolbook history' is the kind of story that is deemed as relevant and worthy of contributing. So if they did not have anything to tell that was formal history, they regarded themselves as unable to contribute meaningfully.

As a result of this, my invitation to 'tell stories' or 'to go for a walk and talk' was approached somewhat apprehensively; even more so because I did not propose a clear-cut goal or topic of conversation before the walk. However, as my practice showed, walking provided a useful means to facilitate conversation and elicit stories.

Various people commented on the fact that they felt more at ease talking while walking. As the initiator of the conversation I likewise observed that it was easier to talk with relative strangers while sharing an activity and pace. The quality of walking as a lubricant to talking has been described by geographers such as Ingold and Vergunst (2008). Jon Anderson in a similar manner proposes 'talking whilst walking' as a method to 'overcome traditional interviewer/ interviewee power relations' (Anderson 2004: 258), thereby producing 'not a conventional interrogative encounter, but a collage of collaboration and unstructured dialogue where all actors participate in a conversational, geographical and informational pathway creation' (ibid. 260). He points at the role that place plays in forming and influencing human identity and calls it, after Casey (2001) a 'constitutive coingredience': 'each is essential to the being of the other. In effect there is no place without self and no self without place' (Casey 2001: 684). The aspect of constitutive coingredience manifests itself through the conversational topics being 'prompted not only by questions, but also by the interconnections between the individuals and the place itself' (Anderson 2004: 258).

Anderson thus contends that through walking the conversation becomes influenced by the surroundings. My practice confirms this proposition, and the thesis argues that this is one of the reasons as to why walking makes talking easier. Like Anderson I observed that by traversing a landscape familiar to the people I was walking with, stories, memories, thoughts and opinions were triggered by the places we passed through. The landscape thus became a mnemonic for their perspectives and we gathered the pieces of their worldview as we went along.

Mike Pearson refers to walking in a similar fashion. He contends that through walking 'the paths and places direct the choreography ... Different paths enact different stories of action for which landscape acts as a mnemonic' (2010: 95).

The latter notion is reflected in my walk with Chris on a fairly windy, fresh, but sunny January afternoon. Meandering through fields where, he narrated, he and his wife once encountered a bull and were forced to turn back, he led me up Brill Hill, which rendered a 360-degree view of the surroundings. With the regular interruption of helicopters we scanned the land. Looking at all the different layers of past and present in the landscape, we then contemplated the possible future of the land (Listen to *View From Brill Hill*, track 10). After having descended from Brill Hill, I asked Chris what he was taking home from the walk. He answered:

I suppose the kind of interesting one was the fact that standing up on Brill Hill, looking down and initially thinking that actually the aspiration was that –or my aspiration– that things would not change very much, that actually the aspiration

is that things would look quite different. You would see the landscapes dotted not with engine houses but with wind turbines, and the glint of solar panels of every roof that you could see and maybe the odd little solar allotment here and there as well. Ah yes, so it could look quite different. (Chris, personal communication, 8 February 2012)

This shows that being in and traversing through the landscape prompted the expression of his perspective on the future of the area. Had we gone somewhere else we would have had a different conversation, thereby revealing a different set of stories and perspectives that Chris holds. Our dialogue therefore became both triggered by and embodied in the landscape, as we literally moved through the topic of conversation. (To hear another example of this process refer to *Farmers' Perspective*, track 11)

Consequently, both the act of walking and the fact that the landscape worked mnemonically served as a means to converse and express perspectives and thus enhanced the participant's participation. It broke traditional interviewer-interviewee patterns, reduced the awkwardness that can exist between people who do not know each other very well, and provided matter to trigger conversation. As a result my walking partners all became storytellers, relaying opinions, past occurrences and visions for the future as we went along. (In Chapter 6 I will develop this point further by adding other conversational strategies)

5.2.3 Locative meaning-making

Another advantage of walking was that, as the exploration of the topic became rooted in the act of walking through a place, the conversation was forced into the here and now. Whenever it threatened to get bogged down in a universal analysis of global terms, the act of walking and *being in* the place allowed me to redirect the conversations to the village, its surroundings and the lives that were traversing. The walk therefore became a form of *locative meaning-making*: what and how we came to know through walking-talking was (partly) determined by the context we were in. And with the walk and conversation being rooted in the land, the tangible presence of here and now, whatever we talked about was locative and directly connected to the lifeworld of the participants.

In section 3.2 I argued (after Freire and Knowles) for the importance of learning processes being relevant to and rooted in the daily lives of adult learners, as they will only engage with issues when they are directly applicable to their lives. Blewitt likewise

refers to the importance of the lifeworld of people in relation to developing solutions for sustainability challenges (see page 74). Subsequently, we can conclude that locative meaning-making (and thus conversive walking) can serve as a means to facilitate such learning.

The proposition of locative meaning-making is very 'Heideggerian' and is rooted in Haraway's epistemology of partial and situated knowledge as described in section 4.1, Cartesian science perceives truth as a destination: a single and static 'bit' that one can arrive at, whereas Heidegger describes truth as a process of '*unconcealing*' certain aspects of something much bigger, which can never be entirely exposed, as uncovering certain things, will automatically leave others covered (McGilchrist 2009). The conversive walks as part of my practice function as an embodiment for this understanding of truth. Walking to one place will trigger certain perspectives, which then generate a truth dependent on and constructed by the places that were traversed. Walking somewhere else would have led to other places, and thus unconcealing different perspectives and thus a different (part of the) truth. We create the world by attending to it in a particular way (and not another), which unconceals one part of the world (and not another). So truth lies in the eternal process of 'a coming into being of something'. And walking in this sense can be seen as means to do exactly this.

5.2.4 Active passiveness

The idea that walking shapes the conversation according to the expression of the place that you are moving through, suggests that the act of walking shapes a conversation *rhizomatically*. The latter term, borrowed from Deleuze and Guattari (1987), refers to a system that has multiple, non-hierarchical entry and exit points. The system grows, as it were, from the inside out, non-linearly, with multiple points of origin that form nodes, which connect up while the system grows, resulting in a network of interconnections.

In the context of a walk it implies that the structure of conversation is not determined top-down (e.g. predefined by the input of a leader, expert or facilitator), but emergent from the (coincidental) encounters of the walkers and their movements in response to the expression of the land. On a group level this means that the walking-talkers conversationally weave their way through a landscape, with what they talk about and with whom depending on the contingencies of that context. As a result, relations,

topics and ideas occur more spontaneously and unpredictably than in a static environment; they shape and reshape themselves in the same manner that a rhizome responds to changing environmental conditions.

This notion of a walk as a rhizome engenders open-endedness. What is talked about and with whom can only partly be determined beforehand and externally. As a guide/ facilitator of a walk, one can do only so much to control the walk. Due to the conversation being dependent on the contingencies of the context one is walking through, there is a vast uncontrollable space where things will take their own turn. To underpin and elaborate this proposition I will draw from respondent's comments with regards to the *Sunday Event*. But before I do so, let me give a brief background of what happened during that Sunday in November 2012.

On a sunny afternoon thirty-five people gathered at the Tolmen Centre, the community centre in Constantine. Some having their own headphones, others waiting to be provided with a set, the participants mingled and chatted till I invited them "go on a journey, stepping in the countless footsteps of the Constantinians that walked this path before you, moving through the past in the present, your mind tuned towards the future."

Everyone set off on the soundwalk, listening to the stories of their fellow villagers, while walking with neighbours, acquaintances and friends. The path led from the Tolmen Centre, through the woods to the Bosahan Quarry. A few walkers immediately lagged behind because of technical issues, others steamed ahead in a well-trained-walkers-stride. Some walked by themselves and drifted to explore certain features in



Fig. 16 Participants of the soundwalk talking while walking.

the landscape. Several would stop occasionally and talk amongst themselves, commenting on the audio or things they encountered en-route. Others met acquainted dog walkers on the way and took off their headphones for a quick exchange of pleasantries. The soundwalk ended in the



Fig. 17 Participants walking the soundwalk through Bosahan woods.

quarry where the participants paused and explored the place, responding to a written question, which they had received on entering the quarry and invited them to imagine what this place should and could be. People stood around, some leaning against big boulders, pointing at certain features,

explaining to each other what had gone on here in the past. (See figures 16-18)

They then returned to the village, taking a different path through the woods, talking with whomever they found themselves walking with. At the Tolmen Centre warm soup and crumble awaited them. The space filled with a buzz of voices and the tinkling of spoons on bowls. Participant LM gave a short presentation of the CEC's vision for the quarry, after which I invited everyone to react, by bringing forward one element they liked about the plan, and another that they saw as a risk or drawback. In the months following that Sunday in autumn, I interviewed nine participants to find out how they perceived the event. (See appendix 6)

Several people commented on the social quality of the walk. Respondent SB remarked that she enjoyed going for a walk with such a big group and getting to know people that she had not met before. She refers to it as a "community experience", which she thinks is "really important" (App. 6: 20). Participant GT confirms the dialogical quality of the walk by commenting on having had a "very interesting conversation". The topic of conversation had been triggered by the questions raised through the soundwalk and the fact that she joined two of the other walkers on the way back from the quarry (App. 6: 13).

These two remarks show that the walking brought people together, and provided the opportunity to talk with people you might not have talked to before. However, based on other remarks made by interviewees, walking appears to generate a specific type of mingling and conversation. Respondent CN says:

I think it was interesting what happened after we visited the quarry, and how that was sort of informal. It was a dead time, it was a very productive time, but it was sort of dead in terms of nothing being planned there. So, we were kind of in the event and kind of not in the event. And so people were bounding off with their little friends or buddies or people that they had not seen for a while. (App. 6: 18)

What she is referring to is the moment that people walked back through the woods. After having engaged in two activities devised by me (listening to the soundwalk and spending time in the quarry answering questions), they walked back as a group to the Tolmen Centre. I purposefully did not plan anything for that time. I was not even there, but busy preparing the food for their arrival at the Tolmen Centre.

This quote indicates that walking creates an informal, 'vacant' time in which participants still feel that they are doing something since they are walking, but at the same time, because nothing 'formal' or obviously planned is happening and they are not directed to do anything, they can trail off and for example –as this case shows– discuss things in the confidence of smaller groups.

Van Boeckel, in the context of AEE (see section 2.2.7) refers to this void as 'active passiveness'. He states that in learning process in which participants are encouraged to create their own meaning, the facilitator walks 'the tightrope between control and surrender' (2012: 104). Too much of the latter and the participants feel 'lost' in the chaos with confusion, anxiety and frustration as a result. In order to return to solid ground they might resort to abandoning the process all together. Too much control, however, means that they learn only that what was already known, pre-determined, or externally induced. Active passiveness is a state of planned 'not-doing', a receptive undergoing of the world (after Dewey)

Heim, in her discussion of Platform's work (see 2.2.5), describes a similar process. She states that the artist creating conversational practice 'navigates, rather than conducts, the flow of the conversation. The artist asks the instigating question, listens, sets a context for action, creates an aesthetic milieu in which the event is



Fig. 18 Sound walk participants gathered in the quarry.

mutually created' (2005: 203). But, the outcome, connections and 'symbolic resonances' that the participants perceive are, 'left radically open, undirected' (2004: 193).

Based on my practice, we can say that the integration of walking in a learning process is a simple means to establish a 'planned unplanned space' that allows for meaning-making to happen on the side of the participants.

This proposition is further supported by the remarks of participants. Interviews have suggested that the 'uncontrolled space' that the walking engendered allowed for people to share things they would find hard to share in the situation of a big group, e.g. a formal 'public meeting'. The chairman of Transition Constantine explains that in his experience it is often difficult to get people's feedback, or "their version of life", as a lot of people are reluctant to talk in a large-group setting (App. 6: 16). They are nervous to open up in a public gathering and express how they think about an issue. The walk according to him therefore might have been an opportunity "to mix, chat, in advance and maybe get more familiar with people and get less scared, shy, whatever, to open up" (ibid.).

This might seem obvious or unimportant, but it is a point often overlooked in public meetings or community consultations. Having facilitated a lot of group discussion in the past, I have noticed that there will always be people who feel confident in expressing their voice in public. This speaking minority takes the floor often, while a large majority keep quiet. Because the latter do not express their disapproval audibly, they are often assumed to agree with what is being said. Or they are thought not to have a view, suggestion or idea worth expressing; because if they would then why are they quiet? However, a person's decision to contribute to an interaction depends on situational norms (where does the conversation take place?) and her individual traits (Sifianou 1997). Thus silence does not necessarily indicate a lack of things to say; instead it might suggest that the particular conditions under which the person is expected to talk do not encourage her to speak.

If social learning in the post-normal paradigm is about civic engagement and the incorporation of a plurality of views, then it should concentrate on hearing as many voices as possible, including the less outspoken or audible ones. Based on the above this implies that such processes should endeavour to generate conditions that stimulate such inclusivity. The *Sunday Event* has shown that walking could serve as a means to do so. It was allowing for an 'unsupervised moment' in which people did not feel exposed and therefore could express their worldview more freely. Thus we can conclude that the

practice of walking in a group 'enhances' the participation and meaning-making during a process and therefore 'improves' the social learning process.

This proposition is further reinforced by the idea of walking as a rhizome, in which the dialogue between walkers is contingent on the lay of the land. The planned-unplanned nature of walking, as well as the fact that whatever the walkers encounter directs (part of) the conversation leads to a situation in which the ambulatory process is hard to direct externally. It is structurally very difficult to organise a conversation in an authoritarian or one-directional way while walking. Where a room with seats creates a relatively controlled environment which lends itself very well for a conversational structure in which information flows in one direction only (e.g. from a supposed expert to a receiving audience of 'lay' people), a walking conversation is inherently more self-organizing and multi-directional; thereby again, allowing more space for meaning-making.

5.3 Inconvenient questions

The previous sections focused on the methods in which my practice either successfully encouraged participation or enhanced the quality of the participation during the process. Naturally, my practice also had its draw-backs. Furthermore, it revealed some 'inconvenient questions' that complicate the matter of community participation.

A first question that my practice begs is, *was it enough?* In section 5.2 I argued that the conditions of my practice fostered meaningful participation because it allowed people to express themselves, but fostering changes towards sustainable development on a community level requires more than simply expressing your view during a village meeting. In fact, it is quite easy to voice your opinion or complain about a matter, in the hopes that other people will take it up and do something about it or incorporate it in *their* plans. In the same manner, the participation of residents along Paul's mail delivery route was fairly minimal: it did not cost much of their time and they were not asked to commit to anything on the long-term.

One might argue that social learning for sustainable development (i.e. a Transition Town process) requires a whole different level of engagement, one that my practice did

not establish. I would contend that the process of communities moving towards sustainability indeed calls for a more profound level of participation, but that my practice took an important first step in that direction. It involved a larger cross-section of the community in thinking about what sustainable development in the context of their village might mean at all. It made people who had never thought about the issue before reflect on this topic, and brought together at least two interest groups with different views regarding the matter. Whatever my practice did should be regarded as one element in a large collection of components that need to happen in order to make change a reality.

5.3.1 Village politics revealed

In my interviews I asked people to name an animal that somehow represented the *Sunday Event*. (Listen to *Animals*, track 12) The animal metaphor captures a tacit impression that people held regarding the event and shows a striking synchronicity. In my interpretation, the resemblance in the choice of animal picks up on a tension underlying the event and especially the discussion afterwards. Several of the respondents, in explaining their choice, refer to this friction explicitly.

Respondent LM, one of the initiators of the Quarry Project and part of the Constantine Enterprise Company (CEC), with the animal metaphor of a “ridged grass snake” refers to a combination of smooth and prickly elements in the event: friction lying beneath a seemingly friendly gathering of people. This bears resemblance to CN’s choice of a badger: “solid, but potentially volatile”. LM makes this feeling more explicit by saying that she felt “a bit niggled” by some of the feedback that was raised (App. 6: 25). She feels that the comments of fellow residents uttered during the Sunday Event indicate that the CEC was overlooking points that according to LM *were* being taken into account (ibid.). Furthermore, LM felt that the feedback uttered by residents was mainly negative (App. 6: 26).

A lot of people were indeed quite critical of CEC’s Quarry Project. However, following ideas underpinning social learning, this is merely a sign that there are multiple but equally valid perspectives on the issue of what the quarry should be, what the village needs in the future and how the village can be more sustainable. The fact that LM felt ‘niggled’ suggests that she took the different views not as a valuable enrichment of the process through participation, but rather as an ‘attack’ on the CEC’s established vision of it, and thus as obstacles to the development of the Quarry Project.

The observations of participant SB confirm this analysis. She refers to the hedgehog as being a metaphor for “two ways of doing things”:

Because if you are in a group and you are going to let out your own ideas, or you are going to let them, as I am trying to do now, emerge on the spot, and not premeditated, then that makes you very vulnerable, so you are like the hedgehog’s under belly. And the prickly bit on a personal level could be the defensive mechanism, or it could be about the other system, that is about appearing to consult but not listening. I don’t want to be judgmental, because I don’t know where it has gone since the whole thing happened ... so it isn’t –they are more observations about society rather than individuals. We are quite stratified aren’t we? (App. 6: 21)

What she seems to imply is that there are two ways of community development: one that is receptive and open to alternative ways and views, thereby allowing things to emerge from bottom-up; the other that is top-down, more defensive and pretending to ask for input but actually not paying attention. She felt she wanted to be heard but was not listened to (which is confirmed by LM saying that she felt ‘niggled’ by the views expressed). Furthermore, she says that through the *Sunday Event* she realised that she had not been asked to share her views about the Quarry Project, which to her indicates that the latter is top-down rather than bottom-up. As explained in the previous section, the fact that the *Sunday Event* provided a reflective space in which experiences could be shared did allow her to have her say, but realizing that nobody had previously asked her made her feel frustrated (App. 6: 20).

This implies that even if the development is managed from within the village (the CEC is entirely made up by people that live in Constantine) it can still be experienced as ‘externally’ imposing. A certain interest group with a strong vision on a particular issue become ‘experts’ in that field, and hence are seen as overbearing by other people in the village. The same can be said about people running a Transition group, who might regard themselves as ‘climate change experts’ or ‘resilience specialists’. Their strong drive to make a change in the village and convince others of the importance of these issues is then experienced as autocratic and suffocating by people that are not as passionately involved.

I have experienced this schism on various occasions. Transitioners are often regarded as doom-and-gloom-thinkers with an oppressive mantra of green ideas and a danger to the landscape as they want to cover the place with windmills and solar panels. Transition groups on their part, although they claim to encourage participation, do not

always see their fellow villagers as capable of meaningfully contributing to the Transition conversation. At one of the Transition meetings in Constantine the group was discussing the possibility of doing a pub quiz dealing with climate change in order to raise awareness among a section of the village that they had not (yet) reached. I proposed that one of the questions in the quiz could be to come up with a (personal) solution for climate change. The 'best' solutions would get most points. I thought it was a pretty good idea myself, as this would bring the awareness to a next level: from a mere knowledge of the gravity of the issue, people might actually feel 'empowered' to do something about it through their own lives. The idea was however dismissed by everyone in the group on the basis that 'that would be pushing it, these people only do quizzes, they cannot come up with solutions for climate change' (Transition meeting, 10th of January 2013).

I would not imply that Transitioners look down on fellow villagers, rather, they regard climate change as a highly specialized subject in which 'experts' like themselves should take the lead. Yet, at the same time they emphasize the importance of involving everyone and expect the rest of the village to participate. But genuinely involving more people automatically implies that one's own vision is going to be challenged by the multiple views of others. 'True' participation means that you end up somewhere else than you would have if you had done it on your own. So you cannot strive for participation *and* expect that everybody will take on your vision. That would be 'tokenistic participation' in which people are given the impression that they have a voice, but in fact only have so within boundaries devised by somebody else in advance (see also page 59).

In the same manner, the CEC encourages fellow villagers to contribute to the Quarry Project, by getting involved in the planning and attending their committee meetings, but 'feel niggled' when they are confronted with different visions on the project. Hence, what people say they mean by participation and how much they actually allow it, does not always correspond.

Concluding, my practice shows that in devising and doing community participation the three (consecutive) factors should be taken into account:

- a) What elements successfully encourage participation and engage people in a meaning-making process? (Discussed in section 5.1)
- b) What conditions safeguard and stimulate meaningful participation during the process? How does one make sure that people are actually expressing their perspectives and able to contribute, besides merely turning up? (See section 5.2)
- c) *Under what pretext are people invited to participate? Are they to participate in order to make somebody else's vision happen, or because the initiator is really interested in the participant's perspective and willing to take on board whatever the participation process engenders? How can one ensure that the results of the participation are actually incorporated in whatever the topic is, even if these interfere with one's initial vision of it?*

5.3.3 Participation at the expense of efficacy

In the first section of this chapter I drew the conclusion that although the number of direct participants in my practice was relatively low, I did manage to open both projects, i.e. the Quarry Project and Transition Constantine, to more people. However, apart from the fact that my attempt to be inclusive still excluded certain groups, the inclusivity itself gave rise to a problem. Whilst this evidently involved a broader segment of the village, at the same time the effort to involve 'everyone' also meant that my practice could be seen as being too wide. In my effort to attract the interest of many, I risked being too broad. Consequently, there appears to be a trade-off between appealing to a broad range of people, and achieving something concrete.

By not setting a clear-cut direction or not imposing one unequivocal message, I might have succeeded in involving more people, but does such approach necessarily generate enough tangible change? *Does the endeavour to be participatory and non-instrumental compromise the success of designing and implementing solutions for sustainable development?* This is indeed a very inconvenient question, as renouncing the effectiveness of participation on the basis of my practice, would imply that we have to reject the learning-based operationalization of sustainable development on which this research is founded.

However, I am not convinced this is necessary. Primarily, because the ethical reasons on the basis of which I renounced an instrumental approach (as raised in Chapter 3) still stand. Dictatorships might have proven very efficient in shaping societies, however we reject them because of human rights and ideals of individual freedom. In a similar way, one can argue that although systems without any civic engagement could be more efficient (for example because we do not have to deal with the complexities that ensue from the plurality of views that participatory processes engender), they should nevertheless be rejected on the basis of ethical considerations.

The second reason not to renounce the participatory approach is because the ways in which we assess the value of the process might be unsuitable. As the outcome of a participatory process is not set in advance but instead emerges through the process of collective meaning-making, then evaluating the process through traditional means pertaining to a predominantly causal and linear paradigm, might indeed produce a wrong assessment.

5.3.4 The right to catalyse change

Another matter that my practice revealed is the question as to how imposing one can allow oneself to be in projects that involve community participation. In Chapter 3 I explain that from a post-normal perspective working *in* society and *with* people means that rather than the research being an experiment in a fairly confined environment, whatever one does has a direct and real impact on the world. Hence as a researcher operating in a post-normal setting one should carefully consider the potential consequences of one's actions as they might have detrimental effects on the people that are involved.

On a similar note, a lot has been written about how disruptive an artist can or should be when working with a community. Grant Kester (2004), among others, has critiqued provocative measures because they might disrupt a community adversely. Furthermore, Kester argues, such measures wrongly portray a community as inferior to the incoming artist who takes the privilege to patronisingly 'shock' people into her view of 'how things really are' (Kester in Bishop 2012: 26).

Bishop (2012) on the other hand claims that it is exactly this view of a community as a helpless entity that is easily troubled, that depicts community as vulnerable and the artists as superior, because the latter regards herself as capable of shocking a community into misery. Communities, Bishop contends, are stronger than that, and moreover, 'unease, discomfort or frustration –along with fear, contradiction,

exhilaration and absurdity– can be crucial to any work’s artistic impact’ (Bishop 2012: 26). That is, in order to foster change sometimes a bit of pain might be necessary.

Thus, the question arises whether it is ethically acceptable for anybody (whether artist, researcher or a combination of both) to take the liberty of having a large impact on a community at all. Even in adhering to a participatory and open-ended approach, I am imposing a certain worldview on the world (namely, one that is participatory and open-ended). *Who gives me the right to do so, to push for my worldview rather than somebody else’s?* Or, who says I have the right to catalyse change, even if its intention is open-ended?

These questions troubled me throughout my practice. Looking back I can conclude that I have been overly aware of the possible impact of my research practice, and in questioning the legitimacy of that, I might have held back too much. In not being sure whether I could take the liberty to foster change and in fear of upsetting things, I trod very carefully. Respondent LM who called my approach ‘gently persuasive’ confirms this characterization of my approach (App. 6: 26). SB in a similar manner referred to my practice as ‘gentle challenging’ (App. 6: 21). I wonder now whether my approach was *too gentle*. Should I have been bolder? Could I have done so without becoming coercive? Could I have been more direct and clear, without imposing ideas or being instrumental? *Does change only happen through provocative measures?* I shall return to this question in 6.1.3.

5.3.5 Coerced participation

A final set of inconvenient questions arises from questioning the concept of participation in general. Following on from the above, Bishop casts doubt on the assumed inherent ‘goodness’ of participation by arguing that in the UK, New Labour co-opted participation as an important buzz-word as it ‘effectively referred to the elimination of disruptive individuals. To be included and participate in society means to conform to full employment, have a disposable income, and be self-sufficient’ (Bishop 2012: 13-14). Subsequently, the emphasis on participation, essentially also removes a person’s right to be socially excluded. This critique raises the inconvenient question: *does everyone always have to participate?* Or can one opt to *not* be part of village activities, and thus remain socially excluded and invisible to the reaching tentacles of the participatory artist, consulting council and aspiring fellow villager? This also relates

back to the issue of silent community members raised in earlier in this chapter; if somebody does not want to talk, should they be coerced into talking?

5.4 Summary

This chapter served two purposes. First, it aimed to show how citizens might be engaged in processes of collaborative meaning-making/ social learning. Thereby (second) highlighting the factors that facilitate it by giving an example of how such meaning-making comes into being. This is a preamble to the next chapter, where I will argue in more detail as to why my practice was indeed a process of collaborative meaning-making and propose other artful elements that enhance such community learning.

Walking played an important role in facilitating the meaning-making process. It broke traditional interviewer/ interviewee patterns, making talking easier. Furthermore, through the act of walking through a place the landscape served as a mnemonic: it supported participants in formulating views regarding a certain matter, which then also helped them to express themselves. This, I argued, generated a form of locative meaning-making, which meant that the conversation was rooted in the here and now that we were traversing. Based on theories around adult education, locative meaning-making serves as a means to connect the topic of learning to the daily life of the participant, thereby enhancing the learning experience.

The above elements each exemplify processes in which an assumed authority or initiator of the process (the facilitator, researcher, interviewer, artist or educator) 'takes a back seat'. By opening up the process to contingencies of the context she deliberately loses part of control over the process. That is, by allowing my walking partners to decide where we were walking to, by letting the landscape become a 'coingredient' in the conversation and thereby permitting the conversation to be determined by factors beyond my control, the learning process became rhizomatic. Such processes are shaped not hierarchically (from the top down), but organically from the inside out, with their form and content shaped by the participants themselves and growing in response to contextual factors.

Because they cannot be predetermined, open-endedness plays a big part in rhizomatic processes. This point was reinforced by the proposition that walking can engender a so-called 'planned unplanned' place: a seemingly invigilated moment where nothing 'official' appears to happen, and participants therefore take the liberty to mingle. It is in such spaces, this thesis argues, that meaningful participation occurs; where participants express what they *really* think and share views, thereby becoming active creators of the rhizomatic process. It is walking that engenders such talking (as well as good listening, as I will show in the next chapter).

Based on this discussion of *Stones & Water*, the practice could be seen as a literal expression of Rancière's proposition that learning processes should be a journey into the forest, where participants experiencing something and subsequently report on that experience. Participants ventured into Bosahan woods, where they experienced an audiotrack, after which they were asked what it meant to them, and were left space to discuss the experience freely. The informal, mobile, self-organizing structure creates a space where perspectives are more liberally expressed. Connecting this proposition post-normal and social learning orientations of sustainable development, we can say that walking can serve as an important and helpful means to establish *extended peer-review* (see page 78).

Apart from listing elements that either encouraged participation or enhanced meaningful engagement, my practice raised a range of questions that should be taken into account when devising and executing community / social learning. These are the following:

- a) Under what pretext are people invited to participate?
- b) Does the endeavour to be participatory and non-instrumental compromise the success of designing and implementing solutions for sustainable development?
- c) Who gives one the right to promote their own worldview rather than somebody else's?
- d) Does everyone always have to participate?

A final point to be raised is that although my practice did manage to engage a diverse group of people and hold a space in which they were able to express their views, it did not actually appear to have fostered more committed participation towards

sustainable development. Such participation is a crucial ingredient to the Transition process. The current research took an important first step in that direction; by engaging a wide cross-section of the village it laid the groundwork necessary for more engaged participation. It thereby addressed one of the many elements that are necessary to make change happen on a community-level.

6

Eliciting multiple meanings, enabling dissensus

Chapter 3 introduced the concept of post-normal science, which, in promoting a more collaborative, less expert-driven production of knowledge and recognizing the complexity of sustainability challenges, encourages the inclusion of a variety of stakeholders. The fact that each of the individuals will bring their own worldview, background and discipline, leads to a diverse range of perspectives on the issue in question. Each of these should be regarded as equally valid and valuable. I demonstrated that the same is the case in social learning, where the multiplicity of views is seen as both a virtue and vice. On the one hand diversity enriches the learning as participants and facilitators can draw from a larger set of ideas, expertise and knowledge. On the other hand however, it complicates the execution of the process as the existence of different, often opposing, views leads to bickering about which problem definition or solution is most valid.

Due to the inherent existence of multiple perspectives the core of social learning revolves around ‘Gestaltswitching’. This encompasses the idea that the goal of a solution-finding process does not lie in arriving at a point in which the range of multiple views is reduced to one fixed and clear-cut meaning, but rather that the objective is to establish the participant’s ability to continuously switch between different points of views. I proposed learning for sustainable development as arriving at the capacity to alternate between the different mind-sets and so taking into account different points of view in one’s planning and acting. As a result, the meaning of sustainable development is ambiguous and dynamic; and it emerges through a process of collaborative learning, in which participants decide on their own understanding of the concept.

Chapter 5 discussed the strength of walking as a dialogic means that catalyses such meaning-making. The current chapter will add to this set of dialogic means. Where the previous chapter focused on the extent to which such strategies encourage the engagement of people in meaning-making processes in the first place, this chapter deals with the question of how to further enhance the learning environment so that meaning-making happens.

I will first further substantiate the argument started in section 3.4, by demonstrating how my practice indeed generated meaning-making among participants and therefore can be equated to a learning process. That first section will end in a discussion of the *dissensus* that ensued as a result of having many meanings of sustainable development existing side-by-side. I will argue that dissensus lies at the core of any meaning-making and thus social learning.

Subsequently, the next two sub-chapters show how such dissensus might be enabled, first by giving a brief overview of existing site-specific practices, then by zooming in on specific means that enable dissensus and thereby proliferate meaning-making. From there I will make a case for the 'subjectification' of sustainable development.

6.1 Art as meaning-making

Let me continue the argument made in the previous chapter, where I stated that *Stones & Water*, is indeed meaning-making processes, and therefore fits the interpretation of both art and learning as introduced in 3.4. A comparison between my own practice in the village of Constantine and my experiences during *The Land Journey* will reinforce and develop that proposition. Although conceived entirely independently from each other, the two contextual pieces show relevant parallels. I will describe these parallels and argue how they stimulate meaning-making among participants.

Chapter 5 described how the act of walking contributed to the emergence of locative meanings of sustainable development. By allowing my walking partners to decide where we were walking to and allowing the landscape to be a 'coingredient', the form and content of the conversation was shaped by the participants themselves and growing in response to contextual factors. The Land Journey equally demonstrated this 'rhizomatic quality'. As well as the dialogue being directed by the landscape content-wise as argued in the previous chapter, *The Land Journey* shows that the geography also influenced the *structure* of the conversation. The following exchange between the participants of the 5-day walking journey, clearly demonstrates this quality:

MG: ...when you walk you nearly always walk alone or in pair. Threes don't work. Fours don't work. It's always pairs and I find that quite an interesting thing too. And how that conversation – you can be in the middle of a conversation and you get to a stile and that's the end of it. And even you might be answering a question and then there is someone else and you are having a different conversation.

TB: Or even when you are having the same conversation, but there is a different person responding to you.

[laughter]

MG: It is very odd, the whole thing that happened.

TB: I thought that dynamic was fantastic, I really loved it. I loved that kind of a rolling conversation, changing conversation, and building connections.

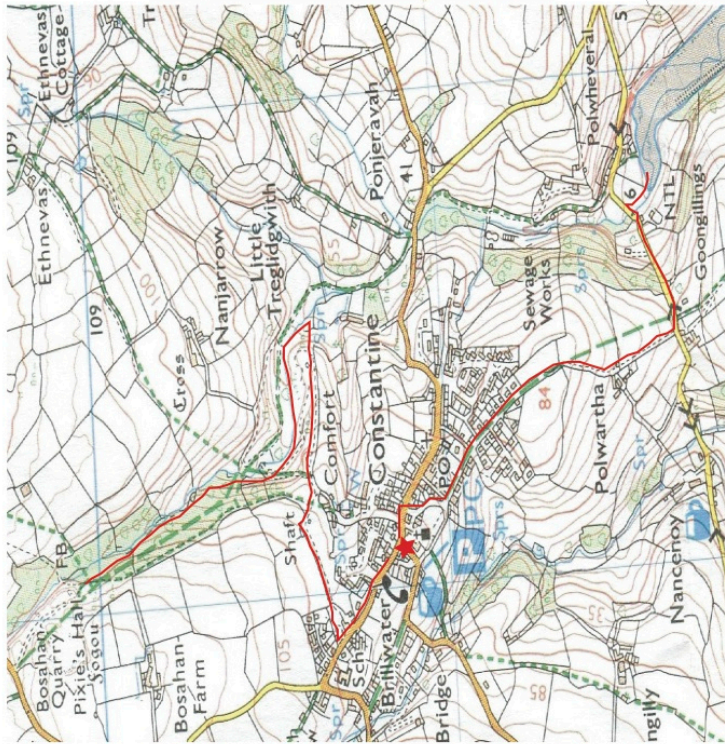
My experience during *The Land Journey* confirms this process. Topics and thoughts travelled through the group as a conversation started with one person, was continued with someone else, while a thread of first dialogue was taken into the next. The group recognized this quality to the extent that we purposefully used it as a dialogic method to make a group decision on the final day of the walk. This shows that walking created a learning environment in which different meanings and interpretations could proliferate, matching the interpretation of learning as meaning-making.

6.1.1 Performed perspectives

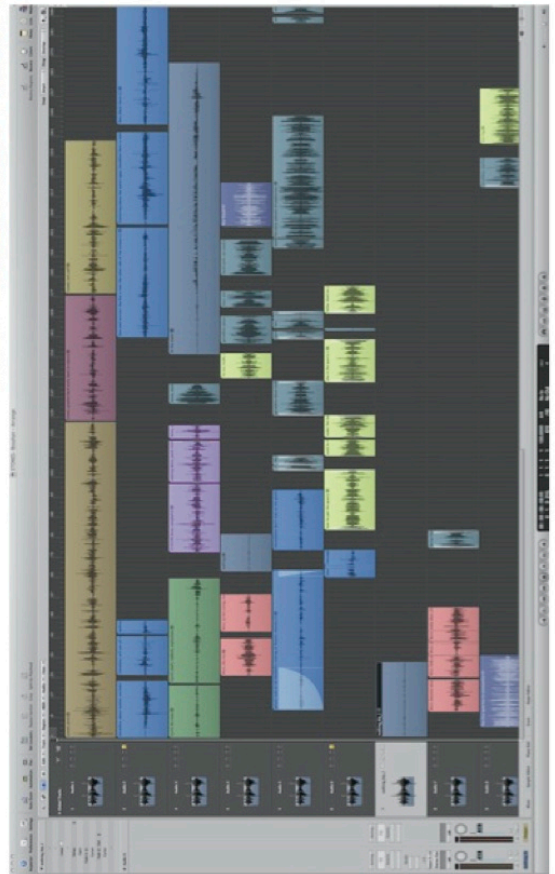
Both art pieces aimed to present participants with a range of different perspectives on the landscape and sustainable development, and allow the latter to decide for themselves how they interpreted the subject. Inspired by the qualities of soundwalks as described in Chapter 4, I recorded all the different interpretations of sustainable development that I collected through the conversive walks, and interweaved them in a way that juxtaposed the perspectives and resituated them in the landscape. Figure 19 gives an overview of how I came to edit the material. I wanted the audio pieces to be a tapestry of different views laid out over the landscape, connecting place to thought and thereby making fairly abstract concepts tangible in the surroundings and lifeworld of people. While walking and listening the participants would move from one viewpoint into the next, thereby intimately connecting themselves to the voices (of their fellow villagers) on the recording. I tried to be as unbiased as possible; choosing excerpts and organising them through obvious connections and more imaginative links. By literally moving through the range of different perspectives, the soundwalk would, I

- Social Club 0.0.00
 - First gate 1.42.24
 - Farm corner 2.30
 - Workshop 3.18
 - Gate 4.18-4.24
 - Tower 5.43
 - wave field 6.47
 - second gate 7.51
 - end gate 8.30
- 8.00
9.30
1.50
0

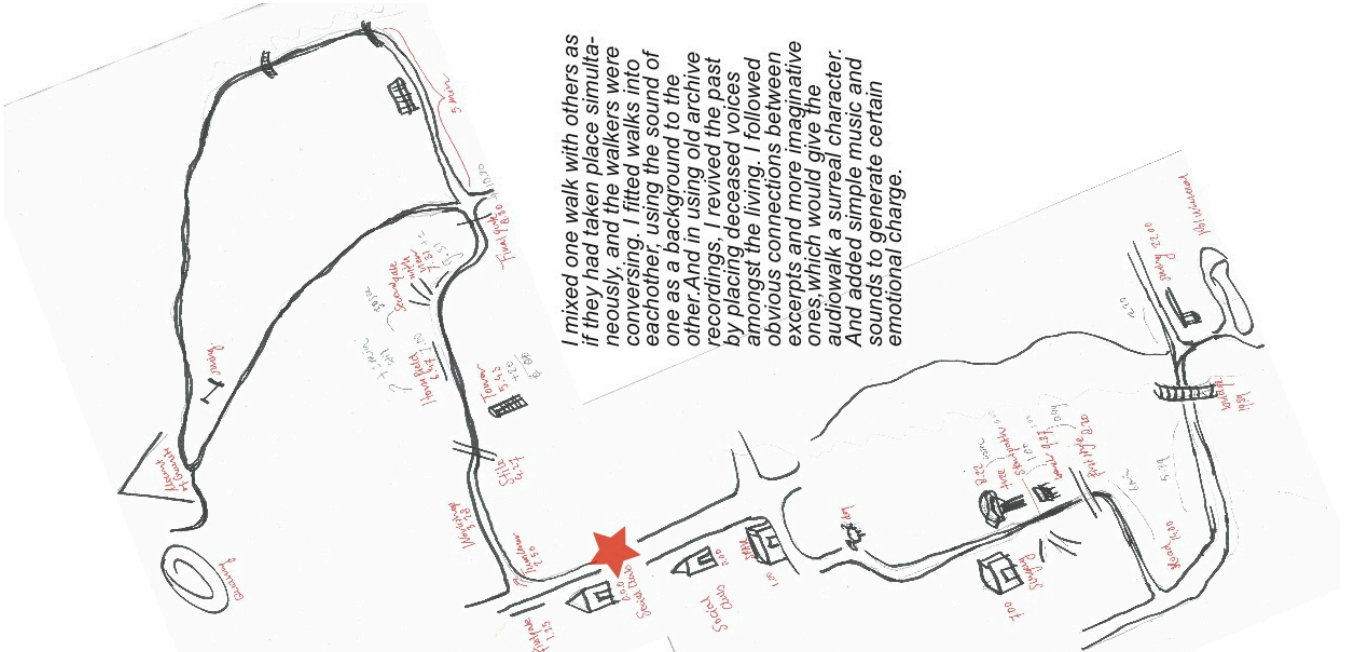
Because I had so much material and felt I needed to honour the people that devoted their time to the project, I decided to make two walks: one going through the woods to the quarry, the other following a path through farmers' fields down to a little beach along the river. I went back to the actual audiotracks and started to edit them. I did so by putting chapters, thoughts, observations and views back to the locations where they were initially uttered, thereby aiming to make them tangible in the surrounding landscape. I also matched certain emotions in the audio with the feel of a place, or purposefully created mismatches between what the audio and the visual world.



Orville Interrogator
↓
Mother about her concert



I mixed one walk with others as if they had taken place simultaneously, and the walkers were conversing. I fitted walks into each other, using the sound of one as a background to the other. And in using old archive recordings, I revived the past by placing deceased voices amongst the living. I followed excerpts and more imaginative ones, which would give the audiowalk a surreal character. And added simple music and sounds to generate certain emotional charge.



envisioned, create a space for suspension and pluralised knowing (referring back to Seeley and Reason 2008).

The comments of respondents show that the soundwalk indeed accommodated a range of perspectives, and thereby was not message driven, but allowed participants to come to their own understanding of sustainable development. For example, respondent JP, a student testing the soundwalk, commented that the soundwalk showed interesting juxtapositions between people's experiences in and recollections of the area. According to her "it gave a sense of the different kinds of people whose lives had been built in and affected by the landscape [in which] they lived and how everybody's response had a commonality but was very, very different as well." (App. 6: 10) Respondent DJ, a participant during one of the *Jubilee Walks* likewise told me:

You've done it very subtle, because there is no overriding message at all. Nor is it nostalgia, it is a kind of sampling of ... people's different kind of perspectives on things. There is no agenda that you are pushing particularly, it's just random reflections. (App. 6: 7)

In the *Land Journey* a similar thing happened. Simon Whitehead curated a range of 'visitations' through which a different human narrative in relation to the land was revealed every day. One walker referred to the visitations as "powerful", as they gave him a "chance to see different perspectives of place and people". The respondent in question explains that by walking through the terrain and encountering different people, he saw some of the ways in which people live in, and interact with, the landscape. Herein he specifically refers to a visitation that involved a river, a man and harmonica. (Listen to *On the Bridge*, track 13) In a similar way to my practice, the walkers confirmed the polyphonic quality of the walk.

In both pieces the perspectives were 'performed' to an audience of walkers; i.e. in the form of the visitations (*The Land Journey*) or through the recorded narrative as part of the soundwalk that participants listened to (*Stones & Water*).

Judging from the frequency that respondents referred to the presence of different viewpoints and the process of meaning-making, it is safe to assume that this lies at the core of *The Land Journey* as an art piece. The mountain leader who guided our group aptly summarizes this point by saying that

It was almost as if Simon [Whitehead] had wanted for everybody to do the same route but look at things differently. ... I think Simon's vision was for everyone to look at the land through their own eyes and then pass on that information to the rest of the group. Which they did to me, there was stuff I was seeing that I hadn't seen before. So perhaps that was the art in itself. If I was to look at a painting and someone pointed something out on that painting that I hadn't seen before.

So apart from the visitations being art pieces in themselves by *performing* a landscape perspective (through a poem, a song, etc.) the fact that the participants created their own narrative as a result of the aggregate of visitations plus the views and backgrounds that the participants brought to the walk, made the journey into an artful experience.

This confirms my proposition that allowing for a range of perspectives so that participants can generate their own interpretation of something, is an artful process. *The Land Journey* and my own practice then present two artful models through which different perspectives (regarding sustainable development) can be collected, as well as made manifest and contained in the landscape. Participants become acquainted with these different views and hold all of them at the same time; the former in the form of a 5-day walk, the latter in the shape of a soundwalk. In the first, one becomes acquainted with the perspectives by meeting people 'live' in the landscape, while in the second, one intimately engages with people by listening to their voices on the audiotrack.

6.1.2 Gestaltswitchung

Another important point that establishes *Stones & Water* as a learning process, is the fact that my practice succeed in producing a certain degree of Gestaltswitching. In section 3.3.1 I explained Gestaltswitching in terms of Kuhn's image that is at the same time a duck and a rabbit, with the animals representing two different mind-sets –gestalts– or perspectives on the same entity. In section 5.1.1 I portrayed Constantine as heterogeneous, with residents having very different views on how the village should be. I mentioned the wide range of village groups each pursuing a different interest, and focussed on two that both aim to improve the well-being of the village: Transition Constantine and Constantine Enterprise Company, addressing the environmental and socio-economic resilience, respectively. One could perceive these two interests as Kuhn's duck and rabbit; both groups are dedicated to the well-being of the village, but have different perspectives on what 'well-being' looks like.

The feedback from participants showed that they felt connected to what they were listening to, with one respondent saying that the audio made her feel part of the

community (of voices). The act of walking and the sounds of footsteps on the recording enhanced this, because these gave her the impression that “people were walking alongside me, as they were talking. So I felt as though there was some kind of companionship” (App. 6: 10). Other participants gave similar feedback, thereby confirming the assumption raised in 4.2.2: the listener cum walker sympathises with the characters on the audiotrack. She walks in their path, seeing the world through their eyes. This shows that the use of audio to create a full-bodied, multi-sensory and immersive experience, and its faculty to connect the listener to the protagonist (whether imaginary or real) can facilitate a profound understanding of a perspective other than one’s own. As a consequence one relates oneself to their perspective and thus ‘shifts gestalt’. The participant moves between mind-sets, seeing a rabbit for what (s)he always thought was a duck (see page 80).

My practice also clearly shows a temporal (intergenerational) gestalt: the ability to move between past, present and future mind-sets. After one of the *Jubilee Walks* two walkers and myself sat in the quarry drinking tea and watching a family of kestrels flying around their nest. The couple from Constantine told me that the soundwalk had made them feel part of what they were listening to: they felt connected to the community of voices and people, as well as part of the place (App. 6: 7-8). Furthermore, they commented, by actively walking the audio in the present, they became part of the narrative that was dealing with the past and the future. They felt “continuity”. Past, present and future appeared as a continuum in which they played an active role. This feedback shows that I indeed managed to layer the present reality with different (past / future) realities, as I intended. It also demonstrates that through the audio and walking, or ‘journeying forth’ of these narratives through the landscape, participants felt that they were part of all of these realities at once. That is to say, they were able to switch between temporal gestalts.

With regards to *The Land Journey* there appears to be less evidence of Gestaltswitching. Although the previous section emphasises the importance of human narratives, various participants felt that the walk focussed *too much* on the human aspect. They thought that the visitations were mostly anthropocentric: “it was kind of humans telling us their perspective and even the farmer [Alun] had a very utilitarian perspective about nature. ... So it is about the land as a resource, what you can do with it”. Apart from the interventions, which all represented a human perspective on the land, there was no time –this walker reasoned– to experience the land through different

means that might reveal the land from perspectives other than just a human one. The walk and visitations therefore did not motivate the walkers to value the land's inherent merit, independent of humans attributing value to it. In that light we might conclude that although there was a range of perspectives present, an essential one was missing: that of the non-human.

6.1.3 Dissensus

A final point to raise here -one that corroborates that *Stones & Water* is at the same time a learning and artful process- relates to the concept of 'dissensus'. A concept extensively discussed in literature related to community arts and citizen-engagement.

In section 5.3 I referred to the *Sunday Event*, explaining that although most of the interviewees indicated that they appreciated the multiple voices, stories and views while listening to the audio, the seated discussion after the walk exposed a reluctance to take different views into consideration. Although the feedback of participants indicates that *Stones & Water* soundwalk successfully opened up a space for collective reflection, it is hard to say whether the plethora of perspectives that ensued was also accepted or integrated in the further planning of the Quarry Project. The process 'ended' in an uncomfortable dissensus. This is however not necessarily negative, and in fact shows that the practice was both 'art' and 'learning'.

Heim (2012: 215) states that 'dissensus is creative' and Irwin, after Rancière, is of the opinion that consensus, as the antithesis to dissensus, is impossible and undesirable (Irwin 2012: 86). She argues that:

... some of the ways in which that consensual vision is activated reduces the multivariate components of a population into a single voice and by arrogating the right to individual expressivity to the powerful, the expert, and the professional: those who are seen to be qualified to lead or speak rather than those who are not generally taken into account. (ibid. 85)

That is, although consensus - or the absence of difference (Lavender 2012: 313)- is generally regarded as something positive, because it is equated with the absence of disagreement and dispute, it actually indicates the subjugation of certain voices, in favour of the more powerful ones. It is the sign of an 'artificial harmony' which, Rancière argues, points at an absence of politics (Elkins and Montgomery 2013). It suggests 'a blank agreement for the sake of it' and a solidification of the existing power structures in

favour of convention and conformity (Lavender 2012). Subsequently 'for Rancière consensual community is unrealizable as it is first and foremost the voices of those qualified to speak that will be heard' (Irwin 2012: 87).

The aspects that emerged through my practice as described in the current and previous chapter, all seem to indicate that dissensus was established. It was said (page 142) that the walking on the *Sunday Event* allowed for less outspoken voices to make themselves heard. This, combined with the fact that an assumed authority in the village (see page 145) felt 'niggled' by the opposition she received, indicates that there was a beneficial dose of opposition among the people that gathered to discuss the Quarry Plan. It indicates that a variety of voices made itself heard, which, following Rancière's line of reasoning, suggests a political and thus 'healthy' community, and should therefore be seen as a positive, rather than negative outcome of the gathering.

Irwin (2012) and Rancière (2007 and 2010) both maintain that art in communities often wrongly aspires to establish consensus, i.e. a desire to make art that generates a seemingly harmonious state among people, but 'produces communities as homogeneous groupings' (Lavender 2012: 314). Irwin argues that 'in reality, consensus in such circumstances is, at best, a utopian exercise existing always just beyond the collective reach' (Irwin 2012: 86); while Rancière believes that consensus is not the thing to strive for in the first place. Bishop in a similar manner refers to 'the antagonist possibilities of art practice', and criticises 'feel-good art' that only seeks to create a harmonious uncritical encounter between people (Jackson 2011: 47).

I recognize this consensus-seeking tendency in my own work. As should be apparent from Chapter 5, *Stones & Water* displays an urge to bridge and connect, to unite people in a communitarian sense of belonging to a place. And, as discussed in 5.3.5, I seem to be afraid to upset and provoke, shying away from dispute and difference; initially experiencing the dissensus that ensued during the *Sunday Event* as a negative outcome.

As an alternative to consensual community, Rancière proposes that artists should strive to establish 'a *sensus communis*'. This, as I understand it, encompasses the idea of a group of people being 'together' not because they blindly and blankly agree with the most powerful voices in that crowd. Instead they are together, exactly because they are apart: because they complement each other with a range of different views upon the

world, and because they display individualist traits, such as 'subjective perception, felt experience, and personal engagement' (Lavender 2012: 313).²²

Subsequently, giving an answer to the inconvenient question in 5.3, art in communities is not about inciting dispute and difference through provocative measures, nor is it about coercing people in seeing the world from the artist's radically novel perspective. If art is indeed about generating *sensus communis* that allows for dissensus, then the core to art as well as learning lies in bringing people together while maintaining their 'apart-ness'. For example, by showing that they are connected through a shared experience, while still encouraging *different experiences* of that experience. To do so, Irwin argues, the artist has to remain an outsider, and unpack stereotypes, by listening 'for the ever-present dissenting voices that contribute to a more complex representation' of that community or the issue at hand (Irwin 2012: 89).

The ability to generate dissensus, this thesis argues, is what interlocks art and social learning: it lies at the core of social learning for sustainable development, and art seems to be the right means to establish it. The aspect that binds together the approaches and means used in *Stones & Water* as well as the *Land Journey* (e.g. locative meaning-making, performance of different perspectives) is their ability to generate dissensus, which allows for meaning-making and thus learning to happen.

Lavender (2012), based on an analysis of three art pieces, distils a range of 'dramaturgical configurations' that enable dissensus. He for example identifies the aspect of 'freedom of movement' and 'frequent changes of positions'. As a consequence 'the audience was treated as a community of individuals facilitated in making small decisions as to what to watch and how, or from where, to watch it' (ibid. 316) He refers to a configuration in which the audience members each determine their own journey, thereby seeing different things, while still sharing the experience of having been to the same performance.

The rest of this chapter will add to these dramaturgical configurations. First I will argue that site-specific/ contextual performance specifically displays such configurations and elements that enable dissensus. From there, I will describe four approaches that arguably generate a *sensus communis* and could be incorporated in social learning to establish more effective solution-finding for sustainable development.

²² Marion Young also advocates a theory of communicative democracy, in which, akin to Rancière's *communis sensus*, 'difference is valued and disagreement becomes a source of new knowledge' (May 2007: 158).

6.2 Different knowledges in contextual practice

Artists do not necessarily dismiss the idea of different knowledges and perspectives existing simultaneously and alongside each other. Van Boeckel states that the process of artmaking often ends in and brings about ambiguity and paradox. He contends that art relies on one's ability to 'deal with and dwell in uncertainty a little longer, juggling between different possibilities' (Eernstman et al. 2012: 201). Schechner 'stresses how performance enables the valuation, articulation and embrace of ambiguity, ambivalence and paradox, all anathema to representational thinking' (Healy 2004: 100). Similar argument is profusely made in existing literature and confirmed by many cases of contextual, site-specific, community-based theatre practice.

Irwin contends that site-specific practice 'suggests ways and means for alternative voices to speak from positions of knowledge through local experience' (Irwin 2012: 85). Theresa May substantiates this point through the analysis of a community-based performance project that involved an indigenous group who had been affected by a disastrous salmon kill, presumably caused by farmers who lived upstream. The performance was based on interviews, stories and insights from both the tribal community and ranchers, and opened up a dialogue between the two groups, by revealing the complexity of the issue and building compassion. Based on her experiences of making this piece, May argues that (community-based) theatre is especially well placed to restore and enhance civic discourse, by representing alternative ways of knowing (May 2007: 157). She refers to the 'particular power of theatre to reveal difference, while not reducing and thus subsuming it', because the play she describes

does not advocate for one side of the debate or the other, nor does it lobby for a particular policy change. Instead, the project explores the cultural-economic-ecological implications of the salmon crises through the unique way-of-knowing of theatre, giving rise to knowledge born of lived experience –knowledge that might make the kind of difference that more data, debate and deliberation could not. (ibid. 158)

Heras and Tàbara (2014) likewise argue that in the light of the complexity, uncertainty and unpredictability of sustainability problems, 'a more nuanced understanding of what constitutes knowledge is required', one that acknowledges and incorporates different kinds of knowledge (ibid. 379). Subsequently they state that

applied performative practice demonstrate 'the capacity to integrate various sources of knowledge and judgement, in combination with emotion-rich expressions and affective communication' (Heras and Tàbara 2014: 388).

This relates to the practice that Pearson and Shanks call 'deep mapping', which encompasses:

an attempt to record and represent the substance, grain and patina of a particular place, through juxtapositions and interweavings of the historical and the contemporary, the political and the poetic, the factual and fictional, the academic and aesthetic' (Pearson and Shanks 2001: 64-6)

Following on from this idea, the interviews I conducted with contextual artists show that in many cases the core of their work indeed lies in the excavation and expression of different knowledges present in a place. Although the argument that performance represents different knowledges is profusely made in existing literature, I will briefly describe *what* different knowledges and perspectives are unearthed. Upon analysing the interviews, I distinguish three overlapping 'categories of knowledge' that are brought forward through the work:

- a) contextual artists unearth hidden narratives of place or the people that live there;
- b) they might approach a location through different 'lenses' or (disciplinary) angles thereby gathering and making manifest a whole range of perspectives on a location; and
- c) in many cases these excavating practices lead to a disclosure of vernacular, lay or local knowledge.

I will discuss each of these by giving one or two examples of work that emerged from my interviews with contextual artists.

6.2.1 Unearthing hidden narratives

McLucas states that 'the real power of site-specific work is that it somehow activates, or engages with, the narratives of the site in some kind of way' (McLucas in Pearson 2010: 35). The interviews that I conducted with artists that work contextually indeed show that much of their practice revolves around making visible narratives that are 'folded into a place'; what Whitehead calls the 'invisible narratives of a place' (page 119).

Pearson refers to site-specific practice as an 'active agency of contemporary archaeology' (Pearson 2010: 46): instead of taking a place for granted, site-specific practice relies on digging into a site, revealing layers and pockets of knowledges under the surface, besides and beyond that what is most obvious or is commonly accepted. Thereby it makes manifest views, histories, knowledges and stories that are not immediately visible. Subsequently, the practice consists in making these knowledges perceptible through an artful rendition, or following these (hidden) narratives and connecting them into a (partly imagined) 'meta-narrative' that feeds a final performance.

Lancaster based performance-maker Louise Ann Wilson, for example, explains that for the piece *House* (1998) she and collaborating artist wanted to return to the area where they were brought up (Yorkshire) and make a piece about a dwelling. After finding the 'right' house they went through an extended period of research of the place, which Wilson describes as 'an excavation': "shining lights into hidden corners or finding really peculiar objects in there that we could not really see in the semi darkness". The found objects as well as the experience of excavation, served as starting points for an artful rendition of the house. For example, the act of entering the boarded-up house with screwdrivers became fuel for the first bit of writing by collaborating poet Simon Armitage. Relics from past occupants, which were collected into a "specimen room", and letters found on the doormat served as sources from which they "began to partly make up histories", or "imagined histories". These pieces of evidence of an ephemeral past, as well as more formal historic research (using archival sources) informed the narrative and imagery of the final performance.

According to Wilson, through the excavation and performance they seemed to have brought to the surface stories that were hidden in the place. As makers they had a sense of opening up the house and bringing the stories to life through an interpretation ("based on fact but obviously transformed"), after which they boarded the house back up and laid everything back to rest. To accomplish such process, or "one of the key features of site-specific work" as Louise describes it, "is that it cannot be rushed, it takes its time", as the work "comes over and through an extended period of time spent in a particular place".

The storyteller Malcolm Green describes a similar approach. Based on his interest in 'the way that stories connect us with our communities and our world', he generates what he calls 'stories from the land' (Tippingpoint.org.uk 2013). In his work he distinguishes between different kinds of stories. Some of them are entirely based on the

collection of existing external material (historic, local, vernacular and archival information), while others emanate from an intense personal and physical engagement with a place.

In the project *Where Curlews Call* (2012) Green and musician/storyteller Nick Hennessey chose one site and spent a year exploring it. As a result of being in and engaging with this place “experiential stories” emerged. He refers to “moments when a kind of engagement happened with the landscape, when something was observed, some kind of an engagement, which felt significant, important, iconic”. These would then serve as the basis to generate a story –a “consciously crafted anecdote”. According to Green, these moments of engagement cannot be forced, but will happen as a result of ‘cultivating a sense of presence’. The latter is the practice of committing oneself to be in a place for a certain (extended) period of time, while being “engaged as you fully can be with the place that you are in” (ibid.). Green refers to it as a meditative practice of being in the place and engaging with it through for example, walking or “cooking, and making fires and putting up a tent, maybe swimming in the river”. In order to entirely attend to the place, Green explains that he has to constantly refrain his mind from running off into all sorts of directions: making assumptions too early, creating narratives, establishing ‘facts’ about the place. Some engagement that generates a story then might happen, or sometimes it does not, or sometimes it comes when he least expects it. (Listen to *Bird*, track 14). In order to do so he refers to the activity of *practicing presence*. The latter consists in engaging with and attending to place, while refraining from cerebral fact-finding.

The work of Wilson and Green demonstrates that contextual practice successfully unearths and makes manifest stories and knowledges beyond the mere obvious ones. They do so by committing themselves to spend an extended period in and with a place, thereby engaging with it, gathering, observing, experiencing, researching and excavating.

6.2.2 Juxtaposing and overlaying different knowledges

Through the interviews I distinguished a pattern of contextual practices that are created through an inclusion, and juxtaposition, of a range of disciplinary perspectives or knowledges. Artists will, in order to become acquainted with a place or to gather material, invite different disciplines to share their view. The resulting performances

then incorporate these different angles on the place by drawing connections between them or by placing one view on top of another. To elucidate this point I will again draw from the work of Louise Ann Wilson.

Much of her work emanates from her engagement with different disciplines. *Jack Scout* (2010) – at the location by the same name (a cliff overlooking Morecambe Bay in Lancashire)- arose from four ‘Dialogues’ between the artists and people with different knowledges of that place (Louiseannwilson.com n.d.). A different artist was put in charge of each dialogue, distilling their experience of the place through creative practice.

In the ‘Underworld Dialogue’ choreographer Nigel Stewart engaged with National Trust wardens and plant ecologists. He for example worked alongside volunteers cutting back bracken. Subsequently, the movements of cutting, pitching and hoiking made their way into his movement material. Likewise, on the basis of different tours that the National Trust wardens had given him through *Jack Scout*, which were marked by different kinds of indigenous flowers, he translated the morphology of the plants into movement and structured the choreography score according to the order in which the flowers occurred on the route. This route then also formed part of the route that the audience took.

In the ‘Overworld Dialogue’ soundartist Matt Robinson worked with RSPB²³ educators and ornithologists; he translated different sounds of flying creatures (birds, bats, etc.) into soundpieces. The third dialogue, that of the ‘Innerworld’ took place in collaboration with children at a nearby school and was the realm of musician Steve Lewis. He translated the children’s experiences, memories and stories of places into song. In the ‘Waterworld Dialogue’ dancer Natasha Fewings approached the place through the eyes of people that engage with the sea and tide: the cross-bay guides and fishermen. She translated their knowledge about fishing traditions, tides, drowning and shipwrecks into a dance sequence that was performed in the tidal bay. Louise Ann Wilson oversaw the entirety of these dialogues: by holding the four maps in her head she was able to draw interconnections between the different worlds, which then informed the structure and narrative of the final piece.

As a result of this mapping process, as well as making these maps experiential and visible through an artful rendition, and overlaying the different maps to create connections between them, Wilson explains that the audience in following the route, experienced the place from different angles:

²³ The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, UK’s largest conservation charity (rspb.org 2013).

It is like we wanted to look at the diversity [of the place Jack Scout] and the sides and the angles of it and give an audience an experience where they would go from one very particular experience of the place, and then suddenly around the corner into a place that has a completely different atmosphere.

The evaluation report of *Jack Scout* shows that 'the performance had allowed members of the audience to perceive the landscape in new ways' (Ho 2010: 7). It thereby confirms Wilson's aspiration to show the place from different angles. Audience members referred to seeing the place in 'a totally different light' and that the performance gave them 'a new vision of a favourite place' (quotes from audience members, *ibid.*).

Based on this practice I conclude that contextual or site-specific practice often revolves around approaching a place from different (disciplinary) angles, digging up a variety of views and knowledges and thereby presenting a place from a multitude of viewpoints. The aggregate of perspectives, and the interconnections and juxtapositions between the different knowledges either informs the structure and narrative of the final performance, or the piece consists in making these different views tangible for the audience.

6.2.3 Vernacular and lay knowledge

The final category of knowledge that is unearthed by contextual practice, and has in fact already been touched upon in all of the sections above, are the informal, lay, local, vernacular, non-hegemonic knowledges in a place, beyond the 'consumed', prevailing and formal perspectives. Of late there seems to be more acknowledgement of such alternative knowledges, demonstrated for example by the increasing popularity and visibility of oral history projects (Heritage Lottery Fund 2009). These present 'an opportunity for those people who have been 'hidden from history' to have their voice heard' thereby providing a 'source of new insights and perspectives that may challenge our view of the past' (ohs.org.uk n.d.). A lot of contextual art practice does the same and thereby forms an important wellspring in this movement of making hidden histories and knowledges heard. In this section, I will give two examples of such practice.

Soundartist Duncan Speakman explains that he aims to uncover the 'everyday' in his pieces. According to him it is not always useful to go into a place as an 'outsider' (i.e. visitor or external artist). In contrast to what is often thought to be a necessary ingredient to make art, seeing a place from an outsider's perspective ('afresh') might mean that one misses out on "the kind of resonances of a place that maybe only come from the people that are living there". That is, you might fail to see the place from an insider's view: the intimate way of knowing that you develop when you have grown up in a place, when the place has shaped you as much as you are shaping it. Rather than showing an audience how he as an (incoming) artist perceives a place, he is interested to demonstrate how people living in that place perceive the place, using his art as an experiential medium to make these views tangible to a larger audience.

Consequently, resisting cultural agencies that direct him to the places that are commonly known for their beauty or historic features, he is interested in making work about and at those places that (allegedly) lack history, the high streets where the everyday goes on, where 'normal' people live. Naturally, these places do not lack history, they just lack *a specific type* of history: one that has been formally appointed as 'important' and therefore 'heritage'. Consequently, there are many different knowledges in those places, which might not all be deemed as important by mainstream media, governmental bodies, academia etc.

Speakman points out that

most of the knowledge that you are looking for someone there already has, and it's just about finding ways of seeing that knowledge in different ways, or putting different people's knowledge together to learn something new about a place. Or even maybe sometimes about making people realise how important their knowledge is; they might not have even been aware of the knowledge they had of a place.

By avoiding places that are conventionally (formally) seen as interesting or valuable, and by including the everyday of the people that live in a place (rather than the heroic stories of a handful of historic figures), he aims to reveal what is already there; what is already known but may be invisibly known, because it does not feature in the hegemonic representation of a place (the tourist guide, history book, etc.).

Artist duo Lone Twin shows a similar way of working. Gregg Whelan describes how in making *The Days of the Sledgehammer Have Gone* (2000-2005) he and his artistic partner Gary Winters were more interested in the local knowledge of the cabdriver than the general, formal knowledge of the tourist office. This piece consisted

in them arriving in a city and making a show in one day. The material for the show was gathered on the streets as they would walk a line from the venue where the performance was to take place to the nearest source of water and carrying water back.

The first thing they would do upon arrival in the city was speak to the taxi driver who drove them to the venue, because according to Whelan the “taxi drivers version of the city is more interesting than the tourist information version because the tourist information version of the city is already consumed, it is already known”. This conversation would make its way into the performance, often verbatim.

Then they would draw a straight line on a map and then walk that line as true to the original map-drawn line as possible. The line and the task of carrying water would function as a means to encounter places and people beyond the ‘consumed parts of town’. As a result they would pass “through places that you as a visitor to the town you wouldn’t go through”. They purposefully engage in what they call “anti-tourism”, aiming to “go the wrong way” (ibid.), and like Speakman, end up making work about those places that are commonly regarded as the uninteresting parts of a town (e.g. along a motorway, through suburbia).

Phil Smith and artist-researcher collective Wright&Sights create with a similar desire to disrupt the obvious way of experiencing, moving through, and getting to know a place. Smith, in his book *Counter-tourism*, gives the reader-walker 50 ways to disrupt the way they would navigate a heritage place (Smith 2012). The *Mis-Guide to Anywhere* (2006 Hodge et al.), produced by said collective, likewise aims to disturb engrained ways of seeing places. They propose a range of means to ‘re-see’ and ‘re-experience’ what has become too familiar, thereby refocusing one’s attention to what you thought was unimportant.

6.3 Means to enable dissensus

After having demonstrated that different knowledges and perspectives are strong components in site-specific and contextual work, this final section will look more closely at the approaches that might be used in order to elicit these different perspectives. Supported by examples from my own practice, the *Land Journey* and strategies drawn from my interviews with artists, I will propose various approaches that help to unearth and integrate the narratives, perspectives and knowledge of participants. This, as argued in section 6.1.3, is to establish a rich meaning-making process and allow for dissensus.

Mike Pearson in his book *Site-specific Performance* describes a range of models, methods and approaches that generate site-specific work. I shall not repeat these, but instead I will focus on means in addition to Lavender's 'dramaturgical configurations' that enable a communis sensus.

6.3.1 Objects that tell stories



Fig. 20 Paul's Future Object

The first method that I will present is the use of objects.

Although, as the previous chapter explains, conversive wayfinding proved to be useful as a dialogic means, as well a strategy to unearth situated perspectives, I realised after a few walks that neither the walking nor the landscape alone were giving me enough 'matter' to

meaningfully manage the conversation. I felt that the conversations remained on a somewhat superficial level and I was looking for ways that would stimulate a more reflective conversation.

I decided to use an additional means to facilitate the process of meaning-making and asked walkers to bring an object that represented the future²⁴. This formed a personal starting point for the conversation and gave guidance during the walk/talk. It gave tangible matter and personal meaning to the abstract concept of sustainable development and generated a collection of diverse interpretations of the concept. A local farmer for example, brought a picture of his son and daughter-in-law, as they represented the future of his farm (see figure 20). For him sustainable development lay in sustaining farming and other employment in the village. This led to us talking about the factors that would enable this, and he commented that climate change could actually

²⁴ This idea was taken from Oleg Koefoed with whom I organised a workshop as part of the 'Ecocultures' Conference at the University of Essex in April 2012. We focused on the contribution of art in the process of creating sustainable communities and invited three other people that work on the interface between art and sustainability (Eva Bakkeslett, Lucy Neal and Karen Blincoe) to contribute. In preparation of the workshop he asked all of us to bring something that represented the future, which then successfully served as a starting point for our conversation.

benefit agriculture in the area, thereby increasing local employment and hence reducing the amount of people that had to leave the village to go to work every morning. A local fisherman was of a similar opinion. He took me to the creek where he showed me his boat. He believed that a rise in the sea's temperature would benefit fish stock in Cornish waters.



Fig. 21: Russ' Future Object

Both these views were in stark opposition with Russ' perspectives, who through his object – a map – expressed deep concerns regarding the current global state of affairs (figure 21). When he and his family decided to move to Cornwall, they pulled out a map of the county and based on the symbols around Constantine (presence of woods, getaway to the water, relatively near to larger towns) decided to move here. In the light of the current resource depletion (e.g. peak oil) and corresponding social challenges (climate migration) the decision to live in this fairly remote corner of the United Kingdom gained another meaning. According to Russ, the impending crisis would hit densely populated urban areas harder than remote rural places; Constantine would thus be less affected. The map therefore represents Russ' deep concern about sustainability, climate, social and environmental issues, as well as the capacity of and necessity for the village of Constantine to develop as a 'safe haven'.

This concern and sense of urgency to act is in line with Chris' views. He brought a miniature windmill that embodied his opinion that the village should focus on finding alternative sources of energy in order to be sustainable in the future.

Compared to the walks without an object, the invitation to bring a 'future object' proved to do three things. First of all, it facilitated the conversation as it provided a personal point of entry that directed our talk and served as a point of reference that we could return to. The parameter it provided allowed us to 'get to the point' more effectively, without me directing the content of that point. Second, the object served as a metaphor for the elusive concept of sustainable development, by taking the life world of the participants as a starting point. It thereby translated an abstract and remote concept into something more personal and tangible. Instead of trying to talk about 'the future'

and 'sustainable development' in general, the object translated the matter at hand into something that was related to my walking partner's everyday life. Thereby, (thirdly) making concrete a perspective that was possibly elusive. In that sense both the landscape and the object functioned as a mnemonics that led people to reflect on and express their views on the past, present and future of the village, which also strengthened the method of locative meaning-making in connecting the topic of conversation to the direct life-world of people.



Fig. 22 Alun telling his story while demonstrating his shearing scissors



Fig. 23: A picture of Alun's dad on sheepskin next to the book 'Six Degrees: our future on a hotter planet' by Mark Lynas, and the paint that is used to mark his sheep.

The Land Journey in a similar way featured objects to elucidate a perspective. In one of the visitation we met Alun, a local sheep farmer (see figures 22-24). He encountered us by quad bike on a narrow path and passionately performed his connection to the land, telling us about his livelihood and his views on his future as a farmer. Out came a rug of wool and his story unfolded while he revealed different objects and arranged them on the wool. He showed us big scissors, the sound of which had filled the summers of his childhood, while his dad was shearing sheep. A portrait of his dad told the story of how Alun came to

be highly dependent on the land as he took over the farm when his dad passed away. Through a clearing in the trees we could see the place in the road where he had stopped to take the call that informed him his father had died. From there he told us how regulations had made it almost impossible to keep sheep profitably, and how wool was imported to the UK rather than bought from Welsh farmers.

In my view, his story and the objects that told it represent what sustains him in relation to the land, and what sustains the land in relation to him. The personal objects scattered on wool are therefore a display of his perspective on sustainable development: human narratives elucidating his personal take on how to live in the land with the future in mind. The objects represent personal, tangible and concrete manifestations of a possibly elusive interpretation of an abstract concept.

Subsequently, the similarity between *The Land Journey* and *Stones & Water* does not necessarily lie in the fact that both rely on objects to tell a story or express meaning. The core that connects the two contextual practices is the fact that they both: (a) elucidate human narratives –*personal* experiences of people or what Whitehead called “realities of experiences” (see page 119); and (b) attempt to find ways in which these personal experiences become tangible and concrete. In these cases through the use of objects.



Fig. 24: Alun demonstrating the rigidity of barbed wire, exemplifying the body of regulations installed by external powers, which now cuts up the land and rules his life as a farmer.

6.3.2 The power of detail

A related approach to tease out the (personal) perspective of people in a piece of community art, was mentioned by composer and producer Pete Moser. In his project *Morecambe Streets* (n.d.) he invited people to write songs and poems about the place where they lived. The aim was to celebrate individuals, as well as to create a catalogue of views on the town: “like a parish map but in song”. The songs were performed with residents, performers and audience members walking collectively, passing through the places that inspired the songs and singing them on location.

The process of collecting the stories and songs relied on the experienced personal detail of a place. “It was”, Moser says “about your feelings towards things, it could be about a particular chair that you loved, a security light that came on in the night, a cooker, a view from a window, a dog, a bicycle”. According to Moser the attention on the detail, rather than the general, is core to such collection processes. In my interview with him, he points at the table and says: “tell me about that square inch of the table. I don’t want to know about the whole table, but tell me, if you look at that square inch tell me what you see. ... So really describe the marks. And when you start to do that with people it is just extraordinary”.

Instead of looking at a concept from a global, universal perspective, thereby distilling general opinions, Moser’s strategy of excavating stories revolves around a focus on personal detail and experience; it allows for idiosyncratic diversity of place and people to become manifest.

6.3.3 Listening

A fourth element that emerged from the interviews, is the importance of listening. Suzi Hopkins from theatre group The Company states that the driving motive of their work is to find a subject that is relevant in the present and to people living in that present. Subsequently, these subjects are explored in the piece of theatre that the company develops in collaboration with the group of people in question. Her partner Stephan Israel agrees; according to him the most interesting and important point of the site-specific work they do is that the fuel for the practice “comes from people”.

The way in which this knowledge is gathered is usually through conversation: simply by “talking to lots and lots of people”. The importance of conversation is confirmed by other artists and companies that I interviewed. The work of WildWorks originates from a similar source. Their website states: “[t]he meaning of the work

develops from research, from chance encounters, from probing the feelings, thoughts, stories and memories of people' (wildworks.biz 2013). Hence, 'the creative heartbeat' of the work is the process of bringing to light human stories, underlining their importance and employing them as material in the making. To do so, Sue Hill, member of WildWorks' artistic team, stresses the importance of *listening* over talking, and draws attention to the value of human stories as conductors and containers of knowledge.

'Listening' in WildWorks' sense, implies both listening to what people have to tell as well as listening – or attending to – a place. The latter involves paying attention to the physical environment; e.g. its acoustic quality, how a certain location 'feels', what it is used for, how people behave in it, etc. According to Hill, the pivot in both processes is "finding ways in which you can do good listening" and subsequently how you understand and attach meaning to what you hear. To the process of listening to people Hill refers to "making a temporary space" in which the listening can happen. 'Space' in this sense can be understood both literally and metaphorically. A WildWorks process often starts with the company organizing a 'tea party': the creation of an actual (physical) space that is "convivial": friendly, warm, opening, talkative and respectful. Community members, residents and anyone else who is interested are invited to come and share their memories or thoughts on an issue.

Figuratively speaking, 'making (a) space' also refers to the attitude of the company or artists entering the place. Hill explains:

When you aren't working in a theatre you aren't in your own space, you are working in other people's –you are a guest in other people's spaces so you have to behave as a respectful guest.

'Space' thus also refers to allowing room for the 'other' –i.e. the people of the place– rather than coming in and taking up too much space with one's own aspirations, goals, feelings, preconceptions, etc. 'Making space' thus also implies that the emphasis is not on what the artist brings but on what the people have to give.

Hopkins from The Company confirms the importance of such space, and says that as a company they "try and go in totally blank, because then you are taking what people want to give you rather than imposing something on it." In order to do so they tend to know very little about the place before they start working, approaching it as an 'open book' and allowing the process to be entirely informed by the features in the place, like landscape, history and people.

These points as raised by Hill and Hopkins are echoed by Malcolm Green's practice of 'practicing presence' as explained in 6.2.1. He says that it is all about "sitting still and just being still". According to him, when you walk into a place while being distracted, everything will disappear. And

if you are very present it probably won't, but once you sit down it will take 10-15 minutes of being still and observant, till activity will resume about you. ... And then you will see things you actually had no idea were there.

We can extrapolate the more individual and meditative state that Green describes, to the larger, community scale that WildWorks and The Company work in. Like the latter, Green points to the fact that if you come into a place distracted – i.e. preoccupied and clouded with your own 'stuff' (preconceptions, aspirations, etc.) – you will fail to really listen, or attend to, the place. As a result things of that place will elude you. It is only when you take the time to be present and listen, that the 'activity of the place' resumes and becomes noticeable.

Hence, although Green and Hill / Hopkins are referring to different conditions and practices (the one more meditative on an individual scale; the other more active and on a community level), the underlying mechanism is the same: a practice of 'deep' listening that involves making space for the other to be present through a practice of being present oneself.²⁵

Besides the act of listening, it is important how one understands and attaches meaning to what one hears. Hill explains that the stories they collect through the process of good listening reveal patterns and themes that represent the nature and characteristics of a place. "Story operates in lots of different ways," she says; "you might have a fragment that really sings in a strange way and it presents you with an image that sets you off on a track. Or you might have a kind of a repetition which lets you know that there is meaning held in that location which is really powerful". In the research leading up to the production *Beautiful Journey* (2009) for example, they talked to a lot of people living in Devonport (a harbour district in Plymouth) where the performance was to take place. It having been a naval settlement in the past, a lot of inhabitants were still involved in the navy in one way or another. Listening to people's stories, Hill explains,

²⁵ This bears resemblance to what Jacques Lecoq calls 'the neutral work', which involves at the same time a stance free of anything and still a preparedness which allow the 'sensitivity towards the least perceptible impulse or sensation' and readiness to be surprised (Frost and Yarrow 2007: 87). It is not a passive blankness, it is a highly charged void: without bringing anything in, it is simply ready to respond to what happens around it.

“there was a kind of rhythm built up that was about endless farewells and reunions”. This narrative pattern of references to constant leaving and returning became core to the final show. Stories returned verbatim and the extracted meaning of the stories formed the leading (metaphorical) themes for the performance.

Connecting this point to the way I employed human stories in my practice, as well as their role in *The Land Journey*, confirms and reinforces their importance in relation to drawing out meaning and perspectives regarding a certain topic (in this case sustainable development). The stories that people tell hold important knowledge about how they relate to a certain place or issue. Using stories to make perspectives visible is therefore an important strategy to unearth knowledge.

The importance of narrative in the context of sustainable development and change was already mentioned in 4.2.2. An article by Paschen and Ison further reinforces the importance of WildWorks’ approaches. They discuss the benefit of ‘narrative research’ in social learning contexts where communities find adaptive strategies to cope with socio-environmental challenges such as climate change. The authors claim that ‘how a community ‘stories’ its past experiences and actions ultimately determines how it understands and practices future adaptation’ (Paschen and Ison 2014: 1084) Like Hill above, they do not see stories as just a way to access data, but as important data in themselves, that reveal how people interpret the world ‘from their specific, historical and cultural locations’ (ibid. 1086). To achieve this Paschen and Ison refer to the importance of ‘listening genuinely’ to people (ibid. 1088), a practice that judging from its recurrence in the examples discussed in this chapter seems to be a skill that especially contextual artists profess.

They stress the importance of such ‘storied ways of knowing’ (Cortazzi 2001 in Paschen and Ison 2014: 1084) in social learning for two interrelated reasons. First of all, because a narrative approach invites previously unheard voices into conversations about potential adaptive strategies. Second, because it overcomes what they call ‘the ecological crises of reason’ is the dominant rationalist paradigm that ‘overwrites the emotional, experiential and embodied entanglements of humans and their environments’ (ibid. 1087). This is key to all the meaning-making approaches discussed in this chapter.

6.3.5 Countering objectification

What all the three approaches have in common and is especially highlighted through the discussion on narrative above, is that they search for the subjective, personal meaning of something. Their power to generate a *sensus communis* indeed lies in their evocation of 'subjective perception, felt experience, and personal engagement', as Lavender (2012: 313) proposes.

The proposition that *personal* narratives lie at the core of my practice (*Stones & Water*) was confirmed by comments from participants. Respondent SB for example states that in opening up my project beyond mere formal heritage' views I consulted the people "whose heritage it is", thereby showing that "[the residents'] stories are as valid and as necessary as anyone else's (App. 6: 22). The practice enabled "people to revalue and to honour their experiences, and their lives, and their personal history" (App. 6: 32).

Participant RC, when asked whether he thought the soundwalk was artful, commented that "The fact that you turned it into the stories, personal stories, to my mind would be the artistic element of it" (App. 6: 14). Subsequently he drew a distinction between a purely factual approach and my more personal 'touch'. Had my practice just been a factual explanation of landscape features (e.g. "this trail here is from 1740") then, he says, it would not have been artistic; "the artistic bit to [him] was tying it into the personal stories" (ibid.).

Participant DJ concurred with this view, and said that the walk was not at all what he expected because:

... I didn't realise that it was going to have what you might call an artistic dimension I thought it was going to be an informative walk around the quarry and the mines and old people reminiscing which would have been fine, but it was much more interesting than that. (App. 6: 9)

When I probed to understand what he meant by 'artistic dimension', he said that it was "impressionistic, rather than factual" (ibid.).

This sequence of quotes shows that the soundwalk was artistic *because* it drew on feelings and relayed a personal interpretation of history and the land. This then shows that there are (at least) two ways of approaching an issue: a factual, practical manner versus an artful, 'impressionistic' approach. The first transmits facts, the second expresses feelings; the former is an objective and formal rendition of the world, the latter a personal and subjective.

This proposition is supported by Conquergood, who, like Haraway (see 4.1) and Wynne (3.2), argues that there are two recognised domains of knowledge: one that is 'official, objective, and abstract' and the other 'practical, embodied, and popular'. He states that the first is that of 'empirical observation and critical analysis from a distanced perspective'. The second one is grounded in 'active, intimate, hands-on participation and connection ... a view from ground level, in the thick of things.' (Conquergood 2002: 145-146). It is a situated knowledge, a view 'from the body' as Haraway (1988) coined it. However, he argues after Foucault, the latter knowledge is 'subjugated'²⁶. Besides its value on an every-day 'domestic' level, it is neglected, excluded and repressed, because it is 'illegible'. The knowledge exists as 'active bodies of meaning' that refuse to be caught in books or linear texts. As Western culture heavily relies on the use of text and words -it is 'scriptocentric' as Conquergood (2002) frames this mode of knowing is regarded as trivial or simply overlooked.

As argued above, what the meaning-making or dissensus-enabling approaches described in this chapter have in common is that they allow plural and unheard voices; they acknowledge the personal experiences of the world, and thereby invite different subjugated ways of knowing. In that sense Rancière's concept of 'dissensus' thus revolves specifically around disrupting the hegemony of the objectified knowledge and building 'sustainability solutions' based on the experiential, lived, lay and situated knowledge of people. One that is 'located, not transcended ... engaged, not abstracted ... forged from solidarity with, not separation from the people', in which 'proximity, not objectivity, becomes an epistemological point of departure and return' (Conquergood 2002: 149).

In section 3.2 I argued against an objectification of environmental issues, contending that if sustainability issues are increasingly portrayed as abstract and taking place in the technological, global and academic sphere, 'ordinary' people lose the 'response-ability' to act. That is, they lose both the sense that it is up to them to act, as well as the feeling that they actually have the ability to do something. Subsequently, employing artful approaches that 'subjectify' the concept of sustainability, by unearthing and integrating subjugated knowledges are indispensable elements to a social learning process.

²⁶ Foucault coined the term 'Subjugated knowledges' referring to modes of knowing 'that have been disqualified as nonsceptical knowledges, hierarchically inferior knowledges, knowledges that are below the required levels of erudition and scientificity.' (Foucault 2003 in Adams JR 2013: 299).

The need for such 'subjectification'²⁷ is also asserted by Heras and Tàbara who claim that 'in many occasions, we find that what is needed in addressing the problems of unsustainability is not just 'more knowledge', but a sense of personal belonging, attachment and responsibility to our connected world; in other words: what role/s can I play?' (2014: 392). In a similar way James Marriott from Platform London states that art helps to 'catapult the climate crisis from the cold realms of science and economics into the emotional world of culture'; this he claims is a necessary step in the transformation processes towards a more ecologically sane world (Tompkins 2011, 233).

In relation to a piece, the practice of subjectifying sustainability lies at the core of enabling dissensus and social learning, and art is a key driver in establishing it.

From my experience in the realm of (social) learning for sustainable development, I argue that although researchers and educators in this field claim to engage citizens, value local knowledge, and allow for the experiential and active modes of knowing, too often their methods, documentation, results and the presentation of those outcomes are generated through the objectifying paradigm. That is, there is discrepancy between what they *say* learning for sustainability is, and what they *show* it to be. There is a gap between on the one hand their claims of engagement, lived experience and 'head/hand/heart' approaches (Orr 1992), and on the other the objectified tone of their conference, journal articles and bullet-point-ridden slideshows that show very little of what really happened in those communities and classrooms that they claim to have engaged (arguably this written PhD thesis is a manifestation of that discrepancy as well).

A similar point is raised in the book *Participation: The New Tyranny?*. The authors argue that where participatory methodology is applied in order to incorporate 'a local view', often this knowledge is still passed through an objectifying lens: 'participatory research 'cleans up' local knowledge' (Cooke and Kothari 2001: 12), thereby 'making people's lives and their social interactions linear and sterile as they fit into charts, diagrams and tables and conform to the boundaries and limitations of the methodological tools' (Kothari 2001: 147). The complexities, contingencies and ambiguities –or 'mess' (see Law on pages 10, 82-83)- that make up people's lives and

²⁷ The concept of 'subjectification' as it is used in this thesis must not be confused with Foucault's interpretation of it. He refers to it as an undesirable state in which the individual is made subject to something or someone else and therefore dominated.

how they know the world are filtered out. Situated epistemologies are turned into objectified ones in order to be understood and 'formally' represented. As a consequence the local epistemology is essentially subjugated once again. Worse still, the participants are entirely robbed from their ability to make meaning, because their opinion, view and stories are supposedly incorporated in the result of the participatory methodology. The agency to make meaning, and be creators, rather than consumers of meaning (see also pages 78, 84, 151), and thus the ability to shape their environment is taken away from them.

Kothari (2001) uses performance as a metaphor to describe this discrepancy between the 'messy' reality versus the 'clean' representation of it. She states that on the front stage practitioners/researchers act as directors who guide and frame the performance of the participants. The latter perform in accordance to what is 'allowed' to be shown on stage, leaving the unfiltered and 'untidy' reality of everyday life backstage. Szerszynski et al. use the same metaphor and state that the performed knowledge on the front stage is of a 'stable and predictable nature [which] can be acted upon, forecasted, known and controlled' (2004: 10-11). Kothari rightfully asks 'What happens to the narratives of those who do not possess the right skills [...] to perform as required?' (Kothari 2001: 150) I would add the question, what valuable knowledge is lost from the narratives that are not fit for performance. Szerszynski advocates that we should bring to the forefront what is kept backstage. I would argue that instead of merely using performance as a *metaphor* for these processes, an answer to these questions is to conceive social learning, community engagement and participatory methodologies *as performance*, like Conquergood and others also argue (Conquergood 2002; Heras and Tàbara 2014; O'Shea 2012). The methods proposed in this chapter are a start of such a 'subjectified, action epistemology'.

6.4 Summary

This chapter demonstrated that contextual practice can indeed be a process of meaning-making and learning. I used *Stones and Water* and the *Land Journey* as examples to show how these practices did not aim to transmit one predetermined view, but integrated multiple perspectives on the landscape and the concept of sustainable development. By encouraging participants to create their own meaning based upon these multiple views these practices oppose linear knowledge transfer models.

Subsequently, I argued that social learning only exists by the virtue of dissensus, as this indicates that more opinions - beyond the most powerful or supposedly professional ones - are voiced. It thereby aims to address and produce community not as a homogenous entity, but as a 'sensus communis': in which people are brought together by a shared experience, but are still encouraged to have different interpretations of that experience.

By means of a brief overview of contextual practices, I then argued that art practice is especially well placed to unearth and integrate different perspectives and knowledges. I gave examples of practices that each reveal different (but interrelated) categories of knowledge; i.e. 'hidden', disciplinary and vernacular.

Subsequently, I discussed three specific artful approaches that unearth, manifest and represent multivocality of knowledges, and thereby add to the 'dramaturgical configurations' that enable dissensus. What connects all of these approaches is the fact that they reveal personal and practical views on an issue rather than objective and factual ones. The making of contextual art and its potential for social learning, reflects a process in which sustainability issues or environmental phenomena are 'subjectified'. They are made personal and situated: re-embedded in people's lives and living, rather than being consigned to the technological realm or to faceless super-agents.

Employing strategies used in contextual art practice may enrich social learning in ways that allow for a re-enchantment of the objectified with contextual, personal, experiential, 'lived' meaning so that (environmental) issues start to matter (again). It brings some of the larger implications of today's massively complex sustainability challenges home, by literally bringing them closer to home, thereby giving people the sense that they have the 'response ability' to act. The practice of subjectification is urgently needed in the field of learning for sustainable development, which despite its claims of incorporating experiential, situated, embodied knowledges is still dominated by a rationalist paradigm. And in the light of this argument, the practice of subjectification is key to enabling Rancière's concept of dissensus.

Perceiving social learning in the first place as a meaning-making and dissensus-enabling practice engenders the final aspect that constitutes this thesis. Irwin states the following:

Dissensus represents the cut between the intentionality and outcome –the unknowable quotient of that which is produced, that which cannot be anticipated or measured but which points towards the demonstrative power of the multiplicity of local instances of political and artistic innovation. (Irwin 2012: 97)

Acknowledging the importance of dissensus and following the interpretation of learning as a collaborative meaning-making activity (as described by for example Rancière, Freire, Dewey and Jackson), implies that these processes are open-ended and to a large extent 'goal-searching' (Heras and Tàbara 2014). As Jackson states 'Any attempt to have the learner figure things out on her own raises the possibility that what will be figured out will not be what is expected' (Jackson 2007: 44). Such processes are, as Heim in her discussion of conversational practice also argues, left radically open (see pages 141-142).

The previous chapter already referred to the open-endedness in relation to participation and social learning. It argued for 'active passiveness' in order to allow for meaning-making to happen. As this is an important but largely unstudied aspect of social learning, the final chapter of this thesis will analyse how open-endedness can be productively integrated in social learning, by again turning to the arts.

7

Navigating open-endedness

Because social learning is not about instructing a pre-determined outcome but instead consists in an explorative process in which different solutions emerge and are tested, the process is relatively open-ended (Wals and van der Leij 2007). Furthermore, when in a post-normal paradigm, social learning constitutes a learning process for an unavoidably and fundamentally uncertain world. This requires, as Maureen O'Hara describes, that 'we will need to balance a fear that we have not enough information with the problems of having too much' (2005: 7). She continues:

What would ensure that enough of us across the various world cultures develop the capacity to hold not just two opposing ideas at the same but many; and to resist the desire for easy certainty and premature closure? What kind of socializing experiences can we invent so we learn to see the world through new eyes and to take in its complexity without becoming overwhelmed by it? What will help us stay 'within the tension of a question or an issue' and live in the messiness for longer than is comfortable in order that creative new forms can emerge? (2005: 6)

These questions pertain to a social learning process, and echo the practice of pluralised knowing and suspension, as brought forward by Seeley and Reason (see 2.2.8). Although open-endedness is frequently mentioned as a distinguishing quality in the context of (social) learning for sustainable development, there is no practical literature available about how such qualities should be cultivated, utilized and managed. This pre-final chapter aims to fill that gap.

To do so, the next pages will first discuss what open-endedness means exactly, and why it is useful to turn to the arts to understand how it might be operationalized. Then section 7.2 till 7.3 will each describe (a set of) approaches that could help educators to productively integrate and navigate open-endedness in their work. These means are drawn predominantly from the interviews that I conducted with contextual artists in the final stages of this research. Subsequently, I will look at my own practice in the light of these methods, and describe how the identified methods transpose to a social learning process.

7.1 The need for open-endedness

There are three interrelated concepts that have been coming up throughout this thesis, and are often mentioned in the context of sustainable development and social learning. All three –ambiguity, open-endedness and uncertainty– are related to each other, or characteristic of the same concept that I termed, following Gunder (2006), as ‘fuzzy’ (see 3.2.3). In an attempt to describe and distinguish between the three terms, let me start with the concept of ‘uncertainty’. The earlier cited articles of Brugnach et al. (2011 and 2008, see page 79) describe three forms or sources of uncertainty.

The first type arises from a *solvable* lack of knowledge. That is, the knowledge is incomplete due to a lack of data or unreliability of the available data, but with time and the appropriate means the gap in knowledge can be resolved, to the extent that the uncertainty dissipates and the system becomes predictable.

The second form of uncertainty is not a lack in information but quite the opposite; it occurs when there is *too much* information available. There is too much, often conflicting information regarding a system, or there are too many angles to and interpretations of an issue, which leads to a ‘blur’ and thus unmanageability of the system, which ends in uncertainty. This in essence is the factor of ambiguity and multiplicity as was the topic of the previous two chapters.

The third and final form of uncertainty resides in an *unsolvable* gap in knowledge; the system is inherently unpredictable. Complex systems express non-linear, chaotic behaviour and are in constant flux due to a high sensitivity to surrounding conditions. They vary according to other factors (which might also be unpredictable systems), and are therefore impossible to manage, control and predict effectively or entirely through models. These systems can be of a natural (e.g. climate) or human kind. The uncertainty might be caused by ignorance: by taking for granted certain factors on the basis of what we know, we might be ignoring things that we do not know we do not know.²⁸ These are not mistakes exactly, as we still follow logical procedures based upon what we know.

Wynne 1992) argues that ignorance is endemic to scientific systems because they are socially constructed. As the sheep-farming case discussed in 3.2 demonstrated,

²⁸ The term ‘unknown unknowns’ or ‘unk-unks’ was coined by John Newhouse in his book *The Sporty Game* (1982), a book about Boeing Aircrafts. It was later popularized by Donald Rumsfeld, at a press briefing in 2002 where he addressed the absence of evidence linking the government of Iraq with the supply of weapons of mass destruction to terrorist groups (See: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GiPe10iKQuk>). It has since been used in engineering and military terms, as ‘those things that cannot be predicted but for which preparation is still required’. My understanding of it is more from an educational, scientific and philosophical point of view, and I feel the need to stress that by quoting Rumsfeld, I am only interested in the proverb and do not support the content of his message.

scientists take wrong decisions based on the taken-for-granted basis that certain parameters are universal and that conclusions drawn from one context can be transposed onto another. Hence, according to him uncertainty is the norm rather than an exception. That systems are in fact predictable or controllable through enough and accurate knowledge about that system is essentially a scientific misconception.

Furthermore, he says, systems that involve human actions are endemically unpredictable because they depend on many social unknowns and contingencies. The way people will behave can hardly be standardized as it depends on complex social and cultural factors; it is generally erratic and unpredictable.

Don Michael (2001) sheds a whole new light on the Sufi parable that is often employed to underwrite a postmodern perspective upon reality. Herein, a group of blind men touch an elephant to learn what it is like. Each of the men feels a different part, such as the trunk, tail or tusk and, based on their experience, draws a different conclusion as to what the elephant is. This tale demonstrates the existence of partial and situated knowledge (explained in chapter 3). And it underlines the importance of multiplicity, as all of the views represent valid and partial standpoints, which when joined with the others, contribute to understanding of the whole: a larger and greater understanding of reality (the elephant).

However, Michael argues, the tale implies that there is a storyteller who is positioned as if at an elevated position which allows him to determine that the whole is an elephant. According to him (and others: see Haraway's and Nagel's criticism of a 'God's eye view') the parable wrongly assumes that there is such position from whence one can know a thing entirely and at once, while everyone else is fumbling in the dark and disagreeing about partial perspectives. Michael states that in today's complex, interconnected and dynamic world, the storyteller is blind too and *everyone* is fumbling, or that there is no elephant at all: 'there is *no* agreement on interpretation that provides an enduring basis for coherent action based on an understanding of the enfolding context' (Michael 2001: 905).

This describes the distinction between ambiguity and open-endedness. The former consists in an existing elephant, and social learning becomes a collaborative dialogical fact-finding exercise to reconcile different frames and establish the larger whole on which everyone can agree. In the latter, where the elephant is entirely absent, social learning becomes a process in which framing is completely open. The outcome of such a process, for example what sustainable development implies and how it can be achieved, cannot be pre-determined and is thus an emergent property (Keen et al. 2005:

11). We are trying to understand something entirely open-ended, fluctuating and ever-becoming through the act of investigation.

Inner and Booher describe this emerging property as follows:

this ... is a type of reasoning and collective creativity fundamentally different from the more familiar types, argumentation and trade-offs ... produc[ing], rather than a solution to a known problem, a new way of framing the situation and of developing unanticipated combinations of actions that are qualitatively different from the options on the table at the outset. (Inner and Booher 1999 in Healy 2004: 99)

Open-endedness in this sense is both an inherent factor of systems and a desirable ingredient in a social learning process. In order to arrive at a solution that is not predetermined one needs to be able to 'devise' open-endedness. The argument presented in the previous chapters underlines this proposition that open-endedness is an important aspect of a meaning-making and social learning process. This chapter aims to understand what conditions allow us to cultivate the unknown, and provide the means that help one to venture into it.

7.1.1 The role of art

Dealing with, or rather, embracing open-endedness is core to the creation of art. Rebecca Solnit in her book *A Field Guide to Getting Lost* states that if we aspire to things that are transformative, we extend the boundaries of the known into the unknown. To do so, she turns to the arts, because:

Certainly for artists of all stripes, the unknown, the idea or the form or the tale that has not yet arrived, is what must be found. It is the job of artists to open the doors and invite in prophecies, the unknown, the unfamiliar; it's where their work comes from, although its arrival signals the beginning of the long and disciplined process of making it their own. Scientists too, as J. Robert Oppenheimer once remarked, "live always at the 'edge of mystery' - the boundary of the unknown." But they transform the unknown into the known, haul it in like fishermen; artists get you out into that dark sea. (2006: 5)

As Solnit, Van Boeckel argues that artmaking is fundamentally open-ended, 'it starts from not-knowing and it may end up in ambiguity and paradox' (ibid. 81). But the fact that one did not arrive at one clear-cut answer does not render the entire activity or the answers useless; it just demonstrates the multiplicity of possible answers or

solutions. He states that 'art can open us up to chaos, to the presence of contradiction, paradox and ambiguity, and this quality of art can be of great value in our current times' (Van Boeckel 2013: 68).

The artists that I interviewed share a sense that the not-knowing is daunting at times but necessary for the making. Knowing too much about the outcome kills whatever might emerge before it has even started to come into being; it takes away a degree of lively freshness required to create something that is new and exciting. Furthermore, entering a process full of one's own expectations and visions distorts the collaboration with who or what one is working with. Imposing one's premeditations on a process implies that one might miss out on whatever 'wants to emerge': topics, directions, stories that are genuinely from the place or people one works at or with.

However, open-endedness in this fashion is not the equivalent of 'unplanned'. In some cases it does imply, as Van Boeckel describes, that one leaves instructions at the beginning to a minimum in order to avoid pre-determined outcomes. Yet, improvisation, taken as an example of a highly open-ended activity, does comply with certain rules (Nachmanovich 1990). In fact, 'most often, the activity *is* highly structured in its seemingly unstructured character' (Van Boeckel 2012: 306, emphasis in original). Lehmann and Szatkowski likewise argue that it is incorrect to infer that improvisation is beyond any control; 'Paradoxically, framing is the very factor that liberates the improvisers from the pressure of being inventive from scratch and lets them become creative' (2004: 56).

From the above the following questions arise: how do we plan the unplanned? Where do you start if you do not know the end? Or, if open-endedness is a property that we want to include in a process, then how do we facilitate it? How do we catalyse emergent properties? What generative framework or conditions foster such emergence? Or, following Solnit, *What keeps our boat adrift in that dark sea?* And returning to Rancière's argument about learning, *How do you venture forth in the forest if you don't know where you are going?*

7.1.2 The role of contextual practice

A look at contextual practice supports the argument above that art is fundamentally open-ended; however, the degree to which the work is open-ended varies. In chapter 2 I distinguished between three forms of contextual practice. A reminder of these three categories will show how the work is indeed open-ended or not.

First, I distinguished the factor of site-specificity; i.e. to what extent the work is inseparable from the physical place that it is taking place in. High levels of site-specificity automatically involve more open-endedness. The product emerges from an engagement with site, which implies that material is not brought to the site but extracted from it. Hence, to create a site-specific piece, the artist should not have any preconception of what she is going to produce, because if she had, it would not be entirely generated from the site in question. For example, Louise Ann Wilson's piece, *House* (1998), started with the idea of making a performance in a house; the exact shape and content of the final piece then entirely emerged from a prolonged period of researching the house and anything they found in it. Hence, the artist may have a vague vision of the final piece (it will be a walk or a dance), but to create a piece that is entirely premeditated would defy the idea of site-specificity.²⁹

The second factor brought forward, was the extent to which people other than the creating artist(s) determine the work. As the artist allows other people to interfere with and determine the content and shape of the making, she knows less about the final outcome when she starts the making process: the more people-specific, the more open-ended the process is.

Finally, the degree of context-responsiveness determines the open-endedness of a devising process. The more the final performance is dependent on uncontrollable factors at the time and place of the performance, the less ability the performer has to predict what will happen exactly. Whatever has been planned is going to be changed, adapted through the specifics (often erratic conditions) prevalent at the time and place of performance. Lehmann and Szatkowski emphasise that improvisation incorporates high levels of open-endedness. They liken it to walking backwards: 'You can see where you have been walking, but you do not know exactly where you are going' (2004: 56).

It is important to understand that improvisation does not start with the allegorical 'blank canvas'. Although actors' actions are not pre-scripted and they create in response to their environment, they do bring in their habits, cultural proclivities and physical vocabulary. The same is –as I will show in 7.2– the case for other site-specific practice, in which 'the canvas' consists of everything that is present at the place and time of conception. In fact, one might argue that coming to anything entirely bare is an illusion, as one always brings in the baggage of previous experience and preconceptions. Hence,

²⁹ This is not to say that less site-specific work does not involve any open-endedness; the majority of theatre devising contains a certain degree of open-endedness, e.g. actors develop their characters through improvisation. However, for the purpose of this argument, this thesis focused on site-specific theatre which is 'by default' open-ended as it does not have a pre-existing script that determines the outcome.

it is important to note that I am not necessarily interested in 'open-*beginning*', but rather in open-*ended* making, thereby not ignoring the baggage but finding ways in which one might reduce its influence on the making process.

Despite the lack of a clear-cut delineation of the final work, the contextual artist *does* embark on the making. Apparently, they do know how to begin the journey without knowing to where. Hence, I was interested to find out what strategies allow them to do so and how these might usefully transpose to the field of sustainable development and social learning.

My conversations with artists showed how they conceive open-endedness in their work, and how they manage it fruitfully to make art. Through the interviews a range of different forms of open-endedness emerged. Each art piece discussed in this chapter maps out differently along the three continuums that characterize contextual practice, and thereby demonstrate different types of open-endedness.

7.2 Making the piece that the place lets you make

This section discusses open-endedness dependent on the first characteristic of contextual practice. I will demonstrate that there is a cyclical relationship between open-endedness and site-specificity. Being site-specific automatically implies that a process is open-ended. From this it follows that site-specificity can be used as a means to produce a more open-ended process. I will illustrate this proposition by drawing from the work of In Situ, *Back on Track* (2008) by Kilter Theatre and *House* (1998) by Wilson and Wilson.

7.2.1 Balancing between the artistic vision and the reality of a site

Most of In Situ's work does not emanate entirely from a site but starts with a script or text (e.g. King Lear, Macbeth) that is often first rehearsed inside and then taken outdoors to be fitted in the place they have chosen to work. The pieces are 'tweaked' according to the site-specifics in the second half of the making process, and could therefore be said to be site-*sympathetic* rather than specific. Although less open-ended than site-specific work (according to the proposed model of contextual practice), the

devising process that director Spaul follows usefully reveals how open-endedness 'functions' in relation to the specifics of a site.

A determining factor in the process of bringing the indoor piece outdoors, and adjusting it in congruence with the features of that open-air location is, as Spaul describes it, finding the route that the performance will end up following. By exploring the site and finding interesting places within it (like a big tree trunk, an open space or good acoustics) he will gradually piece together a possible route. Herein, he balances his original ideas and artistic preconceptions against what the reality of the site allows him to do. For example, the on-site location of the places that he perceives as artistically interesting and how these fit certain scenes will determine the sequence of the story. To do so he might have to compromise his conception by, for example, changing the order of the story so that it fits with the sequence in which the chosen locations occur on a certain route. According to Spaul, working outside is about how a text or narrative "maps onto the space and find[ing] the most interesting or coherent way in which that could happen". Thus the work emerges from a dialogue between on the one hand the artistic conception of the maker (the artistic map), and on the other hand the practicalities of a site, i.e. what a site offers.

Caroline Garland and Olly Langdon from Kilter Theatre, whose work seems more site-specific as they never work with pre-made scripts, equally describe a phase in the devising process in which they balance practical and artistic considerations. They describe that they had to 'reroute' the making of their piece *Back on Track*. This show was specific to the old Bath to Bristol Railway Path, with the audience travelling by bicycle and the performance happening along the way. Because the cycle track is linear and the audience had to return to where they had started, Kilter realised that it was unfeasible to reach a certain location where they had wanted to finish. This shows that, although the work is site-specific they did have some sort of artistic conception of 'what works' or 'what is interesting', which subsequently clashed with the actual reality of the site. Consequently, they had to rethink their preconception of the piece. During our interview Garland uses the teapot and my elbow that were both resting on the table as props to explain that in changing location they had to consider the following:

[Pointing at the teapot] what does it do being next to the teapot? How is it going to change when I wanted it to be next to the elbow? I am now next to the teapot and, ok, we'll do it, and it will change; it will be about the teapot and not about the elbow.

Rethinking the route, and thereby relocating the finale, subsequently, also changed the artistic conception and content of the piece. This is of course exactly what makes a piece site-specific. So committing oneself to be site-specific means that one has to be willing and able to change one's preconceptions according to whatever reality arises on site.

The fact that they are, in a way, 'subjected to' the reality of a site, is in Garland and Langdon's opinion, at once freeing and constricting. It is liberating because they are not confined to the limited spectrum of possibilities of a theatre building or stage (Pearson 2010), and restricting because they cannot, like on stage, simulate a context or pretend that something is what it is not. However, the fact that a place is exactly that and nothing else is what drives their passion for site-specific work. The place has something to tell and add to the performance; it offers a context that they cannot recreate if it were not for being there. This is why they take audience to these places: "it is always for a reason that we have taken them there, not just because the theatre wasn't available". And therefore, as Langdon puts it, "it is always good if there is a teapot in the path, because there is a teapot in the path and that is why we brought them there".

Louise Ann Wilson gives a similar description of the site-specific making process. During the devising of her piece *House* the architect told the makers that, due to the instability of the floor, they could only have 5 audience members at once in any room. As a result they had to divide the audience, which then determined the shape of the piece, the journey of the performance and the way the narrative was revealed to the audience. Hence, she says that often her work emerges from a "really nice interplay of what the place lets you do, and what you then want to or can do." Consequently, the artist creates as Wilson put it, "a piece that the place lets you make".

7.2.1 Committing to what is there

These interviews demonstrate that site-specific work still involves some artistic conception by the maker. These preconceived ideas are mapped onto or tested against the practicalities of the site, and are subsequently adapted to fit what is there. Wilkie describes the site-specific making process as 'a means of dealing with the perceived shortcomings of a site' (2002: 156). The fact that she refers to 'perceived shortcomings' indeed shows that the maker had a preconception of the conditions on site, otherwise they would not turn out to be shortcomings.

This implies that the site-specific devising process is open-ended, but does not have an open beginning. The work emerges from being aware of the characteristics of a place and subsequently responding to them, both in a practical and artistic sense –whilst being willing to let go of one’s preconceptions if they prove to be unhelpful. The artist attends and responds to what is there, while at the same time stretching the site’s potential by having a certain artistic vision; e.g. a narrative that she maps and remaps onto the place in order to find an exciting fit. The piece in that sense emerges from finding a balance between artistic and practical considerations: between preconceived ideas and reality. So whether a process is open-ended or not relies on the extent to which an artist is ready to adapt her preconceptions according to what she finds on site.

This proposition can also be reversed. The willingness to adjust these preconceived ideas according to the practicalities of a site is exactly what drives the open-ended making-process. The realities of the site form, as Langdon puts it, the “supports around which you build your work”. They literally frame the work. In committing to work at and with a specific location, the practitioner can use the place-specific characteristics and conditions as building blocks for the making process. The site offers a limited set of options that helpfully contain the possibilities of what you can make. Open-endedness lies in committing to a context (a place, situation or community), attending to it and consequently allowing its features to determine the devising process.

This insight about the ‘operation’ of site-specific practice usefully transposes to the realm of sustainable development and social learning. The artistic practices described above illustrate what an alternative to a technocratic approach might look like. In the latter, a ‘sustainable solution’ arrives in the form of a blueprint designed externally and with the intent to be implemented in a wide range of places and conditions. Although ‘the’ solution might be designed in a manner that suggests that all of these sites are the same, the socio-environmental specifics of each place will be different. Assuming universality has had adverse consequences in the past, as I showed in Chapter 3, following Wynne (1996) I explained how giving preference to universal knowledge at the cost of local, contextual knowledge often leads to the implementation of the wrong measures. After Van der Ploeg (1993) I argued that a lot of technocratic solutions, which are designed through little engagement with the locality in which they are to be implemented, only ‘work’ when the local conditions are adapted. So rather than the solution fitting the context, the local, existent conditions of a certain place have to be ‘tweaked’ to make the imported global solution work.

The site-specific practices show that there are ways in which one can generate solutions that are context-specific instead of context-generic. The context-responsive ways in which site-specific artists work offer valuable clues about how to approach sustainable development in a non-technocratic way. That is, carefully balancing what the site allows you to do and what you want it do to and not seeing the practical features of a site as impediments to the making process but rather as opportunities and building blocks that inform the creation.

Nachmanovitch has described such a process as *'bricolage'*: 'making do with the material at hand' (1990: 86). Instead of wishing one had something else and creating something for a situation that is not really there, the maker is resourceful with what is available. Thereby eventually 'pulling a large amount of rabbit from a small amount of hat' (ibid.). Such bricolage does not just apply to the devising phase but extends into the execution of the final piece as well. This generates another type of open-endedness, which will be the topic of the next section.

7.2 The idea is not the thing

This second category of open-endedness comes forth from the third factor that characterizes contextual work: the extent to which the piece is dependent on the conditions at the time and place of performance. In contextual work the performance of a piece takes place under the influence of what Wilkie calls 'the distractions of the everyday' (2002: 155), i.e. weather, light conditions, traffic, passers-by, etc. These real world elements, which to a large extent are uncontrollable and unpredictable, will shape the final piece. (Pearson 2010) As a result, the outline, vision or concept of the piece is not 'final' until it is actually realised. The piece comes forth from the alchemy between the envisioned artistic piece of the maker as a result of the devising process and whatever presents itself at the moment and place of performance. This process is open-ended in the classic understanding of the term: in dealing with inherently unpredictable systems, the artist has to manage an unsolvable gap in knowledge as she cannot predict how certain planned elements are going to pan out.

However, like the open-endedness in the devising process where the artist is 'subjected to' the particularities of a place, the sense of losing control during the actual performance of a piece is (mostly) not regarded as detrimental. The cases below will explain why.

7.2.1 Losing control and getting lost

The interviews showed that a lot of pieces cannot be usefully rehearsed in situ. Either because they cannot be rehearsed at all as the performance sites are too remote; or because the conditions under which the piece is to be performed are so dynamic and unpredictable that a rehearsal is simply not that helpful. Louise Ann Wilson in referring to *Fissure* (2011), a three-day walking performance that traced the auto-biographical story of Wilson's grief about her sister who died of a brain tumour, explains that some sequences were never rehearsed in situ as the performance places were simply too hard to get to. The same goes for Simon Whitehead who in the creation of *The Land Journey* did walk certain parts of the route, but never walked the route as a whole, and more importantly, never in the company of the group of people that was present at the final performance of the walk (the actual 5-day walk that is). Subsequently, as these two performances were one-offs and never rehearsed the devising process starts to overlap with the performance of the piece.

In the same manner a lot of practices, even if they are performed various times, are unique events and therefore fairly 'unrehearsable'. This is due to the influence of unpredictable factors at the time of performance, such as weather conditions or the behaviour of the audience. *Fissure*, for example, was devised to culminate in the ascent of Ingleborough Mountain. The mountain represented a lump in the landscape that, like a brain tumour, does not allow water to flow through it, but only around it. For two days the mountain had been on the horizon, with the group approaching and circling it, and the third day they would actually ascend it. However, on the day itself the weather turned out to be so poor that it was too dangerous for the group to make the ascent. Wilson describes that she was so determined to get up the mountain that she initially ignored the advice of the assistant producer not to go there. However, during the ascent she too realised that it was not safe to keep on going, and as she says "at some point even my desire to get there needed to end".

They turned back, which led the piece to end in a different place and way than Louise had envisioned. Yet, looking back at it Louise realised that this event –the fact that the finale could not be realised– actually became symbolic of the bigger story that the piece was aiming to tell: "that life will just not let you take the route that you want to go onto". In that way the unforeseen, unpredictable weather conditions became an integral part of the story and the piece. Moreover, as Louise now narrates it, they generated a version of the piece that was 'better' than the planned one. As they arrived back at the village where they had started from, a naming service was happening. From

all over the area, children were gathering with their lambs to get them named. And so: “it was all full of hope”, Wilson says. “So in a funny way it was the right place to end. Probably better than the top.”

A similar mechanism is at work in another work by Wilson. In reference to the piece *Jack Scout* (2010) in which small groups of people were taken around an area, she says: “Every single show was so different, you can tell with those intimate different groups, [every audience] is completely different, depending on how they behave among themselves”. So in this case, because these contextual performances assume a different relationship between actors and spectators, the piece only comes into existence when it is actually performed with an audience. Hence, the piece, besides being context-dependent, becomes *spectator-driven*.

Clear examples of such open-ended, spectator-driven work are the pieces of soundartist and composer Duncan Speakman. He describes how the work of his company *Circumstance*, is almost entirely audience-dependent. These pieces are mainly audio-based and they often work through a *subtle mob* principle, which like a *flash mob* takes place in public space and involves the assembling of a group of people that performs an act (everyday or more artistic) for a brief time, after which they disperse again. Unlike a flash mob, however, *subtle mobs* aim to remain invisible for the people that are not involved in the staging of it. The participants are part of a cinematic experience that they perceive through headphones. The audiotrack, devised by *Circumstance*, weaves a narrative into the world around the participants with the surroundings becoming a stage and each of the participating audience members (often unwittingly) taking a role on that stage. So, while nobody else really notices, for the participants, ‘everywhere they look the stories come alive in the world around them’ (productofcircumstance.com n.d.). The company composes the track and decides on the parameter of the ‘stage’; but how people subsequently listen to the piece, interact with it and with each other, is out of their hands. Hence the piece is owned by the audience: “they run it, they put it on, they decide to turn up and listen, or not”.

Speakman explains that as a company they are scared of losing control, but at the same time enjoy handing it over. The way I understand this is that they are apprehensive about the moment that they cannot direct its outcome anymore. Simultaneously however, this is also when the piece comes into being, exactly because they hand over the control of the outcome to something bigger than themselves: the audience and everyday distractions of the real world. Were they to keep the control, and not allow the audience to own it and determine its eventual shape, then it would not be

the piece that they intend to make. So paradoxically, to make what they envision they have to lose the control over making it.

Many of the other artists I have talked to confirm this mix of apprehension and excitement over the extent to which they control the piece. Wilson for example admits that she has sleepless nights as a consequence of not knowing what will *really* happen during the performance. It appears however that the reason why artists work contextually is exactly because the loss of control due to contingent and unpredictable factors offer unforeseen opportunities that enrich the work. Contingency thereby becomes a welcome ingredient in the making, generating outcomes that the artist could not have imagined or planned.

Solnit also promotes the action of losing control. In order to find the thing that is totally unknown one has to get lost. After Walter Benjamin she distinguishes between not finding one's way and being lost. The latter is a voluptuous surrender; a state of being 'utterly immersed in what is present so that its surroundings fade away' (Solnit 2006: 6). She worries that nowadays people hardly allow themselves to get lost. Therefore, people do not know what to do when they *do* get lost. To find one's way one has to be proficient in the art of 'reading the language of earth itself': attending to the weather, landmarks along the way, reading the sun and looking back to see the landscape the way it looks when one returns.

Not finding one's way conversely refers to having clear directions but being unable to find them. That is, when we know where we want to end up and we realise we are not getting there, we say 'I am lost'. However, if there is no end point, nowhere specific to arrive at, then there is nothing to be found and thus nothing to lose either. Solnit describes how explorers were always lost because 'they never expected to know exactly where they were' (2006: 14). Hence, there is an art in allowing oneself to enter, remain in the unknown and cherish being there, having no endpoint to arrive at or pre-determined direction to follow. Solnit then argues that in order to get lost one has to allow oneself to *lose control* (ibid. 14).

Van Boeckel introduces a differentiation between control and surrender, and argues that an artful learning process (like AEE, see also 2.2.7) partly relies on a certain degree of control-loss. He distinguishes the 'subcontrast' between which a process might move. These are respectively, 'the pairs of purposiveness and open-endedness; of 'receptive undergoing of' versus 'creative acting upon' the world'; and of static and dynamic quality (Van Boeckel 2013: 105). The first covers the extent to which an artist or educator plans a process with a pre-determined goal in mind, or reversely leaves it

open without rationally planning beforehand what the learners/ participants should have attained by the end of the process. Like Solnit, he considers art as a doorway into such open-endedness and thus the unknown. He quotes Bateson, who says that a mere purposive rationality without art (among a few other phenomena), leads to a destruction of life, as art essentially exists of an interlocking circuit of contingencies, which we can only attend to through an open-ended disposition.

After Dewey, he describes that in an AEE process an educator moves between a 'receptive undergoing of' versus 'creative acting upon' the world. Dewey observes that every experience comes about through an interaction between the live creature and an aspect of its environment. In this encounter the creature undergoes something of that aspect (e.g. the weight of a stone, its texture) and then acts actively upon the properties thus undergone. After which the creature is receptive again to undergo the aspect, etc. In a similar fashion an artful process is a constant oscillation between receiving and active doing as a response to the reception, and this sometimes includes doing nothing or a state of 'active passiveness', like already mentioned in Chapter 5.

The last contrast refers to the difference between static (Apollonian) and dynamic (Dionysian) quality in an art-making process. After Nietzsche and Pirsig, Van Boeckel is of the opinion that the one quality cannot exist without the other and life in general constantly moves between the two extremes. Relying on a dynamic quality, in which boundless movement dominates, would result in too much chaos and ephemerality. For things to settle, persevere and hence exist there need to be moments of order, structure and stability. However, too much static quality leads to stagnation, an ossification and hence destruction of life. 'Without dynamic quality the organism cannot grow, and without static quality the organism cannot last' (van Boeckel 2013:112).

7.2.2 Letting the world happen

This thesis argues that the way site-specific or spectator driven practice allows for contingencies to determine the work, and thereby the artists to loose control serves as a model for an educator to allow herself to walk this tightrope and thereby allowing the unknown. Soundartist Duncan Speakman succinctly terms this process as "leaving a space for the world to happen". He narrates with reference to a piece that was performed in an office block while the audience sat on the roof of a building opposite to it, following the actions of the characters through binoculars while listening to an accompanying soundtrack on headphones (*Contains Violence*, Fuel theatre, 2008):

There was a pub on the street down below, and at one point during the show a fight broke out in that pub and everyone just started watching that; it was much more interesting than the show we were watching. And it was this kind of moment that they had never let any space in the show for the world to happen. It was all about what happened in their staging of it.

Hence, he says: “you’ve got to leave space for the world to happen. Otherwise the piece will end up fighting with the world and the world usually wins.” There is no point in trying to fight or control, the -what Wylkie (2002) calls- ‘distractions of the everyday’, i.e. forces in the real world are inherently uncontrollable and unforeseeable; because they will prevail and remain uncontrollable anyway. Moreover, allowing these factors to become part of whatever one is making, might actually enrich the creation: they might take the piece beyond what the artist could have planned for.

This insight applies to the field of sustainable development and social learning in various ways. As I explained in Chapter 3 the process of finding solutions for contemporary sustainability challenges takes place in what has been called a post-normal setting. Among other things this implies that the science and experimentation takes place in the real world: in society, on plots among farmer’s fields, in the real sea, etc. This, as I argued, has various implications, one of them being the fact that the consequences of this ‘direct experimentation’ are *irreversible*: the presumed trials are essentially not a recce, but the real thing. Whatever happens *happens*, and however powerful we might regard ourselves as the human species (or researchers), there will always be an unbridgeable gap of knowledge that makes operations inherently unpredictable and unreliable.

Szerszynski also refers to this -what he calls- ‘boundaryless laboratory’ in which experiments are not taking place isolated from society and the natural world (Szerszynski 2005: 188). In contrast to the classic experimental setting, which attempts to ‘isolate the pure, replicable scientific fact underlying the messy, muddy contingency of the world’ (ibid. 189), the post-normal setting shows that messy contingency is inseparably part of pure scientific fact. In the case that Szerszynski describes, the contingency that ‘messed up’ the clean and assumingly replicable scientific experiment, were activists who destroyed a GMO test field, which was set to test yields of a genetically modified corn variety. As a consequence, the protesters unwittingly became part of the experiment.

Szerszynski argues that 'knowing nature thus becomes much more provisional: nature comes to be known not as a fabricated object is known, but as we know a co-participant in a dialogical performance' (Szerszynski 2005: 188). Our environment is not something that we can separate and act upon, instead it is always part of what we do. Thus, in research we do not investigate it as a object on its own, but always in relation to us: as a continuous performance of mutual adjustment between us, whatever we are testing and the contingencies of the environment in which it is tested (ibid. 189).

As we have seen in the examples above, some contextual practice occurs in a very similar fashion. But rather than avoiding the unforeseeable circumstances or trying to minimize the messy contingencies, artists practicing in this field in many cases will use them to their advantage. Part of their work comes from receptive undergoing of the world and walking the tightrope between control and loss of control.

Taking this insight into the realm of sustainable development tells us that rather than fighting the world by exercising control and forcefully implementing one's vision onto it, a post-normal approach would be to integrate it as part of or within that vision, thereby accepting that reality is contingent and allowing these 'real world' elements to seep through whatever one is making. The idea of 'leaving a space' echoes ideas espoused in 5.2.4: creating a 'planned unplanned' space, through which the 'authority' partly or temporarily lets go of their control over the process.

This notion also involves recognition of the fact that real-world elements might actually influence the practice beneficially. Instead of just seeing them as nuisances in what would have otherwise been a tidy process, they mess up and disturb what we had planned, which takes us somewhere that we could never have planned for. As a consequence of the disruption, we venture into the realm of the unknown unknowns. They are hence necessary ingredients in the process of keeping things alive and dynamic.

This also demonstrates that whatever we do (as contextual artists, post-normal researchers or community facilitators) cannot be seen as separated from the context. Contextual practice reminds us that things never exist 'on their own', objectively separated from their surroundings in a Cartesian-like fashion. As McLucas contends:

In a real site there is very rarely the plain backdrop favoured by most modernist art forms – the white gallery for showing pictures, the black theatre for creating clear outlines. The removal of clutter and the suggestion, through framing, that events and objects may be separable and visible in high contrast to each other against their bleached out context, is a difficult strategy to sustain in a contemporary cultural landscape (McLucas in Pearson 2010: 117).

The same applies for practices (research, learning, solution-finding) conducted in a post-normal setting. It is tempting to seek clarity by removing the clutter of the world from the thing one wants to know, through a process of what McLucas calls, 'bleaching out the context', i.e. separation, extraction, objectivity and detachment. However, once extracted, the framed picture of the object ceases to truthfully represent reality, as the thing exists *within* that clutter. Hence the move from studio to situation (see 2.2), from the framed traditional theatre to real sites, resembles the shift from a conventional understanding of science as detached and separated from processes of life and living to the acknowledged situated position of post-normal science. So again, how contextual artists deal with, utilize and appreciate the fact that they are operating in the real world, might be of value to the post-normal paradigm and practices that flow from it like social learning.

7.2.3 The map is not the territory

The ideas above tie in with the process of balancing artistic preconceptions of a production with the practical reality of a site, as I explained in the first section of this chapter. It also reinforces the idea that one should treat something the way it is, and not as something you wish it to be. It emphasises the importance of being prepared to reroute if one's preconceptions do not prove to fit with what is there. And it confirms Nachmanovich's idea of 'bricolage': the notion that the art of something lies in making do with what is at hand. Furthermore, Nachmanovitz contends that:

There is a gigantic difference between the project we imagine doing or plan to do and the ones we actually do. It is like the difference between a fantasized romance and one in which we actually encounter another human being with all his or her complexities. Everyone knows this, yet we are inevitably taken aback by the effort and patience needed in the realization. A person may have great creative proclivities, but there is no creativity unless creations actually come into existence. (1990: 66)

Gregg Whelan from Lone Twin makes a similar point:

Many times you set out doing one thing, and you end up doing another. But that is like the nature; that is sort of the basic nature of it, I think. This is a real simple thing: the idea is not the doing of it, so you can have an idea, but until you are doing it on the ground, ... you don't know what it is, really. ... it is empirically not, the idea is not the thing. That's what I mean. So the thing will have all sorts of qualities and surprises that the idea didn't.

The notion that ‘the idea is not the thing’ was the theme of Simon Whitehead’s *The Land Journey*. The walk through the contingent landscape served as a metaphor for the concept of open-endedness in relation to sustainable development. Whitehead’s starting point for *The Land Journey* was a map on which he drew two elliptical circles, one towards the south of the Centre for Alternative Technology and the other going northwards. The piece consisted in the act of two groups walking those ellipses in the terrain. As Whitehead conceived, the practice of walking the planned route in the landscape would change the map-drawn ellipses, because the preconceived route would interact with the contingencies of the landscape. For example, at many places the path was wiped out because it intersected with a gas pipe that was being built. As a result, the mountain leader was forced to find another path. By redirecting, we would retrace our steps and skip parts of the planned route. In other words, based on the reality of the site, we literally rerouted the conceived artistic rendition of the walk, balancing Whitehead’s vision and the reality –or Wilkie’s ‘perceived shortcomings’– of the site, thereby recreating the form of the initial two ellipses.

As well as the encounter with the pipeline stirring meaningful conversations about fossil fuels among the walkers, the act of rerouting lay at the core of the artwork. For Whitehead the art in *The Land Journey* consisted in the process of walking the *idea* of two map-drawn ellipses in, or *into*, reality, and acknowledging that the translation from map to landscape would inevitably change the shape of those ellipses. Without us walking the planned route, the two elliptical circles would have existed only in theory. In order to come into being, the route had to be walked, with the consequence that it interacted with the contingencies of the time, site and humans involved. By walking these two map-drawn ellipses changed their original shape in relation to the context in which they were animated. Hence “the idea is not the thing” as Whelan also asserts.

The walk can therefore be seen as a practice in bricolage, which allows one to –as Whitehead proposes– meet the future “with a sense of contingency and improvisation”. And, as Nachmanovitz’s quote above also shows, art lies in doing exactly that: walking an idea into existence.

This practice concerns a process very similar to the ones described earlier: in realizing the idea of something, the artist’s vision for a place and piece intermingle with the actualities of the reality in question. The outcome (or final piece) is a mix between these two forces: what you want a place to do, and what the place allows you to do. In the case of Whitehead’s piece this rendered a very literal reading of Korzybski’s (1994/1933) dictum that ‘the map is not the territory’ (and not quite the way Korzybski

meant it): i.e. the idea, theory or vision of something does not equate its shape in the actual execution of it.

This point holds a key to understanding sustainable development and open-endedness. As politicians, visionaries, activists, or the human species in general, we might have visions of what a sustainable future could be –i.e. we have drawn a shape on a map– but until we start animating the plan, it essentially does not exist. Whilst realizing the route we both honour the plan and acknowledge that what we drew is only a line on a map; it is bound to interact with what is there (people and place).

From my experience in the field of learning for sustainable development or in fact academia in general (see also the discussion on ‘cognitionism’ on several places throughout this thesis), I would argue that the importance of actual doing besides mere theorizing *about* doing is somewhat lost. In line with Conquergood’s proposition practical, lived, embodied ways of knowing are wrongly regarded as inferior, the abstracted theoretical conception theory of sustainable development seems to be more prevalent than the actual experiential, practical and embodied realization of it.

This thesis therefore argues that like the art lying in the actual execution of something, sustainable development only exists when it is actually ‘done’. Subsequently, the meaning of the concept also rests in its actual execution. There is no point in pontificating what it might mean before or without doing, because only through the interaction with and in the real world and all its contingencies and complexities can we say, “this is sustainable development”. Without its performance the realization essentially does not exist, it is only an idea, a route drawn on a map. And in that performative interpretation of sustainable development, the process becomes like the practice of improvisation; it is about ‘truthfully responding to changing circumstances, and about generating meaning out of contextual accidents’ (Frost and Yarrow 2007: 5).

7.3 The Iceberg

In the above I have presented two interrelated ways in which open-endedness might be facilitated. First, by using the features and parameters of a context as the building blocks for the making. And second, allowing the contingencies of a context to interrupt a design, thus losing control and allowing space for the unforeseen. Thereby also acknowledging that something only ‘is’ when it is executed in reality, and that the

features of that real context are therefore useful guides that inform the making. This section will present a third means to facilitate open-endedness, as it emerged through the interviews with artists.

7.3.1 Simple scores and red herrings

The third manifestation boils down to disregarding the destination and focussing on the journey instead. Choreographer Nigel Stewart for example describes how his work is strongly influenced by Eugenio Barba³⁰ who stated that “the important thing is to know how to drive not where you are driving to”. Because, Stewart asserts, it is only through having confidence in method and following that process through that the indefinable starts happening: method gives rise to “those leaps of the imagination that one can never even plan for, but arise unselfconsciously”.

Attending to the process and not the outcome or expectation is a means to facilitate open-endedness. This partly relates back to the idea that the art lies in the starting, making and doing of something; a proposition echoed in Bottoms’ discussion of the theatre company *Goat Island*, whose work emerges through a sequence of practices and experiments. They say the following about the beginning of a devising process: ‘We had no idea where this would lead us, or when it would lead us there. We simply agreed to begin, and then went out for Thanksgiving dinner.’ (Bottoms and Goulis 2007: 128)

The method could be as simple as setting oneself one rule or task –a score– through which things start to happen. Lone Twin for example, in *The Days of the Sledgehammer Have Gone* (1999-2005) would create an evening show on the basis of the material that they gathered during the day, by following one straightforward rule. They were commissioned to do the piece in different cities, and each time they would find the nearest source of water (a river, lake or the sea) and draw a straight line from the place of performance to this source of water. The day was then spent walking that line to collect an amount of water equivalent to their body weight. If the source was far away and they could only make that journey once, they would have to carry and fill a huge barrel; was it close by, then they would walk that line many times, collecting little amounts of water on each run. The score of drawing a line and walking it would then generate material specific to that site, as the encounters with places and people along that line would feed the performance.

³⁰ Italian theatre director based in Denmark, founder of the Odin Theatre and the International School of Theatre Anthropology.

The line, walking and fetching were a means to facilitate little or big things to happen, which found their way into the evening performance; e.g. conversations that ensued from people asking what they were doing were relayed in the show. So it was not necessarily about the line and the act of fetching water, the practice of walking the line was, as Whelan says, “an excuse for something else to happen”.

I followed a similar method in *Do the Hills First*. The initial purpose of this walking project was to follow a postman. That is, we set ourselves the simple task ‘to walk with a postman’. And while we initially thought we would make a piece about Paul and his mail delivery, the score led us past houses and their residents, opened doors into their homes and revealed stories about their lives. This then exposed a complex meta-narrative, which became the theme of the final performance.

Very soon we realised that we had approached Royal Mail in a time of great turbulence. Due to ever increasing costs and declining demands (i.e. less mail) they were forced to make their delivery system more efficient by changing the way the postmen deliver the mail. This meant among other things that Paul would have less time to deliver his mail and that his route was going to be different. Although we first perceived these changes as detrimental to our process, the eventual soundwalk explored and embodied these changes, making them the core of the piece. It followed the section of Paul’s delivery route that had not changed over the course of the implemented innovations; it discussed the decline in mail, due to changes in the way people communicate; it explored the theme of changes in Penryn in general; it showed how the changes in the delivery would affect the lives of the people along the route; and embodied these themes through the audio, walking and the finale which consisted in the audience writing a letter to someone they had lost touch with (in a café that used to be the vegetable shop of one of the ladies on the recording).

Extrapolating both examples, the method relies on finding a means or excuse to start the doing, which then opens up avenues and themes that the work becomes about. The scores (to fetch water or walk with a postmen) are ‘red herrings’ that allow the practitioner to discover things they could not have conceived before they started because it only emerged through the practice. Thereby leading the process away from the starting point into something related albeit different: the outcome consists in the accumulation of all the steps that were taken to get there.

7.3.2 The promise of a boat

In some cases, as appears from the interviews, the method of making things happen is in fact formulated as a perceived outcome. Seemingly in opposition to the strategy mentioned above, in which practitioners refrain from formulating an outcome and entirely focus on the process, this strategy does include an intention or goal. As argued in 7.1, makers of contextual, open-ended practices in most instances do have some sort of conceptual structure in mind of what they would like to realise. However, it is the *quality* of that structure or the way the intention is framed that determines whether the process is open-ended or instead closes things down.

The best example of an open-ended piece in this context is *The Boat Project* (2012). As part of the 2012 London Olympics Lone Twin created a sailing boat made out of wood collected through a process of public engagement (figures 25-26). They invited people to donate wooden objects that told



Fig. 25 *The Boat Project*

a story: objects that were somehow part of the owners' lives and important to them. The wooden objects were sliced into 2-3mm thick cross-sections and assembled into a state-of-the-art sailing boat, which thereby became a 'seaworthy archive of stories and memories' (theboatproject.com n.d.). Each object has its place in the boat and can be traced in a book, which features the portraits and stories of the donors and also lists the coordinates of each object as it is situated in the boat.

From the very start Lone Twin did have a clear-cut idea of the outcome of the project, namely a seaworthy boat. However, the process leading up to the final tangible manifestation of this idea, allowed space for a huge amount of complexity and open-endedness. Whelan relates:

The little things along the way, that becomes what the project is about. Yeah the boat is great example, we didn't know how it would happen, and we didn't know who would be involved in it. We didn't know how much wood we would need. All these sort of huge questions. But we always did know we were in the business of making a boat from people's stuff.

Hence, the idea of a boat and the building of it, or as Whelan puts it “the promise of the boat”, became the structure within which all sorts of things could happen. “The event and the activity of building a boat” thrust the project forward: it brought people together and provided a framework for social encounter. The sequence and



Fig. 26 The Boat project

content of the donations subsequently built the boat. So they knew that they were making a boat, but what the boat looked like exactly (how many bits of wood, what shape, the stories behind the wood) was not predetermined. As a result the boat became a vessel that metaphorically, visibly and physically incorporated the open-endedness of the process.

Furthermore, as Whelan comments above, the process was flexible enough to incorporate high margins of uncertainty. If they did not get a lot of donations they could simply use bigger bits of the donations that they *did* get. In the same manner, when eventually a huge number of people got involved (Lone Twin received 1200 donations), that was not detrimental to the outcome either, because they simply took smaller bits: “The more stuff we got, the smaller the bits on the boat got, but that allowed us to get lots of people involved in the project”. Hence whatever happens is not value-dependent, (e.g. more is better than less) it just creates a different outcome, but the process is flexible to accommodate anything that comes.

The ‘promise of a boat’, represents various elements that together form a framework essential for ‘successful’ open-endedness. First of all, it offers a straightforward score that stimulates and facilitates the doing and happening (‘we’re going to make a boat’). Secondly, the score provides a structure through which one can build complexity and it ‘allows for the world to happen’, i.e. attracting and accommodating elements one could not have been planned from the start, but which become what the project is about (‘the boat will be made out of wood donated to us by other people’). Furthermore, the process is flexible, and can be adapted according to what happens (‘we can change the size of wood according to the amount of objects we get’). And lastly, it functions as a metaphorical, physical and literal framework for the

accumulated complexity to still be perceptible (the objects are still being visible in the boat, their stories traceable in a book). Consequently, the perceived outcome is more a description of the process than a fixed entity to work towards.

Artist Sue Palmer concurs with me in this understanding of successful open-endedness. She summarizes it as follows:

I think some of the best projects I can think of, are where the outcome is very clear and the project works towards that clarity, knowing what it is going to be, and yet the complexity unfolds from not knowing what it's going to be.

The artist has a clear intention, but at the same time she does not know the exact shape and content of the outcome as this will be determined through the process of making it. Palmer likens the shape of such a process to a “great big fishing net”, in which the driving vision, that promise of something, or invitation to people, is clear and succinct but the journey towards it is dense and big. To illustrate such process she gives the example of *The 100 year Old Band* (2012), in which Palmer invited random people in the street to be part of a cross-generational band, including one person from each decade (biggerhouse.co.uk 2013). The visible outcome of the band was the performance of their one and only song, but the process towards this product allowed for much more than that: conversations with people in the streets, encounters between the band members, the rehearsal process, etc. It was the complexity of these elements that made the piece into what it is, driven forward by the idea of the band.

According to Palmer, the outcome of the project subsequently has the shape of an iceberg. Because, she explains, “you know there is so much underneath that isn't visible, and then the thing that is visible, is tiny”.

7.3.3 Crafting the invitation

Returning to my own practice, and analysing whether and how it was ‘productively’ open-ended raises a final aspect with regard to how open-endedness is navigated. To assess the value of my practice, one of the questions I posed in my interviews with participants of the *Sunday Event* was whether they thought that my practice (the soundwalk, the *Sunday Event*, and my activities in Constantine as a whole) related to sustainable development. (‘Do you think that my project has done something for Transition, resilience or sustainability?’) The members of Transition Constantine

that I spoke to tentatively acknowledged that they did not think my efforts contributed much to their Transition endeavours. Respondent and TC member SB for example says:

I feel, if I am totally honest, that it veered from where you came in, from a Transition perspective; once it went that way to the stories and the history of the community, and in particular the museum, the heritage centre and the Granite Trail [Quarry Project], then it didn't have the kind of resilience focus. (App. 6: 22)

This observation could imply that my project was in fact *too* open-ended to reach a tangible outcome in the field of sustainable development (as SB frames it, 'I *veered from* the topic of village resilience'). At the same time however, one could argue that the fact that my project *did not* attain sustainable development shows the success of my approach, because had I arrived exactly at the objective that I set myself in advance, it would not have been an open-ended process. Predetermining the exact objective of social learning closes down the process, which in turn would refute the open-ended approach that social learning adheres to. Does that then mean that if a practice is open-ended any outcome besides the pre-set objective is a 'good' result? By this token, any failure would be a success, rendering the imperative of sustainable development entirely meaningless. That is not at all useful.

The ideas practices presented above suggest that an open-ended process *can* be driven by a vision or objective. However, as Palmer points out, there are different kinds of goals; the choice of which determines whether a process can be open-ended or not. In relation to *The 100 year Old Band* she explains:

We don't want to change people; we just want to make a band. And also we are inviting those people to be part of what we make, and the interesting thing about it as a structure is that written into it, it has intergenerational, participatory art practice without it being the main agenda. So the project is ... it is almost reversed engineered, you might call it. We never set out to say, "we want to help people to play music and we want to bring older and younger people together." We came from another direction. We said: "wouldn't it be interesting to see a band full of cross-age people, because you never see that." And also "wouldn't it be great to have non-musicians with musicians, or to put strangers in a band, because that would be fun.

In order to be successfully open-ended, the project has to be fuelled and inspired by the vehicle itself –by the drive to make a certain thing or a passion for a certain process– rather than by a set of instrumental goals that this process is supposed to

fulfil³¹. That is, instead of predetermining that the art project ought to reach an abstract goal such as ‘participation, ‘cross-generational interaction’, or ‘transformation towards sustainability’, and design a vehicle that supposedly is going to fulfil that agenda, a process is truly open-ended when it is what Palmer calls ‘reverse engineered’. The artist does something because she really likes the idea of doing exactly that, and consequently –almost by accident– all these other things start to happen, which turn out to fit instrumental outcomes that funders and public services like to see.

This proposition relates to what Jackson presents as two contrasting notions: a ‘targets and outcomes culture’ vs. ‘playful culture’ (2007: 198). The first is based on the idea that there is a direct and causal connection between the action of the practitioner or message of the sender on the one hand, and the behavior or awareness of the participant or receiver on the other. This culture assumes simplicity: action A directly leads to target B. The playful culture, in contrast, supposes a more complex rendition of reality, in which the result of a process is shaped by the interaction between practitioner and participant and (playful) interrelations between whoever is there. Also echoing Rancière (see 3.4) the playful culture does not assume a direct instrumental connection between what the artist/educator puts in, and what the participant gets out. The outcomes cannot be predetermined and attained directly through a planned rational sequence. Instead they are emergent properties: the unforeseen result of a complex interaction between planned and unpredictable elements.

Regarding the concept of sustainable development from the perspective of a playful culture, and linking it to the above ideas on open-endedness, produces two final conclusions about an artful rendition of social learning. First of all, learning and sustainable development in a playful culture is as an emergent process that is driven by an engaging vehicle, score or invitation that generates an interaction-rich environment in which meaning-making can happen. *The promise of a boat* engaged thousands of people to share their story and thereby participate in the creation of a seafaring vessel, because the invitation was clear, thrilling, enticing and accessible. Likewise, the art in social learning lies in finding the right invitation or vehicle that speaks to people’s imagination and entices them to be involved. It is an invitation that is relatively framed and does not sound vague but still allows for a huge spectrum of possible answers/directions.

³¹ This also echoes the way practice-as-research functions. Citing Smith and Dean (2010) I explained that a PaR project starts from the fervent drive to develop a certain piece of practice and see what questions and answers arise from it, instead of formulating a question beforehand that delineates the research (see footnote on page 96).

Secondly, the playful culture informs us that social learning should not strive for sustainable development as a goal in itself. It exists *threaded through* the fabric of whatever is happening, rather than being a focus or outcome on its own. As a consequence, this approach gives meaning to sustainable development in ways that are implicit and possibly ambiguous, yet embodied, and thereby alive exactly because they are implicitly present and woven into in how we live and relate to the world.

However, coming back to Conquergood's criticism of the way in certain modes of knowledge are subjugated, there is a tendency in Western society to ignore such implicit meanings, and favour only the ones that can be spelled out. He argues that

What gets squeezed out by this epistemic violence is the whole realm of complex, finely nuanced meaning that is embodied, tacit, intoned, gestured, improvised, coexperienced, covert – and all the more deeply meaningful because of its refusal to be spelled out. Dominant epistemologies that link knowing with seeing are not attuned to meanings that are masked, camouflaged, indirect, embedded, or hidden in context. (Conquergood 2002: 146)

McGilchrist similarly argues that there is a tendency in Western Society to grasp by making things explicit; including the ones that need to remain opaque in order to be there at all. 'Happiness and fulfilment are' McGilchrist argues, 'by-products of other things, of a focus elsewhere – not the narrow focus of getting and using, but a broader empathic attention' (McGilchrist 2009: 436). Sustainable development, this thesis argues, should be regarded in the same way.

7.4 Summary

Based on the interviews I conducted with artists, this chapter aimed to unpick the elements that constitute open-endedness in their work. I proposed three different 'models' of open-endedness, which could be of use to facilitating social learning for sustainable development. The first is the idea that the place-based features, or 'perceived shortcomings of a site' function as the building blocks for the open-ended making process.

The second model is based on the notion that the piece is not final until it is performed because, as in the devising process, the eventual shape of the performance will be largely dependent on the conditions in which the piece is carried out. And in

order to incorporate that notion, one should leave a space for the world to happen: to let the contingent and unplannable 'real world's' clutter interfere in a constructive manner with whatever one has envisioned.

The third model for open-endedness starts with the idea that the method drives the process. A related approach is that one might have a straightforward and neat goal, but that the process towards that goal involves a great deal of complexity that gives the goal its exact shape and content. This was termed the Iceberg: the top being the outcome, pregnant with a dense and rich process that lies underneath, and sustains it.

Summarizing, we can conclude that from these models it transpires that the artfulness consists in three elements. First, the discussion shows that since the idea is not the thing or the map is not the territory, the art lies in the doing. There is no point in endlessly pontificating about something before any actual practice, as whatever it is one is trying to know, will only take its actual shape in and through the interaction between the idea and the contingent reality of the practice. Hence, the concept of sustainable development does not exist without practice.

Second, the art lies in the intuitive, implicit, tacit and indirect. Hence following an artful approach to sustainable development implies that we acknowledge sustainable development cannot be aimed at directly and instrumentally, as a goal in itself, but has to be implicitly threaded through the fabric of whatever one does. This also means that the meaning of sustainable development exists as an implicit, 'rhizome' of knowing, rather than in explicit, abstracted fragments of knowledge.

Third, the focus lies on the invitation that initiates social learning and generates an 'interaction-rich' process rather than an instrumental outcomes it is supposed to attain. An open-ended process can indeed have an objective. However, for it to be prolific, we need to reassess the kind of objective that is set at the beginning of a project. As the case of the *Boat Project* and Palmer's analysis show, an artful project is driven by an objective that is (formulated as) a vehicle that makes things happen.

8

Conclusion

The contribution to knowledge of this thesis does not necessarily lie in the description of strategies of contextual practices that artists use in order to create their work. Although this knowledge could be of use to readers that would like to develop contextual practice themselves, it rather consists in overlaying the map of these artistic practices (as described in part II) onto the conceptual framework of social learning for sustainable development (part I) and assessing where there is a useful fit. The superimposition has already been integrated in the three chapters leading up to this conclusion; this chapter summarizes the results.

Before doing so however, it is important to remind the reader about the validity of these results and the nature of the knowledge that this research has produced. Following the epistemology presented in Chapter 2 and 4, I do not claim this conclusion to be universal or directly transferable to another context and time. Comparable to the way in which a worldview was, after Heidegger, *unconcealed* as part of the process of locative meaning-making (see page 138), the 'truth' of this conclusion is situated in, and partial to, the opportunities and pathways that emerged during the open-ended practice-as research, as well as dependent on the views of the eleven artists that I chose to interview. There are an infinite number of different constellations of situations, practices and relations that could have emerged, which would have rendered a different conclusion than this one. This means that I do not wish to authoritatively present this 'contribution to knowledge' as a finished, fixed and pre-digested package that can be directly and unchangeably implemented elsewhere. The theory presented here is a source of inspiration to be creatively challenged and adapted in the practice of the reader. Hence, there is a responsibility on the reader's side to acknowledge that the theory has to be put back into practice in order to be or remain true.

The art of meaning-making

Over the course of the thesis I have asked myself a range of interrelated questions. I started with the broad query of how arts might contribute to social learning for sustainable development in communities. Acknowledging that artists are already active in communities addressing sustainability issues through their practice, this question was rephrased to ask: 'what methods and corresponding outcomes that the arts produce are significantly different from what is already done by practitioners working in the field of social learning?'

This thesis argues that artists should not assume that they have the (disciplinary) expertise to come up with and transmit solutions for certain socio-environmental problems. Furthermore, communicating a predetermined (scientific) message through their art is not adequate for two reasons. First of all, because the 'deficit model of communication', which assumes that an awareness about a certain topic automatically leads to a behavioural adaptation to accommodate that knowledge, is flawed (Heddon and Mackey 2012; Sheeran 2002; Hannigan 1995). Second, because such direct communication or transmission of messages is neither art, nor learning. After Jackson and Rancière I argued that something is art, when the piece or process leaves space for the spectator or participant to generate their own meaning.

Social learning is based on a similar constructivist discourse. But where the shift from instrumental, technocratic approaches to participatory, intersubjective and open-ended approaches such as social learning is relatively new, artists can be said to have a longer legacy working in ways that are non-directive and 'goal-searching'. Thus, this thesis reasoned, as facilitators of social learning are reinventing their practices to fit the post-normal paradigm, they could usefully draw from the arts. What artists bring to the field of social learning and community practices for sustainability is the innate potential to generate such meaning-making processes. Their strength lies in creating aesthetic spaces in which an event is mutually created (Heim 2005); in crafting the conditions that allow participants to venture into a metaphorical forest and return with a wealth of experiences and reflections (Rancière 2007); and leave 'blanks between brushstrokes' in which meaning is made (Nicholson 2012).

Locative-meaning making

Subsequently, my second set of questions revolved around how the arts allow for such meaning-making to happen: What artful elements stimulate 'rich' meaning-making? The thesis distinguishes various generative elements and different forms of meaning-making; the most important of which will be discussed below.

First of all, my practice revealed a form of *locative* meaning-making: whatever is discussed becomes rooted in and closely connected to the context and time one is situated in or moving through. Meanings are derived from the here and now rather than from abstracted global, universal and remote terms.

Walking is an important 'tool' in facilitating such learning; it establishes a 'planned unplanned space' in which the assumed authority or initiator of the process takes a back seat and allows for contingencies of the context to determine the direction of the process. As a consequence, the learning becomes rhizomatic: shaped not hierarchically (from the top down), but organically from the inside out, with the form and content shaped by the interaction between the participants and their response to contextual factors.

This informs a social learning process as a mobile forum. Because walking with a group is inherently more chaotic than a seated conversation with a speaker at the front, walking creates a useful strategy to encourage people that would not necessarily speak up, to express their views.

The importance of dissensus and subjectification

Another element core to social learning is the existence of dissensus. Rather than aiming to create a state of homogeneity and artificial harmony, successful learning comes about through 'sensus communis'. Key to this process is that people are together in their apart-ness: they are united through a shared experience, but still encouraged to have different perspectives on and interpretations of that experience. Participants are encouraged to see things from different perspectives, and the practice includes different knowledges besides the mere hegemonic one.

I proposed a range of artful means that allow different knowledges to be unearthed and integrated. The aspect that binds all of these together is the idea that for a practice to be successful, an abstract concept such as sustainable development needs to 'subjectified'. Each of the discussed means attempt to unearth how people perceive an

issue on an emotional and experiential level, thereby connecting rather than detaching them from the issue at hand. Subsequently, it is the inclusion of these situated, embodied, experiential, personal, lived knowledges that need particular attention in order to break the hegemony of objectified and professional voices in a community.

The many examples of contextual practice have shown that it is the arts that have an ear for such personal and local narratives. And the methods artists use to unearth and integrate these knowledges are of urgent need in the field of social learning for sustainability in which academic and objectified ways of knowing still dominate.

Now, this does not mean that we can do away with experts all together. Of course, there is great value in inviting persons with specialised knowledge. However, it is a matter of knowing *when* such knowledge is needed, and avoiding a situation in which what and how these experts know subjugates other knowledges that are equally important.

The subjectified operationalization of sustainable development as described above, also solves the problem of sustainable development being fuzzy and indefinable. Acknowledging that knowledge is always connected to people, a place and their personal experiences of it, means that concepts only and entirely derive their meaning from the context they are in. This then removes the necessity to look for a universal definition that is devoid of situated meaning. Thereby the debate around finding and agreeing on the exact definition of sustainable development becomes superfluous, because the entire notion that any definition can be found is flawed. This produces a way of knowing that is echoed in Ong's description of the oral cultures as opposed to scriptocentric (see page 181) ones:

the oral mind is uninterested in definitions ... Words acquire their meanings only from their always insistent actual habitat, which is not, as in a dictionary, simply other words, but includes also gestures, vocal inflections, facial expressions, and the entire human, existential setting in which the real spoken words always occurs. *Word meanings come continuously out of the present.* (1982: 47, emphasis added)

This notion reinforces the need for learning to occur as *practiced in society*. An artful approach to social learning means that 'learning our way out of unsustainability' does not take place by learning *about* certain abstract concepts, e.g. recounting the universal definition of sustainable development as listed in a textbook. It happens through active engagement with the subject-matter in situ and one's relationship to it, comparable to 'Education as Re-Embedding' as described by Scott Cato and Myers (2011).

Navigating open-endedness

The fact that these dissensus-enabling, meaning-making processes are open-ended, gave rise to final set of questions. Very much in contrast to conventional approaches to sustainable development, which mostly rely on an expert predetermining a solution, these processes require that an educator lets go of the tendency to work towards a preconceived outcome. But if social learning is goal-searching, then what starting-points or building blocks allow one to get going and keep on track? Based on the premise that a lot of contextual practices are open-ended, I asked this question in my interviews with artists and distilled a range of approaches that allow one to navigate open-endedness.

First, this thesis argues that there is a reciprocal relationship between attending to context and open-endedness. Responding to context generates open-endedness. At the same time, to initiate a process that has no clear-cut outcome, one might start by using the parameters and conditions of that context as building blocks for the making. Hence, seeing whatever is there not as impediments to the execution of one's vision, but rather searching for an exciting fit between what one has in mind and whatever the context offers practically, logistically, culturally, etc.

In the same manner, allowing contingencies of the 'real world' to interfere with whatever vision one has of a piece allows what has been called 'a space for the world to happen'. I argued that there is no point in fighting these 'real world' conditions, as they will always be bigger than us. One can only work with them, and ensure that the structure of whatever one is devising allows for those forces to beneficially influence the result. The open-endedness lies in creating a practice that allows such contingencies to enrich the final piece into something that one could not have planned beforehand.

Towards the end of Chapter 7 I mention two final interrelated strategies for open-endedness. The first strategy is one of focussing on process and method: making things happen by, for example, setting oneself a simple rule or score. Alternatively, the rule can be the excuse for other things to start happening: a red herring.

The other approach is one in which the artist does know what the outcome will be, although the exact content and form of the result is shaped through the process of making it. In order to be successful, this process consists in (a) having a straightforward point in the future or a vision that facilitates the happening; (b) an exciting invitation

that builds complexity; (c) a flexible process that allows anything to be incorporated into the process; and (d) the end product is a visible and tangible accumulation of the complexity implicated / folded into the steps that were taken to get there.

Focus on the invitation

From this perspective, and the idea that social learning takes place in a 'play culture' (Jackson 2007), implies that in any open-ended process that engages people in meaning-making around sustainable development, it is crucial to find the right invitation for people to engage in. As I briefly alluded to on page 127, communities of interest hardly readily exist but they congregate around an issue or activity when they are invited in a way that appeals to them. This means that, as an initiator or creator of a learning process, one can still have the abstract, instrumental objective of sustainable development in mind. But in order to engage people, stimulate participation, and indeed 'make things happen', it is key to translate this 'meta-vision' into a straight-forward invitation or activity; one that speaks to the imagination, gathers people, entices and inspires them, and activates a interaction-rich space where meaning is found. The invitation is never transposable, because each neighbourhood, village, place, community is unique and thus requires a different vehicle. Hence the art as part of social learning is to creatively reinvent that bespoke invitation every time one starts working a particular place or community.

Subsequently, it was suggested that art and learning projects should be regarded as 'reverse engineered'. I argued that the 'best' art does not strive to reach an instrumental goal that was set in advance. Similarly, sustainable development might be the overall objective, but this does not necessarily have to be communicated as the goal of the vehicle, because such a broad and abstract concept does not entice and activate a group of people. Instead, the goal exists *threaded through* the practice of doing as a consequence of the invitation.

Certain concepts can only be attained if they are implicitly present in whatever one is doing. Akin to the idea that learning towards sustainable development will not be attained by instrumentally learning the definition of the concept, the ingredient of implicitness entails that sustainable development cannot be strived for as a separate 'thing' or goal in itself.

Further research

This thesis has raised as many new questions as it has produced answers. There are certain things I can relate with partial and situated certainty, whilst other issues remain open, or have become more complex through this research. The issues that this research does not satisfactory answer are material for future research.

A first point to be raised is that although my practice did manage to engage a diverse group of people it does not appear to have fostered more profound, committed and action-oriented participation towards sustainable development. Such participation is a crucial ingredient in the Transition process. The current research took an important first step in that direction; by engaging a wide cross-section of the village it laid the groundwork for more engaged participation. It thereby addressed one of the many elements that are necessary to make change happen on a community-level. However, it seems that both my practices (*Do the Hills First* and *Stones and Water*) failed to generate a level of participation that goes beyond mere expression of perspectives, but reaches a more long-term commitment to generate change in a community. This would require a longitudinal study of community engagement projects such as Transition initiatives, including questions as to how participation is sustained over time.

Second, although pointing out to the importance of different knowledges and perspectives the research does not satisfactory resolve the issue of how to manage processes in which the existence of many different views –or indeed dissensus- becomes a problem. Again, this would require a study in which a social learning process is followed over a longer period in time. This could take the shape of an action research project in which different methods to resolve conflicts are tested.

Such research is especially important in processes that aim to ‘green’ communities. As the situation in Constantine also showed, renewable energy schemes are often very contested. A Transition Towns process often exposes a deep schism between a part of the population that passionately proposes ‘eco-adaptations’ and a section that vehemently opposes such innovations (see also pages 145-146). In Cornwall this schism generally overlaps with middle-class young families and pensioners that have moved from elsewhere and the indigenous working-class population respectively. Jennings (2009) shows that locals feel overpowered by the incomers. Valuable knowledge that they hold about the place and the experience of living there is subjugated in favour of the views and ideas of the newcomers. On the

other hand, from my personal experience of being a middle-class incomer with green ideas, I know that newcomers regard locals as conservative and unaware of the need to build towards more sustainable ways of living.

Apart from the question as to how one can manage and integrate different views on what is sustainable or 'good' for a community, we urgently need to look at the mechanisms that underlie these deep divisions and explore how one might overcome them. Obviously, whilst still respecting diversity and avoiding consensus in favour of the most powerful voices.

A final element that requires further attention is how public services and local authorities adapt to the emerging post-normal, participation paradigm. There seems to be a schism between what public services say they expect of communities and what they in fact allow them to do. The so-called *Big Society*, launched by the Conservative – Lib Dem coalition following the 2010 general election, aimed to 'create a climate that empowers local people and communities, building a big society that will take power away from politicians and give it to people' (gov.uk 2010)³². Although it sounds empowering, democratic and in fact very 'Transition-like', the model has been sharply criticized and shows a lot of flaws. First of all, in practice this aspiration implies that local people commit to *voluntarily* manage and improve their every-day living environment. It is argued that governmental institutions relieve themselves of the responsibility to manage society, and instead put this heavy burden on the shoulders of volunteers and community groups, without giving them (financial) resources to do so effectively (Barker 2012).

As this research shows, 'building a big society' on a community level is not easy indeed. Community engagement is a complex matter, volunteering community members proceed on the basis of trial and error, and the process causes friction and frustration among community members. However, there is very little practical guidance as to how people could initiate and manage processes that allow bottom-up mobilization of their fellow villagers to jointly create this aspired self-managing participative society.

Furthermore, for a project to be truly participatory, the initiator (whether a member of the community or a public service) should be ready to take on board whatever starts emerging through the process of participation. This might mean that pre-set goals, visions and opinions are challenged by the perspectives of the

³² The notion is currently spreading to the continent as well. In the Netherlands it is promoted under the label of 'participatiesamenleving': participation-society, in which individuals become increasingly responsible for services that used to be provided by the government.

participants. As 'real' participation means that processes become increasingly open-ended, the traditional structures in which civic society is organised might prove to be inadequate.

Hence, despite declarations of authorities that citizens should take responsibility to shape the environment they live in, whenever communities grab the opportunity to do so, existing structures only seem to deter them from taking (some of) the power. Whatever they are allowed to shape or determine still has to fit within the general direction and framework set by a governmental body in advance. It is a tokenistic participation that further subjugates what citizens know. The current structure effectively silences and disheartens volunteers that try to have their voice heard and put their free time in mobilizing others, only to realise that whatever they are so passionately trying to determine, has already been decided on.

An essential step in building more sustainable communities through social learning is a shift in political thinking and practice. What this shift looks like and what it requires is material for further research. Based on the findings of this research, I advocate the role of the arts in these 'new politics'. Inventive models of audience participation in theatre, for example, can be useful inspiration for reinventing community consultation processes. The strength of arts to subjectify issues, and the connected, artful ways in which artists engage with communities can be helpful ingredients in translating a written policy document from the sterile environment of a desk to the lived reality of a community.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Kolb's Experiential Learning Model

1. Action, concrete experience, piece of practice, 'a doing'
2. Reflective observation: reviewing what has been done and experienced (What happened? What did I observe, hear and feel?)
3. Abstract conceptualization: making sense of what has happened, interpreting involves interpreting the events and understanding the relationships between them. (What can I derive from it from the observation? What does that mean? How does that relate to other things and to the wider issue that I am looking at? What have I learned? What was the outcome of the practice? How does that differ from the initial aim?)
4. Active experimentation: taking, translating and incorporating what has been learned into a next step of practice (What does the situation need now? What actions should be taken to refine or revise the way the task is to be handled? What do I need to do better/different? What is my (new) aim?)
5. Back to step 1, etc.

(Mobbs adapted from Kolb and Fry 1975)

Appendix 2: Reflection Guide based on the De Bono's Six Thinking Hats

White Hat: Information – facts, data, neutral:

- What are the facts?
- What happened?
- What were the immediate results?
- What did I see?
- What did people say?
- What questions?
- What information was there? And what was missing?
- What is definitely true?
- What do I (or others) believe to be true?

Red Hat: Emotions – feelings, intuition, no explanations, gut

- What/ how did I feel?
 - Before
 - During
 - After
- How did others react emotionally?
- What emotion(s) drove the exercise?
- What perceptions/ biases drove the exercise?
- What did I hope for?
- What did I feared?
- What did/does my intuition tell me?

Black Hat: Bad points judgment – difficulties, risks, flaws.

- What went wrong?
- What did not work?
- What did I do wrong?
- What elements were doomed to fail?
- What misconceptions that informed what I did caused flaws in the execution?
- What was disappointing?
- What should I do different next time?
- What were obstacles and impediments?
- What did not go as I expected?

Yellow Hat: Good points judgment – benefits, harmony, positive, surprises.

- What went right?
- What worked?
- What did I do right?
- What was successful in the design?
- What preconception turned out to be right?
- What went surprisingly and unexpectedly well?
- What should I do next time as well?
- What were openings, helps and accelerators?
- What went exactly as I expected?

Green Hat: Creativity (Green) – lateral, ideas, symbols, alternatives

- Where there any coincidences or serendipitous moments?
- What (title, image, smell, sound...) symbolizes what happened?
- What ideas does the experience evoke?
- What inspired me?
- What seemed to hold energy for me and others?
- Seeds?
- What new ideas does it evoke?
- What are alternatives?
- What hypothesis?

Blue Hat: Thinking - thinking about thinking, summary, focus points

- Summarize.
- Overview. What pattern emerges?
- Distil. What is relevant?
- How does this experience sits in relation to other/former practices?
- What needs attention/focus?
- What are next steps?
- What the role of open-endedness in this practice?

Appendix 3: Published article 'Inviting the unforeseen: a dialogue about art, learning and sustainability'

Appendix 4: Documentation Do the Hills First

Dear Walker,

Penryn, May 2011

Welcome! We are very glad and excited that you came to this audioperformance, which is the result of a lot of walking and talking, many letters and knocking on doors. We started our walk heading at something and then ended up somewhere else, but this is exactly where we should be. We think it tells an important story. So listen, enjoy and Do the Hills First.

Take care,
Helena and Natalia

DO THE HILLS FIRST. CloudCastle Productions, May 2011



ALL READERS
WHERE EVER
ANYWHERE

Dear Reader,

Before you continue, here is some wise postman's advice:

- ... do not irritate any potentially vicious dogs
- ... avoid walking on people's lawn (some might not like it)
- ... look out for hanging flowerpots
- ... take care when crossing the road
- ... keep an eye on passing busses on, especially on West Street
- ... do enjoy the weather
- don't forget to whistle.
- ... and for psychological reasons do the hills first

x Helena and Natalia

DO THE HILLS FIRST. CloudCastle Productions, May 2011



ALL READERS
WHERE EVER
ANYWHERE

Penryn, 6th of April

Dear Natalia,

We started walking with the postman today. He is called Paul. I thought we'd just walk for 2 hours, but it turned out to be 5!!! I was exhausted and he just laughed at me. Fortunately at some point we stopped and had tea at his niece place. It was great, the sun was shining, we were talking to many people. He knows everybody!!

How are you anyway?

Kiss from your postwalker



To: NATALIA

PENRYN

CORNWALL

DO THE HILLS FIRST. CloudCastle Productions, May 2011

Hi Helena!

I am FINE!! It was sooooo great today! I left the letters on Mutton Row inviting people to share their special letters with me. I met Hal and Betha nice couple that told funny stories about different weird and unsend letters. I met Janet who told me a sad story about how she used to have a vegetable shop in penryn that closed down when her husband. It so great to meet all the people; they are so open and welcoming. What are you up to these days? Any news from Paul?

Take care,

Your secret



To: HELENA

FALMOUTH

CORNWALL

DO THE HILLS FIRST. CloudCastle Productions, May 2011

Dear Natalia,

A lot of things happened since the last time we spoke. Paul's route has completely changed. I managed to get hold of him but he seems to be very stressed and busy. There is no longer time to chat to customers... No time for tea and biscuits. His route is bound to change AGAIN. He doesn't know where he will go next. I am bit worried about our project...

Take care my Secret Companion,

Helena



To: NATALIA

PENRYN

CORNWALL

DO THE HILLS FIRST. CloudCastle Productions, May 2011

Dear Helena,
 That's really sad, but lets include that in our audiotour. It can be the theme of our story, how things are changing and nobody has time to talk to each other anymore. How computers are taking over.
 I edited all our material into a 30 minutes long audiotour that leads the audience through Penryn, along Pauls delivery route. Paul is the narrator. They pass the houses of the people that we collected stories from and it ends at the cafeteria the Little Yellow House which used to be Janets vegetable shop.
 Lots of Love,
 Natalia

DO THE HILLS FIRST. CloudCastle Productions, May 2011



To: HELENA
FALMOUTH
CORNWALL

Penryn, 21st of May

Dear Secret,

We did it! While you were down at the start of the tour handing out the MP3 players, I was sitting in front of the Little Yellow House and watched people finish their audio tour. They all seemed to have enjoyed it. Some got lost but we put up more signs along the way. I gave them the last task to write a letter to someone special in their life. You could hear the scratching of pens and rustling of papers in the cafeteria. Paul was there as well with his son, we applauded him and gave him roses - he was the star.

Now it's finished and I'm not sure what to do or where to go; feel strangely empty. Should we go and have some tea at Janet's place? Or chicken soup at wendy's? Oh, but first, there's the letters to deliver.

See you soon,
 Helena

DO THE HILLS FIRST. CloudCastle Productions, May 2011



To: NATALIA
PENRYN
CORNWALL

Appendix 5: Published article 'Locative Meaning-making: and arts-based approach to Learning for Sustainable Development'