



Working paper: Artistic Values

IETM has always been a place for performing arts professionals to develop new ideas and solutions together, in order to strengthen our practice through knowledge exchange. Through [Rewiring the Network](#) we invited the membership of IETM on a journey to collectively engage in envisioning a transition into a more sustainable future for the performing arts.

We already took a number of steps together. Through a survey among the members, launched in February, we mapped the [pressures](#) and [promises](#) of the current situation: which dominant practices we face in our daily work are unsustainable and which grains do we already detect today of working models that are more in line with the values we hold dear? In a first online brainstorm session on May 19, more than 130 IETM members designed a vision for a more desirable and sustainable future for the performing arts. On November 5 (10:00 to 13:00 CET) we move on in this trajectory by tackling the following question: *how can we transition from the current situation into the more sustainable future?* Which steps can be implemented by the international performing arts community and what should be the role of IETM and other accelerators in this transition process?

We are aiming to move beyond survival strategies and question the system of the performing arts as a whole. In order to make this challenge more graspable, we have chosen to tackle it from five different angles: the human, the social, the artistic, the economic and the ecological. For each of these value frames, we mapped the pressures and promises and envisioned a more sustainable future. This paper takes the angle of the artistic values.

1. The current situation: pressures and promises from the artistic perspective

Pressures: unsustainable dominant practices we should say goodbye to

We see a number of current practices that put a lot of pressure on the intrinsic and artistic value of working in the performing arts. Not surprisingly, these pressures mostly come from the outside. We see several types of answers: some have to do with the instrumentalisation of the arts, with economic

instrumentalisation as an often heard response. 'The notion of value attached to art has a connection with the price it costs, in the general understanding of the audience', someone wrote, or: 'Artists are seen as civil workers'. There are some testimonies of countries or situations where arts are under increasing political pressure.

Not always do these pressures on artistic value come from the outside. A respondent mentioned the issue of programming being based on 'trends'. Another respondent mentioned that we in the arts exclude ourselves from the political domain, by 'not acknowledging the ideologies that stand behind different decisions'. A lot of people raised the issue that the conditions in which we create and produce have a negative effect on the artistic value of the work, for instance because of the sharp competition in the sector, leading to a blame game between the different parties involved in the creation, production and presentation.

Promises: interesting experiments or practices we should build on and make more mainstream

How to respond to these pressures and enhance the artistic quality - and the recognition of this value in society? Strikingly, we did not receive a lot of good practice examples of lobbying initiatives. Rather, there were a lot of suggestions on how we should and can put the artistic value of our work back in its central position. Basically, the answer is this: in all our collaborations, we should start from our shared ethics and value framework. We should stay true to that and practice what we preach. The result: sincere and valuable collaborations, long-term collaborations, with partners from within and outside of the arts field. These ethics can be made explicit, in good and transparent arrangements between partners and in frameworks such as a Fair Practice Code.

Check them out on the left hand side of the [transition X-curve of the artistic value framework](#).

2. A vision for a more sustainable future: the artistic perspective

In 2040, the dominant practices in the performing arts field will provide the right and necessary conditions for artistic work to be *artistically* qualitative and meaningful, hence unleashing their potential to stimulate the imagination and reflection of people and offer new perspectives on life and society. This includes:

1. Artistic value is center stage. In 2040, artworks are not instrumentalised. Their core contribution to society lies in their *artistic* value and the impact of art on social life, health, the economy... is rightly considered a consequence or by-product of this core artistic value.
2. Conditions in line with the needs of the artistic work. In order to unleash the full potential of the artistic value, the conditions in which an artwork or artistic practice comes about are organised in line with the needs of that work.
 - a. Keyword in this context is: artistic autonomy. In practice, this means that artists are in charge of defining the conditions in which they operate and that those conditions are tailored to the individual project or process.

- b. Consequently, in this sustainable future, artists have a major role to play in decision-making processes, not only within the studio, but also in artistic institutions and in policy processes.
 - c. By 2040 the production machine has slowed down and artists don't feel the constant pressure to be visible anymore. It is widely acknowledged - also among funders - that periods of productivity and periods of research take turns. Also fallow periods are part of cycles of fertile land. Periods of research also allow for space to reflect and respond to broader cultural and social shifts in society: a core attribute of the arts.
3. A long-term perspective on artistic collaborations. In line with the previous point, artistic collaborations in 2040 are not just production-based, but start from a long-term collective perspective and engagement. Longer term engagements allow for deeper commitments, offer time to get lost and for taking risks.
 4. Create space for transformation. In 2040 artistic institutions have found ways to create spaces that have not been pre-programmed and of which the-rules-of-the-game are not fully set. There, the cross-fertilisation and 'co-practices' can take shape. Breaking out of our own silos and exploring connections to other practices and domains, is not only a way to become more inclusive (see: social values), but also a way towards allowing artistic forms to renew itself. On the edges of the practice, art challenges and reinvents itself.

This future image is mapped on the right hand side of the [transition X-curve of the artistic value framework](#).

3. Transitioning from the current situation into a more sustainable future

So now we have our mapping of the current situation, with pressures and promises and we have an image of our more desirable future in 2040. In other words, we now have an idea of the transitions we have to go through: what we want to move away from and which explicit practices and values we want to be core in the future.

In the brainstorm session of November, the working groups focussing on nurturing the artistic values will focus on the following questions. *How to recognise and avoid processes of instrumentalisation of art? How to make sure that within our own institutions or organisations artists can gain a maximum of autonomy in their work and a central voice in decision making processes? How to slow down and create a larger time horizon? How to create space for the unknown in a highly organised context?*

In the process of answering these questions, we will consider the two movements that are part of transition processes: the deconstruction of dominant unsustainable practices, and building upon already existing promising experiments or practices.

In designing the path of the transition, we will focus on the different roles that need to be fulfilled in order to advance. And we will consider what different actors in the ecosystem of the performing arts can do. We start by asking what we can do ourselves!

Roles to play:

- ... stop doing unsustainable things
- ... learn new skills
- ... connect and collaborate
- ... set the direction
- ... invest in experiments

Questions:

1. Where do I see my contribution? (What is my pledge?)
2. I cannot do this on my own, so who else can help to... (And how?)
3. In this transition, what is the role of international networks?