

Workshop on environmental sustainability

Arts Festivals Summit 2022

14 September 2022, 14.00-16.00, Yerevan, Armenia (hybrid format)

REPORT

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Introduction

In these last years, the topic of sustainability was on the agenda of many festivals and other cultural organisations. In many countries, important initiatives have been initiated with the aim to contribute to international Climate Goals. At the same time, festivals are being criticised in not doing enough to contribute to save CO² emissions.

The workshop therefore had the aim to took stock of what has been done during recent years in the festival community and discuss ways forward in tackling the Climate crisis in an efficient way.

In the first “pitch” part of the sustainability workshop, representatives of festivals presented some of their initiatives, and shared knowledge on their experiences and lessons learnt.

In the second part, the panel consisting of cultural professionals, representatives from a city and a funding agency explored ways of how to professionally work in a sustainable way, how to make a substantial contribution to Climate Change Goals and how to cooperate with policy makers.

The workshop was moderated by Peter Florence from European Festivals Forest (based in the UK).

We would like to draw the attention on the fact that while the concept of sustainability includes economic, human, social and environmental dimensions, the workshop focused on the latter aspect.

Presentation of the 2-hour session on sustainability

First panel: Pitches about sustainability at festivals

Speakers

- Tamar Brüggemann: European Festivals Forest
- Romano Ugolini: Eco-event certification: example of festivals in Italy
- Natália Oszkó-Jakab: Sharing experience and best practices from Valley of Arts

Tamar Brüggemann presented the European Festivals Forest, an initiative recently set up. The idea is that the audiences can partly compensate their carbon footprint by contributing to the forest at a voluntary basis (1€ for one tree). The trees are planted in Iceland in cooperation with the local

Icelandic Forestry Service. For the time being, 7 festivals have joined, and the first trees will be planted in spring 2023.

Romano Ugolini explained the certification process for festivals and other cultural and sports events to obtain the Italian green label “Ecoevents” with whom the certified event commits to “reduce, reuse, recycle and repeat”. The labelling process includes a training for the event organisers. The label is then issued on a trust basis but can be withdrawn at a later stage, when the event is controlled. The costs of the certification process lie between €700 and €5000, depending on the need of consultation services. It doesn’t include a CO² analysis which can be done separately.

Natália Oszkó-Jakab presented the Valley of Arts, a rural festival based in Hungary. The festival has started 8 years ago to investigate sustainability issues and today works on:

- The mobility of audiences (free festival buses are put at disposal)
- Energy (the festival became aggregator free)
- Green programming (including workshops and local artists)
- Collaboration with a university on research on sustainability and the creation of a know how manual for festivals
- Recycling: in 2022, 65% of the waste was recycled

Intermezzo: A quick interview on environmental sustainability

Between the first and second panel, a recorded interview was shown with Joris Janssens from IDEA Consult to give a view on the PerformEurope project and provide food for thought for the second panel.

The interview was conducted by Silke Lalvani from Pearle* - Live Performance Europe.

In the talk, Joris Janssens summarized key learnings from the European project [Perform Europe](#) and described major challenges for festivals and cultural organisations in the field of sustainability, focusing mainly on international touring and presentation. He also asked the question how festivals can concretely work on relevant topics to make a substantial contribution to climate goals.

Joris pointed out that while greening the mobility, the artists’ production, the infrastructure and the event, reducing the ecological footprint is only the first step. Artists, companies, festivals and cultural operators also have a positive role to play in the transition towards a more just and sustainable society. In this sense, environmental sustainability is not just about “doing less” or strategies to reduce impact. It is also about the unique role of the arts and culture as a space for the collective imagination about a preferred future, sustainable and just in a global context.

For Joris Janssens, there is a systemic problem which must be tackled, and this includes rethinking of the production, touring and presentation and the artistic processes that are shared with communities. Rethinking the way festivals link the local to the international. Rethinking the relation between the digital and the physical.

According to Joris Janssens, there is a practice emerging in which touring is no longer about the economic valorisation of finished shows. It is about the sustainable distribution of activities, resources, and values — via local, regional and international connections.

More information can be found in this [blog article](#) written by Joris Janssens after the interview.

Second panel: Debate on how to substantially contribute to climate change goals and work with policy makers at local and at national level?

Panel participants:

- Sebastian Brünger, German Federal Cultural Foundation, DE
- Robert Piaskowski, City of Krakow, PL
- Tamar Brüggemann, Wonderfeel, NL
- Romano Ugolini, Rete Ambiente e Salute, IT

Each panelist starts with a kickoff statement of 5 minutes which was then followed by a debate with the audiences.

The debate included the viewpoint of a federal funding agency and a city and touched on several points which in the current debate on sustainability in the cultural sector must be considered.

- **“Carbon literacy”** is missing: In Germany – and probably in other European countries too – there is still a lack of knowledge on effective sustainable measures. This prevents the creation of sustainable production conditions, artistic projects and events
- **Calculation of carbon footprint** is needed but knowledge must be given about how to calculate
- Do we need to **create obligations and not only give incentives** to follow specific criteria to reduce footprint when receiving federal or local funding?
- Creating sustainable festivals and other cultural events helps make cities a good place to live. Therefore, cities need to **think about appropriate support measures**, discuss their sustainability strategies and facilitate collaborations with different institutions
- How important are discussions about the **audience mobility** in the context of creating a sustainable event? What makes a difference and what doesn't? Thinking about “proportionate responsibility” and how to include other sectors into the discussion, making pressure so that they contribute to more sustainable cultural events (i.e. transport companies).
- In this sense, the **mobility of the audiences and the artists** must be put in a broader – sometimes even global – context.
- **Dependency on the infrastructure** – you can't act alone as a festival
- Creating sustainable festivals means to **make people and the audiences more resilient**, being a role model at the one hand, but also contributing to societal change in an artistic way
- **Foster cultural exchange** is very important: we have to think about better ways how to exchange and improve touring. In our position coming from the global north, we need to include artists coming from the global south, so that we do not create neo-colonial structures as cultural organisations

- **Geographical impact:** Measures on sustainability also depend on the region and the country where the festival takes place: in some regions there is more financial support and better infrastructure to rely on public transport, other areas are more isolated and therefore the impact of travelling and sustainability matters might be lower on the priority latter.

Conclusions

How can we get prepared for the next years in terms of sustainability and how to shift a whole sector towards climate neutrality without losing sight of the essentials: live audiences and sparkling experiences, intercultural dialogue and cultural cooperation?

The workshop opened up new perspectives, evoking new approaches, different roles of the cultural sector and the need to rethink the organisation of live events and cultural exchange.

In this sense, cultural events and organisations are role models for sustainable measures but also creators of societal debates, they can be hotspots for discussions and can contribute to the transition towards a more just and sustainable society.
