#### **‘What role does art have in shifting our society to a more sustainable future?’**

To begin with, it may be necessary to define art, which can be challenging. According to the Oxford Dictionary, 2022, “art is the use of the imagination to express ideas or feelings, particularly in painting, drawing or sculpture”. To this list it would be only fair to also include dance, photography, music, film, poetry, and theatre. Art is a tool for humanity, as well as a reflection of it. In this essay, the most critical environmental issue of our time, climate change and its relation to social justice, will be addressed. It will also explore some examples of a more sustainable future. As a last stop it will address how art can influence such a future.

Environmental issues have a social and natural relationship, it is worth noting that anthropogenic (human-caused) climate change has intensified rapidly in a short period of time and could have devastating consequences within one or two generations. Among some of the risks that include anthropogenic climate change are, sea level rise, intensification of severe weather, changes in rainfall patterns leading to drought and floods and spread of infectious diseases, (The Open University, 2022). Notably, many countries with the least responsibility for anthropogenic climate change are suffering a huge and unfair share of the negative impacts of it. Climate change is therefore a problem of social justice. The question is then, who should be responsible and how can we use information and tools we have available to create awareness, mitigation and adaptation measures that are implemented globally regardless of economic downturns and borders.

Sustainability encompasses meeting the needs of current generations while safeguarding the needs of future generations, maintaining a delicate balance between economic progress, environmental preservation and social well-being. Economic sustainability refers to the ability of enterprises to responsibly manage their resources and generate long-term profitability. Social sustainability aims to improve the coherence and stability of specific social groups. Environmental sustainability focuses on protecting biodiversity without inhibiting economic and social progress. The fundamentals of environmental sustainability encompass actions such as water conservation, energy conservation, waste reduction, adoption of recyclable packaging, minimising or eliminating the use of plastics, sustainable transport, reusing paper, and caring for flora and fauna, (Santander Becas, 2022).

Having briefly defined the problem of climate change and mentioned the main elements of a sustainable future, the importance of art and its interconnectedness with these topics will be assessed. Art raises awareness, informs, moves. Nina Simone, singer, songwriter, composer, classical trained pianist, and part of the Civil Right Movement once said: *“I choose to reflect the times and the situations in which I find myself. That, to me, is my duty…How can you be an artist and not reflect the times?”*. With knowledge comes care, and if we care, then we can make changes. Art helps to move social actors and thus to have agency. With agency we have power and therefore the capacity to make a difference or influence our cause for the planet and for ourselves. It may be romantic and poetic to think that art can influence a sustainable future, but great changes in human history were accompanied by artistic movements. Using art as a tool, as well as a catharsis for climate anxiety and uncertainty, can be one of our allies. The philosopher José Ortega y Gasset, in the Meditations on Quixote, 1983 wrote: *“I am I and my circumstance; and, if I do not save it, I do not save myself.”* Our circumstances as a human species are interconnected with a sustainable future. So, whether it is art, technology, politics, activism, having a sustainable future depends on all of us and should be our duty as global citizens.

In conclusion, the problem of climate change must be tackled using different tools. The issue of climate change is for many nations a current issue. These nations have contributed the least to the problem of a changing climate yet suffer the greatest impacts. Having a more sustainable future is primarily a social justice matter. A sustainable future must be borderless and must focus on environmental as well as economic and social aspects. Art appeals to the emotions. Art can not only raise awareness, but also inform and mobilise crowds. The movement of social actors promotes agency and thus promotes change! Art can therefore serve as a tool and a medium to encourage the development of a sustainable future.

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