Be the change you wish to See
Interview by Luca Barbeni with Maja Kuzmanovic and Bartaku for
Ecopolis

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– what do you mean exactly with "unsustainable cultural practices"?

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There are two ways in which we used the term 'unsustainable cultural
practices' – on one hand to describe a wide-spread culture of
unsustainable consumption, and on the other, the practices within
the cultural sector, where thinking about ecological and social
impact isn't often seen as a core part of the creative process.

People working within the cultural sector often claim that we have
the ability to influence fundamental behavioural and cultural
changes. It is exactly such deep and far reaching changes that are
needed today, to steer human societies away from wasteful
consumption and towards more responsive and responsible
participation. So if it is true that our sector can influence these
developments, we should live and practice such changes ourselves.
With Luminous Green, we wanted to engage our colleagues and friends
from the creative sector in a discussion about how to make our
practices cleaner, more ethical and less wasteful, as well as how to
broaden their social, environmental, cultural and economic impact.

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– On your website i found this really interesting categorization of
the word "culture": macro culture (reality), meta culture
(consciousness), multi culture (community), micro culture
(substance), zero culture (life), can you explain it?

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The word culture has an interesting collection of meanings –
originally it referred to growing and cultivation of plants, only
later assuming it's current definition – the development of human
minds and behaviours. In FoAM we are trying to re-establish, or re-
emphasise some of the various meanings of culture and cultivation.
With our activities, we approach this from various directions – from
generating hybrid realities to finding ways of living a fulfilling
life.

Zero Culture is about experiences in which the participants can let
go of their cultural baggage, high-brow cultural criticism, or
scientific reductionism and open up to simple, fresh stimuli. It is
basically about celebrating everyday life in its many forms –
cooking meals and eating together, climbing trees, or creating
inspiring informal situations for people to hang out together.

Micro Culture is about the materials that make up our culture. It is about artists and designers working not only at the level of form and content, but with the very substance that constitutes their works — becoming more conscious of the process of creation and manipulation of matter — whether biological cells, synthetic polymers, or generative sonic and visual systems.

Multi Culture is about fostering social, cultural and biological diversity. It is about being able to work in diverse situations and adapt to them on a personal, as well as cultural level. It is about communities, their cultures, exchanges and evolution. It is about artists, designers and other cultural workers nourishing and being nourished by the cultures around them. Play and games, nomadic laboratories and guerilla gardening are a few techniques.

Macro Culture looks at a cultures as entire realities and the possible intersections between them — we mainly refer here to the 'Mixed reality' continuum, encompassing a range of experiences that become possible when physical and digital worlds become intertwined — our materials, clothing, furniture and architecture can become more responsive; we can fabricate matter, or generate distributed worlds.

Finally, Meta Culture reflects on the four other layers of culture, it is about understanding 'cultures able to produce other cultures' — DIY culture, Open Source culture, or psychedelic culture for example. Meta culture can help set up conditions, educate, review, forecast and critique contemporary or historic cultures. It attempts this from a broad perspective, providing a philosophical and ethical framework for the emergence of new and alternative cultures and realities.

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— Can you explain the idea of transient reality generators, how it grew up and what are the objectives?

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There are many worlds and many realities in our universe. When one reality, or one world-view is superimposed on another, it is inevitable that social, economic and cultural problems arise. Hierarchies of worlds are constructs of a bygone era. Ecologies of worlds should guide us in considering our future. We imagine this future to be responsive, adaptive and interconnected. We abandon the static and universal designs of the industrial era and move towards a world of malleable materials, objects and spaces. Where buildings can sustain themselves and replenish their environments, technologies can function as immune systems rather than panic attacks, materials are active, pliant and compostable.

In order to bring such a future about, we formed a group of 'Transient Reality Generators' (TRG, http://fo.am/trg/), with the

aim of designing situations able to be perceived as experimental realities. Recently, we have become a part of the ancient Guild for Reality Integrators and Generators (gRig). Within this guild, we are designing environments and situations capable of responding to ecological or social needs, able to adapt and evolve with us. These 'responsive environments' are designed to encourage their inhabitants to converse with their surroundings and each other, through touch, movement and gesture. Our first responsive environments were temporary play-spaces, designed as social, technological and aesthetic experiments. Within these play-spaces, we investigate different forms of responsive and responsible relationships, between humans and their environments.

Participants can chill out, play the space as an instrument, invent new games or tell each other fantastic stories. In these spaces, evolution and environmental change are embodied on a human scale, making us all aware that 'everything is connected to everything else'.

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and what is an irreal ecology?

Irreal ecologies are edge-habitats between physical and virtual, real and imaginary worlds. In irreal spaces the boundaries between fiction and reality are increasingly fuzzy, allowing for hybrid lifeforms to emerge — they are often biomimetic and biomorphic, inspired by the processes of growth and transformation in the biological world. A-life creatures permutating as physical architecture deforms, or physical materials changing shape in response to the density of a digital stream.

-How was the Luminous Green Symposium? any particular idea or topic grew up?

The Luminous Green Symposium was an informal, but intense gathering about 'the role of design and technology in an environment of turbulence'. It dealt with the involvement of creative practitioners in international debates concerning environmental and social instabilities. About 100 people from a variety of backgrounds gathered together — from art and design to education, business, policy and activism. There were six speakers and several artists and designers inspiring the discussions by talking about and showing their work, looking at different approaches to relating art, design, education and sustainability.

The symposium was a part of a week long series of events (see http://luminousgreen.org), which also included an 'Open Space'

retreat, a Hands-on workshop and an Open Lab. Many ideas and topics grew out of these activities, and we're still working on untangling all the discussion threads and seeing what is worth following up. There are a few themes that ran through all events — the increasing need for interconnectedness and interdependence (in Jennifer Leonard's words — design ecologies, rather than design economies), the benefits of whole systems thinking, the need for scaling up and linking existing efforts, the relevance of local solutions and human stories, honesty and transparency in communication, relationships between aesthetics and sustainability, human powered systems, etc. In the coming months, we will translate these ideas into a publication (scheduled to be published in late autumn), and those most worth pursuing will be translated into projects, proposals and the next edition of Luminous Green in 2008.

Finally, a sentence that best described both the Luminous Green events and the ideas that are coming out of them at the moment, was a thought by Gandhi, quoted by S. Srinivasan (Vasu) from the Barefoot college — 'Be the change you wish to see'.