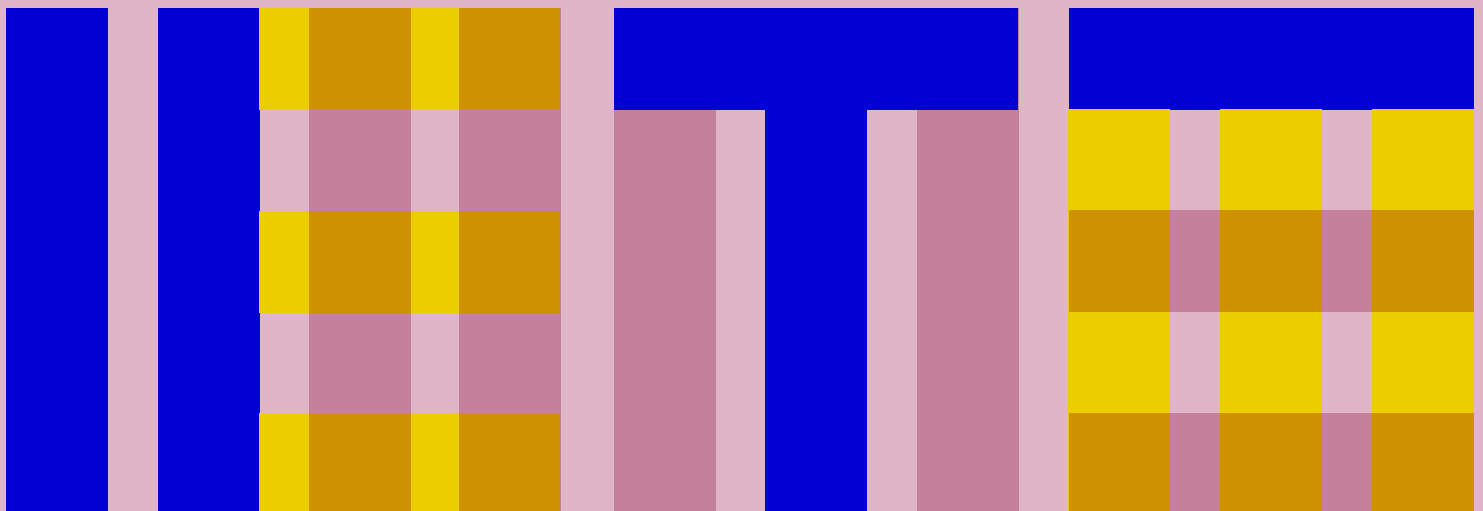


Report

Lost in Transition

from the IETM Focus Luxembourg Meeting

By Elena Polivtseva



IETM Report*Lost in transition***Author**

Elena Polivtseva

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+32 2 201 09 15 / ietm@ietm.org
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ietm@ietm.org

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Introduction

The IETM Focus Luxembourg Meeting, organised in partnership with [Kultur | lx – Arts Council Luxembourg](#), gathered 122 performing arts professionals coming from 21 different countries. Entitled *Lost in Transition?*, the meeting addressed the topic of the climate crisis and the role of the performing arts sector in advancing the world's transition to a greener and more just world. The discussions were held in six working groups over two days and were facilitated by seven performing arts professionals¹.

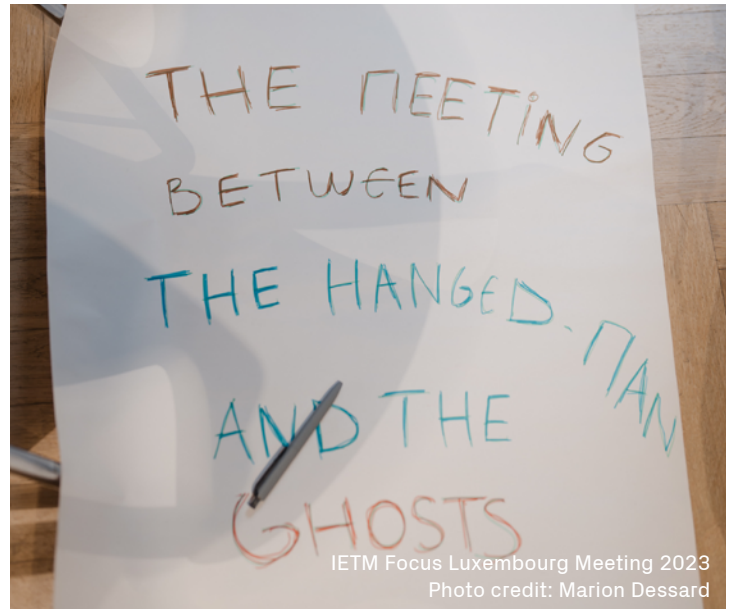
The title of the meeting - *Lost in Transition?* - did not assume that there is one common green transition we can all embark on, that it is happening in the right way, and we should simply find our place in it. Nor was there a preconception that there is or can be a unified understanding and commitment in the sector towards embodying or facilitating this transition. Instead, the meeting hosted an honest and open dialogue about all possible reasons why we may find ourselves 'lost' and how - from our extremely diverse local, professional and personal contexts - we can find both collective and individual pathways towards a more sustainable world.

The IETM Focus took place on **28-30 November**, during the first week of the 2023 Climate Change Conference (COP28) hosted by the United Arab Emirates between 30 November and 12 December. The COP28 aimed to assess the world's progress towards implementing the Paris Agreement². Acknowledging that the efforts undertaken globally are insufficient to reach the stated goals, the conference concluded with a commitment to a more radical phasing out of fossil fuel usage by 2050 and increasing financing of global climate action. Ahead of the conference, more than 1000 cultural organisations from all over the world signed the [Global Call](#) to embed Culture into Climate Policy at COP28, arguing that culture is an indispensable pillar of climate action.

Finally, the High-Level Ministerial Dialogue on Culture-based Climate Action was organised at COP28 and resulted in signing the [Emirates Declaration on Cultural-based Climate Action](#). The Declaration recognises that 'culture, from arts to heritage, has a fundamental role to play in helping people to imagine and to realise low carbon, just, climate resilient futures'. Earlier this year, the UN Secretary General acknowledged that culture is under-appreciated in the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the State Leaders of G20 issued a call for recognising culture as a sustainable development goal. This is an unprecedented act of acknowledging culture's value at that level.



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While these are positive signs of recognition of culture and art in sustainable transition, the IETM Focus, even if not directly reflecting on them and not comparable with the scale and size of COP28, was ironically a place to glean crucial nuances in this discourse. Will the increased political acknowledgement not result in putting pressure without alleviating support? How can this recognition lead to creating a more sustainable and truly supportive reality for the cultural sector? How is culture precisely a 'pillar of sustainable development', and in which ways can artists 'help people to imagine and realise' a better future? How can we assume and exercise our responsibility beyond or regardless of the system's recognition of our value?

1 IETM members who facilitated working groups are Israel Aloni, ILDANCE, Sweden; Isadora Bigazzi, Italy; Chloe Charlton, Cryptic, United Kingdom; Pablo Chimienti, THEATER FEDERATION, Luxembourg; Simón Hanukai, Kaimera Productions, France; Florent Mehmeti, Teatri ODA, Kosovo; Máté Tenke, Pro Progressione, Hungary. Emma Jayne Park, UK, was the facilitator of the whole Focus meeting.

2 The [Paris Agreement](#), signed in 2015, is a commitment to limit global warming to 1.5°C before the end of the century and make sure that greenhouse gas emissions peak before 2025 at the latest and decline 43% by 2030.

IETM Focus: methodology and itinerary

The Focus working sessions were undertaken in two parts. In the first part - 'Envisioning the transition' - facilitators of each group applied the methods of their choice to convene a space for dreaming and imagining better futures. Participants were invited to articulate wishes as big as their imagination can conceive. In the second part - 'Grounding our actions' - group discussions moved towards framing actions that participants can take individually or collectively to advance the green transition. Acknowledging that the departure points of participants are very diverse, the methodology allowed for a flexible approach to 'grounding' one's actions: from designing radical collective movements to individually laying out practical changes in the way one works. Recognising the obstacles and possible compromises was also part of the exercise.

Following this methodology, each of the groups immersed in different experiences: dreaming, acknowledging the imperfection of the status quo, embracing responsibilities, turning on radical imagination or becoming practical. No matter how challenging it appeared for many to dream and articulate hopes - amidst the increasingly less cheery global context, we managed to depict the place we would like our world to be. We discussed the tense and often blocking issue of our actual responsibility for building that world. Finally, we admitted that the overarching context we are part of - defined by policies and funding structures - must help us to turn this responsibility from a mental pressure to a set of achievable actions.

The overarching questions that emerged through most discussions was: when it comes to a systemic issue, where does the change begin? Are we part and embodiment of this change, or can we be a spark for it? We admitted that we are a micro-ecology within a massive and rigid system, but we can do a lot today and tomorrow before anything else happens. Finally, we shared the conviction that as a sector with a unique power to inspire and connect, we can trigger changes in the fractions of that system we cannot directly move.



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Key takeaways, or our two-fold 'green vision'

Vision of a green art sector

1. A green art sector creatively embraces its small and big responsibilities

Confusion, defensiveness and guilt no longer hinder us from recognising and embracing our diverse responsibilities in climate action. By shedding the burden of unrealistic and vague expectations imposed on us externally, we have crafted our own green transitions. Our efforts to take meaningful steps align proportionately with their intended impact. Creatively embracing our climate responsibilities, we ensure they are deeply embedded in our artistic values.

2. A green art sector does not struggle against the system, it transforms the system

We have progressed beyond the daunting notion that we are confined within a vast, unsustainable system. We have identified pathways through which we can influence the system: connecting communities, envisaging the unimaginable and instilling hope. We have also cultivated our own micro-ecology that shares resources, skills and knowledge; generating ripple effects throughout the broader macro-environment to which we belong.

3. A green art sector does what it is good at: exploring, piloting and scaling up solutions

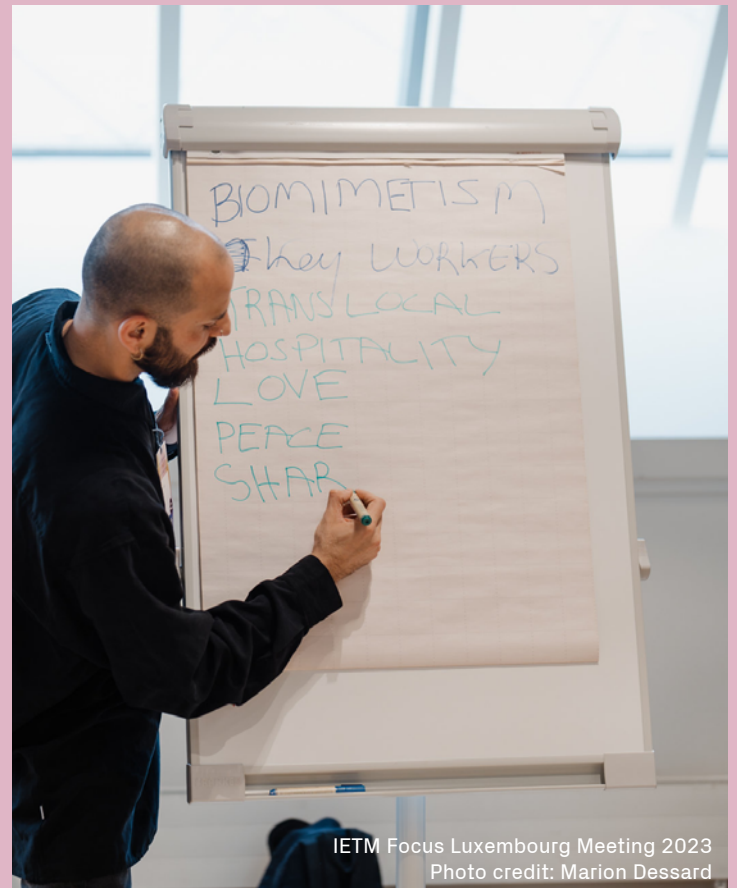
We use our core qualities - creativity, courage, agility, and responsiveness, to foster innovation that societies and economies are in need of. We pilot unconventional, sustainable, and inclusive approaches and models. When these innovative methods prove successful, we share our findings with the broader society and disseminate our micro-level experiments to other sectors.

4. A green art sector is present in the moment and works long-term

Our creative practice is adaptable and responsive to the needs and aspirations of our communities. We invest time in understanding local realities, exploring our context, experimenting with ideas and participating in meaningful conversations. We remain open to adjusting our perspective along the way, while also possessing the ability to influence the perspectives of others. This ensures that our work remains relevant and future-proof.

5. A green art sector aspires for justice

We recognise the existence of structured inequalities in the world and we are committed to taking targeted actions to foster inclusivity within our sector. We do not hesitate to acknowledge our privileges, consistently questioning how we can leverage them for the betterment of societies. Our commitment to solidarity and the creation of a level playing field are essential components of our green transitions.



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Vision of a green cultural policy

1. A green cultural policy turns the value of the arts into better conditions for artists

The increasing acknowledgment of the value of culture leads to the establishment of a fair, sustainable, and supportive environment for the arts to be the fully-fledged catalyst for positive transformations in society. Growing recognition of culture does not only result in new expectations from the art sector but also in structured changes in the support ecosystem.

2. A green cultural policy revives the ability of the arts to be unexpected

Cultural policies offer guidance and a sense of direction, while also allowing room for artistic experimentation, adaptation, ongoing research and critical reflection on one's work and practice. Artists are free to sow ideas, surprise, shock, disturb and evoke life-changing emotions. Art has become unexpected again. Artists are liberated from the necessity of predicting how their work will be received.

3. A green cultural policy provides support instead of exerting pressure

Cultural policies acknowledge that climate challenges are shared, and there is a need for a collective approach to problem-solving. Cultural policy-makers and institutions assume their own role in climate action - the role of a supporter. Instead of merely putting pressure on the arts to bring solutions, policy-makers structures lead by example and provide support for the sector to learn, navigate complexities, overcome obstacles, and develop the necessary skills and courage to lead positive transformations.

4. A green cultural policy understands that community is more important than audience

Cultural policies actively support the art sector to establish and deepen connections with their communities - people from the neighbourhood, local schools and hospitals, like-minded experts, peers from other art disciplines. Community-building is not viewed merely as a characteristic of specific art forms, but rather as an integral component of the functioning of every organisation, just like production, marketing and administration are.

5. A green cultural policy is not obsessed with project

A range of other activities in the arts are equally valued alongside creation and production delivered through projects. These include research, exploration, reflection, training, community-building, mediation, collaboration with other sectors, consultation with experts, and revamping internal processes, among others. Allocating more time and funding to these activities and allowing art workers to build expertise in these fields strengthens the art sector and makes the arts offer more relevant for societies.



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What kind of transition?

The IETM Focus programme did not provide a clear definition of ‘transition’ and did not specify the starting and ending points of the transition for the performing arts sector and society at large. The meeting aimed to embrace the diversity of participants’ perspectives and collaboratively envision a greener future, along with the necessary processes to achieve it.

Many participants expressed that there shouldn’t be a single, rigid blueprint for a green transition due to diverse starting points and the uneven distribution of resources and privileges in the international performing arts sector. Acknowledging the highly contextual nature of the green transition, it was agreed that there should be space for unique pathways, engaging in dialogue with each other, and a continuous space for mutual sharing and support to propel these transitions forward.

There was a discussion about whether we should and can have a clear vision of our desired destination. On one hand, such a vision is necessary as a source of hope, inspiration, and a measure of effectiveness and accountability. On the other hand, predicting humanity’s and the planet’s trajectory in the medium or short term is challenging. The world is uncertain and unstable, making dreaming seem like a useless exercise. How can we ensure that the uncertainty of the future and the reluctance to dream don’t become excuses for inaction? The answer lies in a two-fold approach. First, we must continue to dare to imagine, harnessing this ability as our sector’s strength to inspire and guide society. Second, we must master the interaction with the not known, and help the rest of the society to exercise this interaction, preventing indifference, submissiveness, and paralysis in the face of uncertainty.

For some, the concept of transition appeared somewhat vague and lacking in action-oriented elements. Ultimately, it was highlighted that in the context of a green transition, it is not merely a journey from point A to B. Rather, it signifies a renewal of values and principles. Some of the identified values crucial for fostering a greener future include care, justice, consciousness, sharing, and collaboration. Furthermore, transition encompasses a spectrum of multifaceted movements, occurring at varying paces and following diverse trajectories. These movements may involve radical actions, but the ‘act of stopping’³, refraining from certain actions, and celebrating endings can also serve as catalysts for movement. The ‘act of stopping’ allows individuals to situate themselves in time and space, helping to crystallise the direction of where to go next.



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Another crucial factor to consider when undertaking a transition is the timeline. It is acknowledged that while it is useful to establish concrete deadlines, the duration of a systemic change remains uncertain. At the same time, we are also not sure about the amount of time that is left for us to act.

Finally - and this may have been the starting point of conversations in many IETM Focus rooms: for whom is the transition? It is evident that not all of our peers have equal access to making choices regarding embarking on a green transition. This relates to access, education, knowledge, resources, opportunities and support; it encompasses structured discriminations and privileges. An important disclaimer that has been emphasised multiple times is: our current reality requires driving changes even if we cannot have everyone on board and even if we have not heard all voices. Nevertheless, it is imperative to be strongly aware of the pitfalls of our transition and frame climate discussions within the context of justice and a commitment to equity.

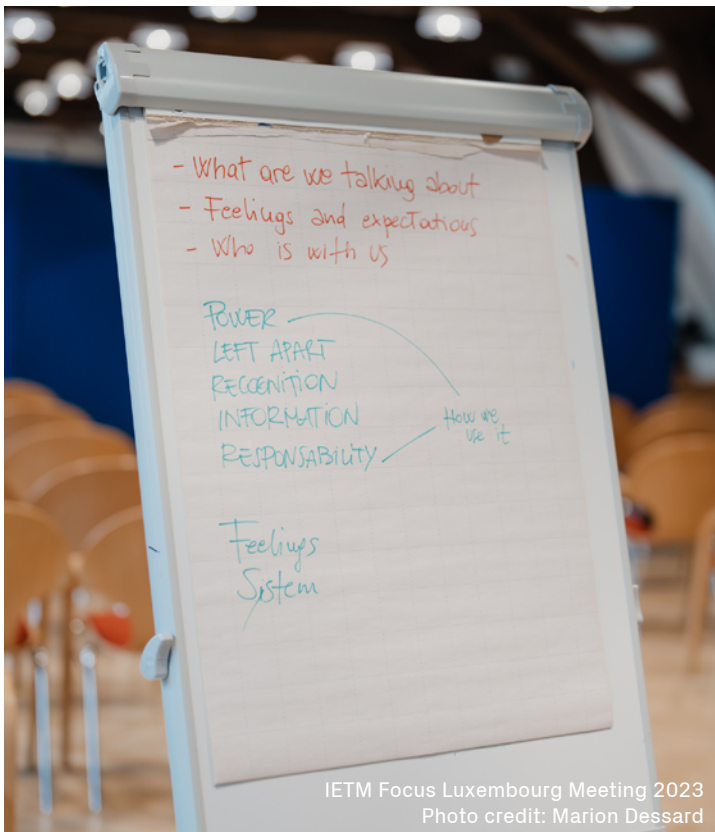
³ The notion of ‘act of stopping’ was proposed by a facilitator in one of the groups. It was discussed as a sort of movement which means withdrawing from all current movements.

Why are we talking about the green transition?

The emphasis in this subtitle is neither on 'green' nor on 'transition,' but rather on 'we.' Why are we talking about the green transition? This question delves into the frequently conflicting and tense perception within the sector regarding its own accountability for the climate crisis and its responsibility for climate action.

Many artists and art organisations find themselves perplexed regarding the specific role they should and can assume in climate action. The overwhelming nature of the climate crisis, characterised by its systemic complexity and large scale, adds to the confusion. At the same time, it appears complacent for the public sector to be uncertain about its role and responsibility in such a significant crisis. This uncertainty fosters feelings of guilt and anxiety, ultimately paralysing our ability to take meaningful action. How can we overcome this mental pressure?

First of all, it is necessary to ask ourselves a few honest questions. If we currently feel an urge, pressure or desire to act, where does it come from? Is it the requirement from funders, a demand from the society, pressure from peer art workers, our genuine self-consciousness, or all these combined? Indeed, there may be different reasons why we are talking about the green transition today:



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- Some of the 196 countries that signed the Paris Agreement profoundly changed their governmental strategies, which also led to the requirement for art organisations to address the climate crisis in their work and adopt sustainable practices. At the same time, in some countries additional pressure on the art sector is linked to the fact that other policies - economic, social, education or environmental ones - do not fully deliver on their intended impact. Indeed, in some places, funders encourage or even require artists to tackle an expanding array of issues such as social tensions, unemployment, migration, and mental health. This trend becomes concerning if it is merely a sign of a dysfunctional system seeking superficial solutions. We must remain vigilant regarding such trends and challenge systems that exhibit these traits, all the while maintaining our commitment to climate and social responsibility.
- Another crucial trend could involve the authentic acknowledgment by society of our value and influence in propelling sustainable development – a cause we have tirelessly advocated for and must now embrace and appreciate. However, this recognition brings not only opportunities but also expectations and pressures. If our responsibilities expand due to genuine social and political recognition, it should be accompanied by empowerment and legitimacy, leading to an improved environment for the arts.
- Finally, as a socially-engaged sector, we may have heightened awareness of the climate crisis, just as with any other issue that profoundly impacts society. We recognise that, like any citizen or human being, we bear the responsibility to care for the environment we inhabit and exploit. It is undeniable: every individual, each and every one of us, shares responsibility for the climate crisis. However, the scale and weight of this responsibility vary significantly, and there are diverse roles for different individuals, sectors, communities and regions of the globe, to play in climate action.

Furthermore, it is crucial to gain clarity regarding our impact, encompassing both negative aspects, such as our environmental footprint, and positive ones, such as identifying areas where we can exert the most significant influence. This applies to us as a sector, organisation, professionals and individuals. Achieving this clarity involves consulting with experts, breaking down the problem into manageable components and delineating our core strengths along with their potential contributions to the green transition. It is imperative not to presume that society or our peer community expects us to save the world. Even if such expectations exist, it is more manageable to navigate responsibilities and duties by aligning them with our own values, solid knowledge and a clear understanding of our capacities and assets.

A few more questions and answers emerged in the discussions, all linked to the notion of responsibility for climate action:

- **Should the green transition necessarily be our passion?** The green transition is not necessarily driven by passion. Our current motivation, energy and expertise may be directed towards other areas. However, before claiming that ‘the green transition is not my topic,’ it is crucial to pause and consider the overarching nature of this subject—how it impacts everyone and its interconnectedness with various other issues. For example, during this summer, you might find yourself compelled to cancel a festival due to flooding or entirely rethink your performance because of a heatwave. In such instances, can we still claim that the green transition is not relevant to our concerns? Furthermore, you may be engaged in addressing diverse topics such as peace, inclusion, displacement, homelessness, or rurality. It’s essential to recognise the profound connections these issues share with climate change and sustainability on a broader scale.
 - **Where do we wield the greatest influence?** Responsibility extends beyond mere accountability and guilt; it encompasses the possession of unique powers to address issues. The performing arts sector boasts various powers that distinguish it from other sectors: the capacity to forge connections among people and foster communities, the flexibility to experiment with and implement innovative solutions, and the aptitude to inspire individuals to envision the unimaginable and translate that imagination into actions that instigate significant changes. While we may lack the conventional power to enact laws, allocate public budgets, make political decisions, or dismantle polluting businesses, we should leverage our distinctive tools to influence the system and initiate ripple effects.
 - **What is our actual footprint?** The performing arts sector is not among the most monstrous polluters, even within the cultural ecosystem, let alone within the broader economy. However, this does not imply that we should be complacent about our environmental impact. It is crucial to be mindful of our own footprint and strategically plan steps to minimise it. The energy and resources invested in implementing these measures though should be justifiable based on their impact and value.
 - **How much can we actually do?** There are different levels of action: a systemic dimension wherein various players are interconnected, and a micro-level comprising small, concrete steps that individuals and groups can take at the organisational and sector levels. It is crucial to distinguish between these two levels and be aware that they are not mutually exclusive. Failing at one level should not hinder progress at the other. For example, if someone is not prepared or unable to fully adopt sustainable practices in their work and personal life, it should not deter them from addressing climate issues in their productions.
 - **How do we use our privilege?** More than once during the meeting it was acknowledged that attending an international event for a two-day brainstorming session on a green transition in the performing arts sector is a privilege. Conversations about privileges can be challenging for some, but they become more practical when we pose the question: how can we use our privilege for good? The focus should be on levelling the playing field, empowering others, sharing our resources, proactively including diverse voices in the conversation, providing support, and taking various other actions.
- For the art sector, it appears crucial to anchor any responsibility within a framework of values and delineate the connection between responsibility and integrity, and even more so - between responsibility and artistic freedom. Conversations about integrity and freedom often circle back to the notion of artistic quality. Some assert a clear stance: any value holds true and contributes to quality only if it is authentic and intrinsic to the artistic concept, rather than imposed by financial obligations or the ‘fast fashion’ of politics and societies. Once more, the green transition ought to be our transition – something we embrace and embody.

Our point(s) of departure

Returning to the concept of transition, what kind of reality are we aspiring to leave behind, dismantle or transform? It is certain that ‘the starting point is as diverse as there are people’, as one participant articulated. However, there are global elements in today’s landscape that are relevant to all, albeit to varying extents.

Therefore, what does our ‘today’ look like, combining the impressions shared by IETM Focus participants?

Nation states are evidently falling short of their environmental commitments, and a sense of urgency pervades even the most diplomatic political declarations. Climate disasters, such as heatwaves, droughts, wildfires, floods, hurricanes and storms impact all corners of the world, leading to social and economic distress, forced human displacement and conflict.

Simultaneously, societies across the globe remain fixated on consumption and growth⁴, striving for consuming more within shorter timeframes. While not universally embraced, the digital way of life has significantly expanded over the past decade, influencing people’s psychology with shorter, rapidly changing and easily accessible experiences. Many in the room shared the feeling that in times of digitalisation and fast-paced changes, our collective memory is diminishing or fading away.

Societies are marked by deep inequality and polarisation on various issues, including the green transition. A diminishing sense of community confines individuals to their personal lives or bubbles, including digital ones. A symptom of this polarisation is the declining ability to read social moods and predict changes, exemplified by the genuine shock people experience when a politician they don’t follow is elected or a measure they deemed unrealistic is voted on in a referendum. Inspiring and encouraging such a disintegrated society to embark on any form of systemic transition is extremely challenging. The reasons for the erosion of communities are diverse: economic hardship and recession, the declining trust in governments that fail to address current turbulences, societal fractures and tensions caused by forced human displacement, lasting effects of the global pandemic, to name a few.

The arts sector is an integral part of this troubled ecosystem. Wars and natural disasters profoundly impact the global cultural sector, destroying or damaging cultural heritage and infrastructure, disrupting artistic processes and affecting audience engagement.

Many participants, from various countries (though not all), express concern that audiences of the performing arts may not be growing and may even be shrinking. While digital technologies facilitate engagement with the public, they also shorten attention spans, exhaust minds and create a reality where people always have some form of ‘food for thought’ at hand, whether real or fictional. This shift diminishes curiosity for more complex experiences, such as those offered by contemporary arts.

For many in the room, the art sector doesn’t appear well-positioned to be a leader in systemic change. As one participant put it, ‘we are not only burning our planet - we are burning ourselves’. This is reflected in and caused by overproduction in the sector, driven by funding structures and artists’ aspirations for economic sustainability. In some countries, due to low pay standards, artists need to work an unreasonable amount of time to gain a reasonable amount of money, and as a result, they produce more work than society requires. This not only harms creativity and well-being but also hinders diversity in artistic offerings.

Overproduction is naturally coupled with the short lifespan of productions. Driven by the prevailing logic of many funding systems, artists and art organisations invest a disproportionate amount of effort, time, energy and money into a production that is then only shown a few times.

The art sector is as fragmented as wider society. One reason for this is the sector’s reliance on a project-based mode of operation. Overly focused on projects, organisations channel all their energy into achieving short- and medium-term goals, often too specific to align with the objectives of other organisations. In this segmented context, mobilising the sector to work together towards a profound systemic change becomes a challenge. Even mutual decisions on practical aspects of organisational work become difficult. The majority in the sector has adjusted their mindsets to this reality, accepting the situation they are in, and yet again, a profound collective transformation seems challenging.

Most cultural policies, much like policies in many other sectors, either ignore the issues of the climate crisis or use it as a checkbox, sometimes not a lasting one, creating pressure and anxiety within the art sector. The support structures that could provide additional resources and information are missing.

⁴ Statista 2023, *Total consumer spending worldwide from 2013 to 2028*, viewed on 17 January 2023, <https://www.statista.com/forecasts/1160305/consumer-spending-forecast-in-the-world>

The perfect world

As mentioned earlier, despite significant uncertainties and the prevailing gloomy context, the central theme of the meeting was the daring act of imagination. Each of the Focus participants, using various formats facilitated by moderators, was tasked with articulating concrete features of their envisioned future. The amalgamated snapshot of participants' aspirations can be summarised as follows:

The world has shifted from a paradigm of extraction to one of regeneration. This signifies an end to the exploitation of nature for our needs, instead fostering a reciprocal relationship by rebuilding ecosystems and contributing to them. We have identified and discontinued futile and harmful processes, practices, and objects, paving the way for the establishment of regenerative methods. This transition extends not only to nature but also to people: businesses no longer exploit employees, corporate hierarchies are non-oppressive, and workers fully reap the benefits of the wealth they generate. Individuals are increasingly recognised as humans, not merely as consumers or labourers. Economic growth is no longer the paramount goal of society.

The places we inhabit have become greener, carbon-neutral, and more sustainable. Renewable energy has become the standard, and infrastructure is designed to be people-friendly and in harmony with nature. Overall, human life is integrated into the natural ecosystem in a less violent and more sustainable manner.

The sense of community has been restored, giving rise to new ways of communal living grounded in equity, sharing, collaboration and non-hierarchical relationships. Factors like race, gender, sexual orientation, physical ability and others that currently lead to discrimination no longer determine access to opportunities and resources. Society is healthier because the healthcare system, in collaboration with other sectors, focuses on the root causes of diseases rather than their symptoms and consequences.

We are connected globally out of genuine curiosity and aspiration, rather than being solely driven by economic interest and prestige. Travelling is slower and more sustainable. There is no war, anywhere in the world.

Technology serves a constructive purpose, being accessible and created by people. Art plays a crucial role in defining and exercising a healthy and critical relationship between humans and artificial intelligence.

Art is an integral part of this new society, with its value reclaimed and firmly established. It does not have to constantly fight for survival; instead, it is deeply embedded in the education system, supported by a sustainable socio-economic framework, and acts as a powerful connector within society and across sectors.



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In this new reality, art workers are naturally more connected with reality, avoiding the rush from project to project and remaining responsive to societal issues. The psychology of artistic production has transformed: there is no longer a sprint mentality, but a cyclical production cycle that builds upon past experiences, creating meaningful connections between activities. There is no obsession with reaching a specific endpoint, allowing for openness to external influences and the freedom to transform practices along the way.

The cultural sector is united, fostering a strong culture of sharing and resource exchange. More people are actively involved in creating the arts.

When we meet across borders, there is no need to address how to avoid getting lost in a green transition. We possess the resources, knowledge, and tools to be carbon-neutral, practise sustainable touring, and ensure that every aspect of our work is as green as possible.

What is holding us back?

After straightening out our responsibilities and imagining the place we want to be in, it is vital to map out the obstacles and barriers that prevent us from acting.

The 'system' deadlock

Green transition requires a systemic change, and we are often discouraged and powerless when confronted with the so-called system. For some of us, it seems counterproductive and yet again unsustainable - in terms of exhausting ourselves and our resources - to fight for change. This is because the change we can achieve seems too insignificant compared to the massivity and power of the larger system, which has evidently gone off the greening track. The paralysis caused by the scale of the problem and the rigidity of the system yet again nourishes the feeling of guilt. It was discussed though that if it seems impossible to have a direct impact on the system, we can construct our own micro-ecology, which shares resources, skills and knowledge, and creates ripple effects for the rest of the macro-environment we are part of.

Unsustainable DNA

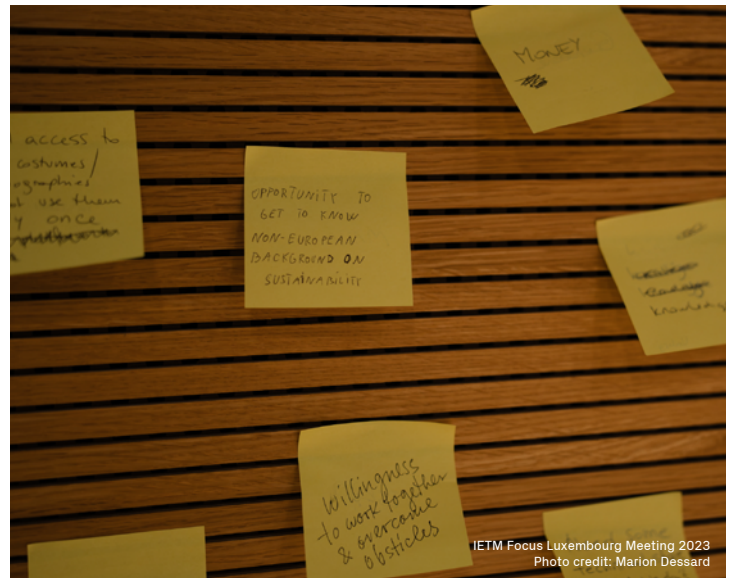
We have talked a lot about how much we are dependent on public funding. It has been for a while now that we deal with funding systems that stimulate overproduction, shortsightedness and an unsustainable mode of operation. In the meantime, the majority of us have drastically adjusted to what funders require and demand. For some organisations or collectives the problem is even more profound: slowing down poses an existential threat for them, as they were born as a project, and a fast-paced sprint mentality is in the DNA of their organisations. For them, ecological consideration comes on top of already a busy and tight agenda, as an after-thought which makes the project not so smooth and incoherent. Instead of investing energy and money into adjusting such a project to a more sustainable framework, one may consider assessing its ecological capacity thoroughly, and if needed, ending it and starting something else, with sustainability as a core value.

Change-phobia

There is a general reluctance to change in society. Often, evidence and data on a potentially positive impact of a measure are not enough to overcome the fear and anxiety towards change. An imagined different future is met with much more scepticism and scrutiny than the current reality, which we just live through as a matter of no choice. In the meantime, power-holders put extra efforts into preserving the status quo, as they are direct products and embodiment of it. As one of the participants put it 'it takes a disaster to create a massive change of behaviour'. Art could be a tool to visualise and imagine such a disaster, help people connect the dots and unite for a collective positive change.



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Elephants in the room

Some topics are largely discussed, but concrete solutions to tackle them are often avoided. For instance, travelling remains a controversial topic. We keep on swinging between the idea of drastically reducing or digitalising cross-border movements to adopting slow travel practices, often without a feasible plan for those who cannot afford spending longer time on the road, such as people with disabilities or care-givers. What is the measure of ethics in this debate? How can we assess the value of touring at the backdrop of the carbon footprint it leaves? Another 'elephant in the room' is the lack of diversity of voices in the conversation. It seems unfair and short-sighted to discuss global issues with a small and in some sense homogenous group of people, realising that many important voices are not heard. How can we make choices for those who do have access to making choices? How can we create a dialogue with those who are not in the room?

Ruptures, differences, gaps

Green transition is a collective and global endeavour which requires working together. Even if we put the ideological weight of inequities and privileges aside, there is a very practical side of the gaps and differences between us that put spokes in the wheel of our collaborations. For instance, the uneven spread of economic wealth or divergence of political priorities between countries can create barriers for a cross-border green strategy. Imbalances in the levels of pay and different legal systems may also be impediments for a deeper cross-border engagement which comes with slower cross-border collaboration. That is why there is a need for accepting transitions of different paces and trajectories while creating a supportive cross-border ecosystem based on sharing resources, skills, power and knowledge. Moreover, it is important to advocate for cross-border standards in art policies and funding structures.

Precarity of resources, time, space and mind (?)

As someone expressed, ‘we can be creative, innovative, activist, and powerful, only if we emerge from precarity.’ Many agreed that the lack of time, money and space restrain our ability and courage to slow down, critically reflect on our own practices, get informed, install connections with other sectors, deepen relationships with our audiences and communities. Even before embarking on the transition, which as such may require additional resources, there is a need and space for research and decision-making. We need to advocate for sustainable policies to help us to gain this time and space and amplify our relevance for society amidst the unfolding climate crisis. In the meantime, it is important to keep asking ourselves the question that emerged as key during the discussions: ‘what can I do with what I have at this exact moment?’

‘Never enough’ mentality

It is possible that nothing has really been holding us back and we have already progressed with small and not so small steps towards a more sustainable future. There have been many valuable actions and initiatives undertaken in the sector, but they may be unseen or not appreciated enough. Perhaps the issue is that we do not have the tradition and capacity to document good practices and continuously look back and evaluate ourselves in a relevant way. This is largely related to the speedy nature of our projects and the way we are required to report on them. The other reason for the ‘never enough’ mentality can be that the final goal or scale of the global green transition is not quite defined. How can a small-scale initiative be positioned and appreciated within this massive process the edges of which are undefined? The answer could be not to get overwhelmed by the scale of the problem, invest in celebrating our good practices and, importantly - scale them up and tailor for different realities and sectors.



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Pick your battle(s) today

Before delving into specific areas of action where our sector can have a meaningful impact, it is essential to establish a set of guiding principles:

- **Clarity and concreteness:** Clearly define our responsibilities and roles, establish boundaries, and commit to tangible, achievable goals. We must wholeheartedly embrace the roles we assign ourselves, communicate them effectively to the world, and transform them into a well-defined action plan.
- **Awareness and consciousness:** Evaluate any proposed solutions in light of the limits and needs of the entire ecosystem. In collaborative efforts, consider the inclusiveness of our solutions, accounting for individuals without the same privileges.
- **Focus:** Avoid allowing discussions to drift into unproductive spaces. Given the complexity and emotional nature of the issue at hand, refrain from being overwhelmed by less significant issues that might overshadow more fundamental problems. Allocate energy judiciously, avoiding investment in areas where our impact is minimal.
- **Holistic approach:** Situate our actions within a broader context and assess their potential negative impact in relation to their intended value and possible ripple effects. Make decisions with a holistic perspective, considering various factors such as environmental impact, depth of social connections, sustainability of professional relationships, and long-term career implications.
- **Leveraging strengths:** In times of polarisation and disintegration, recognise our sector's unique ability to restore communities and forge new connections. Through compelling storytelling and unexpected experiences, we can inspire, instil hope, and stimulate imagination. Leverage our agility and creativity to develop and test innovative solutions that can be shared with other sectors.

The scale of the climate problem and scarcity of our time and resources require us to be choiceful of the areas we get involved in, and invest our time and resources in actions that matter. These are some of the battles we can commit to:

Tell the right story

Many participants emphasised that artistic content represents the realm where artists and art organisations enjoy the greatest freedom and influence. In contrast to the larger systemic changes that many acknowledge as difficult to achieve, engaging in content creation and

drawing inspiration from narratives offers a tangible avenue for expression without necessitating street protests, a revolution in funding structures, or a departure from existing systems. The question arises: which stories should we tell today? Some propose that artists should depict the catastrophic consequences societies may face if they fail to alter their behaviour. Others advocate for narratives that instil hope and envision a positive future, serving as an inspiration for people to aspire towards. Regardless of the approach, when addressing climate and nature, it is essential to move beyond the abstract nature of the theme and focus on incorporating local perspectives as much as possible.

Embed sustainability into your creative process

While not all artists are interested in addressing climate issues through their artistic work, they can factor creative sustainability in the frame, design and dramaturgy of their productions. This could be a performance that is more tourable and has a longer lifespan. For instance, it can be transformable and adaptive to different local contexts, without requiring many people, sets, and materials to cross borders. Moreover, dramaturgy and production of such work can use time more sensibly; for example, the time spent on a train or boat to bring a performance abroad can be creatively embedded into the artistic work or utilised for engaging with audiences and artistic communities.

Travel less, stay longer

One thing has been crystallised for many throughout the COVID-19 period: in the world of inequalities and injustices, isolation is not a solution. Cross-border exchange, even for community-based and hyper-local practices is vital - for getting inspired and informed. There is no doubt travelling should not be removed from our professional practice, but it has to be rethought drastically, in line with the limits of environmental sustainability and our own capacities. Slow or community touring are not new terms anymore, and there are many examples how slower and more engaging ways of bringing work across borders allows to produce a more meaningful work and maximise its long-term value for artists, audiences and broader communities.

Workshop solutions and scale them up

Our core assets—creativity, courage, agility, and responsiveness—are pivotal elements for fostering innovation. The contemporary performing arts sector has these qualities, exploring and implementing unconventional, sustainable and inclusive approaches to its work. When these innovative methods prove successful, it is necessary to share our findings with the broader society and disseminate our micro-level experiments to other industries. For instance, if there is a solution for a venue to become greener, that solution might also work for a stadium.

Collecting and analysing examples of these experiments is crucial. Rather than merely showcasing good practices, our aim is to extract valuable insights and knowledge from them, facilitating the transition of these innovations from niche to mainstream.

Become activist

Many participants highlighted that in tense or stagnated socio-political settings, art can be a 'spark setting a fire'. The activist toolbox of the arts is plentiful and varied. Artistic work can be extremely bold, shocking and merciless, for instance, picturing a potential catastrophe, or calling a spade a spade in times of censorship. At the same time, art can also influence minds and help connect the dots in a more subtle and engaging way, compared to the more confrontational, 'traditional' forms of activism. It is crucial, therefore, not to let our activist power dwindle and to utilise the tools we possess to unite, inform and encourage people to take action, even if it requires stepping out of our comfort zones.

Reclaim the place for art in society

- **Work with other sectors**

We urgently need to transcend the art bubble to all possible fields. Embarking on a complex and systemic journey, we need to get equipped with knowledge, tools and expertise from other sectors. Moreover, we cannot influence other 'polluters' if we remain confined within our own community - no matter what stories we craft, we need listeners, interlocutors and allies. Finally, the arts sector still lacks recognition within society, economy and political systems. Without recognition, it is a challenge to work in a sustainable manner, let alone to lead or trigger systemic change. Which forms can the collaboration with other sectors take? Concrete examples cited by participants include regular meetings with environmental experts; setting up and taking part in cross-sectoral working groups on a city or municipality level; advocating for artists to join boards of directors and take part in decision-making processes.

- **Overcome disengagement and misperception**

Many participants voiced the concern that the image, or the 'aura' of performing arts in society is too elitist, exclusive, or abstract - in fact, everything that is opposite to the sense of community, engagement and care. In some countries, younger people, people from the working class, and vulnerable communities are not engaged with the arts, and the price of tickets is not always the only cause. Some critically reflected that this is not about the content we offer but about the 'structure around the theatre', the packaging of our stories, the often outdated tools and methods we use to profile our work, the formats in which we interact with society. These could be the never-changing buildings, a 'top-down' set-up in a performance room, the abstract language used to promote performances. There is a need for more agency and a bigger role for diverse audiences within our interaction with them. Our work must better

reflect diverse needs and stories, and importantly, offer space for people's active involvement through co-creation and the concept of 'creating with - not for'. Artists do not have to change their content in a despair to adjust it to as many people as possible, but all forms of mediation between the arts and the public are key in today's polarised and disengaged society. Diversity of art forms taught in schools can be one of the key forms of mediation.

- **Build and bridge communities**

It is important to shift the focus from developing audiences to building communities - creating long-term reciprocal relationships with a diverse range of people: inhabitants of the neighbourhood of your company or venue, peer art workers from other sectors, or experts engaged with the topics you are working on. A strong community around your organisations is that sustainable framework to work within, which we all dream of. It is your support, your ambassadors, your megaphone and your source of recognition. Community-building is not necessarily an artistic practice; this is a vital part of your work that helps you build your legitimacy, bring people to your building and ultimately engage with your art. There are many different ways in which art organisations build their communities and connect different communities among each other. These include undertaking activities in their premises which are relevant for a diverse range of people: workshops, classes, lectures. As suggested by one of the participants, 'once you get them into your room, ask them what they need and lack in terms of art'. You can also step out of your territory and bring your work to places where people will notice it and likely engage with it. You can unite with like-minded people from outside the arts through an activist initiative, social work or a community project.

- **Remind everyone you talk to that art is work**

We often find ourselves desperate about the ignorance of the society regarding our value as workers and the poor working conditions we are faced with. There are, however, not enough spaces in which one can observe or learn how art is created, what it takes to write a book, to rehearse a circus show, to prepare a stage for performance. When engaging with society and other sectors in whatever way and demonstrating the value of the arts in whatever field, make sure you also demonstrate that art is labour and artists are workers. We should educate society that art is a job that requires time and energy and thus needs to be remunerated.

Change the way we work

These more practical changes in the way one works were mapped by participants they can undertake individually or promote and advance at other levels: organisations, partnerships, or the entire sector.

Across borders

- Rethink large-scale international exhibitions and festivals. Audiences and art communities should be stimulated to use greener means of transport and make their stay in a place hosting the event an experience of learning, connection with the local context and care for the surrounding environment.
- Develop a cross-border 'impact calculator' for assessing the value and necessity of measures and activities against their potential footprint and taking into account a variety of contextual factors, such as availability of alternative transport options.
- Develop cross-border communities or working groups based on their local landscape and nature features and the climate issues they face, such as melting ice; heat waves; and draughts. Such networks can help address specific topics and learn from each other how to adapt to distress and get inspired on how to address specific nature-related matters in their work.

Within the sector

- Develop a sectoral charter or manifesto that would articulate the key shared principles and commitments regarding your collective green transition
- Practise new ways of self-organisation and collaboration that is founded on the principle of sharing resources, skills, knowledge, and expertise. Streamline the practice of production houses offering diverse services, such as communication, administration, but also advice on greening operations.
- Normalise and regularise the exchange on environmental issues, in order to act collectively in the most inclusive and effective manner, share information, and mitigate the anxiety, unclarity, doubts and the feeling of pressure.
- Share material used for production of artistic work, through various formats, such as membership-based storages, utilising each others' spaces, maintaining digital databases, to name a few.
- Eradicate narcissism and selfishness in the sector. The persona-centred and genius-focused type of art should be replaced by art based on care and the focus on community.

Within an organisation or a project team

- Recognise the value of research and reflection at the organisational level through introducing a weekly 'reflection day' - a day dedicated solely to exploration, research and thinking.
- Develop a shared and commonly agreed green strategy, including the goals, processes, targets, tools, and put it on paper; introduce the way to evaluate and revisit this strategy
- Address green transition as part of every meeting for which you can set or influence the agenda, to make sure it is normalised and advanced within internal processes and priorities.
- Explore sustainable options for your infrastructure and activities you undertake, such as recyclable material, 'green' suppliers, vegetarian and local food, renewable energy.

Individually

- As someone put it, 'there is one resource that is always available - the brain resource. Use as much of your brain resources as possible before using other resources'. You need to reflect on how and why you do certain things. It is everyone's responsibility to share that brain resource and transmit knowledge, awareness and solutions.
- Reduce your own footprint to the extent possible: reduce travelling by air, avoid digital calls and speak on the phone, remind people about your communication preferences in your email signature.
- Take care of yourself when you can: you cannot care for anything and anyone else after you exhaust yourself.

Call for a green transition of cultural policies

The art field relies on funding structures and broader policy frameworks. Therefore, a fundamentally new cultural policy system is necessary to support and propel the comprehensive green transition of the sector. Importantly, by 'green' policy we mean here a policy that leads to a 'green' art sector. But to achieve this, a 'green' policy touches multiple aspects and layers holistically, including those related to society, human care and economics.

The new, green cultural policy must recognise, affirm and promote the two vital elements:

1. Art plays a unique and important role in the green transition, inspiring and igniting imagination during times when hope is scarce. Through narratives and storytelling, art can help people in comprehending and navigating the complexities of the climate crisis, motivating them to take action. Furthermore, the arts serve to connect people, emphasising the cultural and human dimensions of the climate crisis, and ensuring that the pursuit of justice is integral to collective efforts in building a greener future. Finally, artists can pilot and test innovative solutions, offering the results of these experiments to wider social and economic systems.
2. The operational framework for artists is currently unsustainable and precarious. The increasing acknowledgment of the value of culture must be accompanied by the establishment of a fair, sustainable, and supportive environment for the arts to function as a fully-fledged catalyst for green transformation. Creating an enabling environment for the cultural sector entails guaranteeing appropriate working and living conditions for the cultural workforce through the implementation of relevant regulations and the reinforcement of cultural budgets. Furthermore, sustainability in such an environment can only be achieved if culture is an integral component of crucial policy processes and agendas.

Recognising these two truths, the new cultural policy must actively articulate, aspire for and embody the following transitions:

First of all, transitioning **from overproduction and project delivery to reflection and practice** is essential. To become a catalyst for change, art requires the necessary time and space to contemplate, integrate itself into the social fabric, experiment and learn from failures.



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Creative pathways need to be flexible and responsive to social impulses. The emphasis should shift from prioritising results and outputs to valuing processes. An organisation's significance should be determined by the quality of its work and the strength of the community it fosters and not by the number of outputs it produces.

Cultural policies should revolve around the appreciation of 'time and space.' This creates an environment where it is acceptable to produce less within an extended timeframe or to produce in a manner that extends the lifespan of creations. Financial support should be calculated based on the time invested rather than the scale or number of final outputs.

Moreover, various activities, not necessarily forming a 'project,' should be equally valued alongside creation and production. This includes research, exploration, reflection, training, community-building, mediation, collaboration with other sectors, consultation with experts and revamping internal processes, among others. Allocating more time and funding to these activities can ultimately enrich the artistic offering for society, transforming a funding programme into a more responsible and effective use of the notorious 'taxpayers' money'.

Other transitions for cultural policies include:

- **From over-prescription towards the ‘freedom of being unexpected’.** In a society increasingly segmented into bubbles and echo chambers, the arts’ ability to surprise becomes one of its most potent assets. Constricting funding expectations and multiplying priority check-boxes, however, erode the arts’ intrinsic nature of the unexpected. While cultural policies are essential to provide guidance and a sense of direction, they should concurrently safeguard the space for artistic experimentation, adaptation, continuous research and critical reflection on one’s work and practice. Moreover, cultural policies should not force artists to predefine for whom they create their art, let alone pre-determine the intended impact their work will have on audiences. Art should remain liberated from assumptions about communities, avoiding the reinforcement of societal compartmentalisation. While it is common for policies to outline aims and target audiences, it is equally reasonable for artists not to predetermine who will engage with and benefit the most from their work.
- **From developing audiences towards building communities.** A binary ‘us and them’ mentality towards audiences is not a viable solution for uniting a fragmented society. Instead, the remedy lies in fostering close collaborations with neighbourhoods, peer art communities and individuals from other sectors. This collaboration should be built on actively listening to the diverse needs of people, sharing resources, and engaging in the creation of content with communities. Cultural policies need to shift their focus away from the fixation on audience growth and redirect it towards recognising the value of establishing and deepening connections with communities. Community-building should not be viewed merely as a characteristic of specific art forms, but rather as an integral component of the functioning of every organisation, essential for its sustainability, alongside production, marketing, and administration. Cultural policies should acknowledge that cultivating and enhancing relationships with communities are pivotal for leveraging the transformative potential of the arts. However, achieving this goal requires the acquisition of relevant skills, allocation of resources, and dedication of energy.
- **From a pressure-driven system towards a supportive ecology.** Shaping a better, more sustainable future can only be a collaborative endeavour, in which every agent in the cultural ecosystem has a role to play. The role of cultural policy makers in a green transition may not be to demand solutions for complex problems and put additional pressure on the art field in the vacuum of support. Instead, their role should centre around fostering a supportive environment within which the cultural sector can learn, navigate complexities, overcome moral obstacles and develop the necessary skills and courage to spearhead positive transformations. Contemporary cultural policies need to acknowledge that

the challenges are shared, emphasising the need for a collective approach to problem-solving. This perspective can contribute to a shift in the dynamic between funders and beneficiaries, evolving towards a relationship based on mutual exchange and collaboration. Establishing a support ecosystem may involve various strategies, such as appointing ‘green officers’ in cultural ministries or arts councils, allocating additional budgets to cultural organisations for hiring ‘green teams’ and consulting experts, facilitating the creation of permanent working groups within the sector, and encouraging participation in multi-sector dialogues. Financial support for sectoral initiatives aimed at sharing and recycling production materials can also contribute to building a sustainable cultural ecosystem. Furthermore, implementing clear minimum greening standards and rules across all funding programmes at international, national, and municipal levels, taking into account existing gaps and inequalities in the sector, can serve as valuable guidelines for the art field. Importantly, cultural funders and structurally funded institutions must lead by example, build the expertise and transform themselves and their practices while advancing the change in the sector.

A new, green cultural policy will result in the transformation of funding programmes and structures. This is not only about Here are a few features of funding schemes required for driving green transition in the arts:

- **Sufficient and diversified budgets.** Assuming that initiating a system change requires a radical redistribution of resources and visibility, a new set of values could be established for redistributing money from scratch. Cultural budgets must be significantly increased and allocated proportionally to various needs and activities, including research, preparation, exploration, alliance-building, training, education, community building, production, mediation, strategy development, and more. Importantly, there must be an additional budget to factor in the needs of people with disability, both art professionals and audiences. Finally, implementing a basic income for art professionals, not limited to artists alone, should be embraced as a standard practice for the entire art field, without diminishing regular structured and project funding for culture and the arts.
- **Coherent and sustainable priorities.** Funding programmes should convey a long-term vision grounded in a cohesive value system, rather than frequently shifting focus from one topic to another or introducing new priorities. Within a sustainable and long-term vision, beneficiaries should have the freedom to choose which current social or global developments they wish to address. They should be empowered to design their own sustainable approach aligned with their values, capacities, and resources, as well as the specific needs of their communities.



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- Inclusive and accessible application processes.** There should be a practical acknowledgment that not all art professionals deserving of public funding possess the same proficiency in crafting eloquent and lengthy texts to persuade funders about the value of their projects. Additionally, not every organisation can afford to engage external consultants for application writing. To minimise, rather than exacerbate, access gaps, programmes should provide various formats for submitting applications. In addition to written applications, these formats could include auditions, pitches, interviews, conversations, pre-recorded videos, and more. Furthermore, streamlining application processes for different funds and schemes within the same countries could prove beneficial. For instance, various funders should have access to key information about applicants and their work through a centralised system. This approach would enable applicants to reduce the time spent on fundraising.
- Efficient and relevant reporting process.** Reporting processes should not only cater to the funder's needs but also prove beneficial for applicants and justifiable to the public. The public, likely disinterested in reading reports, would prefer public funds to be allocated to meaningful artworks rather than excessive reporting. Applicants should be encouraged to formulate their own evaluation processes with a central question in mind: how will this assessment method contribute to improving your work? Each organisation should have the flexibility to design its evaluation process in alignment with its stated objectives. Furthermore, the funder, seen not merely as a financial contributor but as a partner, should consider engaging more actively. This involvement may include site visits to funded organisations, conducting interviews, participating in meaningful conversations, attending their performances, and exploring other authentic methods to better understand and support beneficiaries.
- Transparent assessment models.** Applicants must possess comprehensive and clear information regarding the key elements of the evaluation process, including who will be conducting the assessment, the timing of the evaluation, and the criteria by which their applications will be assessed. The evaluation panel must have the capacity to carry out its duties independently and with transparency. It is crucial to recognise that effective and impartial evaluation practices, such as regular rotation of evaluators and maintaining the anonymity of both evaluators and applicants, may be applicable in some countries but may not function similarly in other contexts. Various factors, such as the size of the country and the scale of the art sector, can influence the effectiveness of these practices.
- Sustainable usage of knowledge.** To avoid reinventing the wheel, it is crucial for art organisations to collaborate meaningfully. They should share experiences, exchange project and initiative insights, and collectively analyse their learning points. Adequate funding must be allocated for collecting, processing, and transforming this knowledge into policy papers, manuals, and, where applicable, training courses.

Conclusion

There was a shared acknowledgment in the room that the sector is currently grappling with the challenge of surviving within an unsustainable system that demands high productivity to stay afloat. Our dependence on this system is evident; it must provide us with resources, time, and space first, before we can grow stronger and attempt to change the very system we rely on. Isn't there a sad and provocative irony in this statement? The paradox might fade away if we comprehend and deconstruct our relationship with the system and our position within it. This relationship appears to be one of those 'elephants in the room' paralysing our actions.

- **'Be the system'** could be an alternative title for this report, if it weren't too much of a cliché. Although this statement won't be featured on the front page of the publication, let's reflect on it here.
- **'Be the system'** can be a call to instigate a radical shift and create a better world. It entails assuming a proactive role, recognising and shaping one's responsibility, and reclaiming agency. It can be rephrased as 'be the author and embodiment of a new, better reality'. This is about leveraging our unique power of creativity, inspiration, and courage, as well as our ability to connect. It also involves attempting to disengage from the dysfunctional parts of the current system and establishing viable alternatives. Why be radical today? Because it is uninspiring to travel far and spend days with skilled and knowledgeable people only to rehash issues discussed five, ten or even thirty years ago. Another reason for urgently creating a new system is that humankind is failing to uphold its commitment to preserving life on this planet and a significant part of the global population is already suffering from the effects of this failure.

- **'Be the system'** can also be an honest acknowledgment of the fact that we are part of the current system. It can be rephrased as 'be conscious of where you are and act from there'. It involves being clear about your place within the disaster and your responsibility for it, even if there are other players with clearly larger responsibilities. It's crucial not to be a powerless bystander within this reality, disapproving of it but not taking action to change it. If we feel unready or incapable of leaving or dismantling the system we are part of, then it is vital to start acting from within, finding allies, empowering others, and triggering ripple effects.

There are various ways to pursue and drive a transition to a better future for the world. We are all navigating different boats in different waters. Whether we choose to be radical or play a mitigating role, it is crucial to keep in mind the substantial gaps that exist in the global performing arts sector and strive to create a level playing field. As Jordi Baltà Portolés and Isabelle Van de Gejuchte, authors of [IETM's publication on climate justice noted](#): we must lead climate action 'assuming a nuanced approach to international mobility, an increased acknowledgement of local knowledge and the building of common spaces and the exercise of solidarity' (Baltà Portolés, I. Van de Gejuchte "Climate Justice - Through the Creative Lens of the Performing Arts", IETM, Brussels, November 2023).



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