



Working paper: Ecological 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 ecological values.

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

Pressures: unsustainable dominant practices we should say goodbye to

There is a lot of worry and concern about unsustainable practices in the arts, which have a negative impact on the ecological value and natural resources. First, there are concerns about the *limited ecological awareness* in the sector, and the toughness of our habits. It seems we are addicted to flying

(or: from the current perspective - we used to be). These habits, of course, are linked to the way we have organised our (international) practice. First, there are a lot of concerns about *travelling for short trips* to meetings and conferences. Second, there are a lot of issues with the materials we use (and the lack of a circular approach). The major catch-22 for the performing arts, not surprisingly, is the issue of international touring. How can you be ecologically responsible in a system that relies so heavily on international touring and mobility?

One of the survey respondents wrote: *'Environmentally unsustainable: international touring of large companies - the environmental impact of this is huge. However, so many companies rely on international touring to make ends meet, and because there is a demand for international work and a hunger to experience culture from other spaces (which is great!). The impact not only of flights, but of hotels, one-off items, conception, and energy usage... is significant over time.'*

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

There are quite a lot of experiments to deal with this: setting up tours in a different and more sustainable way, a more circular approach to materials and energy when producing and presenting... More fundamentally, there is the insight that unsustainable practices are personal and have to do with ingrained habits. It is important to raise awareness and make a click, in order to change these habits, and fly less and consider other options.

Sometimes, a little pressure or some constraints from the outside can help to break down our unsustainable behaviour. We also see that there already are quite a number of experimental policy approaches to promote ecological sustainability within the arts field: for instance, Pro Helvetia stopped supporting short tours outside of Europe and the Dutch Performing Arts Fund gives additional support for those touring by train.

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

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

In 2040, the dominant practices in the performing arts field will be respectful towards the use of energy and materials and conscious of the boundaries of the natural resources of the Earth. This includes the following elements.

1. Ecological awareness. By 2040, all actors within the ecosystem will be fully aware of the fact that all their activities are embedded in broader, planetary ecosystems and have an ecological impact. They will be able to self-assess this impact and reflect it in their behaviour and decisions. The value of reciprocity will not only be cherished in human relationships, but also in the relation between humans and nature.
2. Ecological artistic production practices. Slowing down the cycle of creation, production and dissemination of performances will imply that we will produce only when it is urgent and meaningful. We will make every effort possible to use environmentally friendly materials and energy systems and recycle production materials.

3. Meaningful and green mobility. Artists stopped being tourists: they stopped hopping from one city to another by airplane. They travel less frequently and when they travel, they prioritise green mobility. Mobility is not taken for granted. We travel when it is meaningful. This implies different time frames and paces, allowing for different connection to local audiences. This also means that quality is valued over quantity. For programmers, especially, this means that they are able to leave their FOMO behind.
4. Rethinking internationalisation. 'Working internationally' does not equal 'travelling' anymore. By 2040, we have developed many different ways to work within an international context, that do not necessarily need the physical presence of the artist elsewhere. Long distance meetings are often held online. We have worked on the mobility of ideas, next to the mobility of live art. We work local, with a global outlook. In this context of rethinking internationalisation, we equally take into account that (meaningful and green) mobility should be accessible for everyone.
5. Environmentally aware funding schemes. The time to act against climate change is now (because yesterday is over). By 2040, funding schemes will take the ecological impact of artistic work into account and will play a major role in mainstreaming ecological awareness and practices. This includes that they also started valuing quality over quantity. Environmental friendly touring is valued more than 'successful' extensive touring all across the world.

This future image is mapped on the right hand side of the [transition X-curve of the ecological 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 November, groups addressing the ecological realm, will focus on the ecological value frame and will discuss the means to transform this vision into a daily practice and make the future of performing arts more ecologically sustainable. More specifically, the group will reflect on which are the forces that can help not only reduce the negative environmental impact of materials, energy and travelling, but also that can help raise more awareness on the topic among the sector and funders.

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?