

Culture and Climate: Video-Gespräch mit Laura Walde im Rahmen der 66. Internationalen Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen am 11.06.2020

Laura Walde talks with Annett Baumast, the founder of baumast. kultur & nachhaltigkeit. They discuss the ways climate affects culture and how (theatre) productions can be more sustainable.

Laura So, Annett Baumast, thank you so much for taking the time to talking to us virtually. You're the founder of baumast. kultur & nachhaltigkeit / culture & sustainability and this has the aim of increasing awareness, especially in the cultural sector, for issues of sustainability and you're also a teacher, could you maybe tell us a little bit about your background and what it is that you do on a daily basis?

Annett Sure! Hello from Hamburg, my name is Annett Baumast. I've been working in the area of sustainability for about 30 years in completely different functions and for the past approximately ten years I focused on the culture, the culture sector and sustainability. As you mentioned, I've got my little office baumast. culture & sustainability and I've been working with cultural institutions from different areas with little bias and direction of theatres, for the past ten years doing projects together on sustainability, developing programs or strategies how the institutions can put sustainability measures in practice. As you mentioned, I'm also a teacher, I've been teaching now since the mid 1990's I think, at different universities in Germany, Switzerland and Austria. At the moment I also have a part-time job at the University of Music and theatre here in Hamburg at the institute for culture and media management as a research fellow.

What do I do on a daily basis was the question. Well, at the moment, as the summer semester starts, we're dealing with all sorts of different formats and bring our content to the students in online world, in which we're living at the moment. So I'm developing different formats on culture and sustainability and in my other life, in my own office, I'm working on different projects. One is creating online courses actually, that people from cultural institutions can do independently. That is one thing I'm doing at the moment and I'm also waiting for the kick-off for different projects, one is with a theatre. They want to start a season under the heading of sustainability and the other is a project with a municipality developing a sustainability strategy for cultural institutions.

Laura *Because you mentioned, that you only started to focus on the cultural sector about ten years ago, in your experience, what are the challenges, that may be specific for the cultural sector, when it comes to sustainability? Is there something, that is much more prominent in our field than for example, I don't know, the economics or just different fields of work?*

Annett Well I think for a long time the challenge really has been to accept the fact that also the cultural sector has a responsibility for sustainability, that hasn't really been the case, at least not so much in the German speaking countries which I focus on my work, because there were lots of exhibitions, films theatre productions on sustainability issues, but nobody really felt, that behind the scene, something had to happen as well. So there was a somewhat weird dichotomy between those two sides, the cultural side on one hand and the organizational side on the other hand. And for a long time, that was never matched, that never matched in people's hands, if you asked the theatre

director “What are you doing on sustainability?” and this is a real quote from the former artistic director, he said “Well, I’m staging ‘Uncle Vanya’, what else can I do?”. So, that has changed in the past, let’s say 15-18 months, and also in cultural institution. And I’m generalizing here. I mean there have been exceptions of course, you have lots of great things in the past years, don’t get me wrong, but over the last 15-18 months a lot has changed. And a lot of cultural institutions have understood, that it’s also their responsibility to take action in the area of sustainability, climate change, etc.

Laura *It’s an interesting point I’ve been thinking about as well. It’s curious, how our self-understanding as cultural workers, left and liberal, has not been in think yet or up until now with issues of sustainability and also gender parity. It comes together, all these issues and I think in the end we’re talking about the same issues here. Do you have any idea, why it took so long? Why Greta had to come on board to wake us up?*

Annett I think one big argument has always been the freedom of the arts and that the people felt that if they also had to consider sustainability issues they would not be as free in creating their art, which is also a bit strange, because when you have any kind of production, you have a budget and that’s financial limit, so thinking about renewable energy or environmentally friendly material or good working conditions, it’s setting the scene in a way, it’s the area that you play in or work in. I think that has been a reason. I’ve heard many times “we’re not as bad as a cement factory, we don’t have such an environmental impact”. But if you look at large festivals for example, they do have quite a large environmental footprint. If you look at open air festivals or large theatre and opera productions, it’s good if the whole material goes into storage, because in the

German speaking countries we have a repertoire system, so if an opera runs really well, it runs for 30 years. I think here in Hamburg the "magic flute" has been running for nearly 40 years, they stopped it a couple of years ago. I mean that is very sustainable, if you keep reusing the same material for the same production. But it's not always the case and sometimes we've got really material intense productions, even more so in the film sector, because you make the film, you create the set and then basically you throw it away, if you don't find another solution. So the environmental impact is there, but there was always a comparison to other industries, where it's worse. The need wasn't really felt to do something about it.

Laura *So what can festivals actually do? You're also a consultant. When you start working with a new project, what is it, that you first look at and then what is the strategy you advise festivals to follow?*

Annett I think it really depends on where you stand with your festival. Whether it's a new festival, which is sometimes a very nice position, because you can already take everything into consideration from day one. Sometimes you have festivals, that are running for ten to twenty years -

Laura *Or worse: 60 -*

Annett Oh yes, it's the 60th version this year, isn't it?

Laura *I don't actually know, how embarrassing. I think the 64th.*

Annett So in this situation, you already have processes, that are established and things, that you've always done, because you always do them the way you do them. In this case, it's very

important to get the people on board and ask them what they think they could do, because normally, they already know. Everybody is always a specialist in his or her field and I can tell you “Yes, we could this together, but we haven’t been able to, because...”. If you really commit to and taking measures to making changes, this would be the first step. Also to assess, where you stand, because sometimes some things are possible in some festivals and in other festivals it’s not possible, if you look for mobility for example. It really depends on where the festival takes place and if it’s not easily reached by public transport. Can you do anything about it, because you change the location every year anyway, so next year you can take this into consideration? But if you’re always in the same space, you cannot very quickly change anything about the public transport situation for example. It’s really important to assess, where you stand and find, what you can do easily, what you maybe always wanted to do, but haven’t really gotten around to doing. I would say in an ideal world, you do develop a concept or strategy on how you want to go on over the next years, because nothing is more frightening than if you see all the things that you could do and it’s far too much or you couldn’t handle it and can’t do it this year. So really have a plan and take one step further every year and try to implement things one by one and not everything at the same time. Unless you have a chance which may be now to replan your festival and make it something different.

Laura *Which is maybe what the whole corona crisis at the moment challenges with going online, so maybe as a last question: I guess travel is one of the main issues, when it comes to the environmental footprint for festivals, because festivals live of having lots of people from all over the world, gathering in one space. This year, as I just mentioned, many of us are forced to*

actually go online, to find new ways of getting together and talking together. You mentioned it as well, it's the same force for education at the moment. Your background is firstly in theatre and there has been for quite some time also initiatives of bringing theatre productions to people all over the world by live streaming, which is of course something completely different than sitting in a theatre and this is, I guess, a similar situation now to the festivals, It's a completely different experience, sitting together in cinema, focusing on a screen and then watching it online. Do you have some thoughts on how going online will also change the identity of events like this and do you see it as a possibility or an opportunity as well or do you see a lot of traps and mines, that we kind of have to circumvent now?

Annett: I think different sides, actually. At the moment, I think, it's a good thing to replace things, that have already been planned and that have been quite far advanced. It's always so much around you, you've already got the films, that you want to show and it's a way of getting it out and getting it to the people. If you maybe can combine that with an online getting together, which is not the same as getting together in the same space physically, I think this is a good solution, at this time. Personally, I think at the moment, lots of cultural institutions, theatres and museums as well, are overdoing it. There is so much content online. In real, in physical life, I do not watch theatre or all the movies there all the time, so now I also don't have the time to do this. Maybe some people have and they're totally enjoying this diversity they see at the moment. But in the future, I think we can learn a lot from mixing these different versions of things and I'm really convinced you do not have to invite everybody from far away to every festival. You can try and focus on and also work with the audience, work

with your participants on what would be the most environmental friendly way of travelling. You can travel by train from lots of places. Not in the moment of course, but generally, night trains are raising again and you can get to London easily, in and around Europe. It's quite easy to travel by train and it's also a way of changing your own thinking. Is flying really great, is it lots of fun? Or is it more annoying to having to wait at the airport, having to strip down your clothes? It's really exaggerating not being able to sit down for three hours and work, what you can do on a train normally, if you're not too unlucky. I think we need to tell different stories and make experiences different. I've completely changed my own way using mobility and I totally enjoy long train rides. Not only in my work, because you know I'm working with sustainability, I can't fly around the world, but also in my private life. I just enjoy going somewhere not too close and slowly getting home again. I'm not just at an airport, flying somewhere and back home, but I can slowly come back, leave the holiday thoughts behind and slowly get the custom to get back to work. It's really the story, that you tell to your visitors or your audience. I think it's always a journey together.

It's not good prescribing things. Sometimes it works, but usually this meets resistance in lots of people. We need to change things and we need to change it altogether.

Laura *Thank you, that was a really nice summary and I really liked the idea of changing narratives and changing the story that we tell people and that we built some things together, it's very close to what we do on a daily basis, with film festivals, with theatre, with art in general. So thank you so much for talking with us.*

Annett You're welcome.