



## Raising environmental awareness through art projects

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### ABSTRACT

The paper analyzes the importance of actively raising awareness about the significance of ecology and the preservation of our environment through various art forms. The role they play in the process is an important one, both in terms of educating the younger, and raising awareness among the older generations about environmental issues. Art strives for the preservation of culture and cultural heritage, and represents a permanent record of a certain age, a way of life, the social and political circumstances, human opinions, and socially relevant topics. Ranging from architecture, as the most frequently used type of art, via literature and film, to music which reaches the widest of audiences, it can convey any message to the greatest number of people, and each art form can give its own contribution to environmental issues. Socially engaged art is a frequent occurrence. Throughout history, art has been used as a call to rebellion, resistance, and change. Environmental topics have been increasingly more present in art over the past few decades, but are still not present enough. Great potential for the awakening of mankind in terms of the environmental challenges we are facing lies precisely in various art forms. Everyone has their own preference when it comes to art, which is why no art form should be neglected; instead, they should all be developed equally so as to encourage as many people as possible, spanning all generations, to consider the importance of environmental issues.

### 1. Introduction

Solving the environmental problems that have arisen is of crucial importance for the future quality of life and survival of both humanity and the flora and fauna. In many countries around the world, the increase of environmental awareness has become an important goal. This most often involves various campaigns aimed at reducing pollution, economic, and political measures, but also educating the population, especially the young (Mitić et al., 2018). Education of the population is usually done through various projects and workshops. It is necessary to start raising environmental awareness at the

preschool age, then continue the development of environmental culture through further education, all in order to have a responsible community in the future. Ecological consciousness includes behaviors, motives, desires, and expectations in relation to the natural environment (Ilić et al., 2010).

Two projects for raising awareness about the importance of recycling were organized in the kindergarten “Star grove” in Belgrade, in the municipality of Zvezdara, and were named “I do not throw away, I create” and “The story of old looms”. As part of these projects, children created new works of art, toys made of PET packaging, yarn for looms from old

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newspapers, as well as works of art by combining art techniques with old newspapers and packaging. (<https://zvezdara.rs/oni-su-spojili-ekologiju-umetnost-i-tradiciju/?lang=lat>).

In sports, medals made of recycled electronic material were made for the first time at the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics, and seven years later the Government of Japan issued a document requiring all citizens to donate old mobile phones, computers, and other electronic devices in order to collect a sufficient amount of gold, silver and bronze to make medals for the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo in 2020 (Šiljak et al., 2019).

Eco-fashion is becoming more and more popular in the world. Eco-fashion and eco-design are clothes made of materials that help preserve the environment. They are made without the use of materials of animal origin and are produced according to environmental standards, so that the production process itself does not disturb the environment in any way (Frfulanović-Šomodi and Savić, 2019).

Another problem we face today is the amount of information we receive daily. Excessive exposure to it leads to lethargy and a lack of interest in “difficult” topics such as climate change or pollution. Reading serious literary works, such as “Anna Karenina”, “Doctor Zhivago”, and others is often replaced by watching a film or a brief abridged version of the same story; thus, topics that are of vital importance cannot easily attract the attention of the general public if they are presented in the form of a scientific paper or a serious newspaper article.

The simplest way for a certain message to reach a large number of people and leave an impression is through various art forms.

Engaged art is not new. The theater in the Middle Ages was financed by the church. It featured plays with religious content (Adam and Eve, Noah's Ark, the birth of Christ) to convey messages to the illiterate (Raduški, 2017).

One of the most famous works of the Spanish painter Pablo Picasso is a painting called Guernica, painted as a reaction to the Nazi bombing of the Basque city of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War. Guernica depicts the pain and suffering of innocent civilians. Thus, this image became one of the greatest anti-war messages and a constant reminder of the destruction of war, and at the same time one of the greatest symbols of peace. (<https://www.pablocassio.org/guernica.jsp>)

It is, therefore, not surprising that an increasing number of works from various types of art forms now contain an ecological message and call for social responsibility, that is, they carry a warning of a dark future if we continue to neglect nature.

This paper aims to show that raising environmental awareness should be approached responsibly at all levels and in all domains of social life. This inevitability also applies to art, but the ways of reaching this level of

consciousness are slightly different, and they present a challenge, both for realization and analysis. For that reason, the topic warrants more attention.

The paper is structured as follows. After the introductory section, individual chapters outline ecology in various branches of art such as: architecture, literature, fine and applied arts, music, film, and theater. The final section contains the concluding remarks.

The paper is intended for the interested professional and scientific public, as well as for all those who could benefit from the elaboration of this insufficiently studied issue.

## 2. Ecology in architecture (green building)

When it comes to art forms, ecology has found its greatest application in architecture, an art form that has the greatest use-value. The concept of green or sustainable construction appeared with the first concepts of sustainable development in the 1960s and 1970s.

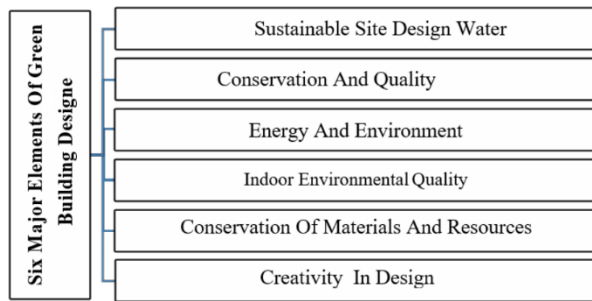
A green building is an innovation that stems from an awareness of the need to preserve the environment (Singh et al., 2020). It is a building that by its design, construction, or use reduces or eliminates negative impacts and has a positive effect on the climate and natural environment. It can be a house, an office building, a school, a hospital, a shopping mall, or any other building (<https://www.worldgbc.org/what-green-building>).

There are a number of features which can make a building ‘green’. These include:

- Efficient use of energy, water, and other resources,
- Use of renewable energy, such as solar energy,
- Pollution and waste reduction measures, re-use, and recycling,
- Good indoor environmental air quality,
- Use of materials that are non-toxic, ethical, and sustainable,
- Consideration of the environment in design, construction, and operation process,
- Consideration of the quality of life of the occupants in the design, construction, and operation process; and
- A design that enables adaptation to a changing environment.

Very few of these so-called green buildings actually possess all of the aforementioned characteristics. Nevertheless, the goal of green architecture is full sustainability. This ecological approach to architectural design is based on the premise that it is possible to integrate these new systems into pre-existing natural functions (Ragheb et al., 2016). Alazm and El-khalidi (2018) have compiled a comprehensive list of the six

major elements of green building design, which can be found in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Six Major Elements of Green Building Design (Alazam and El-khalidi, 2018)

Just like the concept of sustainable development itself, the green building contains three important segments: the natural environment, the social aspect, and the economy. The beginnings of green buildings in the United States date back to the 1990s. In Europe, the number of green buildings doubles every three years, while in Serbia they are still in the development phase. A significant contribution to the topic of green architecture and the opportunities it provides is given by green building fairs held in Belgrade (<https://balkangreenenergynews.com/rs/>).

### 3. Ecology in literature

Twentieth century art has brought about a significant shift in how we as the audience perceive the artist. Artists are no longer merely individuals portraying feelings of amazement at something; they are now the ones intervening in the situation at hand. Such ‘interventions’ are evident in the works of Joseph Beuys, who through his work strives to encourage his audiences to look for and establish a new form of harmony between themselves and their natural environment (Verri, 2020).

Contemporary literature is increasingly more focused on topics related to the field of ecology and sustainable development. Most often, these are works of science fiction that consider the possible consequences for the planet if humanity continues with the trend of industrial development and the associated degradation of the environment.

Interesting books in this field that deal with the current situation are:

- “Last Chance to See” by Douglas Adams and Mark Carwardine which discusses species that are on the verge of extinction.
- Mike Hulme’s “Why We Disagree about Climate Change: Understanding Controversy, Inaction and Opportunity”, in which Hulme, after 25 years as a scientist on climate change, Hulme uses an insider account of the origins of these changes.

He, through aspects of science, economics, religion, psychology, sociology, and politics, seeks to explain why scientists disagree on climate change.

- “The End of the Line: How Overfishing Is Changing the World and What We Eat” by Charles Clover which reveals the hidden costs of bringing food to the table, both in households and restaurants, and reveals that 90 % of large fish in the oceans have disappeared in the past 50 years.
- “Sustainable Energy - Without the Hot Air” by David MacKay was written in the form of a case study on the topic of nuclear energy, fossil fuels, and the possibility of international exchange of renewable energy (<https://fivebooks.com/books/ecology/>).

### 4. Ecology in fine and applied arts

It is believed that different environmental content and the use of recycled materials can be important factors in raising environmental awareness among students. One of the most famous artists involved in recycling is certainly Mexican artist Alejandro Durán. He is known for his project “WASHED UP: Transforming a Trashed Landscape” in which he collects garbage that comes out on the Caribbean coast and makes sculptures out of it. Over the years, Alejandro has identified the garbage of 58 different nations from six continents (<https://alejandroduran.com/statement>).

A very famous work is the installation of the Bulgarian artist Christo Javacheff called “Running fence” (Figure 2). The fence was set up in America, starting from Highway 101, all the way to the exit to the Pacific Ocean. It is 39.4 kilometers long and 5.5 meters high, and was made of a piece of nylon (<https://christojeanneclaude.net/artworks/running-fence/>).



**Figure 2.** Running fence (<https://christojeanneclaude.net/artworks/running-fence/>)

Another example is the installation of the Finnish artist Tea Mäkipää, a sloping cabin that floats on a lake, while the sounds of family life can be heard from it, drawing attention to global warming (Brown, 2014).

With ecological concerns on the rise, Chinese artists have also joined the ongoing trend and shifted the focus of their work to global environmental concerns. One such artist, Cai Guo Qiang, achieved notoriety with a work titled “The Bund Without Us”. The painting depicts what the riverfront of Shanghai would look like centuries in the future after it had been reclaimed by nature. Humans are nowhere to be found in the depictions (Carroll, 2017). Another example is the work of Mary Mattingly. Her series of photographs titled “Her House and Universe” depicts, among other things, the naked body of a human being pressed down by a huge ball of garbage wrapped in twine. The desired effect is to blur the lines between the human and the ball of trash, and to juxtapose both against the purity of nature. (Carroll, 2017)

## 5. Ecology in music

The song “Woodman! Spare that Tree” by George Pope Morris and Henry Russell from 1837 is considered the first ecologically engaging song. After that, this topic will run mostly through folk (traditional) music. However, it is not surprising that with the development of new musical genres, this theme spills over into new musical directions. Rock and pop music have been extremely influential for decades and reached the largest number of people, so many musicians have decided to spread environmental awareness through the music they create.

The famous rock band The Beach Boys had a series of songs focusing around the theme of preserving the environment, such as “Don't Go Near the Water”, which was about ocean pollution or “A Day in the Life of a Tree” which was about air pollution.

The most popular music song of this kind was the 1995 “Earth Song” by ‘the King’ Michael Jackson. The song was accompanied by a high-budget video lasting seven minutes, which showed the destruction of the planet in several ways. Although the song was nominated for a prestigious Grammy Award and was number one on the charts in many countries, this song, like the rest of the video, is almost unknown to the American audience.

Live Earth, the largest international entertainment event that brought together musicians with the intention of raising environmental awareness, was established in 2007. However, this event was followed by numerous controversies because often the main sponsors of the event were companies that were considered the biggest polluters of all (Kahn, 2013).

Numerous artists are involved in environmental activism, and not only through the music they create. The famous musician Sting is one of the founders of the Rainforest Foundation, which deals with the preservation of rainforests and the rights of indigenous tribes living in them. This foundation supports projects of the sister organizations Rainforests UK whose work focuses on Africa, Rainforests US whose work focuses on South America, and Norwegian Rainforests whose work

focuses on Asia. Although each has its own area to cover, all of these organizations operate internationally.

Since the 2000s, an increasing number of sound artists have become actively involved in contemporary environmental issues. This level and extent of activity has virtually led to the formation of a contemporary movement. Despite their activism, their work is yet to achieve the impact and recognition already achieved by artists working with other art forms.

An illustrative example of this contemporary movement is the staging of the “Ear to the Earth” festival in October 2006 in New York. The organizers of this five-day festival were Joel Chadabe and the Electronic Music Foundation. What was originally a means of promoting environmentally concerned sound art went on to become an annual event held for seven consecutive years. Another example is the EcoSono. It is an activist network established by Matthew Burtner in 2008, involved in raising awareness through sound art. It went on to develop into an annual educational event, the EcoSono Institute, aimed at achieving environmental sustainability (Gilmurray, 2017).

## 6. Ecology on film

The concept of the ecological film dates back to 2004, to the work of Scott MacDonald titled “Towards an Ecocinema”. Later on, the ecological film has appeared in various genres: documentaries, animations, science fiction, as well as horror films.

In 2013, as part of the “Let's not pollute Serbia” movement, the educational film “Nature and Society” was made. It deals with solid waste, water supply, and wastewater. This film was realized through the program of support for the development of local self-government infrastructure, financed by the EU and implemented with the help of the Delegation of the European Union to Serbia.

The Belgian environmental organization “Wake Up” posted 10 documentaries on the Internet that were part of a festival called the “Green Up Film Festival”. The idea of the organizers of this festival was to increase awareness of environmental issues through the film form. The films were divided by topics - biodiversity, food and agriculture, pollution, water, green economy, and energy. The film “New York, Green Revolution” spoke about the city of tomorrow, and “LoveMEATender” asked questions about the real cost of our meat consumption.

The film “Throwing in the World” highlighted the fact that a third of the world's food production ended up as garbage, while on the other hand, a billion people went hungry.

“Electronic Waste Land” provided a look at the 50 million tons of electronic waste generated each year and then shipped to poor parts of the world, while the focus of the film “Chemical” was an American family trying to get rid of chemical cleaning products and cosmetics

(<https://www.rts.rs/page/magazine/sr/story/411/film-i-tv/1581498/ekoloski-dokumentarci-na-internetu.html>).

In his book “Hollywood Utopia: Ecology in Contemporary American Cinema”, Patrick Brereton looks at films on nature and their impact on ecology, using films such as “Jurassic Park” and “The Emerald Forest” (Brereton, 2004).

Another interesting film is “An Inconvenient Truth”, directed by Davis Guggenheim. The film is about the campaign of the former vice president of the United States Al Gore to raise the level of awareness about global warming. The film is actually an adaptation of a presentation that Gore gave more than a thousand times around the world.

Among the films that emphasize the ecological aspect is the 2016 film “Before the Flood” in which the co-producer and the narrator is Leonardo DiCaprio. The 2009 film “Home” produced by Luc Besson, was a great success, winning the Caesar Award for Best Documentary about the interests of large companies and the impact it can have on the environment (<https://booksandideas.net/Towards-an-Ecological-Cinema.html>). These examples tell us that more and more famous and influential people are trying to contribute to raising awareness about environmental protection through various art forms.

## 7. Ecology in theater

Although no theater projects that deal with the topic of ecology and the environment have achieved global popularity, it would be unfair to say that no efforts have been made to present ecology to the general public through this art form. According to Wendy Arons, “The attitude of humanity towards the environment has become worrying and this topic should be addressed by all who can have some influence, including theater artists” (Arons, 2007). Even though we are in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, one gets the impression that these themes are underestimated in dramatic works. As much as the concept of ecology has been developed in architecture, design, fashion, it has been rather neglected in the sphere of theatrical art (Woynarski, 2015).

If there are projects of this type, they are usually realized in smaller theaters by smaller theater troupes (<http://www.ashdendirectory.org.uk/directory.asp?searchTerm=allProductions>), while it is almost impossible to find environmentally engaged performances on large stages.

Despite the fact that the fewest examples of socially engaged projects can be found in the theater, the very motif of nature in dramatic works is quite common. Some of the examples of works with themes of nature are Shakespeare's play – “A Midsummer Night's Dream”, then “Waiting for Godot” by Samuel Beckett, and Chekhov's “The Cherry Orchard” (Cless, 2011). Another very interesting book is “Ecology and Environment in

European Drama”, written by Downing Cless, in which the author focuses on the motifs of nature in famous plays, from Greek tragedies to Berthold Brecht and Samuel Beckett (Cless, 2010).

## 8. Conclusion

The motif of nature has appeared in art for centuries. It can be found in Shakespeare's plays as well as popular 19<sup>th</sup> century music. With the development of industry, humanity has faced new problems, so the view of nature went beyond mere enjoyment, and the topic of connecting man with nature took on a whole new dimension. Industrialization has contributed to environmental degradation, manifested in increasing waste storage, forest destruction, and the associated extinction of plant and animal species, declining sources of drinking water, as well as ozone whole problems and global warming. All that contributed to the need to start looking at nature through the prism of its preservation. The accelerated progress of humanity in the 20<sup>th</sup>, and especially the 21<sup>st</sup> century has led to an alarming situation in the field of ecology and increased efforts to draw humanity's attention to common problems because they do not affect individuals but the entire planet. There are more and more thematic seminars, scientific papers, and appeals at the state level in this area, in addition to the adoption of the necessary laws to regulate the problem of the biggest polluters as much as possible at the state level.

In addition to trying to enlighten humanity, the importance of educating the youngest members of our society was emphasized. If taught from an early age to respect and care for the environment in which they live, future generations have a better chance of living a more responsible life both towards themselves and others. Educating children is most often done through creative workshops that frequently include art projects. In this way, children learn about their environment and the importance of caring for it through fun and creative work. As the situation and view of nature changed, so did the artistic contents, adapting to the new circumstances and needs. In addition to the already well-known socially engaged themes in the field of art, such as war and globalism, the influence of ecological themes on various art forms has been growing in recent decades. Ecology has had the greatest influence in the field of architecture, which, as an art form, has a pronounced use value, only to gain increased influence in the field of music, literature, and film.

Despite the efforts of many authors who have attempted to improve the situation with their books and articles, the field of the theater remains an underused resource in an attempt to support the ecological sanctuary. This area must be as relevant as possible in the coming period because the theater is a great place to convey very strong and impressive messages.



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## Podizanje ekološke svesti kroz projekte u umetnosti

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### I Z V O D

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U ovom radu se razmatra pojava i važnost podizanja svesti o značaju ekologije i očuvanja životne sredine kroz različite umetničke forme. Veliku ulogu u tome mogu igrati različite umetničke forme, kako u vaspitanju novih, tako i u skretanju pažnje sadašnjih generacija na probleme očuvanja životne sredine. Umetnost teži očuvanju kulture i kulturnog nasleđa, i trajni je zapis određenog doba, načina života, društvenih i političkih dešavanja, ljudskog mišljenja i društveno aktuelnih tema. Od arhitekture kao najupotrebljivijeg vida umetnosti, preko književnosti i filma, do muzike koja ima najširu publiku, pa samim tim može preneti poruku do najvećeg broja ljudi, svaka umetnička forma može dati značajan doprinos ovoj temi. Društveno angažovana umetnost je česta pojava. Kroz istoriju, umetnost je korišćena kao poziv na bunt, otpor i promene. Ekološke teme u umetnosti su sve prisutnije poslednjih decenija, ali ipak još uvek nisu dovoljno česte. Velika snaga za buđenje čovečanstva po pitanju ekoloških problema sa kojima se suočavamo, leži upravo u različitim umetničkim formama. Svi imaju različite umetničke afinitete, pa iz tog razloga ne treba zanemarivati ni jednu umetničku formu, već ih podjednako razvijati, ne bi li značaj ekoloških pitanja podstakao na razmišljanje što veći broj ljudi, svih generacija.

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