

SUMMARY:

Solutions and Methods!

Working internationally in the age of ecological crisis, part 2

Saturday 19th October, 13.30-16.30

Notes compiled by Katarina Lindholm, Dance Info Finland, Nov 2019

INTRODUCTION

In the age of ecological crisis, how should we prepare for a more sustainable future? Which methods should we use to change behaviours, and which are the first steps to be taken? It's time to go from words to actions and develop a few concrete proposals for measures to be taken by the dance community!

A keynote and panel discussion addressed these questions on Saturday morning and 45 participants took part in the collaborative working session that same afternoon. The idea was to focus on a few key topics and envision what sustainable international work could be and which steps should be taken in order to make it happen. The session was moderated by **Ása Richardsdóttir (IETM)** and **Katarina Lindholm (Dance Info Finland)**.

The topics were as follows:

- How does travelling less or differently impact the artistic processes and content, its quality and development? (facilitated by **Antti Majava/BIOS Research Unit**)
- Which incentives and criteria could funders or support organizations have to increase sustainable/ecological mobility and international work? (facilitated by **Anna Talasniemi/Kone Foundation**)
- Sustainable mobility in the age of green transition – what could travelling differently be, which forms could it take? (facilitated by **Nina Refsnes/Nordic Culture Point**)
- Working internationally and sustainably requires money and time, of which a freelancer has neither. How to ensure socio-economical fairness in facing the ecological crisis? (facilitated by dance artist **Sari Palmgren**)
- Consumption culture in the context of working internationally. More art and culture is better - can we question this? (facilitated by **Sanna Rekola/Dance Info Finland**)
- What impact could sustainable mobility have on local communities and audiences? (facilitated by **Katarina Lindholm**)

The participants were asked to join one of the group discussions. The aim for each group was to address the topic and propose a solution/actions/next steps/idea for development directed at artists and art practitioners, funding organisations and politicians and policymakers.

GENERAL NOTIONS AND FOCAL POINTS

The topics were (also deliberately) intertwined and offered multiple perspectives for looking at key issues of sustainability in working internationally in the dance field in particular and the art field in general – mobility. Despite these multiple perspectives, the discussions still circled around some easily identifiable key issues and focal points, which are briefly summarized in the following.

Most discussions centred on the general notion, that **time and money are key factors in sustainability**.

Time and money should also be coupled in funding. A new attitude with regard to time and money as resources require **changing mindsets**, questioning our values and value systems. We should:

- Normalize low-carbon living and working (should we implement sustainability certificates or labels?)
- **Slow down**
- Reduce = produce less, consume less
- Prioritize
- Problematize both internationalism and localism
- Value quality over quantity and establish new signs of quality (e.g. slowness → “slow art”, “deep working”)

Regarding sustainable mobility and international work, much of the focus was on **touring activities**. Touring should be smart, synergetic, ecological and well planned, and make it possible for artists to lengthen their stay, optimize their travel routes and schedules. This needs more time and money from funders and organisations as well as tighter and more purposeful collaboration between festivals and venues. Alternative means of travel was discussed a lot; sailing came up as an example of ecological travel that requires time and flexibility with schedules. Travel time should be regarded as paid working time or even part of the artistic process. We should explore the possibilities of using virtual presence and digital tools in international work and collaboration. This could result in new working models (eg. creating or re-creating artistic work from distance with virtual tools).

Seeing the value and purpose in **internationalism** on one hand, and **localism** on another, was a recurring dilemma in many groups. Does art have a bigger impact when working locally? Longer-term audience building locally leads to stronger and more long-lasting relationships between audiences and artists (and organisations). Local audience building is sustainable, but requires much more time. On the other hand, artists need to go where their work is, many might have limited options locally (too few resources, no audience-base, etc). Internationalism redistributes opportunities and resources for artists. It’s also a question of our value system: success is still measured in how international you are. Is an increased emphasis on localism, on ecological or community art, a threat, as it might narrow down the kind of art that is being made and exclude artists with other kinds of practices or focuses?

The outlook on **the role of artists and artistic content/work** in sustainability and green transition was equally ambivalent. Artists and artistic work was seen to have the possibility to trigger change; artists could propose a better future and “carry the light”. Arts can also give a wider perspective to science, making it visible and approachable on an emotional plane. But emphasizing this might narrow down artistic content, exclude artists, and increase competition for funding in particular. Artists – as all of us – should be ecologically aware but this shouldn’t need to be the focus of their work.

In short, **diversity and equality** (in terms of opportunities, possibilities, distribution of resources) might be at risk, if we over-emphasize localism and the role of art in fighting climate change. Also, shifting toward longer-term funding and investments in fewer projects/artists/initiatives means that fewer artists and art works (in numbers) will get support and create more competition and more exclusion, which is the opposite of the strive for accessibility to and equality in arts that most governmental and cultural policies are now promoting.

Ecological awareness and the realities of the operating environment in the arts often bring up conflicting feelings, anxiety and tension. It was acknowledged that the pressure on the individual to change his/her practice is problematic due to conflicting demands and needs. The **focus needs therefore to be on systemic change, structural changes and policy changes**.

The need of **building and sharing knowledge** also came up. For example, how does one measure and improve one's own sustainability? We need measuring tools and criteria, information, e.g. in the form of workshops. Should education institutions or other organizations provide that information? We should learn from other models, for example look at the carbon measurement initiatives of Creative Carbon Scotland.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS, ACTIONS, NEXT STEPS AND IDEAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

Some concrete/combined picks from the different groups:

General/for all:

- Reduce, slow down; do less, slower, go deeper
- Prioritise what tasks are really important to make
- Prioritise what tasks you need to do and what tasks others can do just as well or even better

Organisations and networks:

- Prioritize which travels to do and make use of virtual tools
- Organize meetings in easily reachable places
- Put quotas on travel and flights for organisations and networks
- Do carbon offset actions
- Create and apply green certificates/labels in order to share your values and contribute to changing mindsets
- Collaboration instead of competition
- Re-schedule and re-route festivals in order to encourage sustainable touring; more sharing between venues/festivals/presenters, especially when presenting artists from other continents
- Local residencies: time and space to work locally; eg. one-year residencies at home for working with and impacting local communities
- Information/knowledge targeted to artists/organisations on how to be sustainable and measure your sustainability, eg. workshops, source materials and info packages (on topics like biodiversity, sustainable travel, travel costs, economic situation of country of origin and country travelled to)
- Info packages (see above) targeted to policymakers

Artists:

- State longer travel times in your applications
- Use travel time as part of the artistic process
- Arrange and participate in workshops; share and seek out information on sustainable practices
- Articulate and think about why you want to travel and exchange – prioritize
- Stay longer and work more deeply with local audiences
- Recreate work in new places with local dancers
- Create artistic content that makes change

Funding bodies:

- Time and money resources should be coupled in funding sources, schemes, criteria and practices
- Our production-based economy promotes (non-sustainable/-ecological) travelling and the creation of new work. Support should be given to supporting post-production, distribution, re-creation (and also planning, thinking – seed-funding)
- Longer-term funding
- Funding for alternative means and modes of traveling; support ecological travelling and touring:



encourage planning, local collaboration and impact, regionality; extra support for not flying, money for the time spent travelling (travel time as paid working time)

- Funding for re-creating/warming up existing work
- Carbon offset actions should be encouraged in mobility, production, funding

Politicians and policy makers:

- The money to create the tools for artists and developing the art sector should not come from culture funds, but rather “sustainability” funds (environment, economy, employment, etc)
- Quality generates more impact than quantity – art and culture should be measured differently
- Seeing slowness and slowing down as a value and sustainability indicator
- Expectations for audience numbers should be problematized