

From Ignorance to Resonance: Analysis of the Transformative Potential of Dissensus and Agonistic Deliberation in Sustainability Communication

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In an intensifying climate crisis with sustainability as a moral framework for political, corporate, and individual behavior, there is a broad range of nonprofit organizations communicating increasingly professionally as agents of social change. Here, the potential of Eco-art as a way to stimulate social and ecological transformation by communicating sustainability more strategically (and thus effectively) is currently overlooked. After conceptualizing Eco-art as an example of a new type of antiprofit—in the sense of agonistic communication, putting existing (unsustainable) power structures and symbolic order into question—we examine the project FOR FOREST, which transformed a local football stadium in Central Europe into a large public art installation, where 300 trees were transplanted over the existing football pitch. The qualitative analysis of (social) media content in the exhibition period, complemented by interviews ($N = 15$) with central stakeholders, offered insights into three problematizing fields of discourse. With our contribution, we show the potential of Eco-art for sustainability communication in handling dissensus with agonism and its important role in demystifying sustainability by moving from ignorance to resonance.

Keywords: sustainability communication, climate change, Eco-art, nonprofit communication, narratives, agonism, deliberation

Challenged by the peak of climate change communication in Europe, by elections culminating in the “Green Deal” (Simon, 2019) and a worldwide movement of Extinction Rebels including Australia, the Fridays-for-Future youth in Europe, or the Sunrise Movement in the U.S., there is a broad range of organizations, groups, movements, politicians, and activists that are communicating increasingly professionally as agents of social change (Hurst & Ihlen, 2018). Additionally, sustainability is sneaking in as normative framework, not only influencing the corporate world but also offering a moral compass for individual behavior as well as all kinds of organizations (Frank, 2017; Weder, Lemke, & Tungarat, 2019). Here, foremost, nonprofit organizations are related to the 2030 Agenda titled “Transforming Our World: The

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2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" (UN, 2015), captured in the 17 goals (UN, 2020) and related policies based on the "common sense" that the idea of sustainability has to be negotiated in public deliberation (Weder, 2017; Weder, Krainer, & Karmasin, 2021). This offers various relational, structural, and rhetorical challenges as well as possibilities to communicate *about* sustainability (Berny & Rootes, 2018; Newig et al., 2013)—again, mainly for nonprofit organizations, being perceived as "leading the way on Sustainability Development Goals" (Sustainable Brands, 2018). From this perspective, nonprofit organizations are perceived as one part in the for-profit/not-for-profit dualism, both operating *within* the existing power structures and the order of capitalism, both using the category of "profit" for their characterization and demarcation (othering; Harvey, 2010).

Sustainability communication from a corporate perspective represents a strategic rather corporate perspective, conceptualizing nonprofit organizations as partners that are already building traction and strong foundations in reaching the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Here, nonprofits are seen as a catalyst for public-private partnerships. In other words, having a nonprofit, a "good cause" organization, as a partner is a way to operationalize the so-called corporate social responsibility. It helps your business to get the license to operate and shows the social impact of a business (Golob & Bartlett, 2007; Rasche, Morsing, & Moon, 2017).

But today, facing the climate crisis, ecological degradation and related social and health issues, nonprofit organizations, mainly in the area of environmental engagement and sustainable development, get more and more attention as not only "partners" but as independent communicators, as agents of change, either in climate change negotiations (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2016; Giorgetti, 1998; Pandey, 2015) or in realizing transformation processes in local environments (McGregor, Yerbury, & Shahid, 2018), on a national (Quinn-Thibodeau & Wu, 2016) and international level (Allan & Hadden, 2017; Della Porta & Parks, 2014). Then, "nonprofit" is no longer the most suitable label for rather "antiprofit" or system-critical (communication) efforts and engagement. Thus, new forms of organizations emerge, thinking about sustainability not as alternative *within*, but as alternative *to* the existing system, the capitalist market economy with all its patterns and structures.

Here, the potential of *art* in creating awareness, anti- and counternarratives and resistance without being instrumentalized or without being partnered with corporate interests is often overlooked, although there is a long tradition of using arts to communicate issues capable of questioning dominant paradigms (Belfiore & Bennett, 2007; Curtis, Reid, & Ballard, 2012). Additionally, art typically uses metaphors, analogies, or narratives, which climate communication in particular generally lacks (Roosen, Klöckner, & Swim, 2018; Schäfer & Bonfadelli, 2017). Art provides visualizations of a specific problem and an experience with the subject matter—which is particularly important regarding rather abstract and complex problems like the climate crisis and communication using and abusing the blurry and sometimes overused framework of sustainability (Weder et al., 2019). We take climate as culture and art as variation of nonprofit communication, which has the power to question existing patterns, norms, and (symbolic) power structures and to unleash alternative narratives and move people (Buckland, 2013; Weintraub, 2012) as well as the ability to articulate social and emotional trends through individual participation and passion in offered and articulated narratives and visions for the future (Roosen et al., 2018).

Thus, in our contribution, we take a specific stand in analyzing an Eco-art project as an example for uncovering new potential for organized communication *for* sustainability. We assume that in this specific form of not-for-profit or even antiprofit communication consensus is not the primary goal or the condition of and for communication, with dissensus also being particularly important for the continuation of communication. We further assume that the negotiation of every act of communication is possible and can be anticipated. Thus, the aim of this article is to identify discourses related to the project and to identify problematization as an inherent constitutive communication process of Eco-art.

Dialogue as “Holy Grail” in Nonprofit Communication so Far: A Survey of the Field

In our contribution, we define nonprofit organization as the wider framework compared with the concept of nongovernmental organizations (Lecy, Schmitz, & Swedlund, 2012). Nonprofit organizations are environmentally or socially concerned organizations that pursue nonprofit interests and motives, representing “the good,” as having “moral supremacy” and a general interest orientation as well as a “cultural voluntaristic authority” (Boli & Thomas, 1999, pp. 37, 273)—albeit *within* existing systems and related cultural patterns and power structures. A wider perspective, and a survey of the field of nonprofit communication, shows the dominance of a top-down perspective on public-private partnerships and nonprofit engagement, and participation from a corporate perspective, represented in rather operational and therefore nonconceptual studies (Schwarz & Fritsch, 2015). Furthermore, the communication models from a corporate communication perspective are mostly taken over as ideal for nonprofits as well. Only recently, a new perspective complements this first type of top-down nonprofit communication concepts (labeled as Type A in Figure 1). It describes nonprofit communication as rather integrated communication, as citizen participation, advocacy, or campaigns for change (Meneghetti, 2001; Oliveira, Melo, & Gonçalves, 2016) and lists specific communicative challenges of provocation and bottom-up communication (Type B in Figure 1). Here, the regulative idea discussed predominantly is dialogue as principle at the core of efficient and effective communication management, with an orientation toward compromise or consensus among divergent organizational goals, strategies and frameworks.

	A	B	C
Objective	Communication about climate change and sustainability	Communication of the climate crisis	Communication for sustainability
Narrative	Sustainability as alternative <i>within</i> the system. Organizations operating within the existing power structures and order of capitalism		Sustainability as alternative <i>to</i> the system. “Anti-profit” or system critical (communication) efforts and engagement
Example	Top-down Universities, political Institutions, Shareholder activism/ethical investment, investment in business from an ethical perspective with ‘positive’ influence on corporate behaviour in mind, consulting, reporting, evaluation of corporates by NGOs, like the global Reporting Initiative or Litigation, lawsuits and court proceedings of activists to fight against corporates/their misbehaviour (Earth Rights International)	Bottom-up. Watchdog activism, investigation and disclosure of corporate misconduct (naming & shaming) like Greenpeace; as well Consumer activism and the fairtrade movement, information about and boycott of ‘un-sustainable’ or un-ethical products, like Fairtrade Critical research, public education, advocacy against misconduct on a larger scale (politics/economy), like Amnesty International	Reflexive Friday-for-Future, Extinction Rebellion, Sunrise Movement, Eco-Art as representation Eclectic activism, mixed and diverse participation, initiating and stimulation of agonism, generating information and context related to a specific corporate or broader field of economic (or political) behaviour
Problematization	Low (dialogue as ideal)	re-active (provocation, disruption)	(pro)active problematization (reflexivity)
Communication as organization	Construction of an issue	Deconstruction of the issue	Constitution, conversational through representation of an issue; emergence of new narratives
Constitutive potential	Research, Innovation (technical, solutions), Information and Education	Popularization, orientation for action is given	Agonistic Deliberation

Figure 1. Eco-art as communicatively performed problematization.

However, from our perspective, even dialogue concepts do not recognize the specific character as well as the potential of nonprofit communication, especially in communicating not only *about* sustainability but much more *for* sustainability and social transformation. Critical communication and PR literature points this out by saying that dialogue always defines the ideal stakeholder interaction (Pieczka, 2011, 2015; Theunissen & Wan Noordin, 2012), and is predominantly discussed as solution-oriented tool in engagement processes (O’Riordan & Fairbrass, 2014). For the conceptualization of an innovative approach to nonprofit communication as antiprofit, system-critical, and disruptive communication, which will be necessary to better understand Extinction Rebellion, the Fridays-for-Future movement, and Eco-art and its potential to communicate not only about but *for* transformation, we draw on Davidson (2016), who takes on this critique and introduces a normative position of communication management that he calls an agonistic critique of the established frameworks of dialogue and symmetry. This goes back to Mouffe’s (2005, 2013) political theory (Parker & Parker, 2017; Wenman, 2013). Davidson refers to critical communication theory, which involves the exchange of ideas either in response to or *to perform and to facilitate change* (L’Etang, 2008). Much more, he introduces *problematization* as a core process of communicative engagement—especially in a sustainability context, related to the right to dissent as an agonistic principle of a transformative, sustainable organization of communication (Weder et al., 2019; Weder, 2020).

Eco-Art as Communicatively Performed and Organized Problematization

In our contribution, we chose “artivism” (in particular, Eco-art), as—from a communication perspective—rather underexplored context. But much more, we believe that Eco-art is something that meets

the specific characteristics of nonprofits in terms of instigating societal change, communicatively stimulating public discourses, performing and facilitating change—beyond existing frameworks, norms, and structures of power. Thus, we introduce a third, new concept for organizational communication *for* sustainability, categorized as Type C in Figure 1, which acknowledges conflict, dissensus, and pluralism of arguments.

Problematization and Communication for Sustainability

To better understand organizations and in particular Eco-art projects' potential to realize agonistic deliberation and aiming, in terms of theory, for a rather differentiated view on not-for-profit or even antiprofit-oriented organizations, we, first, relate to a previous concept of nonprofit communication offered in *Management Communication Quarterly* by Koschmann (2012), who describes conflict, tensions, and discourse fields as part of nonprofit organizing processes—and thus communication processes. This is what we want to complement by introducing *problematization as constitutive form of communication* (Weder, 2020; Weder et al., 2019). As mentioned in the previous chapter, the work of Laclau (2005) and Mouffe (2005) inspired new normative conceptualizations of (strategic) communication and its potential ability to agonize (Davidson, 2016). To agonize implies the acknowledgement and communication about pluralism in a conflict situation for being constructive rather than destructive (Hallgren, Bergeå, & Westberg, 2018; Mouffe, 2013). Agonism means a debate resulting in the actors involved understanding and respecting the difference between perspectives. Here, *problematization* is understood as the core process of permanent contestation, or stimulation of dissent and legitimization of (hegemonic) arguments. We assume that *problematization* is organized in discourses or *conversations* (Weder et al., 2019) and is per se a process of (ethical) reflection and of critical thinking, led by the principle of reflexivity and intrinsic social values, which goes hand in hand with a demystification of common knowledge or common-sense issues. *Problematization* is the *communicatively performed and organized deconstruction of situations taken for granted*. *Problematization* emerges in practice and invites the transformation of situations and can itself be described as action that starts with the recognition of a situation (context), an issue (content), or an idea as problematic and increasing the level of involvement via conversations (Weder, 2020). Aiming for a differentiated view on Eco-art as form of antiprofit and therefore critical communication, putting the political and economic status quo into question, we identify a new type (see Type C column in Figure 1) for communication for transformation and social change going beyond existing frameworks and categorizations of nonprofit organizations, where *dissensus is seen as important for the continuation of communication*.

To better define this new type in relation to sustainability as normative framework, we firstly refer to Utting (2005) and Waddell (2004) who introduce types of *not-for-profit organizing* that are categorized related to their function; here, they list watchdogs and the fair trade movement, as well as corporate nonprofit partnerships or eclectic activism with specific functions like evaluation, information, investigation or stimulation, which fit into Type A or Type B (Figure 1). However, focusing on *problematization as key process of agonistic deliberation* as elaborated earlier, we see the need for a differentiation between organizations that communicate climate change as threat and crisis (Type B, Figure 1, an example would be Greenpeace), from the second type of nonprofit communication, described as communication *about* climate change communication and sustainability. This tends to be done by scientific organizations, political institutions, intermediaries and nongovernmental organizations, which communicate about climate change related issues or sustainable development (goals), which can be characterized as rather constructive communication (Type A, Figure 1).

However, communication *of* and *about* sustainability is still happening *within* the existing political and economic system following and manifesting existing power structures. Thus, there is a need for a third, new category (Type C, Figure 1) for organized action communicating *for* sustainability, for a better future, and therefore introducing sustainability as alternative *to* capitalism, rather than thematizing sustainability as alternative within this economic framework. This new type is "communities of interpretation," which constitute entities of social change and thus are "natives of social change" (Oliveira, 2019, p. 93). Here, the Fridays-for-Future movement or Extinction Rebellion are examples, they show the constitutive potential, the potential to instigate conversations and discourses by problematization, by introducing new narratives and arguments. Eco-art belongs to this third category as well, which will be further explained in the following section.

Eco-Art as Representation or Intervention

In the course of human history, art has provided a wide range of services and has fulfilled many functions, so that it has taken a central place in our society (Weintraub, 2012). Art has the potential to help us envision "other worlds and possible futures, to reshape consciousness and create new narratives" (Reiss, 2019, p. vii), by reaching us on an affective level through the use of resources that involve emotional responses. This enables art to fulfill its main task: the development of new worlds, the reproduction and disarticulation of a particular and mostly hegemonic narrative, and the maintenance and the transformation of certain symbolic orders and patterns (Mouffe, 2013). Prevailing hegemony can be questioned especially by critical artistic practices ideated as counterhegemonic interventions. Indeed, critical art encourages dissensus while trying to reveal what the dominant consensus attempts to hide and silence. Critical art aims at giving voice precisely to all those who are silenced by the existing hegemony and has therefore to be detached from traditional institutions to oppose hegemonic discourses, practices, and paradigms (Mouffe, 2008, 2013). To be critical and innovative, art has to be further correlated with the type of changes and development as well as hegemonic issues in society at that time. Today this increasingly means dealing with the present and future conditions of water, soil, and atmosphere (i.e., nature). Thus, art must correlate with the exacerbation of environmental problems as well as the uncertain fate of life on planet earth, as one of the main issues of the present time (Weintraub, 2012). This is the basis of Eco-art.

Traditionally, Eco-art is understood as a subgenre of the umbrella term environmental art, while recently it has also been used as an alternative term for environmental art itself (Marks, 2017). Eco-art can be defined as art practices that deal with environmental problems and it pursues more "eco-friendly" approaches and methods (Bower, 2016). In this regard, Weintraub (2012) points to the engagement of Eco-art with examinations of systems thinking that investigate the totality of an ecosystem to generate environmental changes in the active effort to maintain the vitality of the earth's ecosystem. In other words: Eco-art focuses on global ecological ideologies (Carruthers, 2006), to stimulate sociocultural changes, while challenging modern individualism and anthropocentric perspectives and fostering the recognition of the interrelation between mankind and the environment (Marks, 2017; Wallen, 2012).

With our theoretical framework of differentiating between communication *of/about* sustainability and communication *for* sustainability in mind, we identify the need for developing a new narrative as counternarrative and critique of the existing system. Here, we introduce Eco-art as form of organized communication which then can be reconceptualized as way to stimulate collective action by stimulating

conversations, by organizing discourses about environmental issues. There is a long history of art as specific medium to communicate environmental issues and human–nature relationships, with a specific focus on climate change and related problems and issues in the past decade (Curtis et al., 2012; Giannachi, 2012). However, a deeper understanding of Eco-art goes even further. The literature describes this medium as very effective when communicating *for* sustainability in the following way (Buckland & Wainwright, 2010; Davoudi, 2012; Gabrys & Yusoff, 2012; Munden, 2008; Thornes, 2008; Weintraub, 2012). Eco-art perceives humanity connected to the natural world socially, philosophically, economically, and spiritually; the disconnection of humanity from the(ir) environment is communicated by exposing and critiquing the ways in which humanity is derelict in its duty to preserve and be connected to the earth; showing the limitedness and fragility of nature and the environment; highlighting how the disconnectedness from earth causes social inequality and injustice and worshipping the beauty and greatness of nature and those connected to it (Darts, 2004; Gabrys & Yusoff, 2012; Guy, Hensaw, & Heidrich, 2015; Thornes, 2008; Wakeland, 2012; Weintraub, 2006, 2012).

In line with these concepts, art projects in general have become more radical over the past decade; they have become rather disruptive and represent an intervention in a specific natural environment. Miles (2010) identified two standpoints as the art project being either a *representation of* or an *intervention in* the issue at hand. Intervention means the creation and strategic communication of meaning, which then is more aligned to Type B (see column B in Figure 1) and communication about sustainability. However, more and more, the artists behind the representation projects want to further engage people’s minds and their imaginations; they are no longer interested in “just” an audience for their work, but in a public with whom they can correspond about the meaning and purpose of their work. They want to create a deliberative process, an ongoing sense-making process, here reconceptualized as agonism. Then, Eco-art stands for reflexivity (Brand, Blok, & Verweij, 2019, p. 37; see Type C column in Figure 1), the contestation of cultural norms and emancipation (Darts, 2004; Giroux, 1981). To show the practical implications of our theoretical contribution to the existing body of nonprofit communication literature, we picked the art installation FOR FOREST as an example for the constructive power of art by representation, and *problematization by representation, by offering a space for a discourse*, in Mouffe’s (2013) sense, a public space where “conflicting points of view are confronted without any possibility of a final reconciliation” (p. 93).

Case Study and Methodological Consideration

The Eco-art project “FOR FOREST—The Unending Attraction of Nature” was conceptualized as a temporary art project by Klaus Littmann, a Swiss artist and art manager. It took place between September 8, 2019, and October 27, 2019, in the local football stadium in Klagenfurt, a Central European city in the southern part of Austria.

The pencil drawing by Max Peintner (1970/1971; see Figure 2) shows a multifunctional stadium with an urban smoke-mantled skyline in the background. Littmann understands this piece as “icon of the European Environmental Movement” (For Forest, 2019) *representing* a sarcastic, critical scenario of the future, where the human-nature relationship has deviated in such a way that we can only “watch” nature in a stadium like we observe animals in a zoo.

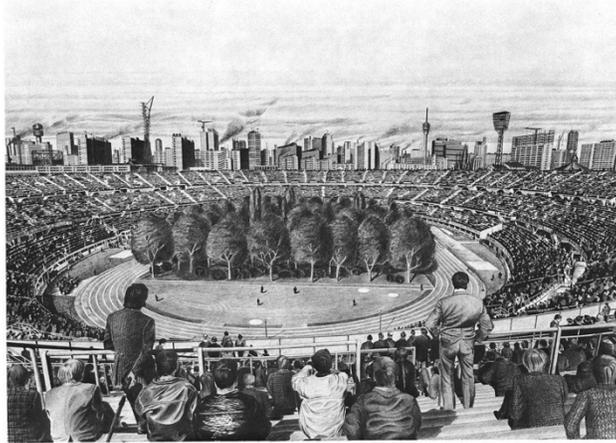


Figure 2. The unending attraction of nature (drawing by Max Peintner; For Forest, 2019).

In 2019, nearly 40 years later, Klaus Littmann, who perceives himself as “art-businessman” or “CEO of ART” (For Forest, 2019) created FOR FOREST as organizational framework to bring Peintner’s drawing to life and realize the following art project: Inspired by Joseph Beuys (1921–1986), he assigned landscape architect Enzo Enea to use 300 trees to cover the entire playing field of the football stadium in Klagenfurt (Austria) with a mixed forest, characteristic for the forests in Central Europe (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. FOR FOREST, Klagenfurt/Austria (credit: UNIMO).

During the exhibition period, visitors were able to admire the spectacle of the trees at daytime and at night from the grandstands (from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m.) for free, and reflecting (reflexivity; see Figure 1) on this rather unfamiliar experience and their related emotions. Depending on the time of day, weather conditions, and light, the forest represented in the stadium was a constantly changing landscape, where even the leaves turned into their autumnal colors. The disruption of a familiar sight (trees) placed in an entirely different context was meant to change our awareness of the human–nature relation in the future and individual ecocultural identities (Milstein & Castro-Sotomayor, 2020). FOR FOREST is a form of elective activism (Waddell, 2004), it brought nature into a new setting and—from our perspective—is a perfect example of a less intervening or disrupting but rather representing Eco-art project, problematizing the human–nature relationship, problematizing sustainability as intrinsic value of today’s society, and offering a communication space for the emergence of conversations, for the emergence of narratives.

Research Framework

From a communication perspective, we analyzed the public discourse related to the Eco-art project FOR FOREST with a specific focus on conflicts, dissensus, and agonistic deliberation. To find the smallest unit to analyze, we tried to identify the dominant *narratives* to understand their problematizing character. The key research question for the explorative analysis was the following: *What are the key narratives related to FOR FOREST?* We assumed that we would be able to follow conversations and their performance, as well as their transformation from ignorance to resonance, from confrontation to active problematization and to cooperation in the media. Therefore, the content for the text-based analysis of the narratives and their degree of problematization was picked from the FOR FOREST Facebook page, and the media coverage, collected by a media observation agency. The comments on the Facebook page were included in the text corpus (marked as Facebook Comment#), adding up to 287 original posts and nearly 2,000 comments between August 1, 2019, and November 30, 2019. The traditional media corpus contains 284 news articles in various languages. TV and radio coverage, as well as non-English and non-German media coverage, were excluded from the analysis because of research economic reasons, as well as articles that were about other art projects and only referenced FOR FOREST. Because we had an Italian native speaker in the coding team and with the location being close to Italy, we included 12 Italian newspaper articles in the sample. Thus, we ended up with $n = 161$ articles in German, 48 in English, and 12 in Italian (marked as “M#” in the findings). The selected content shows the breadth of the discourses around the Eco-art project.

Complementary to this, we interviewed $N = 15$ central (local) stakeholders (political parties, $n = 2$; art-project/leader, $n = 1$; PR agency/social media strategists, $n = 3$; lay people, $n = 3$; sports union, $n = 2$; neighborhood, $n = 3$; corporate/catering, $n = 1$; marked as “I#” in the findings) to reflect on the narratives and main storylines that were found in the text. The interviews were conducted by the authors, who each had significant background knowledge of the topic and practical experience, and who followed a prescribed interview guideline (Bryman, 2016) looking for the same aspects: the issues that were raised and the key narratives. The interviews were all conducted in German, and the transcripts were then translated into English. The recordings of the interviews were literally transcribed (Mayring, 2002) and analyzed in the same framework as the media content with an inductive coding with QCAmap (<https://www.qcmap.org>). Related to the research questions, the interviews and the media material were treated the same; inductively, we reduced the data to a more specific and a broader category. Examples are given in Figure 4.

Source	Text	Category 1	Category 2
Media (M)	"Klagenfurt; FOR FOREST left tourism untouched. At least the bare figures don't show an effect on tourism "	The project didn't affect tourism economically	(5) Economic, (4) locality
FB (FB) (original post)	"Last Chance: Only until Sunday you can experience it between 10:00 and 22:00 h for free, after that you can only admire it on fotos and videos"	Enjoy and admire the installation life or in the media	(6) Art
FB (C) (comment)	"Well, it's our money , tax money, that were used for this shit instead of inesting it in more reasonable issues 🙄"	Waste of public money	(5) Economic (4) Locality
	"I'm amused about the fact, that those who are puffed up about the project, make a selfie in front of the Eiffel tower in Paris without question. Which cause much more orror and uses much more CO2 and is made of steel only. Here (FOR FOREST) nature is raised to be an art work and this is beautiful and up to date "	Other artwork and buildings produce more CO2 emissions FOR FOREST is nature pure, represets nature People are misjudging the Eco-rt project	(3) Climate crisis (3) Eco-identity, Human-nature relationship; sustainability (6) Art
Interview (I)	"The politicians destroyed the whole project . In Klagenfurt and the region everything was just about the damn conflict " (I5)	Art project as battle field in politics. Local conflict versus international recognition	(2) political misbehaviour (4) Locality
	"It was a co-oporation between us (FOR FOREST) and Riedergarten and STRABAG , their motivated workers supported the project, they worked hart to realize this lighthouse project for our region ." (I14)	Financial transparency, Riedergarten and STRABAG financial partners of FOR FOREST	(5) financial background (transparency) (4) Locality

Figure 4. Example of the text corpus and the analytical categories, reduction of the material (translated content).

In this process, the focus was laid on the stories that were told, the problems and conflicts that were mentioned, as well as the interpretations of and references to climate change and sustainability as normative framework—if existing.

Findings

The mixed content of media stories, comments, and reflective interviews offered new insights into the potential of conflicts when it comes to raising awareness and creating and organizing a consistent narrative with an Eco-art project while the project was running—and not in advance, which then could have been communicated strategically. And, indeed, overall, the analysis of FOR FOREST shows the constitutive potential of problematization for the emergence of sustainability as narrative of the future, a narrative of transformation, here, *for* sustainability. What is more, the communication was *about* pluralism itself; it acknowledged various, often conflictual, arguments as part of the conversations. As Figure 5 shows, the evolution of a new narrative of sustainability started in *the polyphone argumentations* themselves, so it was not introduced on purpose or for strategic reasons, which would then be related to Type B (see Figure 1), and labeled as Eco-art as intervention. Instead, the project was a continuing problematization process, which will be further explained and discussed with the detailed findings.

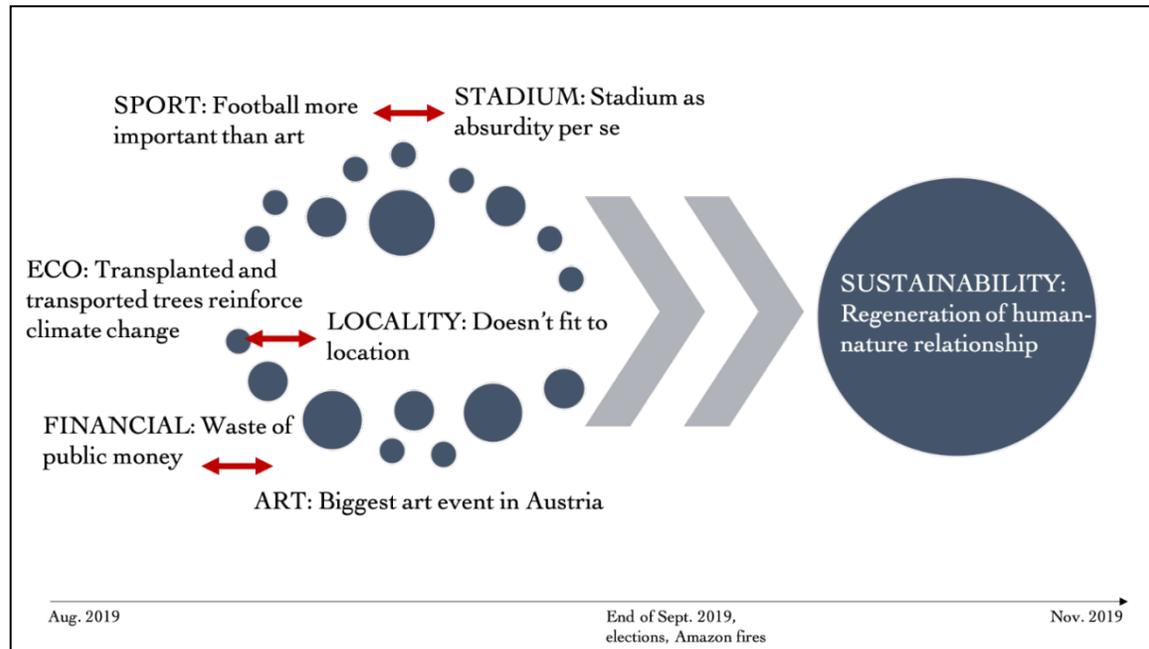


Figure 5. Polyphone argumentations, agonism, and the evolution of a new narrative of sustainability.

Communicative Constitution of Dissensus

The Eco-art project FOR FOREST was highly debated and rather conflictual—in particular, on a regional and local level. Various storylines could be identified in the analyzed conversations represented in the media; in fact, the dissensus was the key for an ongoing continuation of communication about the project, as well as negotiations of every act of communication. Much more, the conversations seemed to be bound to acceptance and were anticipated by corresponding communication. The discourse apparently had the character of an agonistic deliberation in the following three key conversations (see Figure 5).

Discourse 1: Stadium, Soccer, and Sport

Built in 2008 for the European Football Championship, the 32,000-seat stadium is the property of the city of Klagenfurt and used for sporting and musical events. The football club of Wolfsberg, the regional first league club, plays in this stadium now. The Austrian right-wing party, FPÖ (Freedom Party) claimed that not only Wolfsberg but also the city's second-tier football team were made homeless by FOR FOREST, while missed chances to make money by hosting international matches meant a loss of revenue in the millions.

However, the conflict around the stadium is also a historical conflict about the (again far-right) politician Jörg Haider, who built the stadium in the face of massive opposition in a rather small city, criticized as megalomania. This can be seen in the comments on Facebook before the exhibition opened its doors to the public: "If there is something very crazy about it, then it isn't the project, but rather the stadium itself"

(Facebook Comment #37). The artist Klaus Littmann argues (I2): "The stadium was only given to me to use because the crowd numbers at the local football matches were so low," he says in the interview, which was supported by comments on Facebook saying that "it was a decision rather by coincidence that Klagenfurt was picked for the stadium; it is about the project itself rather than the location" (Facebook Comment #21). Here, two narratives can be detected (see Figure 4): The first narrative is about the stadium being part of the art project and a politicum as well as an absurdity per se, leading to the second narrative of art being independent from the location, being autotelic. Though art itself is theoretically described as autotelic, Eco-art seems not to be. Eco-art as specific type of nonprofit communication is dependent on the location where it takes place, which can be shown with the density of discussion, the agonistic deliberation processes that FOR FOREST stimulated mainly on a local level.

Discourse 2: Art, Public Money

Art is often debated as being an end in itself, as getting away with everything. Art is about critique and disruption, about cracking cultural patterns; mainly, Eco-art communicates the disconnection of humanity from the(ir) environment by showing the human–nature relationship as limited, as fragile and related to climate change issues, as regressive, as destructive. The discourse on the project as piece of art is the discourse with mainly positive connotations, following the narrative of "this is the biggest art installation of Austria ever" (M83; see Figure 5). The evaluation online of the art aspects of the project was rather shallow in the sense of "I love it" (Facebook Comment #236), "it's the only reason why I regret having moved away from Klagenfurt" (Facebook Comment #728), or "this is the best thing that could happen to this city" (Facebook Comment #49), or "Art is my life" comments (see Figure 6).



Figure 6. Art perceived as just being art and the project as pure joy, comments on Facebook, November 2019.

There were only few comments reflecting on the critical potential of art, the potential to influence people's behavior. More often, people referred to the experience of being in the stadium, either to sit and look at the trees, or during one of the events that were held in the stadium, during the exhibition period, like theater plays, music events, silent disco, or public readings (www.forforest.net).

However, before FOR FOREST opened at the beginning of September, and thus, before people could participate with and enjoy the project, as quoted, a rather skeptical narrative dominated the public discourse, saying that public money was being wasted by the city council. The discussion on Facebook was driven by comments like the following: "It is the first time ever that no rent was paid for the stadium—it's a loss of 100,000 Euro" (Facebook Comment #433) and further skepticism: "In the future we will learn about all the public support that was given out of public money pots" (Facebook Comment #457). Whereas the city council, supported by the Green Party, said that "all processes are made transparent" (I5). Furthermore, the right-wing party (FPÖ) accused the (Social Democratic) city government of spending public money on the project; however, while the stadium was made available to the artist (Littmann) for free, any further financing was sought from private donors (STRABAG, Riedergarten).

The dominance of the conflict about the financial background of the project overlapped the discourse on art per se and its potential. Foremost, at the end of September, at FOR FOREST's halftime, the polls in Austria changed the Eco-art project into a political battlefield. The FPÖ exploited the situation to mobilize opposition to the project, to which it had been hostile from the beginning. The BZÖ, a splinter group of the right-wing party, even urged its members to protest outside the stadium with "nonfunctioning chainsaws" (M15)—which they did. The artist himself was met by a level of hostility so intense that he feared for his own safety. In the media, Mr. Littman was reported as being called a "son of a bitch" (M42) in a public meeting and threatened with hanging from a tree. Much more, he was even physically assaulted on the street (M27). Thus, the art project opened up a communication space—with the risk of being abused for other, here, political, messaging purposes.

Discourse 3: Sustainability and Human-Nature Relationships

The financial background of the project was probably one of the most debated issues over the whole time that we analyzed the communication and discourses online as well as in the interviews. The only argument leading away was an increase in the number of tourists and visitors coming to the city of Klagenfurt. "Against all the prophecies of doom, FOR FOREST is the best advertisement for the region that I can imagine" (I7).

This was taken on in the news media and disseminated via Facebook as well (M) in the end phase of the art project (see Figure 7).



Figure 7. Questions to the artist on 200,000 people being attracted to come to Klagenfurt and grateful comments on Facebook.

However, the increasing number of people coming to Klagenfurt and the stadium was questioned from an environmental perspective as well; one argument brought up by people was the transportation, the number of cars and buses, with little counting exercises that were done on Facebook resulting in “an average of 80 buses a day if everyone had taken the bus—imagine the air pollution!” (Facebook Comment #1347); as well, further effects on the environment were discussed like the following comment: “don’t throw your cigarette butts on the ground . . . and take your waste to the next bin! This is what helps nature much more than this stupid project” (Facebook Comment #663). From an environmental perspective, the argument was also brought up whether “ever-green” and “water- and forest-rich” Carinthia was the best place for the art installation. “Everywhere around me, everywhere I look, there are trees, there are mountains, there are massive forests—why would this art thing be a memorial or moral pointing finger for me?” (Facebook Comment #319).

The conflictual narrative of the project not being sustainable dominated mainly interpersonal discourses. An interviewed person from the neighborhood of the stadium explicitly pointed out that “it isn’t sustainable to cart trees across Europe to the southern part of Austria” (I11); another local resident similarly mentioned that “the trees are grown in an arboretum, they are replanted every five years, and are never found in an original Austrian forest—contrary to what is communicated by FOR FOREST” (I12). This argumentation can be followed up in the social media rebellion against the project. “It’s a shame; there are trees everywhere—why do they have to be transplanted? We could go for a walk” (Facebook Comment #201). The example in Figure 8 shows another comment saying, “What about this? Very normal in nature, where plants grow naturally?” (Facebook Comment #892). Thus, FOR FOREST as representation of nature, offered the communication space for a self-emerging sustainability narrative.

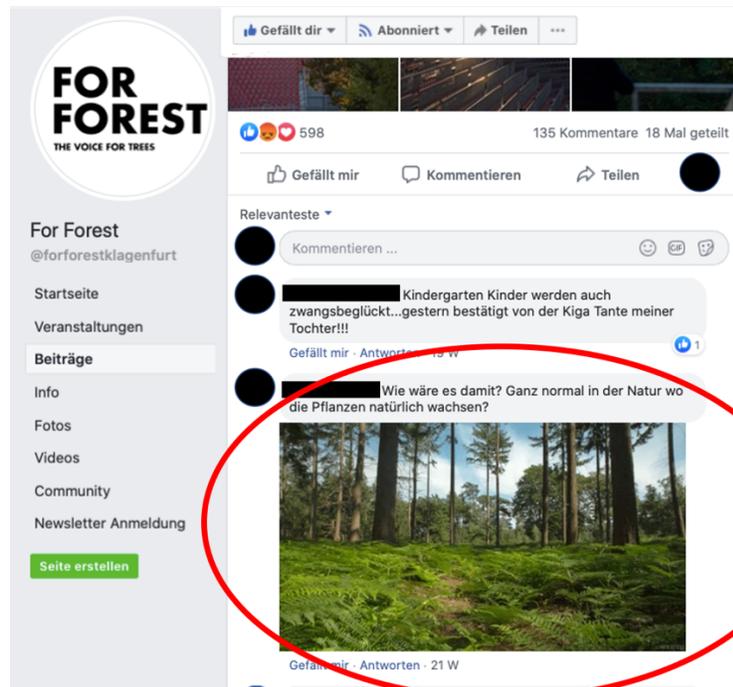


Figure 8. Comments about human–nature relationship.

FOR FOREST as Performance of Pluralism

The most interesting finding overall is that the project itself did not intentionally and strategically implement a sustainability narrative. Instead, FOR FOREST fostered agonistic deliberation, acknowledged the conflicting voices and frames used by various actors. The narrative of restoration and sustainability emerged through the *representative character* of the art project. With the analysis of the media content over a four-month period, there was a tipping point that revealed the theoretically conceptualized potential of nonprofit communication, the potential of agonism. The plurality of arguments and narratives, the breadth of the public discourse of the project lead to a peak of problematization with a new narrative emerging and organizing itself. "All of this has a lot to do with the fact that there is an election right in the middle of this project," Klaus Littmann says (I2); "the installation isn't meant to say just one thing, but recent events highlighting global warming have made it highly topical." It was not only the election that caused the political antagonism to tip over—the fires in the Amazon and related public attention opened up space for a new storyline:

The exhibit is not supposed to have one single message but of course it's also about climate change. Events of the last few months such as the fires in the Amazon have made the project relevant in a way that I could not have predicted. (Littmann, I2).

However, climate change itself seems too big.

The transition from the rather established (political, economic) to a new narrative (Hendersson & Wamsler, 2020; van der Leeuw, 2019) was discussed in the theory section. With FOR FOREST as representation, as performance of pluralism at hand, we draw on Heidegger (1965) and his explanation of narratives as means to explore the alternative choices that might lead to feared or hoped for futures. If we can change narratives, then we create impact. So, it is not the art project itself, but rather the communicative constitution of a new narrative that offers learnings for future nonprofit communication. "If we change narratives, we change something fundamental in the moral and political constitution of the society; thus, it is in narrative(s) that new visions of sustainable living begin" (Frank, 2017, p. 312). Sustainability as metanarrative was picked up in the public discourse at the end of the exhibition period. "I feel renewed," "I left the stadium with a new form of attentiveness" (Facebook Comment #1178); "The trees in the stadium, the silence where I sit in the stadium, that's where I feel regenerated, this is where I feel regeneration" (I13).

Summary and Discussion

The Eco-art project opened up a communication space where the new narrative could emerge. Even if sustainability was not turned into a field of conversational contestation itself (Weder, 2012, 2017), mainly not on a local level, the potential for Eco-art communication in acknowledging conflict, supporting the polyphony of narratives became obvious with the exploration of FOR FOREST. The conflictual lines of argumentation and dynamics of problematization that could be identified in the analysis at hand were as follows:

- First, around a narrative of megalomania: The first variation of the narrative that we detected in the media discourse was that the project itself was a megalomania of the artist; the second variation was that the Eco-art installation was a reply or payoff related to the megalomania of building a stadium (seen mainly as financial disaster) of this size in a small, local, and green environment like Klagenfurt/Austria. On the contrary, we detected a societal, cultural, and particularly sport-related discourse, covering a narrative of "sport being more important than art" and a wider narrative on popular culture versus advanced or higher culture and mobilization against elite culture or the elite in general.
 - *Takeaway 1:* Though art itself is theoretically described as autotelic, Eco-art is not; it is rather a specific type of organized and organizational communication and dependent on the location where it takes place; this includes digital projects, criticizing the Internet and techno-capitalist narratives,¹ as well as projects happening in this specific communication space.²

¹ <http://www.janavirgin.com/about.html>

² <http://wro2017.wrocenter.pl/en/works/deforest/>

- Second, an economic discourse was dominated by the narrative of “intransparency and abuse of public money”; however, the organization Littmann Culture Projects was only subsidized by the city of Klagenfurt with the waiving of the rent for the stadium. There is a conflict about the lack of public money invested in local cultural events in general, and the criticism that this form of patronage will set an example and work against the local art scene; however, this was problematized by the second narrative that FOR FOREST was the biggest art event in Austria ever, referring to the international recognition and positive connotations surrounding the project.
 - *Takeaway 2:* By being a representation of nature, the Eco-art project opened up a communication space for discourses including polyphony and potential for conflictual conversations without the possibility to get to a final reconciliation.
- The third field of discourse and conflict was around ecology and the location. Littmann did not make the cause about climate change or eco-cultural identity-building at the beginning; it was just an art project, being ostensibly autotelic, like any other kind of art. However, the eco-narrative of transplanted and transported trees reinforcing climate change was dominant and not autotelic at all, it was very much related to the context, the specific surroundings and local environment where the Eco-art project took place. Contradictions that are part of large projects like FOR FOREST, such as CO₂ emissions or tourism and unsustainable mobility and transport issues, were brought up; mainly the debate about the wrong place chosen for the project and a new form of patriotism (“if I want to see trees in Klagenfurt, I just go for a walk”; Facebook Comment #187) showed the agonism between artistic concerns and people who are not willing to think metaphorically or symbolically—or just cannot.
 - *Takeaway 3:* FOR FOREST as a representation of nature offered the communication space for further problematization of inherent symbolic order and structures of the system and related economic and political values and the emergence of sustainability as narrative of a different future.

To summarize: As soon as FOR FOREST became an issue and individuals made a series of specific contributions to that issue (via Facebook, via comments to the local newspaper postings, or in face-to-face conversations), communication took place. It was only through and as conversations that the project, the event, received social relevance and meaning. The discourse on FOR FOREST overall was a constitutive communicative process event within the society. Consensus was not the primary goal or the condition of and for the communication—here, used as example for a new, third type of nonprofit communication (Type C; see Figure 1), conceptualized in the theoretical section. Thus, we can state that a specific character of nonprofit communication can be that it can handle dissensus as agonistic deliberation—with Eco-art being a specific shape of this new type of antiprofit, system-questioning type of organized communication.

Limitations and Outlook

This article takes a critical perspective on established understanding of nonprofit communication and applies the constitutive perspective on communication and organization to the field of Eco-art in an era

of environmental degradation and climate crisis. It theorizes a new type of nonprofit or antiprofit and system-questioning communication as active problematizing, as realizing and performing agonism, instead of antagonism and conflict.

As a limitation of the study, it has to be acknowledged that media content mirrors public discourses but does not take face-to-face encounters and individual representations and emotions into account. Also, the number of interviewees was not representative to reflect the narratives and stories that people told about the project on a larger scale. Furthermore, because the communication strategists as well as the artist of the project and major stakeholders were interviewed, it is likely that the interviewees pursued their own agendas and told preformulated stories rather than engaging with the interviewer and getting into the (critical) process of narrative storytelling itself. It mainly has to be pointed out that the results were not reflected with other artists working on eco-, environmental- and sustainability-art projects or in a related context. Therefore, it has to be acknowledged that this article offers a rather academic interpretation of the discourses, which makes an extension study with additional interviews with artists necessary and attractive—not only from an empirical perspective. However, the main purpose of the conducted interviews was to reflect on the data of the qualitative media content analysis, to refine the narratives that were found in the text and to gain more insights related to the previously developed theoretical framework, which was possible.

From our point of view and with the example at hand, the so far promoted concepts for nonprofit organizations and related strategic communication have to be reconceptualized. Especially if we consider *sustainability as contemporary nonprofit and no-governmental context*. Rather than advocacy and communication of social change, we conceptualized communication *for* change as organizing social change, as *doing social change, doing transformation*. Here, Eco-art is an example. Agonistic deliberation seems to sit at the core of doing transformation, and is the potential innovative concept leading away from (a) intervention and (b) consensus or compromise-focused concepts of communication management in a nonprofit setting.

The take-away for activism and Eco-art as a fruitful research area for nonprofit communication studies is that—up to a certain point—art needs to be pointless and self-defeating; there is no reason to justify or reason the project, just as there is no reason to implement the sustainability narrative. But, overall, the sustainability narrative worked as a framework for continuing conversations, made deliberation possible by binding the narratives together, and overcoming antagonism and binaries. Agonism means acknowledging the “right to dissent.” Here, sustainability communication gets a new destiny and determination and shows its transformative potential (social impact) in a communicative break-up of the tempting positive and common-sense character of sustainability itself by a communicatively created and constituted problematization process, which has to be further explored—theoretically and empirically.

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