

CATALYSTS FOR CHANGE: HOW SOCIO-CULTURAL CENTRES DRIVE JUST SUSTAINABILITY TRANSITIONS

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the crucial role of socio-cultural centres in facilitating Just Sustainability Transitions (JST) through an interdisciplinary approach that integrates environmental, social, economic, and cultural dimensions. Through multiple case studies of nine socio-cultural centres across Europe, the study highlights the significant contributions of these centres in fostering community engagement, environmental education, and cultural innovation. The centres act as dynamic hubs, addressing sustainability at the grassroots level by promoting social cohesion, empowering local communities, and fostering inclusive cultural participation. The analysis of European policies underscores the need for a holistic approach to sustainability that recognizes the vital role of culture. The findings reveal that socio-cultural centres are well-positioned to support JST by leveraging their deep community ties and cultural resources to promote equitable and inclusive transitions.

Keywords: Socio-cultural centres; Just Sustainability Transitions (JST); Community engagement; Environmental education; Cultural innovation

Introduction

As the global community confronts an era of unprecedented shifts and complexity, the processes by which societies undergo transitions are coming to the fore of academic and policy discussions. The world stands at the precipice of various transformations—be it technological advancements, socio-political shifts, or environmental crises. In this evolving landscape, the importance of facilitating transitions that are not only sustainable but also just cannot be overstated. Sustainable and just transitions offer pathways to navigate these crises and promote a more harmonious coexistence between humanity and the planet.

However, the transition into more sustainable futures has long been stagnated and uninspiring. One underlying reason, as argued by numerous scholars, is that the traditional approach to sustainability science has largely been grounded in the natural sciences, overlooking the indispensable insights offered by social sciences, humanities, and the arts (Hopwood, Mellor, & O'Brien, 2005). Moreover, the 'systems approach' advanced by global change research highlights the profound interconnections between various components of the Earth system, including human societies. Transition into a more sustainable future should therefore be seen as an interdisciplinary effort that can generate positive social and environmental change globally (Geels, 2010).

Culture, a potent and often underexplored dimension in this interdisciplinary discourse, can offer an understanding of the nuances of such transitions. Essentially, culture serves as an evolving narrative forged by choices and interactions. It provides the framework wherein individuals find a voice, subcultures develop, and collective societal identity is nurtured (Throsby, 2010).

Central to this cultural milieu are socio-cultural centres. These community players often serve as hubs of artistic expression, social interaction, and community-building. Their potential importance in Just Sustainability Transitions (JST) comes from their capacity to foster dialogue, disseminate knowledge, and empower collective action in the community. Additionally, these centres are often deeply rooted in their locales, utilising local resources and promoting new forms of social exchange. Many of them are linked to networks of similar initiatives, enabling them to exchange experiences and share problems on an international level (García, 2017).

Who are socio-cultural centres?

Even though, one way or another, we are all familiar with cultural centres, we are not always aware of their exact role, the nature of their offerings, and the diversity of their activities. Neither exclusive broadcast venues, nor simply meeting places or creative spaces, cultural centres help strengthen local communities and provide access to culture for all. Increasingly rooted in the territories they serve, cultural centres mobilise populations around shared projects. Together with libraries, youth clubs, museums, theatres, centres of expression and creativity, and associations, they contribute to the exercise of cultural rights by as many people as possible and are part of a lifelong learning process (Kulbok-Latikk, 2022).

In fact, the literature on socio-cultural centres is scarce. Some authors try to position them as platforms, deeply rooted in their communities, whether physically or ideologically within the community's fabric (Policymaker's Guidebook, 2023). The European Network of Cultural Centres (ENCC) in their strategic plan described socio-cultural centres as nestled in the community, operating at the intersection of artistic and social practice, promoting cultural, artistic, and social synergies, reflecting the multifaceted characteristics of their surroundings.

According to ENCC (2023), key features of socio-cultural centres include:

- **Community-Based:** Rooted in their communities, they cater to local residents' needs, often governed by community members and volunteers.
- **Open and Inclusive:** They welcome everyone, ensuring all individuals and groups feel valued and respected.
- **Promotion of Diversity:** They champion social and cultural diversity, offering programmes that reflect all community members' interests.
- **Platform for Innovation and Engagement:** Increasingly, they are hubs for social innovation and civic engagement, supporting community development and social justice.

The terminology around places carrying similar functions varies across Europe, with some linguistic traditions recognising the theme of 'socio-culture' and 'socio-cultural,' such as the German-speaking countries with their "Soziokultur" or the Italian "socio-culturale." In post-Soviet regions, terms like "cultural houses" are used, exemplified by the Polish "dom kulturalny", ukrainian "культурний центр" and the Estonian "rahvamaja." Despite the different names, the idea behind these places is consistent: socio-cultural centres are community spaces designed to bring people together. They promote cultural activities, foster social interactions, and provide educational opportunities, making them accessible and relevant to local residents. Essentially, these centres act as hubs where individuals can engage in various events, cultural forms, and activities that celebrate cultural diversity, enhance community bonds, and support personal growth and learning.

Jenkins' work on media convergence offers insights into how different cultural forms can come together, much like how socio-cultural centres bring together high, popular, and alternative culture. By bridging varied socio-cultural dimensions, socio-cultural centres address and integrate diverse community needs. These centres thrive on fostering both public and civil partnerships, encouraging

participatory governance, and blurring the boundaries between sectors, making them hubs of cooperative efforts.

At their core, socio-cultural centres are dynamic spaces that evolve with their community's needs. They offer avenues for community actors to express and engage. In essence, socio-cultural centres are important community pillars. Given the increasing global crises—environmental, economic, and social—people often turn to their local communities for support and solutions. Socio-cultural centres, with their deep community ties, are well-positioned to facilitate JST. They can address sustainability at the grassroots level, an essential component in the broader framework of sustainability studies that emphasises action across all system levels. This grassroots engagement is crucial for fostering social cohesion, promoting innovation, and empowering individuals to tackle pertinent issues like sustainability

In the light of this unique position of socio-cultural centres, this paper examines various socio-cultural centres within the context of JST through detailed case studies, highlighting the form of their contributions, challenges, and the conditions that support their success. The structure of this paper includes a theoretical framework, a description of the methodology, detailed case studies, a discussion of the findings, an analysis of enabling conditions, and a conclusion summarising the key insights. Additionally, the paper analyses various European policies that mention sustainability transitions, identifying whether and how these policies incorporate cultural aspects.

Theoretical Framework

The notion of sustainability

Sustainability, as defined by the Brundtland Commission (1987), involves meeting present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own. This multifaceted concept includes environmental, economic, social, and cultural dimensions, each of which is essential for achieving holistic sustainability.

- **Environmental Sustainability:** This dimension emphasises responsible interactions with the environment to prevent the depletion or degradation of natural resources, ensuring the long-term well-being of the planet. Key aspects include biodiversity preservation, addressing climate change, reducing pollution, and promoting renewable energy sources (WCED, 1987).
- **Economic Sustainability:** Economic sustainability focuses on fostering a stable economic environment that ensures long-term growth and stability. It involves the efficient and equitable use of resources to ensure that economic practices today do not hinder future opportunities. This includes job creation, equitable distribution of resources, and prudent use of assets to ensure resilience against future economic challenges (Goodland, 1995).
- **Social Sustainability:** Social sustainability is about creating and maintaining a harmonious society that meets the basic needs of its current members without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It underscores the importance of social cohesion, inclusion, equal opportunities, human rights, and overall well-being of individuals within a community (Colantonio, 2009).

This foundational pillars of sustainability, as developed by the Brundtland Commission, provide a comprehensive framework for understanding and addressing the diverse aspects of sustainability. These pillars include environmental, economic, and social dimensions, which are critical for achieving balanced and sustainable development (WCED, 1987). However, the concept of sustainability has evolved to incorporate an additional dimension—cultural sustainability—proposed by Jon Hawkes. Cultural Sustainability, emphasises the importance of cultural heritage, diversity, and identity in achieving sustainability. It advocates for the preservation and promotion of cultural practices, languages, and traditions as integral to sustainable development (Hawkes, 2001). This

dimension also stresses the role of culture in fostering creativity, innovation, and social cohesion, making it essential for holistic sustainability. Incorporating cultural sustainability into the broader sustainability framework addresses several critical gaps:

- **Recognizing the Role of Culture in Social Cohesion:** Cultural practices and heritage play a vital role in shaping community identity and cohesion. By preserving and promoting cultural heritage, communities can maintain their unique identities while fostering mutual respect and understanding (UNESCO, 2003).
- **Promoting Intercultural Dialogue and Diversity:** Cultural sustainability encourages intercultural dialogue and the celebration of diversity, which are essential for peaceful coexistence and social harmony. It supports the idea that diverse cultural expressions contribute to the richness and resilience of societies (Hawkes, 2001).
- **Ensuring Inclusive and Participatory Processes:** Including cultural dimensions in sustainability planning ensures that diverse voices are heard and respected, leading to more inclusive and participatory decision-making processes (Fraser, 2008).

4 Sustainability Pillars

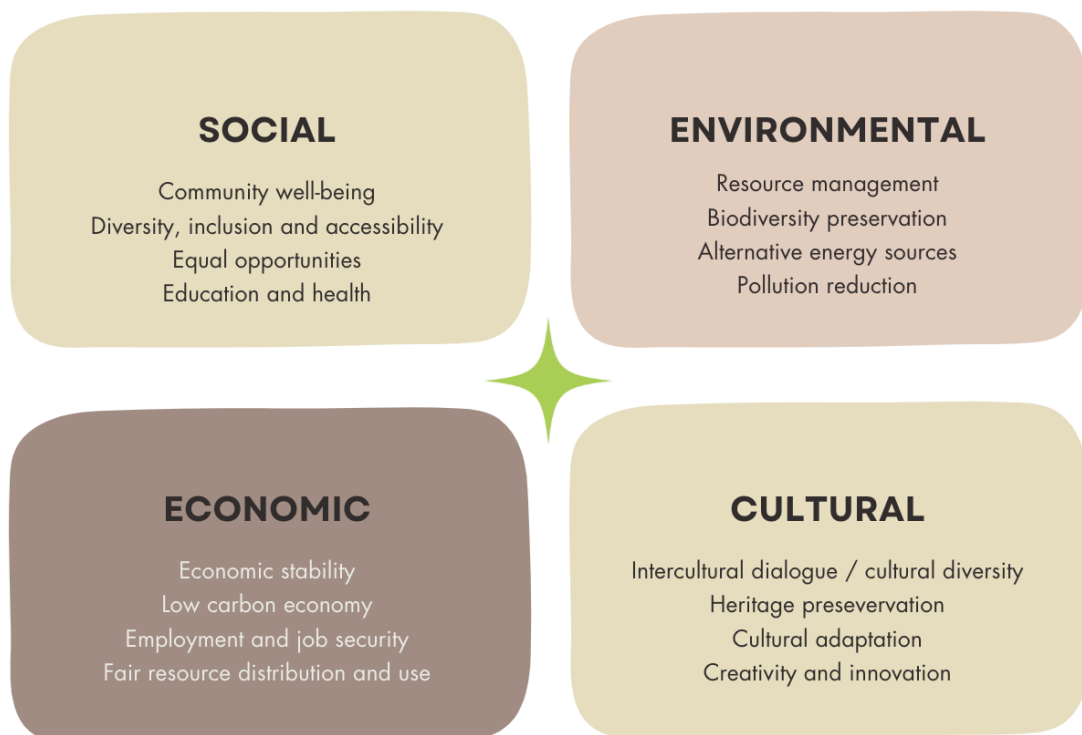


Figure 1: The Pillars of Sustainability were developed based on the definition provided by the 1987 Brundtland Commission and further expanded in Hawkes' 2001 work, *The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability: Culture's Essential Role in Public Planning*.

Integrating these four pillars—environmental, economic, social, and cultural—creates a comprehensive and nuanced framework for sustainability. This integration ensures that sustainability initiatives are not only environmentally sound and economically viable but also socially inclusive and culturally enriching. By integrating cultural sustainability with the traditional pillars of sustainability, socio-cultural centres can play a pivotal role in fostering JST. These centres can leverage their cultural resources to support environmental conservation, promote sustainable economic practices, and enhance social equity, creating a more holistic and inclusive approach to sustainability.

Just Sustainability Transitions

The term "transition" refers to a nonlinear shift from one dynamic equilibrium to another, encompassing changes in technology, economy, institutions, ecology, culture, behaviour, and belief systems (Rotmans, Kemp, & van Asselt, 2001). Sustainability transitions are large-scale societal changes necessary to solve grand societal challenges. They are defined as “radical transformation towards a sustainable society, as a response to a number of persistent problems confronting contemporary modern societies” (Grin, Rotmans, & Schot, 2010). These transitions are characterised by their long-term, multi-dimensional, and fundamental nature.

JST refers to the process of shifting towards sustainability in a manner that is equitable and inclusive, ensuring that no group is disproportionately burdened by the changes. This concept integrates the principles of social justice with the goals of environmental sustainability, recognizing that true sustainability cannot be achieved without addressing underlying social inequities (Agyeman, Bullard, & Evans, 2002).

The term "just transition" has been widely discussed in sustainability literature and policy-making, emphasising the need to balance ecological integrity with social equity. A just transition involves a shift from traditional, often inequitable, practices to more sustainable ones that consider the needs and rights of all community members (Swilling & Annecke, 2012). This concept is particularly relevant in addressing the systemic inequalities that can arise during sustainability transitions, such as the unequal distribution of environmental benefits and burdens. In recent literature, the discourse around "just transitions" continues to evolve, particularly emphasising the intersection of social justice and environmental sustainability. This includes addressing the distribution of environmental benefits and burdens, ensuring participatory decision-making, and recognizing the rights and needs of impacted communities (Cisneros-Montemayor, et al, 2019). The Institute for Human Rights and Business (IHRB) also explores the concept, emphasising the need for rights-respecting and people-centred approaches in economic transitions towards net-zero, highlighting various areas including the financing of transitions and the engagement of indigenous and local communities in decision-making processes.

The concept of just sustainability transitions emphasises the importance of addressing multiple dimensions of justice, including distributive, recognitional, and procedural justice (Fraser, 2008). Distributive justice focuses on the fair distribution of resources and benefits, recognitional justice involves acknowledging and respecting diverse cultural identities, and procedural justice ensures that decision-making processes are inclusive and participatory. While some actions in sustainability transitions are driven by governments and large institutions, smaller organisations, informal groups, and individuals also play a crucial role. These actors go beyond 'behaviour change' approaches and work towards shifting worldviews and values to create large-scale societal change (Avelino & Wittmayer, 2016). Socio-cultural centres, by virtue of their community engagement and cultural activities, are well-positioned to influence these shifts.

An effective model to understand these dynamics is the X-Curve model developed by DRIFT. This model helps map transition dynamics and facilitates co-creation for transformative change. It illustrates how systemic change is a nonlinear and chaotic pattern where unsustainable practices are destabilised and replaced with new, sustainable practices through a co-evolution of multiple developments involving various stakeholders (Silvestri, Diercks, & Matti, 2022). This model is particularly useful for understanding the contributions of different actors, including socio-cultural centres, in driving these transitions.

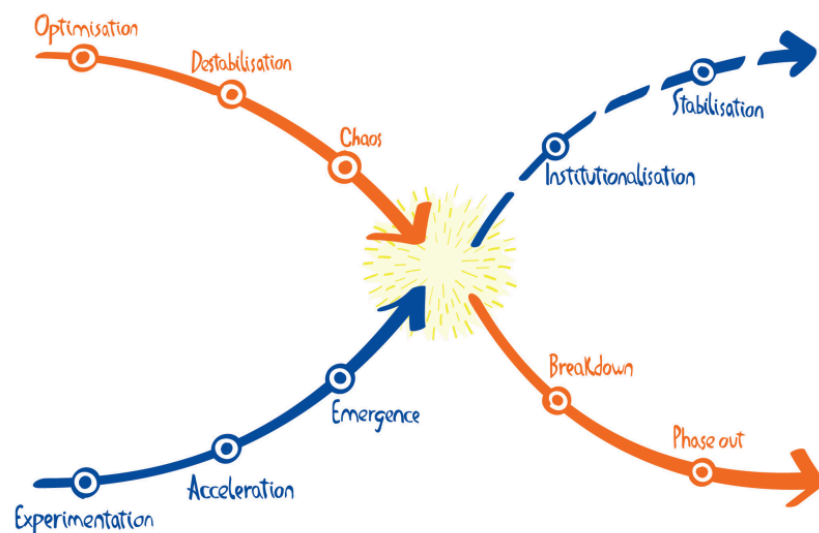


Figure 1: The X-Curve model (source: G. Silvestri, G. Diercks, C. Matti, *X-CURVE. A sensemaking tool to foster collective narratives on system change*, 2022)

The notion of justice in JST

The discourse on just transitions is complex, with scholars emphasising the multifaceted nature of justice in the context of sustainability (Jasanoff, 1990). There is no unanimity on the principles for a transition that aims to be “just”. The concept of justice is very present in the literature discussing ecological transition, underlying how the current wave of low-carbon transitions may “create new injustices and vulnerabilities, while also failing to address pre-existing structural drivers of injustice in energy markets and the wider socio-economy” (Wang&Lo,2021) .

Several reports also highlight that designing and implementing sustainability transitions that are also just require addressing less conventional forms of expertise, skills, and knowledge, including tacit, embodied, and emotional knowledge. In this sense, just transitions are synonymous with truly participatory processes in which all participants are encouraged to express, work on, and experiment with various forms of knowledge (Caniglia, et.al, 2021).

Literature shows that there are **various dimensions and approaches to justice**. As we explore the role of socio-cultural centres in this landscape, it is crucial to dissect the various dimensions of justice:

- Distributive Justice: this dimension highlights the fair distribution of resources, benefits, and burdens (Young, 1990).
- Recognitional Justice: this dimension considers the importance of recognising and valuing diverse identities and cultures (Fraser, 2009).
- Restorative Justice: addressing historical environmental and social injustices is central to this dimension (Bullard & Wright, 2000).

- Intergenerational Justice: grounded in the philosophy of considering future generations (Gosseries, 2008). This dimension resonates deeply with the ethos of sustainability.
- Procedural Justice: this dimension emphasises the fairness of processes and decision-making (Rawls, 1971).
- Cosmopolitan Justice: emphasising global solidarity, this dimension recognises the interconnectedness of sustainability challenges (Held, 2010).

Socio-cultural are uniquely positioned to play a critical role in facilitating these transitions due to their deep roots in local communities and their focus on cultural and social dimensions. Though very diverse in nature, these centres often act as hubs for community engagement, artistic expression, and social innovation. They provide spaces where community members can come together to discuss, plan, and implement sustainability initiatives (Mulgan, 2006). By fostering a sense of community and promoting cultural expression, socio-cultural centres can help build the social capital necessary for successful sustainability transitions.

By exploring the roles that socio-cultural centres can play in JST, this paper aims to highlight their contributions and provide insights into the enabling conditions that support their effectiveness.

The concept of Just Sustainability Transitions in European policy making

The analysis of some key EU (environmental, social, and cultural) policies and initiatives presented in this section aims to take stock of how the concept of JST is framed and to what extent culture, socio-culture, and community aspects have been assigned a role in building a more just and sustainable society. Screening is limited to the analysis of documents and does not concern the actual implementation of such policies and initiatives.

Policy/Initiative	Key Focus Areas	Role of Culture and Socio-Cultural Actors	Examples of Socio-Cultural Integration
European Green Deal (EGD) (2019)	Sustainable transitions, climate neutrality, multi-dimensional transformation	Indirectly through New European Bauhaus (NEB)	NEB promotes aesthetics, sustainability, inclusion via arts, architecture, and design

New European Bauhaus (NEB) (2020)	Aesthetics, sustainability, inclusion	Artists, architects, designers engage in societal transformation	NEB Compass highlights community aspects, fostering creativity to address societal challenges
Transition Pathways for European Industrial Ecosystems (2021)	Greener, digital future for industrial ecosystems	Indirectly through civil society's socio-cultural aspects	Social dialogue with local actors, addressing data privacy, job creation, and decent work
Just Transition Mechanism and Fund (JTF) (2021)	Alleviating socio-economic impacts of transition	Supports education, social inclusion, focusing on vulnerable groups	Aligns with EU cohesion policy, reducing regional disparities, engaging in socio-cultural aspects indirectly
Social Climate Fund (2023)	Addressing social impacts of climate neutrality, supporting vulnerable groups	Encourages stakeholder engagement including local authorities, civil society	Opportunities for cultural actors in supporting vulnerable families, micro-enterprises, and transport users
European Pillar of Social Rights and Action Plan (2017 & 2021)	Equal opportunities, fair working conditions, social protection	Local actors imply inclusion of socio-cultural organisations	Aligns with combating stereotypes, promoting equality through cultural participation

Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion (2020)	Social cohesion, mutual respect, combating prejudices against migrants	Emphasises migrant participation in cultural activities	Promotes grassroots participation in culture, education, sport to combat xenophobia, exclusion
New European Agenda for Culture (2018)	Cultural policies addressing social challenges, promoting positive change	Fosters cultural capacity, participation, cross-sectoral cooperation	Supports culture-led innovation and sustainable development, integrating art and culture into education
Work Plan for Culture 2023-2027	Social inclusion, territorial cohesion, environmental change, sustainable development	Highlights culture's role in climate action, sustainable consumption and production	Recognizes culture as crucial for changing mentalities towards climate crisis

The above analysis highlights that the EU has established a policy framework for JST, but a holistic approach to sustainability—including social, economic, and environmental dimensions—requires considering the role of culture. Three main conclusions can be drawn:

- The European Green Deal alone doesn't provide a holistic framework for a just transition; it must be combined with industrial, social, and cultural policies. Cross-policy analysis is essential for guiding JST, recognizing the interconnectedness of social, economic, and environmental issues.
- The contribution of culture to societal transformation is underestimated in non-cultural policies. While environmental and industrial policies involve social actors, they often overlook cultural and creative actors. Social policies, however, do consider cultural participation's potential.
- Local actors are crucial in implementing these policies. Practical support for local authorities and organisations is needed to build good sustainability governance, with socio-cultural centres playing a key role in co-designing and implementing local sustainability plans.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach to explore how socio-cultural centres can play in just JST. The methodology encompasses in-depth interviews, participant observations, desk research and EU policies analysis to capture a holistic understanding of the centres' contributions and challenges.

The research process began with desk research and exploratory interviews from September to December 2023, establishing a foundational understanding of socio-cultural centres. From January to March 2024, nine organisations were selected for in-depth interviews, gathering insights into their JST activities, which were then analysed. In the final phase, from April to May 2024, relevant EU policies and funding programs were screened to understand the positioning of cultural activities within the broader policy landscape.

Data Analysis

All interviews were transcribed and independently coded using an inductive and iterative approach, allowing themes to emerge organically. Initially, we familiarise ourselves with the data through independent reading and desk research. We then conducted a formal analysis by generating codes related to activities, challenges, and opportunities, achieving an inter-rater reliability score of approximately 93%

Findings

Based on our analysis, we categorised the activities of the chosen socio-cultural centres into three main categories according to emerging patterns: community engagement, environmental education, and cultural innovation. These categories represent the primary ways through which socio-cultural centres contribute to JST in their communities. This structured methodology facilitated a comprehensive exploration of the roles of socio-cultural centres in JST, providing a strong foundation for the subsequent analysis and recommendations.

Organisation	Key Initiatives	Role in JST	Example of Activities Fostering JST
Creative Kernow	Cairn to Cove, FEAST, Arts Lab, Cornwall 365, Cornwall Film, Screen Krowji	Community engagement, sustainable development	Cairn to Cove: Performing arts in rural areas. FEAST: Community and artist-led projects. Arts Lab: Youth mental health support.
Broumov Education and Cultural Centre	"Together with Children Against Drought," "Children's Gallery Lapidarium," Broumov Discussions, Europe Challenge project	Environmental education, community dialogue	Children's Gallery: Art on environmental issues. Broumov Discussions: Debates on sustainability.

Bitamine	River and Water Projects, artistic-editorial projects	Cultural innovation, environmental education	Projects on rivers and water history, fostering reflection on environmental stewardship.
InContext	Art residency programs, "La Centrale" upcycling brand, annual upcycling furniture fair	Cultural innovation, local development	Art residencies, upcycling design waste into home décor, creating economic opportunities.
Brusinka Multicultural Centre	Cultural Fusion Social Hub, workshops, forums	Social cohesion, sustainability advocacy	Events on sustainability and social justice, participatory decision-making.
Blocco Comune	Festa di Natale	Sustainability education, sustainability workshops	Workshops on upcycling and DIY projects led by community volunteers.
Royal Saltworks of Arc-et-Senans	Environmental and educational innovation, new gardens	Historical preservation, sustainability education	Gardens focusing on ecological processes and permaculture, educational programs.
Alter Ego (X)	Theatre projects like GRESYS, "Europe," "Media," "Theatre," "Creation," "Live on!"	Social justice, environmental education	Theatre performances on LGBTQ+ rights, climate change, inclusion, and intercultural dialogue.

Museu Terra	Exhibitions, research, artistic residencies, digital archive	Cultural revitalization, sustainability education	Exhibitions on women's roles in ecology, integrating traditional knowledge with contemporary practices.
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Discussion

The discussion below highlights the complex ways in which these nine socio-cultural centres navigate their roles in sustainability transitions. Understanding the multifaceted nature of the activities provides deeper insights into the challenges and opportunities these centres face. It also underscores the need for supportive policies that recognize the diverse capabilities and constraints of socio-cultural centres, enabling them to maximise their impact within their communities and beyond.

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1. Community Engagement

Community engagement involves working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interests, or similar situations to address issues affecting their well-being (Evans, 2011). In the context of JST, it refers to activities that foster local participation, enhance social cohesion, and empower community members to take collective action towards sustainability. Effective community engagement is essential for fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility among community members, which is crucial for the success of sustainability initiatives (Gilchrist, 2009).

For instance, Creative Kernow's Cairn to Cove initiative delivers diverse performing arts to rural areas, involving communities in event selection and hosting. This approach enhances cultural dialogue and reduces environmental impact by localising events, thereby fostering a deeper connection between community members and cultural activities. Similarly, the Brusinka Multicultural Centre's Cultural Fusion Social Hub organises events, workshops, and forums focused on sustainability, social justice, and cultural exchange. By providing a platform for these activities, Brusinka strengthens community bonds and promotes social cohesion, demonstrating how community engagement can be a powerful tool for advancing JST.

2. Environmental Education

Environmental education is a process that allows individuals to explore environmental issues, engage in problem-solving, and take action to improve the environment (Tilbury, 1995). As a result, individuals develop a deeper understanding of environmental issues and acquire the skills to make informed and responsible decisions. In the context of JST, environmental education encompasses programs and activities designed to raise awareness about environmental issues and promote sustainable practices among community members. It is a critical component of sustainability transitions, as it equips individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary to engage in sustainable behaviours.

For example, the Broumov Education and Cultural Centre's initiative "Together with Children Against Drought" educates children on water scarcity through interactive programs and exhibitions. This initiative fosters ecological consciousness from a young age, highlighting the importance of early environmental education in promoting sustainable futures. Museu Terra, located in a natural park, integrates ecological education into its exhibitions and workshops, promoting sustainable living and environmental stewardship. By combining environmental education with cultural activities, these centres contribute significantly to JST by fostering an environmentally aware and proactive community.

3. Cultural Innovation

Cultural innovation refers to the creative integration and application of cultural practices and expressions to address social, environmental, and economic challenges (Throsby, 2008). It involves fostering new ideas, solutions, and practices that contribute to the development of sustainable and just societies. In the context of JST, cultural innovation includes the use of arts, traditions, and cultural activities to inspire and drive societal change. It recognizes the role of culture in shaping values, behaviours, and social norms, and leverages this potential to promote sustainability and social justice (Hawkes, 2001).

An illustrative example of cultural innovation is Bitamine's River and Water Projects. By transforming research on local rivers and water into artistic-editorial projects, Bitamine engages citizens in documenting and reflecting on environmental changes, fostering a deeper connection to regional history and identity. Similarly, InContext's upcycling initiatives in Slanic Moldova upcycle high-end design waste into home décor and furniture, creating economic opportunities while reducing environmental impact. These initiatives promote the principles of sustainability and creativity, showcasing how cultural innovation can address both environmental and social challenges effectively.

The identified categories—community engagement, environmental education, and cultural innovation—represent the core strategies through which socio-cultural centres contribute to JST. Each category reflects a unique approach to integrating cultural, social, and environmental dimensions, demonstrating the multifaceted roles these centres play in fostering sustainable and resilient communities.

Challenges Faced by Socio-Cultural Centers in Sustainability Transitions

Financial and Resource Constraints

A primary challenge is the lack of financial and physical resources. Centres often struggle with securing stable funding, which is crucial for planning and executing their programs. This instability is compounded by inadequate space and ageing equipment, which limits their capacity to host events and expand offerings. As one respondent noted, "*Financial constraints directly impact our ability to maintain and expand our facilities. With limited space and outdated equipment, hosting larger events or more diverse programs becomes a significant challenge, directly affecting our community outreach and engagement efforts.*"

Stakeholder Engagement and External Factors

Engaging stakeholders effectively is another critical challenge. Building relationships with local governments and communities is essential, yet misalignments in understanding the centres' roles and the benefits of sustainability projects can create barriers. External factors like policy changes, economic downturns, and social shifts add layers of complexity. Resource limitations further complicate engagement with local businesses and government entities, often met with scepticism. As one interviewee highlighted, "*The major challenge we face is securing enough support from local*

businesses and the government. Despite our efforts, scepticism from these stakeholders makes collaboration difficult and hampers our long-term planning."

Complexity of Sustainability Initiatives

Designing and implementing effective sustainability initiatives is inherently complex. These initiatives often require an interdisciplinary approach, utilising tools from various sectors. Additionally, framing these actions within the constraints of public funding, which is rarely tailored to socio-cultural needs, adds another layer of difficulty. As one interviewee illustrated, *"Well, I think the first big challenge has been to explain the connection between culture and sustainability. It's a very natural process in our case, but it's not easy to understand. The other question is to always fight against the trend to talk about ecological questions and forget the social and the cultural questions."*

Resistance to Change and Staffing Challenges

Resistance to change within communities and institutions can threaten the adoption of innovative sustainability initiatives. This resistance is compounded by staffing challenges, including high turnover rates and the continuous need for professional development. Many centres face shortages and difficulties in retaining skilled personnel. A representative shared, *"Change is difficult in our community, and this is worsened by high staff turnover, making it hard to maintain momentum on our sustainability projects."*

Operational Challenges

Operational inefficiencies, such as long bureaucratic procedures and inflexible organisational structures, hinder the centres' ability to act quickly and adapt to changing conditions. These inefficiencies lead to delays and missed opportunities in sustainability efforts. A representative described the implications: *"Our bureaucratic structure makes it hard to adapt quickly, and it leads to delays and missed opportunities in our sustainability efforts."*

Community Engagement and Communication

Effectively communicating the value and impact of sustainability initiatives is crucial for gaining community support and engagement. However, many centres struggle to convey their sustainability efforts compellingly, limiting engagement and support. This issue is exacerbated by resistance to changes in cultural and social norms. Highlighting this issue, a representative expressed, *"Communicating the importance of our sustainability initiatives is a significant challenge, with many in the community resisting changes to cultural and social norms."*

Measuring Impact of Sustainability Initiatives

Measuring the impact of sustainability activities presents significant challenges due to the predominantly qualitative nature of cultural and community impacts. These impacts are difficult to quantify and often overlooked by traditional metrics, making it hard to demonstrate the benefits of their initiatives. An interview participant highlighted this challenge: *"It's challenging to measure the impact of our initiatives because the benefits are often intangible and overlooked by traditional metrics."*

Lack of Recognition

Socio-cultural centres often struggle with gaining sufficient recognition for their contributions to community well-being and sustainability. This lack of recognition is tied to the undervaluation of

socio-cultural activities in public and policy arenas, representing a significant obstacle for these centres. A representative articulated this issue: *"The main issue definitely is the lack of recognition. Our work isn't recognized as a legitimate profession deserving of respect, closely tied to financial challenges and representing a significant obstacle for our centre."*

Despite these challenges, socio-cultural centres remain committed to their roles in sustainability transitions. By addressing these challenges through supportive policies and innovative practices, these centres can enhance their impact and continue to foster sustainable and resilient communities.

As catalysts for societal transformation, socio-cultural centres occupy a unique position at the intersection of culture, education, and community activism. These centres are not only guardians of cultural heritage and tradition but also vibrant hubs of innovation and social change. Their strategic importance stems from their ability to mobilise diverse community segments, foster inclusive cultural participation, and address critical social and environmental issues through creative and engaging approaches.

Implications on Policy Makers

Socio-cultural centres play multiple roles in JST. These roles are essential in fostering sustainable communities through environmental education, community cohesion, and cultural innovation.

To fully harness their potential, it is crucial that these centres operate within an enabling environment that supports their diverse roles and addresses the challenges they face. This environment should not only ensure their survival but also help them thrive, innovate, and expand their impact within communities.

Recognizing the strategic role of socio-cultural centres in sustainability, stakeholders like policymakers, funding bodies, community leaders, and networks should invest in these community-based cultural organisations. This investment should encompass financial support, capacity building, networking, and policy frameworks.

Based on our analysis, the key enabling conditions for socio-cultural centres to effectively contribute to JST include:

- *Supportive Regulatory Frameworks:* At local, regional, national, and European levels, policies should recognize and support the unique role of socio-cultural centres in sustainability transitions, aiding them in navigating regulatory landscapes.
- *Stable and Flexible Funding Mechanisms:* Long-term funding from public, private, and hybrid sources should provide financial stability and flexibility, allowing centres to adapt and innovate.
- *Enhanced Capacity Building:* Regular training and development for staff and volunteers will keep centres at the forefront of best practices in community engagement, sustainability education, and cultural programming.
- *Strong Networks and Partnerships:* Facilitating connections with other centres, businesses, educational institutions, and government bodies will enhance resource sharing, collaboration, and collective advocacy.

Conclusions:

Socio-cultural centres play a pivotal role in advancing Just Sustainability Transitions by serving as community-based hubs for engagement, education, and innovation. These centres effectively bridge the gap between cultural activities and sustainability initiatives, fostering an inclusive environment

that encourages community participation and addresses local needs. Despite facing challenges such as financial constraints, stakeholder engagement, and operational inefficiencies, socio-cultural centres demonstrate resilience and adaptability. The study's findings emphasise the need for supportive policies and stable funding mechanisms to enhance the impact of these centres. Recognizing the strategic importance of socio-cultural centres in sustainability transitions, stakeholders should invest in capacity building, networking, and inclusive policy frameworks to support their vital contributions to creating sustainable and resilient communities.

By integrating cultural sustainability with environmental, economic, and social dimensions, socio-cultural centres can address complex sustainability challenges holistically. Their ability to mobilise diverse community segments and foster social cohesion makes them essential actors in the broader framework of sustainability studies. As global crises increasingly necessitate local solutions, the role of socio-cultural centres in promoting just and sustainable transitions becomes ever more critical. Therefore, fostering an enabling environment for these centres is imperative for achieving comprehensive and equitable sustainability goals.

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