Transcript of ‘Cultural Sustainability’

Season 2, Episode 36, Transforming Tomorrow

[Theme music]

Paul: Ciao e benvenuto a Transforming Tomorrow, il podcast della Pentland Centre for Sustainability in Business. Sono Paul Turner.

Jan: And I'm Jan Bebbington.

Paul: For a long time we've been lacking culture on this podcast, but today that changes. Because we're chatting all about cultural sustainability and its importance, despite its lacking presence within the SDGs.

And I promise it will make sense in a minute why I was speaking Italian.

[Theme music]

Paul: I know Jan, that the thing you were worrying about most today, that I was going to start this episode by talking to you in Italian.

Jan: I did worry about that. So you can go now 'cause I'm now comfortable that whatever language this is going to be in, I shall follow along. Um, slightly confused, but very happy.

Paul: My main concern would be if I was to try and do this episode entirely in Italian, there would be a point not too far in the future that I would be shown up massively as well.

Jan: [laughs] Well, let's, let's stick to English, but that gives us a little bit of a clue that we might have a guest from Italy.

Paul: We might have a guest from Italy. And what we're going to be talking about with our guest from Italy, it's on lots of things to do with cultural heritage and sustainability in the cultural sector.

Jan: Oh, that's really great, because we often forget about the cultural sector. It's a big business sector. Um, but it's also a sector where people live and, and interact with in their day-to-day lives.

But also it's, it's got big sustainable development questions related to it as well.

Paul: And I think you do hear bits and pieces about the cultural sector when it comes to sustainability, particularly in the news when it comes to tourism, over

tourism, certain localities, almost pushing back against tourism and not wanting to be overcrowded all the time?

That's something that we'll talk about during this episode, but there's lots of issues there relating to culture and tourism and sites, that's not even touching on transport and getting to lots of these places, where you might have to fly and the sustainability angle there.

There must be acres of spares to discuss lots of cultural aspects of tourism and sustainability.

Jan: It is, and we haven't been there, so let's, this might be the first of some other podcasts as well, looking at different elements of it, as you say, 'cause there's so many bits to it.

So what are we gonna talk about today though? Within that broad area?

Paul: Uh, we're gonna be talking about some places specifically, such as Venice, and the challenges that are faced in Venice.

We're going to be talking about business models, sustainable business models for tourism, hence to tie in with the sustainability in business and the Pentland Centre.

Jan: Brilliant. So who's gonna tell us about that?

Paul: Well, we are joined today by Doctor Chiara Donelli, who is visiting the Pentland Centre from the Venice School of Management in Venezia.

Hello Chiara.

Chiara: Hello. Hi. Nice to be here.

Paul: [to Jan] Are you confident now that we will just carry this on in English?

Jan: I'm so relieved, thank you to you both.

Paul: I, I'm glad on that front as well. It's been a long time since I've actually had an Italian conversation with an Italian person. It's not quite the same when you speak to someone else who's learning it, but that's it.

Chiara, can you tell us a little bit about your background and how you've come to be over here with the Pentland Centre?

Chiara: So, I'm an art historian as a background, but I decide to take a big shift in my career. And doing my masters, so I took management and accounting

master, and then my PhD followed, uh, with a focus on management and accounting, but I was still focusing on the cultural sector.

But at some point in my life, I became extremely interested in the challenge of sustainability in the cultural sector, or how can the cultural sector can actually drive the sustainability in other sector.

So I thought, uh, Jan was the best in doing that, and I thought it was kind of an interesting visit to come here as one of the leading centre for sustainability discourse in the world.

Jan: Did you hear that, Paul?

Paul: Yeah. I thought we've been sending out memos this year not to be too nice to you [Jan laughs] because there's been, last season there were far too many people who were just saying, oh, you're the best, you're the best, you're the best. We've cut down on that recently. It's been quite good.

Jan: We have, but I think, but there also, the distinction is the Pentland Centre is, it gathers together such an array of scholarship that actually it's probably the Pentland Centre that's the best. I just get to look after the best.

Paul: Yeah, you're just the administrator.

Jan: Exactly. So, the cultural sector. I kind of know it when I see it, but I'm not sure exactly what it is.

So for our listeners, would you be able to define the, what is in the culture, cultural sector, and what does that term mean?

Chiara: Well, that's a big question, Jan. Uh, and it's also really difficult, let's say that if we think about the cultural sector, it can, uh, we can put inside a variety of things.

If we think it as a concentric, with a concentric model, such as the one from Throsby, uh, we have at the very core the, what we usually define as the cultural sector, so visual images, performing arts, and so forth.

But there are also many other sector, or many other areas, which are still part of the cultural sector, which include music, film, festival, but also video games. And um, I really like the definition of UNESCO in which they say that culture is what we are and shape our identities.

So, inside the cultural sector, we can always have, um, both the intangible dimension, which is the one which is most recognisable and uh, let's say the one that usually people tend to think at the cultural sector as.

But at the same time, we also have this intangible part, which is, which include tradition, which include myth and whatever, it's, uh, representing the, the person that we are and what's the community in which we live on. Uh, it's represented with.

Paul: When it comes then to sustainability and the cultural sector, how are the sustainable development goals, the UN SDGs fitting in with culture in the cultural sector?

Chiara: Oh, another challenging question. Uh, let's say that there was a big debate around it because culture was not, didn't, uh, never had a specific goal. And if we think about the pillar, we do have the environmental pillar, the social pillar, the economic pillar, but in the SDGs we cannot find the cultural one.

And that sparked a big discussion. Of, where is culture, and if its culture is still relevant for the cultural of the sustainable development or not. We can say that culture is indeed the transversely present in all the, in, not all, but in several of the SDGs. If we think about decent work, uh, economic worth, economic growth, the reduction of inequalities and so many other.

But the fact that, um, culture didn't have its own specific pillar, it sparked a lot of initiatives around the world to recognise it as pillar per se. So we can say that in the SDGs culture is the missing, is the missing one.

Paul: It's interesting that Jan, because we have talked a lot about in the past, making sure we go beyond environmental sustainability, which is the one that most people are gonna think of whenever you talk about sustainability.

We've looked at economic sustainability, we've looked at social sustainability. Cultural sustainability, I maybe would've put that under the banner of social sustainability, but it's much broader than that. And it can touch on many areas.

Jan: And I think in some ways, uh, what Chiara says, it's sort of like it's a water we all swim in, so we don't even know that we're swimming, in terms of the cultural context and background where things happen. But immensely powerful in terms of shaping how we know the world, um, how he might relate to it, um, how he might think about different futures.

So all of the, the podcasts have sort of thought about what the future might be. All of these have, you know, cultural artefacts associated with them that may be visual, music or art or whatever, that will draw people into those conversations.

So in that respect, I, I think, um, I'm really pleased that somebody picked up that the SDGs didn't actually treat that well, and have had these projects to draw out those elements.

Paul: Because we're not slaves to the SDGs, we don't, you know, look at them and think they're a perfect encapsulation of everything that is sustainability. We've had these conversations before.

We've had guests on the show before who have a particular aversion towards the SDGs, so they're not necessarily perfect. But if there's ways of making sure that culture is involved in the SDGs and that's important.

Jan: Yeah. And I really sort of, I was thinking of, um, Tim Lamont's, uh, podcast where he says, you, you won't save what you don't love. So actually nurturing a, a love of nature and understanding of it, um, is a, is a cultural aspect.

So even, not even seeing it as a subset of social, but linking together all of these different parts and pillars of the sustainable development agenda.

Paul: And lots of people are gonna understand the love of nature, but they're also gonna understand the love of culture…

Jan: …yeah…

Paul: …lots of the things that you've mentioned there, Chiara, such as video games. Jan, I know you're a big fan, [Jan laughs] I know you're every night on the PlayStation, when you finish here at work. Um, video games, you've got opera, you've got song, you've got theatre. All of those areas are things that people love, so therefore it seems natural that they'd want to protect them.

Jan: One of the things I think is amazing is that you get to work in Venice, and so I've only visited Venice once, sort of in the early 1990s, and I was like blown away.

I was, I was fresh out of New Zealand, so it was inconceivable to me that a place like that could even exist. And then almost inconceivable that it actually wasn't a theme park, that people lived there. And it was, it was amazing.

So, a lot of people will travel to, to Venice and, and other tourist um, attractions because they're going there to see culture. So how is tourism and the culture sector linked together, um, and what challenges does that present for sustainable development?

Chiara: Tourism for quite a long time was regarded as an alternative to other, uh, sector, which were much more impactful, um, such as the mining industry, petrochemical plant, and so forth.

So that was regarded as an alternative. Unfortunately, I'm afraid it's not. Tourism monoculture tend to be quite as extractive and as devastating as other type of industry. And if you think about the number of neologism that has been created to describe such phenomenon, such as, you know, 'over-tourism', but also 'disneyfication' of cities, or as you were saying, [inaudible] -ification, the platformisation of tourism, and so many more.

And they all, all these new terms try to capture the very absence of this phenomenon, which is the fact that, uh, I'm afraid to say that no such a thing as sustainable tourism, not that can exist, but it's really difficult to have and we should keep an eye on that.

If you think about the effect of tourism on community, are devastating. It can include, um, the fact that the tourists tend to want to consume as many experience as possible. Uh, and so they result in rise of the price displacement of residents and a lot of services moved from the welfare type of services for resident to, uh, service at the benefit of visitor.

We have researchers working in modern slavery in tourism or stereotypisation of identities. The culture inside the tourist industry tend to be, to become commodify. So heritage, rituals and identities become standardised, simplified, stereotyped, and staged only at the benefit of the visitor, which indeed it's they, they will result, in losing the very essence of their nature.

Paul: I think if you're gonna pick one place in the world that maybe suffers from these issues, it would be Venice, where you're from.

We've all been to Venice, we'll have seen various different aspects of it, and we're also have, no doubt, seen the news stories where you see various things about cruise ships and the issues there.

You see the fact that maybe the locals can't afford to live there anymore because you can only, uh, afford to be there if you're, you know, the hotel and

having that there, the, the amount of wages you might make as a local isn't there.

And then the big thing with Venice that always comes to my mind is the fact it gets flooded every year at various points, and you've got major issues with regarding environmental issues of the rising sea levels, et cetera.

So when it comes to Venice, what challenges have you come across when you've been looking at cultural tourism, over-tourism, et cetera, and what solutions are you seeing being put in place?

Chiara: Ah, put in place, not so many solution, I must admit. What I tend to observe is the fact that, um, uh, we mainly have type of bricolage type of solution, so they are really quick solution that tend to fix a little bit the, the result, but they do not always, do not challenge the very core of the problem. Which it's indeed the fact that the attention is moving from an attention to local communities towards external consumers, or visitor.

Jan: What I liked you describing there is bricolage, and so that's, it's, that's quite a, you know, term that we would use a lot in academia.

But, but I, but I know that our listeners, um, maybe will want a wee bit of help with that. So would you be able to tell me what you mean when you say 'bricolage'?

Chiara: Well, uh, there are first solution that are just adopted to solve the ongoing issues, rather than rethink the system or rethink the very core, very root of this problem.

And in, in the long term, they tend not to solve the issue, but just to solve the…

Jan: …I suppose the symptoms, isn't it…

Chiara: …the symptom, right? Yeah.

Paul: Do, do you see the attitudes of the people who live in Venice towards the solutions that aren't necessarily working, is their attitude they need to be doing more or is there attitude, oh, what can be done?

Chiara: Oh dear, obviously there are so many interests at the stake, so there are different perception. People tend to look at the tourism industry as a potential driver of economic growth, but uh, it's also true that they are fitted up with, there are so many tourism that use the city more like a, an open air museum rather than a living city.

And that's the issue, I think. And it's not only an issue of Venice but of so many other places. So one, the actual being a living heritage becomes something which is only staged for the benefit of someone else.

And so obviously there are conflicting, uh, perspectives.

Paul: It's one thing that always gets me when I visit any places like this. I'll, I'll, we'll try and stay a few days, but you see so many people come in, especially somewhere like Venice, there's a big cruise ship comes in and people have got five hours and that's the total amount of time they will spend in a place like this.

And I can't believe you can see anywhere in five hours. I mean, I, I come from a very small town that even there you couldn't see that in five hours.

Jan: And I suppose there's also a tension then that, that people are, through tourism, maybe looking for something authentic experience. I'm using air, air comments, but in being there, they, they create, you know, they undermine the authenticity of it.

So certainly, yeah, mass tourism has, has huge problems. And particularly for these iconic places 'cause they're iconic for a reason. I mean, they're…

Paul: …yes…

Jan: …amazing. But, yeah.

Paul: And I always find these places tend to be more authentic in the evenings when all the day trippers have gone the, you know, five, six o'clock the day trippers have gone and you, it's quieter and you get to feel it a bit more like it is.

And if you get up early in the morning, you can go and experience it and things. And am I right in saying that Venice is introduced a tax now? So if you don't actually stay overnight, if you're just a day tripper visitor, you have to pay a tax.

Chiara: Yeah. It's, uh, it's exactly the case. So you have to pay five euros, which is not that much.

But first of all, it doesn't tackle the issue of over tourism, because you only have to pay, there is not such a cap for number of visitors that can actually enter the city.

Uh, but at the same time, I have the perception that people that are paying, they feel like they are actually entering a museum. So it's kind of, you know, corroborating this idea of, okay, now you're entering Venice, which as you were saying, is more or less a Disneyland, Disneyland.

Uh, five euros is not that much. How we then decide is a matter of accessibility, but it really depends who you are. And I think it's really strange to have a tax for entering a place such as a city, which is a living place.

Paul: So my question then becomes on that. Yeah, it's not very much individually, but if you've got millions of people, that amount of money's going to add up for the people who are collecting the money.

Are the people who are collecting the money going to use it in any way, shape, or form that might benefit the city culturally or sustainably?

Chiara: Well…

Jan: …I suppose we will see, is the answer…

Chiara: …yeah. And I will say there is not a lot of transparency around that. And also because, you know what, it's true that there is, uh, they're asking for money, but at the same time, they are also hiring so many other people to actually check that people are paying.

So, which is the actual, uh, income, it's still unclear.

Jan: Yeah. I think what's interesting is paying a tax or limiting the numbers, uh, there's some cultural heritage in New Zealand that they, they strongly limit the numbers. Because actually it can only cope with X number no matter what the price is. So you can keep it more open, but you enter a ballot to get in.

Chiara: Yeah, that's the, or if you think about Machu Picchu, for example, you need to book it in, I mean, that's not really cheap, but you need to book it in advance…

Jan: …yeah…

Chiara: ...because for matter of, uh, conservation, just the number of people can actually enter. Yeah, and which is more fair rather than asking people to pay to get.

Paul: Then again, that does seem, again, like the theme park, 'cause everyone's got to pay to go in there. [Jan laughs]

But there's a limited number of people who can go in ach day.

Jan: It's tough. This is a tough issue, isn't it?

So you are visiting us, which we are very pleased that you're with us, but you're visiting as part of a young researchers' project, Sustainable Business Models for Tourism, with a cultural-based approach.

Tell us about that, um, that project, and I suppose we also have to give thanks to your sponsor for allowing you to be with us today as well.

Chiara: Yes, thank, uh, thanks Jan to pointing this out. Uh, yes, this project is indeed, um, part of, uh, National Recovery Funds, which deals with issues related to tourism and sustainable business model in tourism.

And with this team of young researcher, which is a really interdisciplinary team, we want to address issues around, again, sustainability interest, with a reflection around the waste.

Don't take me wrong, I'm not referring to waste uniquely in its physical dimension, but I also refer to waste, uh, in its symbolic dimension. So, for example, what's happened to wasted community?

So those community that become marginalised inside the tourist industry, such as the voice of the community in Venice, but also the voices of the community in the Dolomites.

Because the Dolomites, due to the Olympics, the upcoming Olympics, uh, are facing more or less the same challenges as Venice, so for displacement of the local, the population, and number of visitor, which actually exceed number of the, uh, inhabitants.

Did I mention the fact that last year the number of beds created for visitors in Venice actually exceed the number of beds for inhabitants?

Jan: Oh, wow. That's a whole different thought, isn't it?

Paul: Yeah, that's, that ties in the unaffordability…

Jan: …yeah…

Paul: …of the place. You just can't afford it and it, again, it feels like some kind of like tourist attraction rather than a real place, because you're just like bringing the people in, and you've got the staff to look after you as you go around and admire the various buildings and canals and such.

Jan: And it's not, it's not all about, [chuckles] all about where we live, but the Lake District has some of those same dynamics to it.

And as well, in terms of the, the landscape is a cultural icon and the number of, um, places for people to stay to enjoy that, and the number of locals and the cost of accommodation and those sorts of things.

But Scottish Highlands have got the same thing. Loads of locations have these same problems.

Paul: Yes, because I'm a local to the Lake District, there are certain places I will avoid at certain times of the year. Because I know they're honeypots. That's where everyone is going to at that particular time of year. It's gonna be crammed with visitors, and you're not really gonna get an enjoyable experience.

They're Windermere, Bowness, at the height of summer is just so packed, it's almost unmanageable and you don't want to be there. And it does, it feels like it's been crafted purely for the tourists.

But the good thing about the Lake District is, I would say, is you go 10 or 15 minutes outside, one of those honeypots, most of the tourists who are there, who've travelled by car, they're not there.

They've not gone and done a bit of walking away up the hills. They've not gone and explored the, the Western Lake District or the Northern Lake District. They're not going there, and so you avoid a little bit of this feeling of over tourism, but you are aware that it's there.

And also if you go out of season, it's busy, but it's a nice busy…

Jan: …yeah…

Paul: …it doesn't feel like the place is dead and, oh no, what's gonna happen to this town now because no one's visiting it anymore? I don't think you're ever gonna get that in Venice. I don't think you're gonna get a, a February weekend when it's dead, just because it's February.

Jan: [chuckles] Yes. I suppose the outside part of the, the Lake District means that it, when it cools down, people go away and we all turn up, [laughs] which is quite nice.

So, let's think, keep on thinking about the cultural sector and um, um, you'll be able to correct me on this 'cause I think I've got it right. But it's a, it's an Italian word, so I thought we would focus on the Venice Bilani.

Paul: Bilani? No, no, Biennale.

Jan: Binaa? Belaa?

Paul: Biennale, yeah. Biennale. That sounds like some kind of dish [Jan laughs] maybe served in Scotland, in those Highlands that you've been to. I'll have a bowl of bilani please.

Jan: Or a fight of some sort. It was a big banani. Anyway, just I, I think I'm gonna pass this question to Paul 'cause he can ask it.

Paul: Now my, my tip of anything Italian is just pronounce every single letter you can see and it comes out better.

So, Biennale. Yes, so…

Jan: …biennale, thank you…

Paul: …the, the Venice Biennale. I've heard of it. And, uh, when I was in Venice, it was a year when it wasn't happening, but there was still the, the grounds where it's held and you can still see all of that, and everything.

Can you tell us a little bit about what the Biennale is?

Chiara: The Venice Biennale is all, often portrayed as one of the most prestigious and international platform for contemporary art, but also architecture, cinema, dance, music, and theatre.

It was founded back in 1895 to promote, um, uh, Venetian cultural identity and to stimulate, uh, tourism, funny enough, which back then was not so developed in Venice.

But, uh, I wouldn't say that Venice Biennale it's only, uh, a platform for contemporary art. I think it's more than a fair. It mirrors the social, political, um, issues and position of the country both in Italy and internationally.

Both, uh, recently, but also historically we can see Biennale as a place of contestation, which is between elitism and participation, between cultural diplomacy and critical engagement, between commodification and resistance.

So I think it's such a nice case to think about when we speak about the cultural sector.

Jan: And how has, um, the, the event, um, engaged with sustainability from its inception?

Chiara: Did I mention the fact that I'm, I was looking for sustainability in, uh, its archival in, in the archive of the Biennale?

Well, I will say that, uh, the term 'sustainability' was not part of its regional vocabulary as we intend it today. But Venice Biennale has historically engaged with the key dimension of sustainability, such as social and governance related practices.

And it engaged with this practice, uh, long before they were formally institutionalised, both in the discourse, uh, academic discourse, but also in its reporting standard.

So despite the fact that now Biennale claim to be carbon footprint, just because they, they took a compensatory path, I will say that the Biennale start to engage with sustainability, uh, with a focus on, its mainly in its social dimension. And, and then also in its governance dimension.

So between, um, fifties and seventies, the Biennale try to, uh, experiment some participatory governance. A solution with, for example, board meetings, staff assemblies and inclusion of trade unions inside their board of, board of directors.

But it also integrated social concern directly into its cultural production, promoting themes like social justice, political resistance. Think that they, back in 1970s, they have a specific theme, uh, of the Biennale reflecting on dictatorship in South America. How surprising is that?

So they were trying to actually include those marginalised community voices inside their strategy. And also they, they centralise their activities, reaching out to the working class and moving part of their traditional activities from the very core, the very centre of Venice into, uh, production places. So industrial petrochemical plant. For me that was extremely fascinating.

Well, if we think about the environmental dimension, uh, they were reflecting on that. But, uh, mainly through the themes of their exhibition. Say for example, in 1968, Uriburu has, uh, a performance in the Grand Canal in which

he dyed the water of the Grand Canal to actually make, make people aware of the pollution of the water in Venice.

Well, to me it was surprising because I thought sustainability was actually kind of a new phenomenon which, indeed, it's not.

Jan: And in, in fact we've been having some really interesting conversations 'cause we've been thinking about, uh, how people produce, uh, sort of oppositional accounts to the mainstream. And, um, for the, in the accounting side of academia, that started in the 1970s.

And so there was this big upwelling of a lot of experimentation at that time, and then it all went quiet, and then it sort of returned in an environmental form in the mid-nineties.

So it seems that there, there's sort of that same thing going on here, that there was something about the 1970s and, you know, the first Earth Day and all of these sorts of things that created a, like a bunch of themes that then died down, but are now resurgent again.

Paul: Sounds to me like the academics and, uh, the accountants were just 10 years behind the sixties, weren't you? [Jan laughs] It took, it took the academics that, that long to catch up on all your accountants to…

Jan: …well, well the sixties does play into it. Because there's also a, a theory of, you know, who, who did these things.

So in the seventies the people who were doing some of these things in practice, and then again in the nineties, 'cause I'm more senior in businesses, were, were hippies. Um, who then put on suits.

So sometimes, uh, when people try to, I try to explain what, you know, maybe environmental accounting is about, I say, oh, it's hippies in suits.

So if you like [laughs] the, the sixties are definitely there. You, you pin the date really well. Although not the explanatory factor.

Paul: I don't know, maybe they just finally came down from being high in the seventies and got to doing some stuff, uh, more practically.

Jan: Yeah. But then they're more senior in, in businesses in the 1990s and things pop up again…

Paul: …mm-hmm…

Jan: …so there is a generational effect I think.

Paul: So, let's bring things towards a close then Chiara, and ask you, what's giving you hope and inspiration when it comes to cultural heritage, cultural sustainability?

Chiara: Well, we've covered all culture as potential driver of unsustainability, but I think I didn't stress enough, enough, the fact that culture can actually be a driver of, for sustainability and for sustainable development.

So I will say that arts and culture can have a role of advocacy. So disseminate and bolster scientific evidence around climate change, biodiversity laws, and so forth.

Both in terms, if we think, for example, of the public art that can actually make us aware of the climate change. So for example, around the world, there are a numbers of, uh, work of art, but also pieces of public art that actually try to make people aware of the climate change.

During my visit, I discovered that in the jetty of Morecambe, there, there is a bell, which actually tried to make people aware of, uh, the level of sea rise. For me, it was surprising.

But also if we think about the power of film, movies, and images to actually think, and make us think, and make us reflect on the effect of climate change. Um. So that's one point.

But also I like the fact that, um, arts can tend to be more radical in what they say. So they can help us to actually think about possible solution which are not traditionally perceived as possible. So it help us envisioning, uh, let's say really radical utopias, and they can make really radical contestation about, uh, capitalism and the system in which we are part of it. So this really good at, um, uh, spotting out inequalities.

So we can say that in the very end, the culture can be perceived as sustainability. So at the very end I can say that culture can be perceived as, uh, sustainability per se.

If we think about, uh, traditional way of farming or fishing or dying, for example, related to Maori culture or aboriginal knowledge, that's culture. And if we think about rediscovering, uh, those ecological knowledge and bring it in different sector, I think that can be the key for the sustainable developments.

So, I will say that culture have a transformative power also for other type of sector.

Jan: I'm convinced.

Paul: Well, I can be convinced.

Jan: [laughs] That's as good as it gets Chiara. Well done, well done.

Paul: Well, thank you very much, uh, Chiara, for bringing along some much needed culture to this podcast. [Jan laughs]

We've been lacking culture for a long time, me and you, Jan and…

Jan: …I think so….

Paul: …Chiara, you provided it in spades. Thank you very much for joining us.

Chiara: Thank you for having me.

[Theme music]

Paul: So Jan? Cosa pensi della discussione?

Jan: Uuuh, sì! [bursts into laughter]

Paul: Yeah, got you there…

[Jan and Paul laugh!]

Jan: …our, our producer currently is, is almost wetting herself laughing. [giggles] Given, given that, yeah.

Paul: Yeah. But what the listeners can't see is that your arms move about and what you obviously view to be a very exuberant and gesturing Italian manner.

Jan: I, I have a, a half-Italian grandson. So I suspect that it would be really good for, for both, um, you know, my husband and myself to learn some Italian because he's going to be bilingual, so it might be really good for us all to have a wee go.

Paul: Sì, devi imparare l'italiano.

Jan: Uh, yes does… [makes uncertain noise]

Paul: I said, yes, you have to learn Italian.

Jan: Excellent, I'm with you. Okay, so enough of this nonsense.

So what, what did you make of that conversation?

Paul: Funnily enough, that's exactly what I said to you at the start of this. [Jan laughs] Only I said it to you in Italian and you didn't understand. So you're just going right back to what I said a few moments ago…

Jan: …to the beginning.

Paul: Yeah, it, it was really interesting. There were lots of points that got brought up there where you realise that culture and sustainability could and should go together, but aren't necessarily being drawn together by the people who think about sustainability.

Jan: And, uh, Chiara's, um, spent some time in, Aotearoa New Zealand. And so in that context, cultural sustainability is always a fourth pillar. And, and, um, is there because of, well because it's a good pillar to have, but also if you have a, a strong indigenous community as well, then you can't, it's just drawn to your attention.

But I think it's in the background of many of the other conversations that we've had with guests, and so it was really nice to foreground it and for us to be able to see a bit more about it.

Paul: Yeah, we've talked a lots about different cultures and how they approach sustainability without necessarily highlighting the fact that this a cultural element towards sustainability. Yeah, so it has been good to bring that there.

When, before we'd had this conversation, when it came to culture, what I think about of culture is historic culture and the culture of a place. And it was immediately obvious from when Chiara started to talk there that other areas of culture, which other people will think of as culture before they think of anything about the history and the, the background of a place are there as well. So the arts, the video gaming.

Jan: I thought that was, it was really good that it was, I mean, because that's contemporary contemporary as well as, so, so there's sort of high art and then there's, well, you know, never mind the rest, but craft…

Paul: … hang on, hang on, hang on…

Jan: …craft will be in there…

Paul: …don't you go [Jan laughs] slagging off video games…

Jan: …I'm not!

Paul: …there's high art. And then it was obvious what you were thinking. There's high art and then there's Nintendo, and…

Jan: …not at all. Because craft is in the same place.

So craft, quite often it takes material, it takes material culture, it's, it's got a deep, um, cultural significance. But it's quite often left outside of the cultural industries as not being posh enough.

Paul: Yeah. Arts and crafts. And you don't have to ask which one of those is viewed in the higher regard by anyone who uses the term arts and crafts.

Jan: But here's, here's the other thing, Paul. I… I always feel quite conflicted about tourism, and so, um, you know, I have been to Venice visiting a dear friend in the north of Italy on, on the train, which I'm really looking forward to over the summer.

And, and I would like to go back, but then I feel well, should I, and for, you know, uh, Florence, all, all these sorts of places that, that are just, you know, miraculously wonderful, and even places close to the home, like some parts of the Lake District that we were talking about, et cetera.

I feel really quite torn about being a tourist, and then creating all those negative disruptions, even though the experience is transformatory and really fantastic for you as a, as a person.

Do you have that same tension in your thoughts?

Paul: For a start, when it comes to Venice, I'm in a small minority. I've been to Venice once. It was all right. I am not someone who went to Venice and was like, this place is absolutely amazing, it's the most wonderful place in the world, I can see why there are 7,000 cruise ships currently sailing down the Grand Canal and mean a bloody big eyesore. Um, it was all right. I enjoyed it. Maybe because it's too touristy I was just a bit meh, but I know what you mean.

We as a family, when we travel, we're restricted by school holidays. That particularly puts you in danger of being part of the over tourism problem. Whenever you go anywhere during the school, summer holidays in August, in July, you are gonna be part of bigger crowds.

We've tried to assuage little bit of that by traveling at the end of August, because you find, particularly in continental Europe, all the schools have gone back at that point, so it's not quite as busy as it could be.

But you're still part of a tourism issue. And you're going somewhere because it's nice to visit, and therefore there is almost certainly going to be a bit of a tourist thing there.

We go to places that aren't quite, you know, overly touristy. We've never been to Disneyland, or anything like that. Um, my children probably don't like me because we've never been to Disneyland. [Jan laughs] We don't go to the most obvious places to go.

We don't go to Paris, say. We've taken the children to Munich, we've taken the children to Vienna, we've then travelled by train through Austria, Switzerland, up into Germany. Again, we've been to places like Cologne, Bern in Switzerland. These are places that are touristy, but they never feel crazy touristy, and I think we try and avoid the crazy touristy places.

Jan: And what I like about that approach is that tourism is a big sector, it's a big, you know, source of employment and, and economic wellbeing, is that you can spread it around a bit as well…

Paul: …yes…

Jan: …it doesn't sort of concentrate all in one place.

Paul: We've talked about where I'm going on holiday this summer of, uh, going to Denmark. The immediate place, you're going to Denmark, you're going to Copenhagen.

I think we're gonna spend two, three days in Copenhagen, but we over a two-and-a-half-week holiday, we're going Aarhus, we're going to Odense, we're going to a place called Billund. Have you ever heard of Billund?

Jan: No, I haven't.

Paul: You don't have children. [Jan laughs] Oh, you've got a small grandchild of the right age…

Jan: …I think he's too little...

Paul: …Lego.

Jan: …ah, right…

Paul: Billund is Lego. Billund has an airport because of Lego. There's nothing else in Billund, apart from that.

There's Legoland there and there's the Lego House. So we'll be, you know, enjoying Billund, which probably is a bit of a touristy place 'cause it's got Legoland there. But yeah, we'll love that.

Yeah, we do like going places that are [pause] there, there's stuff there to do, but we don't necessarily need to go somewhere that's massively packed.

Jan: Yeah, no, that makes good sense.

Paul: One thing that really struck me is that the Biennale was created because there was a time when tourists weren't flocking to Venice.

It seems crazy, doesn't it? We think about Venice now as. Being such a unique place that surely tourists have always gone there, but obviously not.

Jan: No, I think places come and go and then sometimes as well, events like that then have their own dynamic and, and feed off them. Uh, but also that the, at a time when mass tourism is also quite a recent phenomena.

People who had the wealth and the means and the, the expectation maybe would go on a European Grand Tour, but that that wasn't for most people at most times.

Paul: Yes, when you think about the Grand Tour, you're very much thinking about the likes of Byron and people like this who were very much well off. They, they weren't struggling for cash. They weren't scraping their last pound together just so they could afford the bread to go up on their table that evening.

And even domestically, places like the Lake District, places like the Seaside and Blackpool and things only really took off in the 19th, 20th centuries when mass transport became available through the railway lines. Mass transport, that was also speedy. Because there were canals before that, but you weren't going on a canal trip to Blackpool, 'cause you'd leave London on the Tuesday and arrive on next November. So.

Jan: And this also ties into thinking about, you know, how the speed of travel then dictates different places as being accessible or not accessible. So all of these things are, I suppose it's that wicked, wicked framing again, isn't it?

The complex adaptive system. All of these things come together in order to make sense of, um, what the situation might be for a particular place at a particular time.

Paul: And it ties back to what we spoke about, a few weeks ago now, about the night trains and how that fits into the European geographic model, and it fits into the Chinese geographic model in a different way. It doesn't always fit into other geographic models

And that, particularly night trains might be used by tourists. And we talked to them about the different restrictions that are in place for domestic fights in certain countries, and, yeah, there's, there's so much to consider when it comes to the tourism aspect of it.

But certainly Chiara's in the right place for it in Venice, looking at the situation there, because I don't think there's a place you hear about more in the news when it comes to things like over tourism, and locals and their revolts, and the taxes that we talked about, and the number of cruise ships that are allowed in, and the barriers that have to be put in place to stop it flooding every five minutes.

Jan: Yeah. That's amazing. Amazing.

Paul: So next week we're not going to be talking about cultural tourism, but we are going to be going far, far away.

Jan: Really? Where are we going next week then?

Paul: We're gonna be talking about shrimp in Thailand.

Jan: Oh yes, that's far, far away. Indeed. [laughs]

Paul: Yes. I don't know if Thai shrimp are a cause of over tourism in Thailand, but I'd suspect not. I'd suspect that people go to Thailand more for the beaches and for the nature and various things like that.

Jan: Yeah, and they've got some, you know, amazing old ruins there as well. Yeah. So no, Thailand. Let's go then. What are we doing in Thailand?

Paul: Well, we're talking about Thai shrimp, [Jan laughs] and we're gonna be talking about it specifically when it comes to things such as antibiotics.

And we're gonna be talking about antibiotic resistance. We're gonna be talking about antimicrobial resistance. We're gonna be talking how this all fits in with farming of foods and how this fits in with humans.

Jan: That's a really nice, diverse segue from tourism, to shrimp.

Paul: Yes, and I'm sure you'll have shrimp on your next holiday, just not necessarily the ones we're talking about.

Until next time, thank you very much for listening. I'm Paul Turner.

Jan: And I'm Professor Jan Bebbington.

[Theme music]