IETM

The New International
Against All Odds

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Foreword by Ása Richardsdóttir

With this publication, IETM takes a deep dive into our work from the past years and lays a foundation for our vision of the future.

We encourage you to take the time to read it or listen to it.

Our membership has concluded that working together across borders remains intrinsically important[1]. Many of our members will expand their international partnerships in years to come using sustainable practices and have their eye on new ways to connect and transcend across borders.

We have captured their visions in **Six Axes for the New International in the Performing Arts** and we invite you to use this publication to develop your own perspective on how **art sectors across the globe** should be valued and how we can bring international collaboration in the arts to a new level.
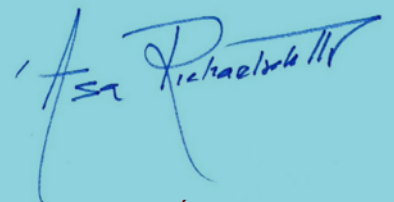
We are aware of the dark conflicting times we live in. We address them in this publication. Dark times call for the spreading of hope and imagination and the revealing power of arts and culture.

Let's seize this moment to imagine better futures - together. Here are a few of mine:

I*magine if ….*

- *The EU would open up the Creative Europe programme to more countries, and eventually the entire world*

- *Indigenous knowledge would be recognised as an essential driver for global green transition*

- *Arts and culture got 5% of all national and transnational budgets*

- *International collaboration in the arts was a primary pillar of all national arts policies, guided by principles of justice and equality*

- *The artistic quest for new meanings was recognised as essential to understand a world in crisis*

Imagine….

Ása Richardsdóttir,
Secretary General of IETM

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1 Outcome of an extensive survey and evaluation by the membership conducted during the last part of 2024

Introduction

The New International in the Performing Arts
Against All Odds

Openness to the world lies at the heart of the arts. The international dimension of culture holds immense value, as it remains one of the few common goods that transcend borders. But today, the ways in which the cultural sector engages internationally must be reinforced and reimagined to address the seismic events shaping history as we speak. Presenting a renewed vision for international collaboration in the performing arts is the very goal of this paper.

In 2025, IETM - the International network for contemporary performing arts - will celebrate its 44th anniversary. Since its inception, IETM has been exploring and championing the concept of 'internationality' in the performing arts. The network's efforts to reinvent international practices in the field have been deepened through initiatives such as Rewiring the Network[1] and Perform Europe[2]. In 2021, this journey culminated in conceiving the three-year project supported by Creative Europe: *New International in the Performing Arts (NIPA): Bridging Local and Global* (2022–2024).

The NIPA project aimed to stimulate innovation in cross-border collaboration models within the performing arts and to envision a new state of play where fair, inclusive, and ecological collaborations become the norm. The conceptual framework of the project has been *translocalism* - cross-border collaborations rooted in local realities and enriched by global perspectives[3].

As part of this three-year trajectory, IETM focused on two key themes: *fairness and inclusivity* in 2022, and *environmental sustainability* in 2023. In 2024, the project's final year, the aim was to consolidate these insights into a renewed vision for international collaboration in the performing arts. Let us look back to 2021, when the network was about to embark on this venture. What did the world look like?

To start with, the essence of the NIPA project was influenced by the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, which was still ongoing during the project's design phase. These were the times when the dire situation of cultural workers, including the unsustainable modus operandi and the inequalities within the sector, became more visible than ever. Awareness of the precarious working conditions in the cultural sector significantly increased.

Some of the long-standing taboos surrounding exploitative practices and unfair remuneration in the arts were broken. This shift resonated with broader justice movements already underway, such as #MeToo and Black Lives Matter. The ground for addressing long-standing issues in the cultural sector had all of a sudden become fertile. Our voices were loud; our concerns were legitimate. Policy changes were discussed, prepared and tested.

Meanwhile, the world was compelled to slow down and adopt more sustainable and thoughtful ways of working. The pandemic brought a renewed focus on the local, fostering deeper connections with communities and redirecting our energy from international travel to rediscovering the realities closest to us. This grounding felt like the first step toward a more sustainable future. 'We are not going back to how it was before the pandemic' - this became a widely held conviction within the network.

Where do we stand today, at the outset of 2025? The pandemic experience undeniably catalysed cultural policy changes, transforming some sectoral practices and giving rise to impactful initiatives, such as Perform Europe, which has now evolved into a full-fledged programme. However, the sobering reality is that - like society and the economy at large - we did not have the necessary tools or (political) will, nor the time or power to fully dismantle outdated systems and envision new structures and models for working and living together. The 'bigger picture' has remained largely unchanged - continuing to harm the planet, perpetuate inequalities, and degrade labor conditions across many sectors, including our own.

However,we are not entirely back to the pre-pandemic 'square one', and new challenges have emerged since 2021. To begin with, global violence has escalated: Russia has been waging a full-scale war against Ukraine for three years now; ongoing violence in the Middle East is causing devastation in the region and creating divisions worldwide; and several other violent conflicts continue or arise across the globe.

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1   IETM - Projects - Rewiring the Network (for the Twenties) 01.2020 - 12.2021 n.d., last seen 15 January 2025, Link

2   Perform Europe n.d., last seen 15 January, Link

3   IETM - Projects - The New International in the Performing Arts (NIPA) 2022-2024 n.d., last seen 15 January 2025, Link

The climate crisis has also become more acute over the past couple of years, with natural disasters occurring worldwide and 2024 on track to be recognised as the warmest year in human history[4]. The UN Climate Change Conference (COP29) in Azerbaijan concluded with a historic agreement to triple climate action financing for developing countries[5]. While this represents a significant step forward - albeit one achieved through challenging negotiations - it also underscores the sobering reality that the world is failing to meet its commitments to curb ecological degradation.

Danish sociologist Nikolaj Schultz captured a striking paradox in his keynote speech at IETM's Plenary Meeting in Aarhus in 2023: 'Ecology is everywhere, and ecology is nowhere'[6]. This paradox aptly reflects the challenges of our time. Despite the increasing prominence of scientific warnings and public discourse about the climate crisis, green movements have struggled to achieve significant political breakthroughs. Even Europe, once a leader in the green revolution, is now witnessing a green backlash, with ecological parties losing one-third of their seats in the European Parliament.

Right-wing forces, on the contrary, have increased their influence. In 2021, we were already witnessing a political shift to the right and anticipated it would take an even sharper turn. Our concerns materialised in 2024, with conservative and right-wing parties winning elections in several countries across Europe, Canada, the US, Japan, and beyond.

For instance, the European Parliament has never been as right-wing as it is today. In many cases, this shift to the right involves, among other things, tightening border controls, adopting more hostile migration policies, and focusing on national identities at the expense of openness towards the world.

Political changes, combined with strategies to address economic challenges and shifting government priorities toward defense and security, have triggered significant budget cuts for culture across Europe and beyond. In Bulgaria, Canada, France, Finland, Germany, Italy, Korea, Sweden, and in other countries, cultural budgets are beginning to erode, also affecting institutions that support international cultural relations. While this is not an entirely new trend, the combination of reduced funding and rising costs is creating an increasingly dire situation for cultural organisations and art workers. Moreover, the growing number of attacks on artistic freedom[7], now observed in more countries than ever before - including traditionally strong democracies - paints a grim picture for the arts sector, calling for resistance and resourcefulness.

The international performing arts sector is already feeling the strain of shifting policies and dwindling funding. Yet, there is also an enormous commitment - now more than ever - to uphold the values of the arts sector across borders.

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4   European Commission - 2024 on track to be the first year to exceed 1.5°C above the pre-industrial average 9 December 2024, last seen 15 January 2025, Link.

5   United Nations - COP29 concludes with climate finance deal n.d., last seen 15 January 2025, Link

6   IETM - Resources, Living on the Edge - A Nature Divide? - IETM Aarhus 2023 Monday Keynote n.d., last seen 15 January 2025, Link

7   Polivtseva, E 2024, State of Culture, Culture Action Europe, p. 68

As ongoing IETM conversations and the survey conducted at the end of 2024 revealed, members are eager to strengthen the sense of global solidarity, resist challenging local realities, and unite efforts to address global issues. But how? Given the changing discourse and political landscape, can we still reimagine the world in ecological terms and reaffirm our fight for a fairer, more livable planet?

IETM members have been and are acutely aware of the challenges limiting internationalisation of the performing arts. Through the NIPA project, our aim was to 'to address the contradiction between the growing constraints of internationalisation and the artistic and economic drives of art professionals to transcend borders'.

In 2021, at the onset of NIPA, IETM posed an exciting and important question: How can we rethink international practices in fairer and more ecological terms? Today, a revised version of this question arises: How can our international work continue in times of growing scarcity of resources and freedoms? How can we build sustainable and fair international cultural practices in 2025 - against all odds? No matter how challenging these questions may seem, they are urgent and relevant: if we fail to address them now, growing inequalities and the escalating climate crisis will hinder the international dimension of our sector sooner than we expect.

Methodology

To produce this paper, we consolidated the knowledge generated throughout the three years of the NIPA project. Key research steps included:

- The review and analysis of the content from the three IETM Plenary meetings - Belgrade (2022), Aarhus (2023), and Sofia (2024) - including recordings of keynote speeches and session reports.

- The review and analysis of IETM's key research papers: *Which Side Are You On? Ideas for Reaching Fair Working Conditions in the Arts; Climate Justice: Through the Creative Lens of the Performing Arts; and Fair Pay in the Arts: The talk of the town or the elephant in the room?*

- The review and analysis of the content generated through the three Focus meetings held in Brussels (2022), Luxembourg (2023), and Den Bosch (2024). The last, in particular, served as a core content base, as the entire meeting was dedicated to exploring and articulating IETM's new vision for international collaborations in the performing arts.

- The analysis of the membership survey, completed by 225 people, and interviews with 17 members. Both the survey and the interviews were conducted at the end of 2024.

Points for ongoing exploration

Before delving into the renewed vision of the new international in the performing arts, let us first highlight the key, often contentious, issues that have served as a leitmotif of our exploration. These essential and complex topics have consistently emerged in network discussions over the past few years and will continue to do so, as they require ongoing debate and reflection. While this section raises many open questions, don't feel discouraged - some answers will follow later.

Values: from juggling to thriving

Within the network, there is a growing recognition that the 'business as usual' model - marked by the expansion, acceleration and multiplication of international projects and trips - can no longer continue. This approach harms the planet, depletes human capacities, and exacerbates already deep inequalities and injustices present in our world.

Motivated to move beyond this status quo, IETM laid out the key values of the NIPA journey: fairness & inclusion and environmental sustainability. Earlier, through initiatives like Rewiring the Network and Perform Europe, the network adopted conceptual frameworks that integrated these priorities into a unified vision of sustainability. This vision recognises the interconnectedness of ecological, financial, human, social, and artistic sustainability[8].

This perspective aligns with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations, which link diverse aspirations such as conserving natural resources with eradicating poverty and fostering peaceful communities[9]. Similarly, the EU's *Just Transition* framework seeks to ensure that the shift to greener economies happens 'leaving no one behind', balancing ecology and just societies[10].

However, when it comes to practice, these priorities - fairness & inclusion and environmental sustainability - are often perceived as being at odds. Discussions frequently revolve around compromises, balancing objectives, and avoiding overreach of boundaries, as exemplified by the Doughnut Economics model, which advocates reaching a 'safe and just space' between ecological ceilings and social foundations[11]. It is assumed that one priority will hinder the other if there are no checks and balances in place.

In the arts, policies aimed at fostering a green transition and ensuring inclusivity and fairness in the sector often operate in silos, resulting in two separate boxes to tick. It is a trend that mainstream funding programmes require applicants to design a standard project that, in addition to its usual architecture, must also be environmentally sustainable and apply fair practices to those involved. The most widespread scenario is then trying to strike a balance when juggling with these two objectives. As a result, these two priorities are not addressed as mutually reinforcing and organically interconnected. In the precarious world of the arts, such a fragmented approach to sustainability only adds further strain and ultimately becomes unsustainable.

How can green and fair transitions in the arts complement and enhance each other as part of a unified transformation? How can we use our creativity to transform sustainability from a balancing act into a thriving reality?

The challenge: crafting a vision where ecological sustainability and fair working conditions mutually reinforce rather than conflict with one another.

8   IETM - Projects - Rewiring the Network (for the Twenties) 01.2020 - 12.2021 n.d., last seen 15 January 2025, Link
9   United Nations - Department of Economic and Social Affairs n.d., The 17 Goals, last seen 15 January 2025, Link
10 European Commission - The Just Transition Mechanism: making sure no one is left behind n.d., last seen 15 January 2025, Link.
11 Doughnut Economics Action Lab - About Doughnut Economics n.d., last seen 15 January 2025, Link

Resources and measures of their value

We define the elements necessary for international work, and the rewards it provides, as resources. During IETM's Focus meeting in Den Bosch, we asked over a hundred participants to identify the key resources that performing arts professionals need in order to be able to operate internationally. Responses included money, time, space, skills, knowledge, access to audiences, possession of local cultural codes, networks, and more. This exercise marked the beginning of a conversation about how resources can be shared more equitably in cross-border professional collaborations.

Creating clarity around what constitutes a resource in this context is essential. Mapping these resources helps illustrate the current flows within international collaborations in the performing arts: who is included, who is excluded, and what barriers, privileges, gatekeepers and 'gates' exist. This clarity is a vital step in designing policies that address inequalities and challenge power dynamics. Essentially, defining resources and ascribing value to them shape policy priorities and focus.

However, a critical question arises: who decides what qualifies as a *resource*? Indeed, before we can address inequalities in access, it's vital to acknowledge the contextual nature of what counts as a resource. For example, consider indigenous knowledge - it is regarded as vital by some but dismissed by others. As discussed at the IETM Aarhus Plenary, 'Western society retains the role of arbiter in determining what is and isn't seen as "useful" knowledge.'[12]. As a result, indigenous knowledge is often undervalued, suppressed, or excluded from resource-based frameworks, instead of being nurtured and supported.

Another key consideration is the hierarchy of resources. What resources are most important? Money frequently emerges as the most existential and universal resource required for sustainable and fair international practices. This is not surprising: we live in the world of monetary economy, and money is obviously crucial both for decent lives and professional sustainability. Yet many participants in Den Bosch resisted placing money at the center of the conversation. According to them, framing money as the cornerstone of resource discussions can distort the true value of art and artistic collaborations. This true value can lie in many different places, such as building solidarity, exercising freedoms, and building relationships.

Which resources are most important for international collaborations in the performing arts? Which should be prioritised for redistribution? Who should decide what resources are most vital?

The challenge: to craft a vision that values diverse resources for international work, going beyond financial gains and striving for balance of resources.

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12 M. Tenke, IETM Report: Indigenous Ecological Knowledge I Insights from Outside the Arts, IETM, Brussels, September 2023, p. 3

Money: never the reason, always the obstacle

Just as the impact of art itself cannot be measured solely in monetary terms, the rewards of engaging in art practices, including those across borders, cannot be confined to financial gain either.

But what role does money then play in international collaborations in the arts? One key takeaway from IETM's research on sustainability in the performing arts is that while money is not the primary benefit of international collaborations, it remains the main obstacle to their realisation. This is evident, for example, in the findings from the first phase of Perform Europe, which discovered that economic benefits were ranked the lowest in terms of value of cross-border touring by both presenters and producers. At the same time, limited financial resources were identified as the most significant barrier to organising or participating in international tours, far outweighing other obstacles[13].

In fact, the simple truth that 'all this is not for money' is by no means new. Recent experiments with basic income for artists have been carried out in countries such as Ireland, the US, and the Netherlands. Studies emerging from these experiments[14] suggest that when artists receive a fixed and steady income, they do not become 'lazy'; on the contrary, they double down on the quality of their work. As the study on the basic income experiment 'No Strings Attached' in the Netherlands suggests, creative workers tend to act in 'economically illogical' ways, prioritising intrinsic over extrinsic motivations. The study concludes that, compared to workers in other sectors of the economy, creative workers are often more willing to trade monetary rewards for the meaning and pleasure they derive from their work[15].

This perspective is also discussed by Hans Abbing in IETM's publication *Which Side Are You On? Ideas for Reaching Fair Working Conditions in the Arts*. Abbing argues that due to the unique nature of artists' motivation to work, they will always be underpaid.

For him, this motivation is rooted in the quest for individual self-expression, which comes hand in hand with creating art and does not see low, or no pay, as an obstacle: 'Considering the perpetual low incomes of artists, it seems that the desire to express oneself—or actualise oneself—is stronger than ever, despite the grim income prospects'[16].

This relationship between artists and money is central to discussions about effective support systems and funding structures for the arts. Our attitude to money is particularly relevant for our exploration within this report as it is about how we organise our work and allocate money within our partnerships, especially those that bring together different realities and cultures. Our perception of money, as well as other resources, lies at the heart of our responsibility towards other partners.

As the discussions in Den Bosch confirmed, money is just one of the assets required to work internationally in the performing arts, and that which one gains from their work in this field. It is essential to rebalance the importance of various resources, ascribing different values to them, some of which are not necessarily monetary. On the other hand, removing money from the conversation or equating it with less tangible resources risks undermining the economic sustainability of the arts field in a world shaped by the money-driven economy.

> Where is money in the hierarchy of resources required to work internationally? Can we compare or equate money with other resources and rewards without undermining its importance or exacerbating precarity in the sector?
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> *The challenge: to craft a vision where our relationship with money not only fosters fair and sustainable working conditions in the sector but also enables us to value and prioritise other rewards and resources.*

13 J. Janssens, M. Fraioli, 'Research Results of Perform Europe', June 2022. Link. For further information please contact info@performeurope.eu, p. 20

14 Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, Ireland 2023, Basic Income for the Arts Initial Impact Assessment (6-month); Wijngaarden, Y., Berkers, P., Kimenai, F., & Everts, R. (2024). Basic income, post-precarious outcome? How creative workers perceive participating in an experiment with basic income. *Cultural Trends*, 1–16. Link; Creatives Rebuild New York, Guaranteed Income for Artists: Preliminary Findings

15 Wijngaarden, Y., Berkers, P., Kimenai, F., & Everts, R. (2024). Basic income, post-precarious outcome? How creative workers perceive participating in an experiment with basic income. *Cultural Trends*, 1–16. Link

16 K. Praznik, B. Kunst, H.Abbing, "Which side are you on? Ideas for Reaching Fair Working Conditions in the Arts", IETM, Brussels, December 2022, p. 22

Fairness: what it means and who determines it

'How often do we think if our actions towards other people are fair or not? Do we need a crisis to remind us to be fair? How can we move on from subjective concepts of fairness to objective ones?' - These questions concluded the report of the IETM Focus meeting that was organised in Brussels in spring 2022[17].

These three questions, reflecting the ambiance at the meeting that gathered 173 performing arts professionals, suggest two important insights. The first is that we in the sector admit that we are not treating each other fairly. From discriminatory practices and tokenism to ableism and sexual harassment, from unpaid labour to failing to recognise certain tasks as labor at all - these are issues that art professionals perpetuate in their daily working practices.

This insight was confirmed by other IETM resources. When it comes to fair pay, IETM's study *Fair Pay in the Arts: The Talk of the Town or the Elephant in the Room?* highlights that there are many various funding policies that promote fair pay in the arts sector. But without enforcement, fair pay recommendations often go unheeded. As the study demonstrates, one of the most significant challenges is the lack of, or very slow, mindset shift - viewing art as labour and artists as full-fledged workers - not only within society and policy-making circles but also within the art field itself[18].

Another well-known reason for this is the notorious lack of money in the sector. Yet even when funding does increase, it is most commonly allocated to producing new work and rarely redirected to increase fees within the sector[19]. Finally, Katja Praznik highlights another issue in IETM's publication *Which Side Are You On? Ideas for Reaching Fair Working Conditions in the Arts*: there is a genuine lack of solidarity among artists, particularly when it comes to defending their rights to fair pay[20].
So, the arts field is not a fair field. But citing the IETM Brussels report, where should positive change in the field originate?

This discussion often centers around how policies and funding need to evolve to help us move away from unfair practices. We touched on this in Den Bosch, specifically addressing how arts funders should promote a fair distribution of resources within international partnerships. But participants expressed doubts on whether funders or policymakers are the right agents to define what fairness means in the context of complex, cross-border arts partnerships. If they would, it seems like a continuation of the usual power dynamics when decisions about what is considered 'fair' are made by a select group and imposed on a wide sector that encompasses diverse disciplines, countries, values, and realities.

To put it concisely, we struggle when funders impose anything on us, whether it's inclusivity, environmental sustainability or any other priority, and we believe no one knows better than ourselves how such essential concepts as 'fairness' can be defined. Yet, we also realise that positive transformation cannot come from within the sector alone - which has been accepting and replicating unfairness for too long.

Why should a funder intervene in or govern how we distribute resources in an international partnership? Can a funder decide what is fair for us? Can the funder leave these decisions solely to the sector that has not been treating artists and other workers fairly? Is the 'objective concept' of fairness possible? What role should the funder play in designing it? And what kind of relationship do we need with the funder to implement it?

The challenge: to craft a vision that includes a workable and inclusive definition of fairness, one that is championed by both the funder and the sector and rooted in a relationship of partnership and trust between the two.

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17 V. Shishkova, "IETM Report Fair Enough?", IETM, Brussels, September 2022, p. 12
18 E. Polivtseva, "Fair Pay in the Arts", IETM, Brussels, June 202, pp. 5, 8
19 Ibid, p. 18
20 K. Praznik, B. Kunst, H.Abbing, "Which side are you on? Ideas for Reaching Fair Working Conditions in the Arts", IETM, Brussels, December 2022, p. 7

The system and us

When reading the previous sub-section, one might wonder whether the responsibility for making art collaborations fair and sustainable - especially those taking place across borders - falls solely on the sector and art funders. This question is legitimate as the bigger picture, the so-called system, is notoriously problematic, both in terms of valuing economic growth over human sustainability and failing to care for the planet as a whole.

Through multiple discussions over the past few years, we've encountered the 'system block', acknowledging that as an arts community, we are only a small part of a much larger machine, one that is turning with great force. Every now and then, we are reminded of a simple truth: changing the world entirely is beyond our reach.

What's my role as an artist? - This is the question we hear repeatedly when discussing fundamental systemic problems facing today's world. In Luxembourg, during the IETM Focus meeting on the green transition in the performing arts, we delved deeply into this issue. We discussed that a green transition requires systemic change, and we often feel discouraged and powerless when confronted with the so-called system. For some, it seems counterproductive and unsustainable - both in terms of exhausting energy and resources - to fight for a system change.

This is because the change we can achieve feels too small compared to the scale and power of the larger system, which has clearly veered off course in its path toward sustainability. The paralysis caused by the scale of the problem, combined with the rigidity of the system, feeds a sense of guilt. However, the desire to be the authors of a new, better reality is also strongly present in the sector[21].

Too many challenging questions have been posed throughout this section. We recognise that these are recurring, essential questions that will arise again and again in IETM meetings and within the broader performing arts community. For now, let us delve into what we have discovered through the NIPA journey, including the attempts to provide solutions to these and other dilemmas.

How can we leverage our unique strengths - creativity, inspiration, and courage - toward changing the system, while being honest about the fact that we are part of it? Can we construct our own micro-ecology and create ripple effects that extend to the broader macro-environment we are part of?

The challenge: to craft a vision in which we are not blocked by the dominant system, nor burdened by the expectation to dismantle and rebuild it from the ground up.

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21 E. Polivtseva, "Lost in transition", IETM, Brussels, February 2024, pp. 12, 20

Working Internationally in the Performing Arts: Why, What and How

The 'Why'

In today's polycrisis times, the motivations of performing arts professionals to pursue their international practice may not be the same as, let's say, five years ago. It is essential we capture them. For instance, although not measured scientifically, there has been a noticeable increase in the desire within our sector to explore and connect with local realities and communities, a shift largely fostered by the COVID-19 pandemic. At the IETM Focus Brussels meeting, 'acting locally' was not just discussed as a convenient or viable model, but as a core value of today's art field, alongside solidarity, care for the planet, trust, and more[22]. At the start of NIPA we assumed that local engagement is now viewed as a crucial component of the transition toward fairness and ecological sustainability.

Amidst this growing desire to reconnect with the 'local', why do performing arts professionals (still) choose to work internationally today? This question lingered throughout the entire NIPA parcours and was explored in greater depth through the 2024 membership survey and the Den Bosch Focus meeting.

As it has been known for a long time, the number one reason for people in the performing arts to work internationally appears to be the continuous need to broaden their perspectives - by nourishing their practice with different approaches, meeting diverse visions and styles, encountering new audiences and challenging their own paradigms. People in the arts are genuinely curious about the unexplored. Just like the art itself, which is, by nature, a never-ending quest to explore the unknown or even what has yet to exist, expanding the boundaries of what is reachable and visible. This quest can never be confined within national borders. Therefore, cultural workers continue to engage with the diversity of the outside world and to engage with the 'different'.

At the same time, building relationships with colleagues from abroad is a way for artists to reach the level of understanding and conversation that they do not find in their local environments. Cross-border collaborations help them reach unity in thought, values, doubts and ideas with like-minded people, beyond national borders. It's no coincidence that IETM frequently addresses its membership as 'a global performing arts family'. The rising tide of nationalism and isolation - spreading within societies and promoted by many governments - make the need for a sense of a 'global family' within an inherently translational sector more urgent than ever.

Therefore, it appears that cross-border practice for art professionals is both a search for difference and challenge, and at the same time, a quest for like-mindedness. While this might seem paradoxical, it becomes clear upon deeper reflection that these two motivations are organically intertwined. Artists indeed seek inspiration through challenge, friction, and difference, and all these elements can be embraced in a more constructive and profound way within the safe space of a cross-border community that shares fundamental values and is based on trust. Engaging with different perspectives can also happen within a local context, in interactions with people who hold radically different views and values. The two types of engagement are closely connected: by challenging and broadening their perspectives through deeper cross-border experiences with like-minded peers, artists become better equipped to handle more radical local challenges. In local contexts, they may face more intense disagreements or even hostile attitudes, but their fundamental values shared with peers across borders help them navigate these challenges.

There is also a more practical and existential aspect. Many professionals express deep concern about the shift of national politics toward the right and the growing influence of nationalist sentiments on funding systems and budget allocations. Many members report feeling disconnected from the dominant discourses in their countries and unwilling to rely solely on national support structures.

22 V. Shishkova, "IETM Report Fair Enough?", IETM, Brussels, September 2022, p. 4

This disconnect serves as a driving force for seeking international partnerships and networks, applying for international funding opportunities, creating alliances and co-creating and co-producing art.

But this is not merely an escape tactic; on the contrary, engaging globally is seen as a vital strategy for uniting forces with like-minded peers to build resilience against nationalism. This happens both through sharing tools and fostering mutual confidence, and by reaching wider audiences to promote understanding between diverse communities across countries. Performing arts professionals believe they have a role to play in fostering global solidarity and dialogue - essential endeavors in a time marked by nationalism, exclusionary identity politics, erosion of democratic principles, social polarisation, and the rollback of freedoms in too many countries.

The challenges we face - such as climate change, artificial intelligence, migration, and conflict - are vast, world-wide, and too complex to address solely within national or localised frameworks. Our world is intricately interconnected, even if some of the current trends suggest a slowing of globalisation or a shift toward 'regionalisation'. Acknowledging the undeniable truth that global challenges demand global solutions, the performing arts community is coming together across borders to learn from one another and adopt new strategies. Cross-border collaboration also serves to amplify local impact. Advocacy for specific needs or issues - such as disability justice for artists and audiences or the rights of indigenous peoples - often faces limitations at the national or local level and can benefit significantly from international platforms and broader outreach. Moreover, for many in the sector, participating in international practices is a way to contribute to the global redistribution of resources, address systemic injustices, and advance the decolonisation of politics and international cultural relations.

Finally, many in the network respond to the question, 'Why do you work internationally?' with a counter-question: 'Why would one work nationally?' Many describe themselves as natural nomads or migrants, viewing national borders as more of a man-made obstacle than a useful framework - both personally and professionally. Moreover, being outside the mainstream - which is often the characteristic of the contemporary art community - is often linked to a desire to forge connections that transcend rigid border constructs.

Therefore, for many in the sector, international work isn't a deliberate choice but an organic part of their practice, a consequence of their individual parkour or a feature of their background. There is often neither a desire nor a realistic option to localise their work. Survey responses such as, 'We started as an international festival anyway', 'Our project was born from international collaboration', or 'The very purpose and DNA of our organisation is to connect trans-border realities', illustrate this sentiment. For some, working internationally is not just a preference but an inherent part of their identity and operations, leading to doubts about whether they could adapt to a purely national or local context, even if they wished to.

At the same time, there is a clear recognition that beginning or sustaining an artistic practice in the transnational realm is not only natural - or 'inevitable', as some describe it - but also a privilege. Many prerequisites must be in place to initiate and maintain an international professional practice. The next section delves into this in greater detail.

The 'What'

Which resources are necessary for working internationally? This question is pivotal in understanding the dynamics of international collaboration in the arts and in shaping policy priorities and strategic focus. It was addressed to participant groups during the Den Bosch focus meeting. The mapping exercise featured both tangible resources, such as money, spaces, infrastructure, and transportation means, and less tangible ones, such as skills, knowledge, freedom, and time (see the graph for the full list).

This question served as a prelude to the meeting's central discussion: *What principles should guide the equitable distribution of resources in international partnerships?* Two important assumptions were conveyed through the design of the exercise: first, that there is an overall scarcity of resources for international collaborations in the performing arts; and second, that these resources are not distributed equitably across the global performing arts field.

The task, inherently complex and expansive, felt abstract to some participants. Mostly because it required crafting unified approaches to a couple of dozens of resources listed during the previous exercise. Can every resource be shared or distributed? Is equity relevant as a principle when dealing with resources that are non-rivalrous by nature? How do we reconcile or juxtapose very different resources, such as money and skills? Are they even comparable?

Among all the resources mentioned, money stands out as the only one that can be directly and explicitly divided or distributed in equitable or inequitable ways. In economic terms, money is both *rivalrous* and *excludable*: once it is used by one party, it is unavailable to another, making it fundamentally different from what is called *public goods*[23].

Thus, money is uniquely positioned as the resource most directly subject to distribution or division in their strict sense.

Some resources, such as knowledge, information, skills, experience, awareness of local contexts, professional networks, and access to audiences, can often be shared among partners without diminishing their value for the contributor. Certain tangible resources, like physical spaces or access to software, can also fit into this category in certain situations. Moreover, there are also non-rivalrous resources that are essential for the success and sustainability of international partnerships and can be continuously generated within the partnership itself. These include emotional care, hospitality, transparency, solidarity, and mutual support.

On the other hand, there are resources that cannot be transferred, divided, or distributed in a strict sense, such as reputation, qualifications, geographic location, political stability in a country, and access to mobility.

However, these resources - or more precisely put 'enabling factors' - can contribute to the success of a common project. A partner can 'bring' such resources to the collective effort, where they gain value in combination with other 'ingredients' contributed by others.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, one resource was identified as indispensable for every partner: the right to contribute their voice, values, and perspective to the shared work - artistically, socially and politically. Through the discussion, the right to participate in the partnership as an equal was deemed somewhat more vital than the right to derive tangible benefits from the partnerships.

Once again, the desire to be heard, respected, and included - which aligns with Hans Abbing's earlier reflection on the fundamental pursuit of 'self-expression' - emerges as the core aspiration for art professionals working internationally, often outweighing considerations of material gain.

What do these mappings and groupings of resources tell us? At least a few important things. First, tangible resources like money are not the only ones considered essential by the sector for enabling international practice. This is not surprising, but the way the Den Bosch exercise was framed - as an effort to 'distribute finances and other resources' (as stated on IETM's website[24]) - suggested that the focus might be primarily on money, a resource that is undeniably crucial yet unequally distributed across the world. Yet having listed money as just one of over twenty resources considered vital for international partnership suggests that policies supporting fair international collaboration must broaden their focus. They should not only ensure the fair distribution of various resources beyond just money, but also evaluate the success and impact of projects in ways that account for a diverse range of tangible and intangible values.

23 Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy - Public goods n.d., last seen 15 January 2025, Link
24 IETM - IETM Focus Den Bosch 2024 - DECLINING OR THRIVING? n.d., last seen 15 January 2025, Link

Second, it has become clear that not all assets critical for working internationally can be shared, divided, or distributed among partners. However, their inventory is still fundamental for the endeavor to make collaborations fair. It is crucial for partners to be aware of whether or not these resources are available within the partnership and for whom. The overview of listed resources and their diverse nature indicates that the pursuit of fairness in partnerships must go beyond simply distributing resources. It should focus on creating frameworks for partner relationships that thoughtfully consider and balance the resources each partner has or lacks, fostering a meaningful, non-transactional relationship aimed at achieving a mutually beneficial goal, leveraging all available resources.

Third, when considering the full range of resources listed, one may question what we mean by the 'inequitable' distribution, which was put forward as an underlying assumption of the Den Bosch meeting. While it's clear that the world is unequal, who is 'better off' or 'worse off' in this context depends largely on how we define what constitutes a resource - basically what is valued within the project and why. At the same time, it is crucial to define which resources should be recognised as objectively fundamental to all partnerships. To start with, access to a fair share of economic resources and the right to contribute on an equal footing can be among such foundational factors.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, there are vital resources for international partnerships that don't need to be divided or distributed. These are resources that can and should be continuously reproduced by the partnership itself for the benefit of everyone involved. They are the resources that nourish the emotional and relational fabric of the partnership - care, solidarity, transparency, respect, and others. In times when other resources are eroding, these are especially vital.

The 'How'

External financing - public or private funds - has been crucial for enabling international collaborations in the arts until present day. For instance, according to the Perform Europe study, external funding is a vital source of financing when it comes to international exchanges and showcases, touring and cross-border mobility: more than 73% of respondents to the survey conducted as part of Perform Europe research said they would not have been able to finance the tour or presentation without external support[25]. But what happens with the funding for international collaborations on which we are so much more dependent?

Two major trends are worth noting:

- The first one is the predominantly patchwork nature of public support for international collaborations that hinders the sustainability of global partnerships and collaborations[26]. Today, when funding cuts have been introduced in many European countries and some are underway, the situation might get even more dire and unequal. Matching this reality with the intensifying commitment of the performing arts field to build stronger relationships with their peers across borders, the question arises: how can this aspiration in the field be realised in practice? If usual sources of support are too fragmented or diminishing, what should be the strategies to leverage transnational artistic endeavors instead of downsizing them? Let us dig into this space a little later.

- The second trend emerging in the public support for the arts in Europe is the increasingly more specific and solid requirement for funding beneficiaries to consider environmental sustainability and fair pay within their projects. Several national governments have adopted strategies for the greening of cultural and creative sectors[27]. Creative Europe - one of the most relevant programmes for the topic of this paper - is expected to help achieve the European Union's goal of allocating 30% of its budget to climate change. The programme recognises environmental sustainability as a priority for the cultural and creative sectors, and even if there are currently no indicators to track progress, they will likely have to be developed in the years to come[28]. In regard to fair pay, many national funding programmes require sticking with defined remuneration standards as a selection criteria[29], and the European Commission is planning to explore the implementation of 'social conditionality' for the next generation of EU's programmes supporting culture[30]. This means that organisations and professionals benefiting from these programmes may be required to adhere to a specified minimum level of fees and other standards of working conditions.

How can these requirements manifest in cross-border, often highly imbalanced environments? Amidst diminishing resources, how can the sector adopt sustainability and fairness in a genuine and organic way? How can practitioners address priorities related to fairness and ecological transition within a system that, broadly speaking, seem to move in a direction contrary to sustainability and fairness? How can these priorities be rooted in artists' own values rather than presented as mere boxes to tick?

25 J. Janssens, M. Fraioli, 'Research Results of Perform Europe', June 2022. Link. For further information please contact info@performeurope.eu, p. 28

26 Nordic Culture Fund,Globus, Dimension 04, Enabling Change Through Transnational Art Practices, last seen 15 January 2025, Link

27 For example, the French Ministry of Culture has developed an 'Orientation and Inspiration Guide' for the ecological transition of culture for the period 2023-2027. See more: Ministry of Culture, France n.d. Themes - Ecological transition, last seen 15 January 2025, Link

28 European Commission 2023, Greening of the Creative Europe programme, p. 39

29 E. Polivtseva, "Fair Pay in the Arts", IETM, Brussels, June 202, pp. 4, 5

30 European Commission, Brussels, 21/02/2024

The question of *how* the art sector can operate sustainably and fairly across borders is by no means new. In 2018, as part of an ongoing exploration, IETM produced a toolkit on fair international collaborations. Unsurprisingly, the key values of international collaboration featured in the toolkit continue to resonate with what members aspire to today: curiosity, transparency, equity, respect, solidarity, reciprocity, and openness[31].

In this document, we are not looking to reinvent the wheel. Rather, we celebrate the enduring relevance and robustness of these values within the network. However, some focal points of our attention may have shifted to some extent in recent times, and we have tried to capture these shifts below.

These are the pathways for international collaborations in the performing arts that we identified and developed through the NIPA journey, offering insights for today's and tomorrow's world:

1. Building backbones for trust and resilience

When resources and freedoms dwindle, consolidating shared values and fostering our most vital resource - mutual support and solidarity - becomes essential. However, our societies are becoming increasingly fragmented, as the pursuit of individual autonomy has often come at the expense of a sense of community. Numerous studies and opinion polls reveal a growing erosion of trust between citizens and institutions, as well as among citizens themselves. This trend contributes to a hyper-competitive society, a pervasive sense of powerlessness, and ultimately, the weakening of civic engagement and democracy[32].

This fragmentation is also evident in the arts sector, with a growing number of small entrepreneurs and enterprises and the increasingly competitive nature of access to visibility and support opportunities. As Bojana Kunst, one of the three authors of IETM's publication *Which Side Are You On? Ideas for Reaching Fair Working Conditions in the Arts*, argues, the dominance of the project-based model for delivering artistic work significantly contributes to the atomisation and fragmentation of the arts field. Kunst explains that the project model compels individuals to neglect the daily practices of sustaining and nurturing relationships, networks, and communities, instead projecting themselves into the future and focusing on producing tangible outcomes.

According to Kunst, this fixation on projects in the arts is also linked to the diminishing trust in artists within society and policymaking circles, forcing them to continuously justify the value of their work, promising it will be seen and impactful in the future[33]. But as a result the inflation of projects and 'festivalisation' of the sector leads to further precarisation and fragility of the art field[34].

The erosion of mutual trust, hyper-competition, and individualisation - whether in the arts sector or broader society - are not conducive to building resilience in times of crisis, scarcity and diminishing freedoms. Perform Europe's study demonstrated that there is a lack of cooperation among all stakeholders in the ecosystem, as well as a power imbalance between artists, programmers, producers, and cultural institutions - within countries and across borders. This leads to unfair practices, such as unequal remuneration and an unequal distribution of risks, with the burden falling more heavily on the vulnerable[35]. As repeatedly emphasised in IETM meetings, particularly the most recent one in Den Bosch, what the global arts field urgently needs today is the development of trans-border backbones and infrastructures for trust and resilience.

31 M. van Graan, 'Beyond Curiosity and Desire: Towards Fairer International Collaborations in the Arts', IETM, On the Move and DutchCulture, Brussels, March 2018. Link

32 Gielen, P 2024, Trust. Building of the Cultural Commons, Valiz, Amsterdam, pp. 16, 18

33 K. Praznik, B. Kunst, H.Abbing, "Which side are you on? Ideas for Reaching Fair Working Conditions in the Arts", IETM, Brussels, December 2022, p. 15-16

34 S. Danig, "IETM Report - Work & (in) stability", IETM, Brussels, December 2022, p. 4

35 J. Janssens, M. Fraioli, 'Research Results of Perform Europe', June 2022. Link. For further information please contact info@performeurope.eu, p. 51

By infrastructures we don't mean roads, railways, airports, stations, or ports. We mean the intangible foundations that are supporting the continuous reproduction of art collaborations and art itself. These can include both small and large networks, alliances, cooperatives, unions, and cross-border safety nets - self-organised structures or communities that pool resources to provide financial, legal, and emotional support in times of hardship, whether due to financial difficulties, political attacks, discrimination, harassment, or other hurdles. Smaller, topic-based networks can play a vital role in addressing specific issues, facilitating mutual learning on how to adapt to challenges, and inspiring new approaches to artistic work or advocacy.

These 'infrastructures' can also serve as models for sharing resources. One example is the Common Wallet project, presented at the IETM Focus Brussels meeting. This Brussels-based collective, which started in January 2018 with ten artists and cultural workers, shares a common bank account where all personal income is transferred, and from which they pay all their daily personal expenses[36]. Other examples include 'skill banks' and 'time banks,' which create shared pools of skills, competencies, and availability, as well as production houses offering various services, such as communication, administration, and advice on greening operations. Additionally, there should be ways to share materials used in the production of artistic work through various formats, such as cross-border membership-based storage, the exchange of physical spaces, and the maintenance of digital databases, to name just a few.

It is these kinds of networks, platforms, collaborative spaces, commoning practices and alliances that glued the art community together in times of pandemic and sustained the very much needed connections in times of conflict, pandemics, and political upheavals, such as Brexit.

It's not that these 'trust infrastructures' are non-existent - on the contrary, there are many initiatives and models being tested and created. However, compared to the time and money invested in making projects and over-producing new things with short life spans, the development of such infrastructures often occurs at the fringes of funding and policy attention. The focus on a project-based model is dominating funding programmes: even international cultural networks like IETM - which are themselves a sort of 'infrastructure for trust and resilience' - have, for more than ten years, been pushed into project-mode operations through the Creative Europe programme.

Investing in the development and maintenance of cross-border trust infrastructures and resilience networks would be an exercise in - or rehearsal of - trust and solidarity: values that are essential in broader societies spanning across and beyond borders. It would also serve as a means of grounding and solidifying the fabrics and foundations of working practices in the arts, and strengthening them in the face of global crises.

2. Shifting from transaction to relationship

Creating cross-border resilience networks and trust infrastructures represent a radical shift away from the model of transactional interactions, toward nurturing a shared value and practicing commoning, and, as a result, ensuring the sustainability of the sector's daily and long-term practices.

What's the difference between a transaction and a relationship? Relational connections are rooted, reciprocal, and rewarding, while transactional connections are temporary and self-serving. Time plays a key role in this distinction: in a transaction, partners contribute with the expectation of something in return, often within a short time frame; in contrast, relationships focus on achieving mutual benefit over the long term.

As we discussed in Belgrade, the current economic system has been forcing artists for decades to adapt their art to more tradable formats in order to fit market-driven relationships[37]. Indeed, in the performing arts, collaboration is too often structured as a transaction. For example, when venues and artists collaborate, the process revolves around buying and selling, delivering a performance (a product) to the audience (a consumer). This kind of interaction, if it ends there, has limited impact on communities and is not necessarily aimed at building trust between partners. The transactional model imposes rigid frameworks that restrict the possibility of setting shared goals and mutually supporting one another.

At the same time, both artists and venues often have values and missions centered around broader social and global issues. It is illogical that there is often little opportunity to explore shared interests, concerns, and aspirations - beyond the short-term contract, and to deepen relationships that would involve communities and allow to explore pathways for collective impact. Instead of focusing solely on buying and selling, partners could identify a shared goal and work together to grow a network of support, complementing and uplifting each other's resources and building resilience. Examples of alternative activities could be designing joint workshops for local communities, engaging with local civil society, developing resource sharing practices, establishing new platforms and networks, and more.

Striving for complementarity and generosity of contributing to a collective endeavor can also help tackle the scarcity of resources. Importantly, a relational approach fosters a fairer exchange of resources and helps avoid exploitative dynamics such as cultural appropriation or extractive attitudes toward people, places, and nature. Building relationships is an organic process but also an exercise of imagination, especially in times when we are pushed into transactional interactions. As one of the members put it: 'If there is no touring, what kind of international collaboration can we imagine? What would it look like?'

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36 Anna Rispoli - The Common Wallet, last seen 15 January 2025, Link

37 S. Danig, "IETM Report - Work & (in) stability", IETM, Brussels, December 2022, p. 3

Building relationships requires curiosity, openness, active listening and learning - as opposed to biased and assumptive behaviours. Genuine generosity - in terms of sharing resources, such as networks, knowledge, connections, spaces, finances and other assets, not expecting to trade them for something else but giving them for mutual benefit - is also a key ingredient of a mutually beneficial and strong professional relationship. Finally, as mentioned at the start, time is a crucial aspect. Any shortcuts or skipped steps in building a trans-border relationship may undermine it in the future.

3. Changing rules of the game

There is no denying that the world is profoundly unequal and unjust. Even access to an IETM gathering focusing on global issues - such as the green transition, fairness, or international practices - remains a privilege unavailable to many in the global performing arts community. Limited or no access to the resources mentioned above is one of the most evident barriers.

While it is often acknowledged that these resource gaps and injustices arise from broader global and systemic issues beyond the performing arts, we also recognise that the sector can proactively and continuously adopt practices that, on a smaller scale, help rebalance power and resources.

This underscores the idea that international collaboration in the performing arts, when guided by principles of justice and equity, can serve as a micro-laboratory for fostering more equitable transnational relationships across varying levels of privilege and power. Challenging and changing the rules of the game within the spaces and micro-ecologies where we have power is a way to resist the system and create ripple effects that contribute to its transformation. So, what can we do to foster fairness and sustainability through our international collaborations?

- **Imbuing climate justice.**
  One of the foundational principles of fair and sustainable collaborations is climate justice. This principle is based on the understanding that the responsibilities for, and impacts of, the climate crisis are unevenly distributed across the globe. Therefore, climate action must focus on protecting the most vulnerable populations and be grounded in human rights. In the context of international arts partnerships, climate justice entails several key elements: a nuanced approach to international mobility, the proactive democratisation of knowledge - through which various knowledge systems, such as indigenous knowledge, can be uplifted and placed at the heart of a green transition - and the creation of common spaces and the practice of solidarity. Moreover, art has a vital power in elevating silenced voices and unveiling suppressed stories on a global scale, thus challenging power systems. That is why due attention should be given to engaging with disempowered communities, who should assume roles of power or actively participate in creative processes and the shaping of new narratives[38].

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38 J. Baltà Portolés, I. Van de Gejuchte "Climate Justice - Through the Creative Lens of the Performing Arts", IETM, Brussels, November 2023, pp. 7, 9, 10, 15

- **Dismantling the gates.**
  It is crucial to conduct a conscious and proactive review at the inception of every project and collaboration - examining who is around the table, who is not, and what factors enable or restrict access. Proactive efforts to include underrepresented or marginalised voices can profoundly shape the very essence of the project or its aspects before it is even conceived and planned. This could influence where the project takes place (for instance, in a country of peers who face limitations in global mobility), what values and knowledge systems it centres around (such as placing indigenous knowledge at the heart of it), or how the budget is designed (for example, factoring in an assistant for a colleague with a disability). It is essential to proactively include the least resourced, marginalised, and censored individuals, but without assumptions or extractive intentions. Additionally, we must eliminate any possibility of gatekeeping within the partnerships, particularly in terms of budget control, providing knowledge and insights, and stirring directions of artistic development and innovation.

- **Dividing the cake fairly for all.**
  When it comes to the actual distribution of resources - such as the division of a subsidy - a partnership can adopt various models specifically designed to address structural inequalities. However, over the course of the three-year NIPA process and the Perform Europe journey, we were unable to establish a universal approach to defining what constitutes a 'fair distribution of resources'. Many members and Perform Europe beneficiaries have employed diverse models to address inequalities among partners from different countries, as regard to monetary remuneration. Some apply the same fee rate to all project partners, regardless of their country. Others choose the recommended fee from the country with the highest rate. Less frequently, some opt for the lowest rate. Another approach involves dividing the grant according to local circumstances, taking into account factors such as recommended local fees, minimum wage, cost of living, the level of cultural funding in the country, and the potential to raise additional funds nationally[39].

- **None of these models are perfect.**
  Each inevitably either overlooks key local factors (as with a uniform fee level for all) or fails to address the underlying injustices between countries (as with a system based on local circumstances). However, the need for a foundational and facilitating framework is clear. One possible solution could be the development of a set of steps for partnerships - a sort of a decision-making blueprint - to follow before embarking on a project. This process would include mapping each others' contexts and defining the specificity of the partnership, and based on this choosing among several adaptable blueprints tailored to their specific group, project, and the local realities of the different partners.

- **Making context central.**
  What can be promoted as universal in international partnerships is the principle of contextualising resource-sharing methods. This involves building both constructive awareness of and taking into account each other's circumstances and operating environments. Transparency and the creation of a safe space are fundamental for this initial step. It requires a thorough examination of several aspects that can guide future decision-making on resource distribution. These aspects include:

  – the local political, social and economic realities and situations of partners, both individual and country-specific, including those influenced by global inequalities and historical injustices
  – everyone's needs, agendas, and expectations in relation to the collaboration, and how the project may impact each partner in the future
  – the resources each partner can bring to the table, as well as each partner's shortages, boundaries and limitations.

4. Co-creating fairness through collaborative codes

The second step following the preliminary scan is developing an agreement, a collective guide, or a code of good practice specifically tailored to the partnership and project. It is essential that such a document is developed jointly, with equal contributions from each partner.

One of the fundamental elements of such an agreement or code should be the alignment of basic values shared by all stakeholders, which will guide the partnership. It should also establish a shared purpose for the project or collaboration, while leaving space to acknowledge the varied agendas, needs, and expectations of each partner. It is crucial that all partners articulate their own needs while also incorporating the perspectives of local communities, harnessing their local ties and knowledge. Key concepts and terms, such as 'fairness', should also be collectively defined and agreed upon. Another important concept is 'care', which is a valuable resource for collective work but can be understood and practiced in many different ways, depending on cultural codes and realities.

Furthermore, various decision-making matrices can be included in the agreement. For example, one could address how to collectively hold a space for differences that may arise, another could outline how resources should be shared and distributed, and another could address how to face unexpected challenges, including mistakes made by partners or external force majeure events. It is also crucial to discuss the aftermath of the project and how the collaboration will evolve once its formal lifespan ends - what support partners may need, how the project's conclusion could impact their local situation, and what the next joint steps may be.

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39 E. Polivtseva, "Fair Pay in the Arts", IETM, Brussels, June 2024, pp. 22, 23

Such agreements should be created with the understanding that they can be revisited and adjusted. As international partnerships are often a learning experience, some elements of the preliminary agreement may need to be tested and modified to align with the evolving needs of the partnership and individual partners. The concept of fairness may need to be amended if it turns out not to work for one of the partners, or if resource availability changes (which can occur with shifts in national and local contexts). Many participants in the Den Bosch meeting discussed how helpful it would be to have an external facilitator assess the validity and compliance with the agreement for the partnership.

It would not be legitimate or possible to create a unified set of rules or codes relevant for every cross-border arts collaboration. However, some very basic presumptions can be shared, or at least continuously promoted and discussed, in the interest of fairness and the sustainability of the arts, the people working in the arts, and the planet as a whole.

5. Claiming dignity for workers and a future for the planet

The profound precarity in the arts field, repeatedly highlighted by new studies, has numerous causes. One significant factor is the perception that art is not 'work', leaving artistic labor invisible within the broader economy. As Praznik explains, the invisibility of artistic labor results in its economic and social devaluation, and this further leads to the societal acceptance that such labor remains unpaid[40]. Another reason, as discussed by Abbing, lies in the nature of artistic work itself: artists' intrinsic motivations often outweigh their materialistic aspirations, leading to limited resistance against the devaluation of art as labour[41]. Finally, as discussed at IETM Belgrade, there is also a sort of vicious circle of fragility: as the field is already very precarious, art workers accept very low fees in order to simply survive and keep going[42].

IETM's study on fair pay concluded that addressing this issue requires a fundamental shift in mindset at multiple levels, including policymakers, society, institutions, and art workers themselves - all these levels identified as 'resistance points'[43]. When it comes to international collaborations, an additional layer of complexity arises: determining fair fees, navigating between transborder equality and equity and accounting for all available resources.

Before addressing fee structures and balancing them with non-financial contributions, partnerships must first establish and promote a shared definition and understanding of artistic labour. This involves reinforcing the view of artists as professionals and art as legitimate work, and promoting this perception beyond national borders. Equally important within a cross-border project is reaching consensus on what artistic labour entails: the planning, research, rehearsals, creation, production, and dissemination, but also meetings, fundraising, reporting, and more. The issue may not be solely about the size of the fee but first of all about recognising what constitutes work and which hours or days merit remuneration. Moreover, it is essential to cultivate a mindset where all aspects of remuneration are clearly addressed from the outset. Fees should be carefully calculated and fully integrated into both the project budget and design from the very beginning.

Yet, recognising art as work is not the only factor that can end precarity within the field. The solution is not only for each of us to start claiming a dignified reward for our work, but also to rethink the very nature of how we operate. Currently, as resources dwindle, artists and cultural workers struggle to maintain the same levels of economic sustainability, visibility, and professional activity. As a result, they become involved in a growing number of projects and explore various sources of financial support, all while doing more and becoming increasingly precarious. This exhausts the sector and nurtures practices that harm the planet - all in an effort to preserve our relevance and visibility in the reality of scarcity.

40 K. Praznik, B. Kunst, H.Abbing, "Which side are you on? Ideas for Reaching Fair Working Conditions in the Arts", IETM, Brussels, December 2022, p. 8
41 Ibid, p. 22
42 M. Fanny, "IETM Report - Work & disability in the arts", IETM, Brussels, December 2022, p. 3
43 E. Polivtseva, "Fair Pay in the Arts", IETM, Brussels, June 202, p. 8

What is needed, instead, is to align production levels with available resources and collectively embrace the idea of producing less. Some members describe this shift away from overproduction as a 'revolution' or a 'radical step'. Indeed, it requires both courage and determination to turn down opportunities and scale back one's presence, especially when others in the field may not share the same perspective and funders continue to prioritise 'deliverables', valuing scale, numbers, and efficiency. For some, the idea of producing less also feels like a slippery slope towards watering down the relevance of their work.

However, through Perform Europe, IETM's other research projects and many conversations with members, we continue to learn that there are ways to undertake this transition while enhancing the relevance of the arts and building a strong narrative around the shift toward fairness and equity in the sector.

First and foremost, it is crucial to rethink models of creation, production, and programming in order to extend the lifespan of artistic works, ensuring they are seen by more people over a longer period of time. This would reduce the exhaustion and poorly paid labour involved in fast-paced processes of creating and showcasing new art. It would also allow cultural workers to engage more people, rather than focusing on constantly offering new content to the same narrow slice of society.

Beyond reaching new audiences and building communities, it is also important to focus on engaging people in practicing and learning the arts, and transforming the tradable model of audience interaction into more diverse, practice- and process-based formats. This is yet again important for artists' rootedness in a place and building trust, but also strengthening the 'imagination muscle' of society. Engaging in the arts can significantly enhance well-being by stimulating a wider range of emotions and senses, fostering connection in an increasingly digitised world, and cultivating an appreciation for the process, practice, and present moment. It shifts the focus away from merely consuming and producing finished products or pursuing wasteful habits in the name of productivity.

Therefore, addressing the precarity of the arts requires a comprehensive shift in how we view and value artistic labor, both locally and internationally. This involves positioning art as legitimate work, ensuring fair remuneration, and reevaluating the unsustainable patterns of overproduction. By aligning operations with available resources and embracing models that prioritise longevity and community engagement over constant novelty, we can reduce the pressure on artists while enhancing the relevance and impact of the arts and adopting more sustainable models.

A Policy for Change

The role for the policy-maker

We recognise that as global and national dynamics evolve, more governments are deprioritising investment in international cultural relations, limiting their focus to 'branding' their nations abroad or boosting tourism. These shifts underscore the need for strong advocacy to reaffirm the value of inclusive, bottom-up transnational cultural collaborations.

This document, however, goes beyond advocating for the internationalisation of the arts. It speaks directly to governments and institutions already committed to fostering international cultural relations, who, striving for greater fairness and sustainability, are seeking fresh policy directions in today's complex landscape. What should these directions be?

To begin with, cultural funders and policymakers should recognise and support what the arts sector is already doing in response to the world's radical transformations. As noted earlier, certain focal points are shifting, with commoning and building trust infrastructures emerging as priorities. While solidarity has long been a value in transnational artistic work, it is increasingly taking precedence, surpassing traditional patterns of transactional connections in the arts. Policy-makers should focus on these emerging, often self-organised models of commoning and solidarity practices.

As Pascal Gielen, professor of sociology at the Antwerp University, stresses in his book *Trust. Building on the Cultural Commons*:

A common-proofed cultural policy (and regulation) can only be built inductively. A government does not act as an initiator or regulator but as a facilitator of civil initiatives and bottom-up practices. [...] An indicative policy means that the government creates space to [...] 'tailor' conditions so that commoners can set their own rules[44].

In short, a cultural policy in times of polycrisis and growing mistrust, both within societies and globally, must focus on two key elements:

- Strengthening the foundational resilience of the arts sector and its international dimension, rather than driving the field to prioritise visibility through growing number of short-term and output-driven activities.

- Acting from a place of support, partnership, and trust toward the sector, instead of exerting pressure or perpetuating stifling practices of control.

Here, we delve deeper into these elements by presenting the key pathways identified during NIPA's three-year journey, shaped by the realities of 2025:

44 Gielen, P 2024, Trust. Building of the Cultural Commons, Valiz, Amsterdam, p. 194

Strengthen the art biosphere

Amidst global uncertainty and overlapping crises, policy should naturally prioritise the resilience and sustainability of our communities and social foundations. In the arts, this translates to nurturing and supporting ecosystems that enable artists and organisations to collaborate, share resources, and engage with society, ensuring the enduring vitality and reproduction of art in its broadest sense.

Bojana Kunst, in IETM's publication Which Side Are You On? Ideas for Reaching Fair Working Conditions in the Arts, asserts that performance is not a singular act but rather 'a dense environment, where multiple practices are enmeshed and at home together'. She refers to this as the 'biosphere of a performance', encompassing the structured processes and operations that sustain the organisations and individuals involved. However, policy and funding often focus solely on delivering a single performance to the world, leaving the underlying fabric of this biosphere increasingly frazzled and precarious. Kunst advocates for cultural policies to establish more sustainable models of resource redistribution, ensuring balance among various elements and enabling practices to endure. This call is especially urgent in today's climate of economic cuts and diminishing public support, where 'less loud' yet essential practices - integral to the ongoing reproduction of life and activity - remain invisible and struggle for recognition[45].

As Kunst succinctly puts it:

> *Instead of individual developments, we need more collective knowledge and experiences, but also forms of support, which would recognise this need for collective reorganisation and for hearing the background noise of care*[46].

Kunst further highlights that 'projects somehow destroy the time for political alliances and complex social processes, and erase durations of alliances'[47]. As extensively discussed in various IETM meetings, the 'projectification' of the arts sector and an overemphasis on product over process exacerbate the fragmentation and atomisation of the field. This trend negatively affects artistic quality, audience relationships, the social rights and well-being of performing arts professionals, career sustainability, environmental responsibility, and the time and resources required to develop innovative collaboration models.

In times of hardship, art workers should instead embed themselves in a stronger and more resilient 'art biosphere'. Shifting focus and support towards more process- and practice-oriented activities - rather than project sprints and marathons often centered on producing end products - would not only make the art community more connected and stronger, but also benefit individuals by recognising them as 'human beings' rather than 'human doings', as aptly expressed by a working group at the IETM Brussels Focus meeting[48].

How can the shift towards nurturing the art biosphere concretely apply to international arts collaborations? Such an approach must amplify support for initiatives that ensure continuation and resilience of connections and partnerships - formats and tools that foster relationship-building, strengthen alliances, test diverse resource-sharing methods, promote ongoing knowledge exchange, and create trust infrastructures and resilience networks discussed above. Investing in broad infrastructures that support cross-border practice while enabling experimentation and deeper engagement with audiences is essential.

Such an approach is also based on proactively caring for partnerships, rather than solely caring for what these partnerships produce. In the name of caring for partnerships, time spent exploring local contexts and building mutual understanding should be valued and factored in, with no specific outcome expected. Moreover, some external facilitation can be initiated and encouraged. An external expert can observe and guide the collaboration, flagging potential tensions, injustices, and patterns that reinforce inequalities. The facilitator's role also includes helping the partnership understand their shared resources and assign value to them, based on the full scope of the project.

45 K. Praznik, B. Kunst, H.Abbing, "Which side are you on? Ideas for Reaching Fair Working Conditions in the Arts", IETM, Brussels, December 2022, p. 19
46 Ibid
47 Ibid, p. 17
48 V. Shishkova, "IETM Report Fair Enough?", IETM, Brussels, September 2022, p. 11

Resilience through engagement

The cultural policy of the 21st century, in a time marked by populism, individualism, consumerism, and societal polarisation, plays a crucial role in harnessing the power of culture to bring people together and equip them with tools for civic engagement. As Pascal Gielen asserts, 'culture is perhaps one of the largest common pool resources still available to us today', which is invaluable in times of growing isolation, mistrust and 'social deprivation'[49].

Widespread and meaningful societal engagement with artistic practices is essential for shifting the focus away from extractive habits of overconsumption in a hyper-competitive society and more towards valuing processes over products, reconnecting with each other, and building mutual trust. Moreover, art spaces and practices are known to be creative in allowing people to imagine, manufacture, and rehearse various things that are lacking or dwindling in real life: a dialogue with the 'other', democratic processes, antagonistic conversations, and more. Finally, giving art space and freedom to permeate every corner of the social fabric can enhance the collective appreciation of culture and, in turn, strengthen the resilience of the cultural sector against political, economic, and other local and global shocks.

Cultural policies should actively support the arts sector in establishing and deepening connections with local communities - whether neighborhood residents, local schools and hospitals, like-minded experts, or peers from other artistic disciplines. Community-building should not be seen merely as a characteristic of specific art forms but as an integral component of every organisation's functioning, just like production, marketing, and administration.

If communities are seen within art practices as key agents of social and ecological change, international collaborations can evolve toward translocal relationships. This means supporting initiatives that allocate sufficient time to connect with local realities, explore contexts, and focus on fostering local relevance. Therefore, cultural policy must support a shift away from a product-oriented and transactional approach in international art collaboration toward one based on relationships and commons, redistributing focus and support for activities such as research, exploration, building alliances and networks, designing models of collaboration, and more.

Foster redistribution of power

In cross-border collaborations that thrive for a better world, it is crucial to address injustices and advance decolonisation processes. Funding strategies and policies should support the art field in the redistribution of power in favor of those who have been deliberately and systematically oppressed and excluded - the quest highly relevant for the performing arts community today.

This requires a much bolder and more transformative rethinking of collaboration structures, rather than merely adding criteria such as 'fairness' and 'inclusion' to existing mainstream funding programmes, or simply requiring to include people from certain countries in the partnership. In doing so, funders must be vigilant to ensure that resources are not shifted in ways that replicate outdated governance and leadership patterns elsewhere, thereby creating new inequalities.

When working globally and aiming to engage underrepresented communities, it is essential for Western cultural funders to refrain from exporting and fostering unsustainable practices and approaches prevalent in their countries. These could include widely discussed approaches to creative labour, such as those focused on accelerating production and promoting hyper-mobility, as well as practices that are detrimental to the planet. On the contrary, funders from the Global North should explore learning more sustainable approaches from other contexts, particularly regarding indigenous relationships with nature, place, community, generations and ownership.

'We need a non-false green shift', urged Aili Keskitalo, Norwegian Sami politician, in her keynote speech at IETM Aarhus 2023, highlighting that Western governments continue to seize and exploit indigenous lands, but now under a 'green flag'[50]. As highlighted in IETM's study on climate justice, from an Indigenous perspective, the Western concept of 'sustainability' is nonsensical, as Indigenous communities' way of life has always been sustainable[51]. Indigenous peoples view humans as part of nature and are therefore mindful of reciprocity in all relationships and a duty of care toward all beings. This means that every individual choice has a collective impact, as it affects all living beings[52]. This and other Indigenous approaches can inspire and guide more sustainable and equitable transnational collaborations.

Furthermore, for cultural funding to move away from colonial structures, marginalised communities - such as Indigenous peoples, racialised groups, people with disabilities, and displaced artists - must be empowered on their own terms. Their lived experiences should be recognised as treasures and embraced in non-extractive, non-assumptive ways.

49 Gielen, P 2024, Trust. Building of the Cultural Commons, Valiz, Amsterdam, pp. 115, 232, 233
50 IETM - Climate Justice - IETM Aarhus 2023 Wednesday Keynote n.d., last seen 15 January 2025, Link
51 J. Baltà Portolés, I. Van de Gejuchte "Climate Justice - Through the Creative Lens of the Performing Arts", IETM, Brussels, November 2023, p. 17
52 M. Tenke, "IETM Report: Indigenous Ecological Knowledge I Insights from Outside the Arts", IETM, Brussels, September 2023, p. 4

Rather than being forced into predefined structures and dominant notions of power, success, quality, sustainability, and resources, underrepresented communities should be supported in creating their own spaces, amplifying their narratives, and taking control of their agency.

Access for marginalised groups can be improved by transforming the broader environment, such as education systems, regulatory frameworks, and infrastructure, while also rebuilding support structures. At the level of funding programmes, the redistribution of power means allowing and encouraging diverse partners to bring their full selves to the project and contribute on equal terms. It is about shifting from simply inviting 'margins' into the existing 'mainstream' to rethinking the very notion of the 'mainstream'.

Finally, people who are typically marginalised and unheard should be encouraged to contribute their systems of knowledge, notions of quality, and artistic relevance, and be supported to lead cross-border partnerships. Evaluation and selection committees, as well as governance structures for cross-border collaborations, should be fundamentally reimagined to ensure marginalised voices are meaningfully included in their design, rather than simply adding people from underrepresented groups in a tokenistic manner.

Politics of trust and partnership

The challenges we are currently facing, such as climate change, inequalities, conflicts, and rapid digitalisation, are shared challenges that require a collective approach to problem-solving. Therefore, instead of responding with top-down requirements and boxes to tick, policymakers and funding institutions must take on the role of supporters in the design of solutions. While still pursuing inductive policy explained above, policy-makers can also lead by example, providing support for the sector to learn, navigate complexities, overcome obstacles, and develop the skills and courage necessary to drive positive transformations.

For instance, when it comes to promoting fairness within an international partnership, the question may arise: how fair is the relationship between the funder and the beneficiary in the first place? As mentioned earlier, there is a need for an external impulse in the arts to make the sector's practices more just and inclusive. However, arts workers - especially those operating in complex environments across different countries and cultures - struggle with the idea that a funder can propose, or should impose, a unified concept of fairness that they would then need to implement within their collaboration.

So, what role should the funder play beyond merely giving money? To begin with, the funder should avoid advancing unfairness, for example, by distorting the balance within the partnership, giving too much power to the 'lead partner' or forcing them to assume disproportionately large responsibilities; installing exclusionary payment procedures (such as only one partner receiving the funds or excluding partners from certain countries from being paid directly); or imposing non-transparent communication flows. Funders should also move aways from pushing for fierce competition that hinders sharing knowledge and resources within the sector. Implementing these measures can be a challenge within existing funding programmes that are under-resourced but oriented towards large-scale outputs and visibility, and speedy production. Therefore, some profound rethinking of these very structures is needed.

Furthermore, why would the funder intervene in or govern how applicants distribute resources? The answer may lie in a lack of trust that partners will be fair to each other by themselves. A more productive approach would be to turn this around and operate from a position of trust recognising that partners within an international collaboration aspire to fair relations, but they need support in defining, calculating, and implementing what fairness means in practice. It may be burdensome for arts professionals to fully grasp all aspects of contextualising each other's realities and, especially, how this contextualisation should influence the practical distribution of resources.

The role of the funder, then, would shift from prescribing protocols and controlling their execution to providing applicants with sufficient time to get to know each other and helping them develop relevant roadmaps to define the parameters of fairness within their specific project. Funders' support can be practically implemented through actions such as collecting and analysing successful decision-making matrices from the field of international collaboration, gathering and pooling data on various aspects of local contexts, and guiding beneficiaries on how this information can help them develop agreements and practice codes for their specific collaboration. The funder can propose several basic blueprints for sharing resources and let applicants choose and adapt the one that fits best - or come up with their own. One of the questions in the application process could be about the reasons the partnership opted for a specific fair collaboration model.

Reframe the art & money relationship

Trust and mistrust towards the arts are clearly reflected in how funders understand, frame, and influence the relationship between artists and (public) money. This issue revolves around which activities are funded, how artists are expected to prove they deserve the funding, and how they report about its use.

But as such, the relationship between the artist and money is clear: in the world of the money economy, financial resources are essential for a decent living and for continuing one's artistic practice. Economic precarity ultimately leads to social, mental, and political precarity of the art field and prevents artists from developing a civic agency[53].

However, art workers tend to prioritise intangible values over financial ones. This very characteristic of creative labour, among other things, contributes to the field's precariousness. But if we shift the perspective, could this focus on intangible rewards serve as a basis for granting artists the trust necessary to receive a basic income from the state? Several studies have shown that artists benefiting from basic or guaranteed income schemes continue to work just as much as before and invest more in the quality of their work. Furthermore, those on guaranteed income are more likely to attract grants and awards, advancing in their careers.

Establishing basic income schemes for artists would have a transformative effect on the field, freeing them from the burden of (typically unpaid) subsidy hunting and allowing them to focus on their artistic practice. Their international collaborations would then stem from artistic relevance and values, rather than being distorted by an unbalanced distribution of available funding. However, when it comes to international partnerships, it is unlikely that most cross-border collaborations will consist of professionals benefiting from basic income support in the near future, and inequality in this regard will likely persist. Nonetheless, this should not prevent funders supporting international cultural relations from incorporating the most beneficial elements of basic income frameworks into their programmes. This means striving for 'no strings attached' funding - low thresholds for accessing the scheme, minimal requirements, fewer priorities to tackle, fewer boxes to tick, and reduced expectations regarding deliverables. Following the conclusions of research on basic income, this should lead to a more thriving and quality result.

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53 Gielen, P 2024, Trust. Building of the Cultural Commons, Valiz, Amsterdam, p. 140

On the contrary, nowadays, reporting and application tasks are excessively laborious and disproportionately focused on meeting funders' requirements rather than benefiting artists, organisations, or audiences. As budgets tighten and competition intensifies, activities like preparing funding applications and reporting is likely to become even more time-consuming, leading individuals to either work longer hours without additional compensation or allocate more resources to procedures that do not directly contribute to increasing compensation for art workers. This way, access to funding programmes can evolve towards being ever more exclusive (favoring the same rigid formats and requiring external consultants to be involved) and draining people's resources, taking energy aways from creating art, engaging with audiences, or building a meaningful relationship within a cross-border partnership.

What could alternative application processes for a cross-border funding scheme look like? First and foremost, they should stimulate the development of genuine, long-term partnerships, foster deeper exchanges, and enable collaborative work and bottom-up co-creation. Rigid frameworks, restrictive content requirements, and complex application procedures do not promote bottom-up collaborations. A more effective application mechanism would allow applicants to define their project as much as possible, starting with values, priorities, and purpose. This approach would enable artists and organisations to be proactive, bringing their ideas and needs to the table, rather than forcing them to fit into a rigid framework dictated by the funding stream.

Some relevant funding models often featured in IETM discussions include open calls for project pitches, two-stage applications (at least one of which may be remunerated), long-term structured support for individual artists and small organisations (not only large institutions), or subsidies allowing institutions to employ artists for extended periods instead of engaging them on project-specific contracts. Other models include seed grants for testing new ideas and approaches, among others. Art professionals also recognise the benefits of random or semi-random selection methodologies (involving two different application steps). Even if not universally agreed upon, the advantage of relieving the arts community from the exhaustion of writing applications, forcing their ideas and aspirations into rigid funding requirements, and constantly competing for public money, is increasingly discussed as essential.

Another essential element in this story is that policy-makers and funding institutions have an enormous role to play in promoting and treating art as work and artists as workers. There are several tasks they can play in this field: making fair pay a criteria - supported by additional budget specifically dedicated to increasing fees; stimulating exchange of information and self-organisation towards collective bargaining within the sector; and finally championing transparency around working practices, boosting overall awareness, and helping the sector to reach a shared understanding.

Rethink impact

An area crucial for revolutionising the relationship between the fund, the funder, and the beneficiary is evaluation. This process aims to understand and assess the impact of the funded initiative, raising vital questions about how impact is defined, who determines it, and the methods used to measure and report on it.

As many members testify, the current reality is that reporting processes often cater primarily to the funder's needs, typically defining impact in quantitative terms and short-term visible gains. Meanwhile, the longer-term contributions of the project to the partnership and local art scene are often sidelined in the laborious and energy-consuming reporting process. Key questions are often overlooked, such as: What did partners learn? How did the collaboration evolve? What takeaways can be shared beyond the beneficiary/funder interaction? Were there tensions, mistakes, or difficulties along the way, and how were they resolved? Was the collaboration fair to all involved? Did the project have an impact on local artists or is it likely to spark further ripple effects in the art field? These questions rarely form the core of the evaluation process, and this imbalance needs to be addressed. Evaluation should move beyond a technical operation to become a meaningful conversation between the funder and the beneficiary, reinforcing trust and partnership.

To start with, applicants should be encouraged to propose their own evaluation processes, with the central question: How will this assessment contribute to improving your work? The expected impact and evaluation questions can be collaboratively developed between the funder and consortium, depending on their shared goals. This approach turns evaluation into a reflection and learning process, creating a safe space without rigid expectations or prejudices.

Moreover, evaluation itself can generate impact beyond the partnership by capturing valuable knowledge and framing the novelties that emerged through the project. This is particularly relevant when exploring new models for fair and sustainable collaborations. For example, a key question during the evaluation process could be: Did the working structure provide a model for the future? Every project and partnership is unique, shaped by specific artistic aspirations, values, and the diverse contexts in which it is implemented. These factors create the distinct authenticity of each partnership. However, as our collective goal is to make partnerships fairer and more sustainable, we should aim to develop adaptable prototypes, working models, and structures that can inspire and be replicated in future collaborations. Funding schemes should stimulate the development of these prototypes, encouraging consortiums to reflect on how they have worked together and whether their approach can be articulated as a model for others. This approach would contribute to building cross-border resilience networks and infrastructures.

Finally, evaluation in translational partnerships should involve local communities - audiences, participants, partners from beyond the funded partnership, and local artists - in a constructive and mutually beneficial way. By exploring what the project meant to them and how it might trigger further ripple effects, the evaluation process can deepen understanding and strengthen connections.

Another crucial aspect is how impact is evaluated and by whom. It is important to recognise that we cannot evaluate a wide range of projects or even diverse types of partners within the same project, using the same lens. Different methods for assessing value are needed, depending on the intention, purpose, and context of the project and each partner.

Various methods may be more relevant than traditional end-of-project reports, which typically include meticulous descriptions and calculations. One alternative is developmental evaluation[54], a structured way to monitor, assess, and provide feedback while the project is still evolving. This approach is useful when inputs, activities, and outputs are not yet defined or may still be changing. Another example is the Most Significant Change Technique[55], where applicants reflect on the most significant change the project will bring to themselves, their communities, or their countries.

54 Better Evaluation - Developmental evaluation n.d., Developmental evaluation, last seen 15 January 2025, Link
55 Better Evaluation - Most Significant Change Technique n.d., last seen 15 January 2025, Link

Summary

The Six Axes of the New International in the Performing Arts

1. Rebalance powers

The global landscape of transnational art collaborations is profoundly unequal. We must approach our work with an acute awareness of the existing imbalances of power and resources, coupled with a firm commitment to equity and justice - values that are urgently needed in today's world. Rather than perpetuating existing colonial structures and investment mechanisms (merely adding priorities such as including underrepresented voices into a pre-established mainstream) we must co-create new frameworks.

These frameworks should empower marginalised and oppressed voices to shape the very foundations of the system. Diverse, lived experiences must be genuinely valued and embraced in ways that are non-extractive and non-assumptive. Instead of forcing underrepresented communities into predefined structures or dominant notions of power, success, quality, sustainability, and resources, we should support them in creating their own spaces. By amplifying their narratives and enabling them to take control of their agency, we can foster a more just and equitable cultural ecosystem.

2. Enhance and contextualise fairness

Making transnational art collaborations truly fair is not just an ideological aspiration; it is a complex practical challenge that demands awareness of contextual differences, available resources, systemic shortcomings, and historic injustices. Our pursuit of fairness in the transnational art field must persist despite the inequities perpetuated by larger systems.

However, it is unrealistic to create a detailed, universal blueprint for fair collaboration, that would anyway be unsuitable for every unique cross-border partnership or project. Instead, the focus must be on agreeing upon fundamental principles - for example, recognising that art is work, that every artist deserves equitable remuneration, and that everyone involved has an equal right to contribute their artistic input, values, perspectives, and approaches.

Equitable resource distribution can be achieved through a process of mapping each partner's contexts, defining the specific dynamics of the partnership, and then selecting from a range of adaptable collaboration frameworks tailored to the group's needs, project goals, and the local realities of each partner. Funders play a crucial role in this process by supporting beneficiaries in mapping contexts and choosing the most appropriate framework to ensure fair resource distribution.

3. Make climate justice a reality

Climate justice is a foundational principle of fair and sustainable collaborations, recognising that the responsibilities for and impacts of the climate crisis are unevenly distributed worldwide. Climate action must prioritise protecting vulnerable populations and be rooted in human rights.

In international arts partnerships, climate justice involves rethinking mobility with a nuanced approach that considers each professional and organisation's geographical, economic, historical, and political context. Western cultural funders must avoid exporting unsustainable practices, such as accelerated production and hyper-mobility, and instead learn from other contexts, particularly regarding sustainable relationships with nature and communities.

Proactive democratisation of knowledge is also vital, uplifting diverse knowledge systems, such as Indigenous knowledge, to drive a green transition. Additionally, the arts have the power to amplify silenced voices and challenge power systems. Engaging disempowered communities and ensuring they assume roles of influence in creative processes are essential steps in shaping equitable and sustainable narratives.
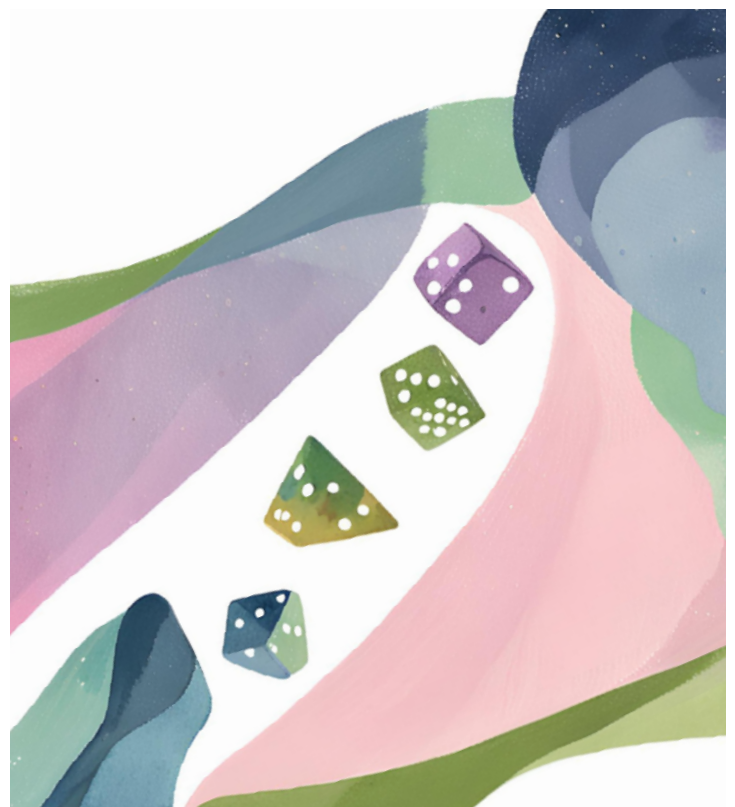
4. Make fairness ecological, and ecology fair

Policies that aim to promote a green transition and ensure fair working conditions for cultural professionals often operate in isolation. They frequently require applicants to retrofit standard projects with additional measures for environmental sustainability and fair practices. However, fairness and ecological sustainability are not optional add-ons - they are essential and interconnected principles. Yet they require a fundamental rethinking of how transnational art collaborations are organised.

For the arts sector, this means aligning production levels with the resources available and collectively adopting the principle of producing less. Furthermore, it is about shifting from transactional exchanges to building meaningful relationships. It involves adopting sustainable ways of sharing resources, and embracing slower working methods. Instead of overproduction, the focus should be on fostering networks of mutual support, resilience, and trust.

For funding programmes, the emphasis must move toward strengthening the foundations of artistic collaboration. This includes supporting long-term alliances and trust infrastructures in the field, and a sustained social engagement with the arts. The focus on visible outputs and short-term, product-oriented goals must give way to nurturing the core relationships that make the arts sector more ecologically thriving - as a professional field, in connection with communities and in relation to the environment.

5. Foster politics of trust

There is an alarming rise in mistrust within societies - between citizens themselves and between people and governments. Art, as an ephemeral yet profoundly impactful domain, also struggles to gain political trust. Spaces where artists can freely experiment and pilot new solutions, particularly in cross-border contexts, are shrinking. Artists increasingly face the burden of proving their impact through meticulous application processes and exhaustive reporting requirements, not to mention mounting political pressures on artistic freedom.

Meanwhile, the challenges we face today are inherently collective and demand united, collaborative action - not fragmented efforts eroded by mistrust and the energy-draining conflicts it creates. Policy-makers must act from a place of support, partnership, and trust toward the arts sector, rather than exerting pressure or perpetuating stifling control mechanisms. Equally, the art sector should provide constructive criticism towards policies, offer new ideas and models and seek to work with policy makers for change.

Politics of trust starts with rethinking funding structures. There is substantial evidence that continuous, flexible funding - granting recipients the freedom to pursue their genuine artistic aspirations (with basic income being an specific and illustrative example) - results in higher-quality work and thriving careers. Thus, funding structures, along with application and reporting models, must be reimagined to prioritise freedom and enable truly relevant, bottom-up initiatives.

6. Champion a system change

The responsibility for ensuring fair and sustainable art collaborations does not rest solely with the art sector or its funders. The broader system, shaped by prioritising economic growth over human well-being and eroding the planet, remains deeply problematic. However, we must move past the overwhelming notion of being trapped within an unsustainable system. Instead, we should focus on pathways for change: connecting communities, envisioning the unimaginable, and nurturing hope.

By inventing, testing, and piloting new models of organising social life, the arts can offer solutions for wider societal and economic challenges. Artistic spaces and practices are uniquely equipped to foster imagination and provide opportunities to rehearse and experiment with what is missing or waning in real life - such as dialogue with 'the other,' democratic processes, and constructive conversations across differences.

Furthermore, international collaborations in the performing arts, when anchored in principles of justice and equity, can act as micro-laboratories for nurturing more balanced transnational relationships that transcend privilege and power disparities. By challenging and reimagining the rules of the game within the spaces and micro-ecologies we can influence, we resist the status quo and create ripple effects that contribute to transforming the broader system.

Conclusion

Openness to the world lies at the heart of the arts and must continually be nurtured and reimagined to address the challenges reshaping our global landscape. These very challenges place tremendous strain on the arts sector, manifesting in public funding cuts, attacks on artistic freedom, and the increasing political instrumentalisation of the arts.

Despite this strain, the commitment to uphold the values of the arts across borders remains stronger than ever. The arts community is steadfast in its mission to foster global solidarity, resist local pressures, and unite efforts to tackle shared global challenges. This commitment manifests in efforts to build solidarity and cultivate relationships rather than engage in mere transactions. It also calls for actively rebalancing power dynamics, practicing justice and trust - qualities sorely lacking in today's world - and fostering awareness of how to distribute resources more equitably. Central to this vision is the continuous endeavor to make the art ecosystem itself more sustainable, through the global reaffirmation that art is work, and artists are workers, deserving of dignity and support.

By adopting such principles, the arts sector can aspire to create a more livable world where justice transcends borders.

For this vision to succeed, policymakers have a critical role to play. Rather than pushing the arts into an unsustainable cycle of rapid overproduction and 'projectification'; funders must prioritise supporting exchange and sharing of resources; commoning rituals and practices; strengthening the foundations of the sector's resilience; fostering cross-border trust infrastructures; valuing processes and practices alongside projects and products; and striving for a deeper and more overreaching engagement of societies with the arts. This shift in focus is not only more sustainable for the long-term vitality of the arts, but also for the environment.

Policy priorities today must include promoting economic, social, and professional dignity for art workers - no matter their location - and decolonising international relations by fostering balanced power dynamics in cross-border art partnerships. Policies grounded in trust in both art and artists are urgently needed to enhance the bottom-up relevance of transnational collaborations and to foster a more sustainable arts sector. If we fail to safeguard the international dimension of the arts today, we risk overlooking their unique potential to model and workshop trans-border trust and care for the planet. Such losses will reverberate in the near term and for generations to come.