Adapt, We Must
Key points from the international Creativity 4 Sustainability Forum
(Ljubljana, 28 September 2022)

Where we've been

In the context of international cultural cooperation and climate change, we're talking less nowadays about how to "limit" or "be smart" about mobility than we were at the international conference **Mobility for Creativity** in April 2019. Since then, the COVID-19 pandemic strongly influenced all our mobility practices and forced artists and cultural workers to quickly adapt to new ways[1] of producing, presenting and disseminating arts and culture.

In these post-pandemic times, we now face new challenges – drastically affected supply chains, rising inflation and looming energy shortages on the one side, and tempestuous, unpredictable and extreme weather patterns and devastating natural disasters on the other. Climate change isn't out there, on the horizon, it's here now and there's an urgent need to adapt. But how? And what role do arts and culture play in adapting?

Setting the context – Slovenia: Small, sustainable, connected

The international **Creativity 4 Sustainability Forum**, hosted by Motovila on 28 September 2022, joined cultural managers, experts, producers, artists from various art and cultural organisations from across Europe and representatives from local policymaker and public funding bodies to discuss just that.

Peter Baroš (Ministry of Culture) spoke of Slovenia's advantages concerning sustainability and climate change because its small size allows for connectivity and quick implementation of innovations and Slovenia is a geographic and ideological bridge between current EU member countries and candidate ones. Through successful projects and practices, Slovenia has become a cultural centre of Europe and can help lead the way with the daring ideas needed to solve the challenges we currently face and those ahead.

Mateja Demšič (City of Ljubljana) highlighted Ljubljana's long-term tradition of sustainability policies, noting its title as European Green Capital 2016 as an important event that fostered innovative practices. She affirmed the city hasn't stopped there. Even the forum venue Cukrarna Gallery testifies to creativity for sustainability – contemporary arts have breathed new life into the building after years of being an abandoned sugar factory.

Mateja Lazar (Motovila/CED Slovenia) set the forum's aims: to avoid the vague, blurry concepts, provide concrete examples and solutions and put them into perspective internationally, nationally, regionally, locally. The wish was to highlight the power of the culture and creative sectors to deal with global challenges and changes, both as an example as well as a communicator. She also acknowledged the event would not be possible without the substantial and trusted cooperation of partners from various levels and sectors and expressed her hope the forum will be a step further into dealing with and thinking the change together.

Ben Twist: "The age of abundance is over", it's time to change our metaphorical climate

In his pre-recorded keynote, **Ben Twist** (UK) shelved the focus on carbon literacy and reminded us why arts and culture are crucial when it comes to adapting to climate change. A former theatre director turned carbon management and systems expert, Ben admits he's a long-term pessimist and a short-term optimist. In the face of climate catastrophe, he still believes in the power of people and especially arts and culture to make positive changes that can affect how we live.

He assured us that arts and artists are crucial because they can make people **think collectively** *and* **build community** in the process. While he acknowledges the sensitivity around "issue-based art", he believes all great art has been produced to forward one end or another, stating, "the best artists have

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[1] Also discussed in Motovila's events #Mobility4Creativity: Working across borders – how and why? (2020) and Plan B for International Cultural Mobility (2021).

always responded imaginatively to the greatest questions of their time". For Ben, climate change is not about *understanding* what changes are happening in the climate, but about *us changing* our metaphorical climate: Culture's influencing capacity can change the (metaphorical) climate through changing the stories that we watch and hear and tell ourselves.

Ben also talked about **what we can concretely do in our cultural institutions** regarding how we manage our physical spaces and our production and presentation practices. Everyone can be a leader in this regard:

1. **Monitor and reduce** our organisational heating and cooling usage.
2. **Understand who makes the decisions around energy usage in our spaces** and figure out when what is running and why. Programming and operational needs should be aligned with sustainability!
3. **Maintain our buildings and venues** to run efficiently.
4. **Lower emissions from travel and transport** where possible and consider who travels where and why.
5. **Have internal staff track their emissions** on their expense claims (e.g., www.claimexpenses.com).
6. **Look at our audience's emissions to/from events**, what new practices can be implemented?
7. **Try to move certain activities to a different season** to minimise energy use (and costs) and maximise impact (better working conditions, low-energy comfort for audiences, minimised disruptions from adverse weather).
8. **Consider how our venues can be a "place of refuge"** for our communities during extreme weather.
9. **Go deeper into examining our audience's practices and promote a change in the climate in that regard.** We might even lower the negative aspects of cultural tourism (as in the case of Edinburgh).
10. **Tell the stories of sustainability** with our actions and our words.

Such practices can lead to a more (g)rounded way of seeing arts and culture, especially in terms of their social and environmental impact(s) as **builders of community**, **providing much needed alternatives** to (just) measuring every kilo of carbon.

Panel 1 – Top-down: Trusting artists is key

The forum's first panel addressed policymakers by talking to cultural managers about their projects in which funders took a different approach: **Matthieu Gillieron's** sustainability tools and online guide for ECoC 2022 Esch (LU), funded by Luxembourg's Ministry of the Environment, Climate and Sustainable Development; **Vânia Rodrigues's** data-gathering academic research project "Green Production – Performing Arts in Transition", funded by the University of Coimbra (PT); and **Zala Velkavrh's** work in Slovenia with Prostorož's grassroots interdisciplinary projects addressing environmental and social challenges, funded by numerous local funders.

Moderator **Yohann Floch** (On the Move) began by quoting the bold and "almost visionary" **European Parliament Resolution** of 15 September 2020, which "Calls on the Commission and on national agencies and desks to establish criteria to enable the environmental aspects of projects to be factored into project evaluation, thus promoting greener practices"[2]. In its 2023 Work Programme, the European Commission responded with a strong commitment to more inclusive and diverse cultural and creative sector and "the greening of Creative Europe, notably in view of contributing to the achievement of an overall target of 30% of the Union budget expenditures supporting climate objectives"[3]. This strong will at the EU level also influences actions at national, regional and local levels. He also pointed out the issue of adapting, especially the **tensions of adapting, the tensions between the reality and capacity in different parts of Europe**, and the tensions between the precarity of the cultural field and the

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[2] European Parliament resolution of 15 September 2020 on effective measures to 'green' Erasmus+, Creative Europe and the European Solidarity Corps, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2020-0211_EN.html.
[3] Amendment of the Implementing Decision C(2021) 3563 on the adoption of the work programme for the implementation of the Creative Europe programme for 2021 and 2022 C(2022) 6138 of 31 August 2022, p. 13. https://culture.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2022-08/creative-europe-work-programme-amendment-2122_C2022_6138.pdf.

necessity for artists to embark on a journey of adapting to climate change but to also have the space to breathe and work.

Considering cultural projects that address sustainability, the cultural organisers on the panel had these **messages for policymakers and funders**:

1. **Understand how organisations see funders' role** – "What I'm expecting from politics is to be like my parents: give financial security, support in need, liberty to think and develop the tools, and to evaluate the results together with me" (Matthieu Gillieron).
2. **Trust** – when funders trust a project's aims and support it to establish its own criteria, measurements and tools to evolve, the results are typically better.
3. **Put an end to hyperproduction** – resist the urge to demand more productions, tour more, present more. Step back from hyperproduction and policies that support it and look at the scale, budgets and methods of production in the arts.
4. **Data for decision making** – Synergistic collaborations and alliances between policymakers, decision-makers, funding bodies, cultural organisations and research institutions can lead to effective data that can inform sustainable decisions.
5. **Take a positive approach** – Organisations want to be challenged, trusted, funded rather than threatened and measured. When policymakers go from doing almost nothing about sustainability to measuring, restricting and enforcing, it has a negative effect.
6. **Consider the context** (local, regional, national …) – external requirements should not be enforced in a context not suitable for achieving them. "There's a paradox – despite the urgency of the issues, some measures shouldn't be rushed" (Vânia Rodrigues).
7. **Aim for substantial, long-term results** – Many organisations are interested in doing initiatives and experiments, but they also want something more substantial, that produces long-term results.
8. **Scale up** – "It's time to move beyond funding just initiatives, pilot programmes, laboratories that only test ideas and never go further to be fine-tuned, upgraded or scaled up after the test phase is over. Now is the time to evaluate them and make them policy" (Zala Velkavrh).
9. **Look beyond the environment** – We shouldn't forget two important questions that often don't get asked: **What about climate justice?** and **Sustainability for whom**?

When asked if freedom should be hindered, if arts should be forced to align with funders' greater agendas, and if arts policy should even adapt specific policies around climate change, more takeaways emerged:

1. **Free-thinking over content limitations** – Funding bodies should leave room for free-thinking and not impose too many content limitations on the projects they fund; artists are anyway dealing with these issues.
2. **Support various formats** – *Yes!* to supporting experimentation, innovation and research …
3. **Simplify reporting** -- *No!* to over-bureaucratic, micromanagement reporting procedures that produce meaningless statistics and piles of photocopied invoices.
4. **Spend more time evaluating the meaningful aspects** – Despite priorities for social impact and environmental impact, panellists remarked there's little dialogue or time spent evaluating the projects on these levels and implementing the results more thoroughly.
5. **Recalculate the numbers** – Consider the potential long-term impact of funding many projects with a little money or short timeframe rather than fewer projects with more money or longer timeframes.
6. **Create flexible schemes** – Organisations need time for growth inside a project and for new opportunities to arise within it, to be able to respond to developments and the current situation.
7. **Invest in projects with long-term value** – Funders should not just be concerned about the immediate deliverables. "It's better to support the things surrounding the project that can lead to a long-term impact."
8. **Systemic problems require a systemic approach** – Artists and cultural managers shouldn't be held responsible for solving systemic issues that fall beyond their purview although they should also sit on the committees for solving them.
9. **Cross-sector and inter-ministerial cooperation is key** – The discussion with the forum audience confirmed that "Policymakers shouldn't stay in their silos". All ministries should have on their staff someone concerned with culture AND someone concerned with sustainability.

Are policymakers and funders ready to take the lead and risk differently?

And a brief p.s. about mobility – artists and even audiences would be able to make greener choices if the infrastructure was better, if train networks covered more territory (especially to peripheral areas) and if public transport ran later so audiences could use it travel home from events. Organisations can sometimes meet half-way by scheduling events to better coincide with public transport schedules, but again, this puts the onus for adapting back on the arts.

Panel 2 – Bottom-up: It's about more than eliminating plastic straws

In the forum's second panel, focused on bottom-up practices, Motovila's **Ines Kežman** moderated a discussion with producers/consultants from the field of new media and web-based art (in Slovenia known as intermedia art), music and film who have been involved in projects that have been creatively and effectively raising awareness and pushing the need to act. **Uroš Veber** (Projekt Atol, SI) spoke about his 20 years building a culture of green thinking in international cooperation projects looking at the human in relationship to nature and the environment. **Karolina Juzwa** (Wytwornia Foundation, PL) gave an overview of the project Footprints, which aimed to support emerging artists to develop their international and professional careers through sustainable tours utilising green mobility (if/when possible), paying artists fair fees, at venues that include the community. And **Katja Schwarz** (International Screen Institute, AT) told of how she introduced green practices into the film industry in Munich, which led to the first green-produced films in Germany in the 2010s.

For organisations interested in what they can do to work more sustainably, a few tips:

1. **Work on reducing your emissions and energy use first** – It's about more than eliminating plastic straws.
2. **Don't hide behind labels** – Whether you call it green, sustainable or resilient, it can even be useful to be critical of buzzwords, labels and tropes and test the validity of using them. Do your practices hold up?
3. **Rethink your branding materials and merchandising** – i.e., engage the audience to make event-branded merchandise from their own or second-hand clothes.
4. **To fly or not to fly** – Although the normal now is for artists to refuse to fly to events, there are times when face-to-face interactions and being in the same room with your audience and others in your field are crucial to new developments in the scene.
5. **Work cross-sectorally and realise that artists can contribute a lot of expertise** – – It's really hard for the artists to build more railways, but they can make an effective contribution to raising awareness of social challenges.
6. **Sustainability is about more than ecology** – it's also about creating practices in the field that support sustainable living, fair practices, health, diversity and mental well-being. Likewise, we should be wary when cultural productions claim to be green yet still exploit their people or have unfair practices. This greenwashing is not at all sustainable.
7. **Cooperation instead of competition** in terms of programming is key.
8. **Build knowledge and awareness of sustainable practices at all levels of the production-promotion-presentation-dissemination chain.** This was an important lesson learnt in the Footprints project.
9. **Build a sustainable system and set an example for younger generations** who want to grow their artistic careers yet feel a tremendous pressure about whether they have a right to do so if it comes at a cost to the environment.
10. **Ask *What can we do?*** instead of *What should we not do?*
11. **Acknowledge that green productions and practices take time and money** – don't be afraid to take a risk and lead the way.
12. **Use green storytelling**, showing the characters' sustainable practices in the background can still leave freedom for the main content and story. It's a strategy we can use in other disciplines too, such as visual arts, design, music …
13. **Step out of our routines and closed circles. Find more solutions, fewer excuses.**

Closing keynote – Zero waste is about the impact of our actions

In her closing keynote, **Katja Sreš** (Ecologists without Borders, SI) asserts that the environment is a concern not only for environmentalists: "Climate action needs culture, decision makers from different sectors and, obviously, a functioning public transportation network."

It's not about highlighting the climate in your artwork. Cultural organisations can act by setting an example:

● Prepare green productions, maintain buildings, travel sustainably.
● Check that your brandprint (brand identity) portrays a sustainable organisation in all activities.
● Start small, start even if you don't have any funding for green projects.

Katja believes that waste is the one factor that we can relate to the most. As leaders in a particular sector, we can more easily inspire others to respond to zero waste priorities because we all produce waste. In the long run, waste is a bigger cost than sustainability.

While Ben spoke about what culture needs to do for the environment, Katja looked at what environmentalists can contribute to culture and sustainability. Joint collaborations across sectors can be a source of new resources, media support and new ideas. Given that Ecologists without Borders holds a world record for mobilizing 14% of the Slovenian population to clean up waste in one day, Katja feels confident that it's possible to persuade people to make changes like giving up plastic "commodities". Still, that comes only with the help and actions of each one of us.

"We can build an educated and open-minded community that can be a driver of bottom-up change for decision makers. Powerful individuals have the power, but nothing beats the power of an impactful community or network". Says Katja, "Zero waste is not only about waste. It is about the whole impact we have on the environment and people. Zero waste is one of the 'different stories about ourselves and the society we want and need to be in the future'. Let us build this future together."

Thus, not only is it: adapt, we must, but create new stories, build communities, and affect change, we must. Together, with others and with intention.

Report prepared by Jana Renée Wilcoxen.

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