



PODCAST TRANSCRIPT - EPISODE THREE - ASIA

IETM - International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts

Climate Justice - Through the Creative Lense of the Performing Arts - Podcast Episode Three - January 2024

The following episode is the final in a three part podcast series commissioned and produced by IETM. Across the course of 2023, a number of Focus group discussions took place in three continents where the vital role of the performing arts in the face of climate justice and climate change was discussed at great lengths. The aim of the podcasts are to reflect on the conversations that took place during these Focus group meetings and to explore the meaning and implications of climate justice on the performing arts sector, as well as to highlight actions taken by the sector to respond to the climate emergency in different socio economic contexts.

The following recordings took place with several performing arts professionals based in Asia and Oceania over Zoom. Katelijn Verstrate, the coordinator and facilitator of these discussions, breaks down the enriching conversations she had

The final episode of this podcast series is a little different to the rest. In April and May of this year, I sat down and interviewed individual artists, arts managers, directors, producers, practitioners and activists based in several countries across Asia and Oceania. We discussed the topic of climate change in the performing arts at great lengths in relation to IETM's latest publication. Through these conversations, I gained a first hand understanding of the effect climate change has on the performing arts sector from the perspective of artists, disabled artists, grassroots and networks. The result of these interviews is not a Focus Group discussion as such, but more a collection of inspiring conversations broken down into several topics.

Topic 1 - Definition of Climate Justice

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| Katelijn | 'Climate justice is still a relatively new or not frequently used concept with the public in many parts of the world. I asked the interviewees about what they think the ultimate definition of climate justice is, and the effect this definition has on the sector.' |
| Melissa Lim - Singapore | 'We're at a very different level, a different starting point. We don't have the same language or capacities. There shouldn't be one authoritative definition of what dealing with climate justice or dealing with climate change in the arts should be. There needs to be a myriad of voices, some of which may not be as palatable as perhaps the European counterparts.' |
| Maria Tri Sulistyani - Indonesia | 'The terminology feels like it is being injected from abroad, it's not the words that we have. There is a distance with that word.' |

Topic 2 - Involving local communities and raising awareness

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| Katelijn | 'Another topic that came up often in discussion was the topic of involving local communities and raising awareness. In Cambodia, Epic Arts develops community arts and education programmes for people with and without disabilities, while raising awareness about human rights and environmental issues (especially plastic pollution) and embedding sustainable practices within the organisation.' |
| Onn Sokny - Cambodia | 'We got funding from WaterAid, who talk about sanitation and hygiene, to bring this research about plastic to a performance. We picked an important message and researched to perform. We know a performance is more likely to reach a different range of target audience and communities and policy makers. The message is simple and relevant to the community but the idea could also be provoked by the policy maker.' |
| Katelijn | 'In Indonesia, Papermoon Puppet Theatre undertakes intensive research work with communities, developing work that is often related to environmental topics like pollution and the relationship between humans and nature, involving communities and schools.' |

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| Geli Arceño - Philippines | ‘People are really attentive and they are very open to the discussion of climate change, which is the reason why we are called free, because we’ve managed to convince it to be like an effort of the masses and the community to actually come together. So it’s not like mainly just like a bunch of kids. You know, it’s like, it’s one song, explaining and talking. When it comes to mass education, I don’t really think we’ve ever had the capacity to move forward with education and climate change or climate hope and look at it on a bigger scale and how everything affects it. It’s all issue based. It’s not really their priority to sit and listen.’ |
| | ‘You can really see how the concerned effort - to really educate the masses - can really affect how they view things.’ |
| Katelijan | ‘In Thailand, Wayla Amathammachad took part in the Asian consultation and is engaging through the performing arts to work on issues relevant to the communities.’ |
| Wayla Amathammachad - Thailand | <p>‘We bring a chef into the area and explore the forest together with the community and try to share what kind of tree they can eat or something like that. That’s something we put in the forest group. We also have other projects that are related to performative things.’</p> <p>‘Another thing we work on right now is a project called the Dansai Food Story. We try to collect the food wisdom of each village in the area and try to see the possibilities that we can make concept art and knowledge databases for an artistic approach. Mostly we spend time with the resiliencies of the artists and invite the chef and to collect some environmental knowledge.’</p> |

Topic 3 - New approaches to design

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| Katelijan | ‘Participants in regional consultations stressed that considering climate change and becoming more aware of environmental issues are leading some performing arts companies to develop smaller-scale works, enabling closer, more intimate relations with audiences, allowing them to easily relate to the issues addressed – while also reflecting on more inclusive ways of relating to local social contexts. Elsewhere, new approaches to stage design may rely on traditional reuse and recycling practices, as highlighted by Japanese stage designer Hiroko Oshima.’ |
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| Hiroko Oshima - Japan | <p>'Last year, I met one person who started to do my dream. He's collecting all the scenery and he's borrowed a warehouse to store it. He is planning to lend out the scenery and the warehouse. He asked me if I could give some advice as a sonographer, about how to promote this business to the industry. He's an actor and fighting teacher (stunt man), and I was so surprised - an actor is on the stage, not backstage. Even they have awareness of wasting scenery. For me, it's more connected. I am the one who should push for it, not him. I started to find research about sustainability and theatre in Japan. I searched for many different keywords and I found very little information in Japanese.'</p> |
| | <p>'As a theatre, if it continues developing, we have to reflect on social issues. That's our artist law, I believe. We have to promote this and give a chance to the public to think about what the social issue is, through theatre or performance art.'</p> |
| | <p>'One day, I was on the train going to the theatre and this train was full of promotions for the SDGs campaign. A special packaged train made by the train company. For thirty minutes, I was reading many posters and learning about SDGs. Then, I went to the theatre to set up production and in that theatre there's nothing about SDGs. And that theatre is owned by that train company! The major companies are promoting it, but the theatre has no idea about sustainability or environmental concerns. I thought that's not good.'</p> |
| | <p>'You just can't create a piece of work which says that we should be aware of climate change and make lots of props and costumes and throw them away, it doesn't work. The Japanese theatre industry wants to create this piece of work, the first step is to change ourselves.'</p> |

Topic 4 - The role of the artist

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| Katelijn | <p>'In addition, it seems artists are not always clear what role they can or perhaps want to play. Some artists wonder how they can still be an artist, given the rapid climate collapse. Should they not become activists instead?'</p> |
| Melissa Lim - Singapore | <p>'Why are artists taking so long to talk about, as opposed to activists - they see an issue and they just go and talk about it and engage the</p> |

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| | <p>community immediately. The artist will hold themselves in a room and try to find creative ways to talk about it - but they haven't started! That's not to disparage artists - it just means they need to start talking. It just means we may need to understand how other people function and communicate. The issues that are closer to their heart as well. We as artists need to find a better connection with our community rather than just talking with our artist friends. We need to talk to people who don't agree with us or understand the arts more often. Sometimes, I even feel that artists want to talk about the issues of injustice to ease their own guilt. I want to talk about it and I think 'What kind of change have I made in my own life? Have I done anything to help someone in an effective way?'</p> |
| <p>Jisun - Korea</p> | <p>'We found, they do not have any time, they do not have any space, they are always doing action urgently. That's why their life is very desperate.'</p> <p>'Sometimes they do not feel that their real world is not spreading to all people. That's why we discuss together - okay, you do action, and we can spread it through the people through the artists way.'</p> <p>'The artist they started to collaborate with the activist, so they joined the climate strike and some other actions, the artists supported them.'</p> |
| <p>Melissa Lim - Singapore</p> | <p>'There is instrumentalisation but I also think that we need to find our commonalities between people fighting for justice and people fighting for the arts. What do we all want? We want to be able to see a hopeful tomorrow, a better future, or better alternatives. That's one commonality we can build on, rather than what we can impose on one another, we can find spaces, what is our dream for a better future, and then go from there.'</p> |

Topic 5 - Creativity

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| <p>Katelijn</p> | <p>Geli Arcena, who was interviewed during the Asian consultation, stresses the power of performance art to help people connect to the bigger picture in unexpected, cathartic ways. Through her work, she has witnessed that common people can really identify with the embodied</p> |
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| | experience of performance arts, much to the surprise of activists who were not convinced at first by the power of performance art. |
| Geli Arceño = Philippines | ‘I think performance art is interesting in a way because it seems silly for lack of better words, but it has one of the biggest impacts on making people look at the bigger picture on how the world is. What’s been happening? The most simple explanation. There’s really something about entertainment that makes people more receptive. It makes people step out of their lives and be projected in front of them. If you take it a step further, making people participate in their performance initially makes them understand in a more cathartic way, of how ridiculous and unjust their situation is. When it comes to the climate situation. To be more specific with that statement, one example would be when I was in college, we were trying to protest the injustice and neglect of the government when it comes to the environment, when they suffered the biggest typhoon of the country. What we did, it was like a nationwide event, we covered ourselves in mud and pretended to be dead bodies and started to walk the streets. We started calling for justice. We’re looking for our family. We’re looking for justice. We did it with a bunch of teens. Conservative activists laughed at us, said no one would relate to that, and when we were preparing for the performance, fellow performers were laughing and giggling. In the middle of the walk, people started crying, people started really embodying it, started to absorb the injustice. The people around us, who were laughing at first, started to take us seriously. It got more media attention than a normal protest with picket signs would. It got the conversation going when it got to the issue of climate and typhoons and climate in general.’ |

These discussions highlighted multiple ways the performing arts approach climate justice, ranging from embodying experiences and awareness raising to community empowerment. They have also underlined that the concept of climate justice is little known and sometimes perceived as an imported concept. What clearly emerged is the need for an enabling environment allowing performing arts organisations and artists to access funding, training and professional development opportunities.

The outcomes of the regional discussion also nourished IETM’s research report ‘Climate Justice - Through the Creative Lense of the Performing Arts’ - which is now available to download, read or listen to via IETM’s website under our resources. We hope you enjoyed this final episode of the podcast series.