

Ca' Foscari University of Venice Student engagement

Using art to promote sustainability: the "Dancing Solar Flowers" project

About the project

Summary

Sustainable Ca' Foscari is a programme started in 2010 by Ca' Foscari University of Venice, with the aim to promote environmental, economic and social sustainability and to include it as a perspective inside every activity of the university.

Several initiatives and projects have been implemented by Ca' Foscari to make the campuses more sustainable and to improve the management of the university on one hand, and to integrate sustainable issues in teaching and research on the other hand.

Many projects have been especially designed to engage the Ca' Foscari community. In particular Ca' Foscari decided to use art as an instrument to promote sustainability and, to engage and educate the students.

The initiative we want to highlight is the artwork "Dancing Solar Flowers" by Alexandre Dang, which consists of an artificial field, made by reused pallets, where hundreds of flowers were "planted", dancing thanks to the sun light. This installation was displayed in the main courtyard of Ca' Foscari University from 7 May till 22 November 2015.

Project partners

This art project has been realised thanks to Alexandre Dang, a French environmental artist and engineer who is convinced of the need to raise awareness of the potential of environmental friendly technologies (eco-technologies) and sustainable development.

Alexandre Dang has developed a pedagogic aspect to his sustainable art, using it to educate young people about the potential of eco-friendly technologies with a focus on renewable energy.

Furthermore, during the installation it was possible to buy the dancing solar flowers and the earnings from the sale have been donated to the association Solar Solidarity International, a non-profit international association aiming to:

- 1) Raise awareness of the potential of renewable sources of energy (and in particular the potential of the sun) for mankind and for the environment;
- 2) Raise funds to support projects using renewable technology, in particular solar photovoltaic technology, to provide energy to the developing world.

The results

The problem

It is hard to engage students and make them aware of how their competencies can have a sustainable perspective or make them understand that sustainability can be an application field for their studies.

Students may think that sustainability is something conceptual, difficult to be applied in their study and work fields. Community as well cannot give a tangible shape to the concept of sustainability.



Ca' Foscari
University
of Venice

Profile

- HE
- 21,373 students (includes full and part time students)
- 1,673 staff
- Urban

The approach

Every engagement initiative organised by Ca' Foscari University of Venice has an interdisciplinary approach, so this is the approach used even for the Dancing Solar Flower project, involving students and professors from every field of study. The engagement required was both practical and scientific: the students were asked to take part in the setting-up of the installation, together with the artist and his team, and also to develop research materials about subjects related to the artwork.

The art's true role is to encourage new ways of looking at daily habits through facilitating thinking, reaction, discussion, debate and deliberation in public spaces and thus stimulating creative invention. In this sense, creativity is the key to finding effective solutions to complex issues and it is through arts and artists that society can gain the new perspectives that build the capacity for change.

Our goals

We want to increase the awareness and knowledge of sustainability issues and at the same time promote the dissemination of sustainability values and encourage sustainable lifestyles.

Obstacles and solutions

OBSTACLE	SOLUTION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stimulating the students' involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organising interdisciplinary projects, such as linking sustainability topics with art
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continuity in the students' involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organising activities in a few intensive days
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Motivating students in promotion of other initiatives regarding sustainability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actively engaging students in sustainable projects

Performance and results

Students' participation is crucial for the University and it is important that during their experience, they acquire information and behaviours that will be considered when taking decisions and actions in the future.

In this project students were given the opportunity not only to get to know international artists first-hand, but also to put in practice their own cross competencies by actively working on the project. After joining the project, students have been more motivated also to promote peer engagement on other initiative of Sustainable Ca' Foscari, such as recycling, bike sharing, energy and water saving in the University buildings.

Furthermore the installations have been set up in a public place, well seen by Venetians, tourists and University staff. The artwork has aroused people's curiosity because it is colourful and quite unusual in a historical place like Ca' Foscari. This makes people stop and want to know more, increasing awareness of problems related to human behaviours and allowing the diffusion of sustainable solutions among citizens and the international community.

This particular initiative had a great impact on the city community and the thousands of tourists that come to Venice every day, especially during the Art Biennale. Moreover the project has been included in city initiatives like the ArtNight and the VenetoNight, which allowed the diffusion of sustainable values among citizens and the international community, reinforcing the role of the University as a promoter and one of the main actors of this change.

The future

Lessons learned

- The active involvement in the project motivated students also to promote peer engagement on other initiatives regarding sustainable issues and allowed them to put into practice their own cross competencies by actively working on the project.
- A project which involves people on an emotional level, stimulates them to seek more information, increasing the awareness of problems related to human behaviours and allowing the diffusion of sustainable solutions.
- It is important to consider the characteristics of the city and territory, to create a project which can establish a dialogue with the community.

Sharing your project

The project reached about one million of people, including tourists, citizens, University staff and students. Thanks to the communication done also in our networks, the initiative has reached an important international dimension. Indeed the project has been presented also at the International Summer School on Sustainable University Campuses organised by Politecnico di Torino and University of Cambridge.

What has it meant to your institution to be a GUPES Green Gown Award finalist?

We are honoured to receive this prestigious recognition which highlights Ca' Foscari's commitment towards sustainability. It is especially important to be awarded this prize in the category of student engagement, as we believe Universities must have a special role in fostering new generations to meet the global challenges.

Further information

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