

EDN Atelier: Tools for Transformation

Summary written by Carmen Amme

The immediate impacts of climate change are more visible than ever as we increasingly observe heat waves, flooding and the melting of glaciers. The voices of many scientists and environmentalists have already called out the dangers of the climate crisis. The demand for collective action is becoming more important in every sector, also in the context of dance and arts. The EDN Atelier 'Tools for Transformation' took place on 7-8 July 2022, in the context of the 'Cool Down' Festival of the Alliance of International Production Houses. It was co-organised and hosted by HELLERAU in Dresden, Germany. During this atelier, questions about our environment and sustainability, as well as how to connect artistic practices with climate change, were raised. It was discussed how to deal with those topics artistically, and in how far these pressing issues influence the artist-audience relation and artistic approaches. The invited guest speakers were artists and colleagues from theatres, public administrations and funding institutions. The participants, who were professional artists and cultural practitioners from the field of dance and performing arts including both EDN and non-EDN members, met in smaller groups to discuss specific topics or to engage in practical workshops to explore their movement in space or relationship with plants.

When discussing the pressing issues around climate change and sustainability, a feeling of helplessness often arises. The Eco Rider, developed by performance artist **Franziska Pierwoss**, is a checklist with practical and sustainable changes that can be implemented by institutions or productions, such as reducing energy and waste, and changing means of transportation, and helps to find a starting point to implement a change. The 'Lean Coffee' method, originally developed by **Jim Benson** and **Jeremy Lightsmith**, is a practical tool that can be applied in a democratic way to find out what the most important issues to be discussed in a group are. The Moving Ground project initiated by the Duncan Dance Research Centre in Athens, Greece, indicated a path to cultivate potential. The doors were opened through a local community garden and invited people from the community and the arts to connect to each other. Artists were invited to rethink their projects through the principles of permaculture: earth care, people care, fair share. Change that comes from the artist and the individual is a good starting point, but a guideline also must come from the political side, where sustainability has to be integrated into the funding structure. The Performing for Future Network - Sustainability in the Performing Arts proposed a manifesto that presents a framework for sustainability in the performing arts and could serve as a building block for creating a policy. All those topics were discussed and presented, and everyone could share their thoughts, worries, hopes and



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doubts in a safe and supporting space. (A summary of all resources and online links can be found at the end of the text.)

Rethinking Structures

When discussing the issue of climate change, tools to measure and evaluate greenness and sustainability are needed. The carbon footprint is a common measurement tool to assess how environmentally friendly something is. „At least in Germany, the carbon footprint in the arts is a blind spot. The data about carbon emission is lacking. We have no means to evaluate the carbon footprint that we as cultural institutions leave,” says **Sebastian Brunger** from the German Federal Culture Foundation. He develops new funding approaches, which include [a pilot project](#) for measuring carbon footprinting in cultural institutions. In other countries where the funding structure is organised differently, new approaches emerge on how to increase pressure on institutions to become more sustainable. In England, the distribution of funding is organised in a unitary way, as opposed to the federal organisation in Germany. „In England, more than 800 institutions have been supported since 2012 to reduce their carbon footprint with great success,” says Sebastian Brunger. Art projects are funded based on sustainability by the Arts Council England, which has led to 800 institutions reducing their carbon footprint by 23% ([source](#)). What is needed to make a change is the possibility to gather comprehensive knowledge about the carbon footprint in our daily working environment, as well as a robust framework that sets the policy. Additionally, ecological matters must be implemented on a larger scale into the funding system. „Carbon footprinting should be a requirement for funding,” says Sebastian Brunger and therefore launched the program [Zero](#) to support artistic productions that try out sustainable performance and work on a low carbon footprint. Some people might oppose the idea that the freedom of art could be restricted if sustainability and ecological matters are considered in artistic work. „However, it only restricts an imagined freedom, because we will face problems that are even more restricting if we do nothing,” says Sebastian Brunger. If the dance and art sector doesn’t act, they will also face a credibility problem, because it is important to practise what you preach. The dance and art sector will also face the practical problem of rising carbon prices which will make artistic work more expensive in the future. „If we act now, we can shape the changes and define how they will happen. If we wait too long the decision will be taken away from us and we can only adapt,” concludes Sebastian Brunger.

A Practical Approach

When tackling issues around climate change, one of the very common experiences is to feel overwhelmed because there are too many things one could focus on. To find a starting point, Franziska Pierwoss, Berlin-based installation and performance artist, developed a tool to start working sustainably in organisations, institutions, and personal work. The [Eco Rider](#) (only available in German, English version is being developed) focuses on ecological sustainability and looks at the most important questions in one go. „If we are honest to ourselves, whatever we do in the arts is not changing the overall carbon footprint drastically. But what we can do is to create public awareness,” Franziska Pierwoss says. „It starts with the small things, like having recycled paper towels in public bathrooms. This leads to other people noticing that change. If many public institutions do this as well, then the awareness of the public will change.”

Another practical example for increasing public awareness would be to hang a sheet of paper next to the entrance and let every guest write down the mode of transport that they used to get to the performance.

The Eco Rider presents practical ideas for artistic work and institutions to become more sustainable and raise public awareness. Energy is among the most important sections in the Eco Rider. When planning shows and tours, artists often plan double energy and generators, just to be sure. „But if you take the time to think everything through and plan carefully, then you can reduce your energy needs and consumption,” says Franziska Pierwoss. But awareness needs to be raised about all the possibilities of energy reduction. Transport is another important section in the Eco Rider, because it has the largest impact on the carbon footprint. Not only the means of transportation that the audience uses to get to the show has to be considered, but also artists travelling and touring themselves increase the carbon footprint. To quit travelling seems not feasible within the artistic community, because meeting other artists and exchanging ideas is a crucial part of artistic work and the development of ideas. One approach to address this problem is to enrich the time that an artist has at a place when travelling, which could be done through hosting a workshop or a masterclass, do more shows or combine it with a residency. „It’s also the artists responsibility to contribute to discussions about sustainability. The artist could unpack other skills to make the most out of a stay at a different place,” says **Kieron Jina**, freelance choreographer based in Barcelona, Spain. „As an artist I would love to stay longer, but it’s more complicated for the organisation, also from a financial point. What makes it even harder is that there is no support system for sustainable travel in Bulgaria,” says **Karina Ilieva**, cultural manager at Varna Dance Theater in Varna, Bulgaria.



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During her 90-minute workshop, Franziska Pierwoss asked the participants to get up if they have the possibility to get their power from sustainable sources. Most people got up, but participants from Bulgaria and Hungary did not. This shows that even within Europe there is an imbalance between the resources we have and the possibilities that result from that. Already the ability to make a sustainable choice is a valuable privilege, and we should remember that.

One idea that emerged during the group discussion was to create a point system where each institution collects points to balance out environmentally disadvantageous behaviour with sustainable behaviour, because it is inevitable in some situations to take a flight. If an artist takes the train, the institution gains travel points that can be used for other people from the institution that must travel by plane. This kind of a system is very good for setting goals and evaluating whether these goals have been met and what could be worked on. Compensation is a widely used tool to raise awareness about more sustainable behaviour. When flying is unavoidable, there is the possibility to compensate for CO2 emissions by donating money to organisations or projects supporting sustainability. However, compensation can be tricky, because often large flight companies offer this as a greenwashing method. A reliable source is [atmosfair](#), a German non-profit organisation that calculates how much compensation is necessary for a flight.

The donations go into green projects and the development of renewable energy. Another consistent approach is that of HELLERAU Dresden. There, employees and artists are not allowed to fly within Germany. When discussing such compensation tools, it quickly becomes obvious that sustainable behaviour costs money. Compensating for a round-trip flight from Berlin to Rio de Janeiro is worth about 150 Euros. Producing and working sustainably is a commitment that artists must make and that must be implemented into the funding structure as well.

A Tool for Transformation

When thinking about climate change and sustainability, we quickly feel overwhelmed and helpless. What is needed is a starting point, and that implies setting priorities. In a group workshop, **Rosa Müller**, artistic project coordinator at HELLERAU, Dresden, introduced '[Lean Coffee](#)', originally developed by Jim Benson and Jeremy Lightsmith, coaches for more productivity and easy workflows. This is a method to generate an agenda of important topics democratically, to get participants discussing and increase productivity.

The first step is to make a table with the following columns: to discuss, discussing, discussed, and thoughts. After that, everyone writes their ideas about possible topics down on sticky notes, then each person gets two votes each to vote for the topic they find most important. Based on the number of votes, an agenda is created. The whole group then talks about the first topic for eight minutes. The person who suggested the topic starts, then others can react. After the time is up, the group democratically decides if they want to discuss the topic for another four minutes. The sticky note with the topic is then moved to the following stage in the table. When working on a project or collaboration, thoughts can always be added to the last column. This is a structured tool to speak and listen to each other, to figure out what is most important for the group and which problems concerning sustainability, or any other topic, should be tackled first.

One of the topics that was voted for to be discussed in the group was that of what it means to be in a crisis. Each crisis is shaping us, be it the climate crisis or the refugee crisis. We increasingly feel that we are in a state of crisis and chaos, but maybe chaos is the new state, because new things can emerge from chaos. “We shouldn’t fear the crisis, but we can use it as an enrichment of our artistic work,” says Karina Ilieva. A state of crisis and chaos leads to questioning the role of the artist. „We as artists are pushed in a role of conveying messages with a deeper meaning. Do we as artists have to change to being activists?,” questions Kieron Jina. Sustainability in the arts and dance sector is not necessarily about making a show or production about sustainability, but it’s more about rethinking our structures and changing our habits while considering our planet and our future.

From Crisis to Action

Many information guidelines about sustainable behaviour exist, but it’s up to the individual to become active and do something. Change needs a robust policy that sets the framework and the individual actors that make good examples. [The Performing for Future Network - Sustainability in the Performing Arts](#) started in 2001 and connects interested people from all over Germany to gather and share knowledge about sustainable work in the theatre and arts sector. Their monthly meetings are held online and interested people can join and connect easily via Telegram, Signal and a mailing list. During the [climate festival](#) ‘endlich’ from 17-22 May 2022, at Staatstheater Augsburg, Germany, the network had its first on-site meeting.

The festival was all about knowledge transfer, workshops, talks, performances, and discussions. The Performing for Future Network organised a 19-day relay race, where participating theatres and freelance artists were assigned a route and organised



creative interventions, discussions and events along the way from Kiel to Augsburg, Germany. They all finished at the '[endlich](#)' festival. **Stefanie Schwimmbeck**, freelance dancer based in Cologne, Germany, is part of Performing for Future Network and has been working on living a sustainable and waste-free lifestyle for the past 10 years. Together with other artists and professionals, she founded a working group that met regularly to develop the ManifÖST (Manifest für ökologisch-soziale Transformation in den Darstellenden Künsten/manifest for ecological-social transformation in the performing arts). This [document](#) presents a framework for sustainability in the performing arts and could serve as a building block for creating a policy. For that, the ManifÖST needs to be presented to politicians for them to see that the art sector wants a change. The final version is still being developed, and the next important step is to think further about how to spread it and how to get people to commit to it.

The ManifÖST defines 9 fields of action:

1. Artists must be educated about sustainable working procedures. They must be supported in spreading that knowledge.
2. The focus must be on long-term and structured funding instead of project funding.
3. Funds must come from the government, not from the artist or other private resources.
4. The socio-ecological transformations must preserve artistic freedom.
5. All institutions must switch to green electricity. Renovations must be done sustainably, and energy consumption must be optimised.
6. Waste must be reduced and separated. Recycling has to be enabled in all areas of the sector.
7. Mobility: International cooperations must be continued and mobility and travel guidelines are needed for that. Train rides should always be preferred over flights, and no flights within the same county should be allowed.
8. Catering: A completely vegetarian/vegan, seasonal and organic menu must be introduced gradually.
9. Knowledge, coproduction, communication: The cultural sector must more strongly encourage a reciprocal exchange of knowledge.

The climate crisis is a crisis of imagination, because the effects are observed in so many different areas. Through artistic engagement on stage, stories and emotional participation, an access to complex issues can be created. Institutions and artists create a public platform that can be used to make the audience aware of any important issue or

topic, but the more important part is to practise what you preach, because raising awareness is not enough if the productions themselves are still unsustainable. Institutions must be managed in a sustainable way by modifying energy and water consumption, waste management, and transportation.

Following the slogan „You can manage what you measure,“ Julie’s Bicycle developed the [Creative Green Tool](#) for the arts and culture industry. This tool calculates carbon emissions and environmental impacts of events, festivals, productions or institutions to set goals, evaluate and adjust the environmental strategies. A very similar [tool](#) for the German culture sector is still being developed, tested and expected to be launched soon by [Aktionsnetzwerk Nachhaltigkeit](#), an interdisciplinary network dealing with operational ecology and initiating and supporting projects dealing with sustainability. Such tools are a great start, but in order to be effective, the number they print out must have an impact on our behaviour. The European Commission developed a tool to support action: [EMAS](#) (Eco-Management and Audit Scheme) is a label that supports organisations to report and evaluate the impact of their actions on the environment. Organisations and institutions with a plan to decrease environmental impact must implement, monitor and evaluate their efforts in order to receive the EMAS label. Carrying that label is a commitment, because the institutions must stick to their plan and efforts in the long-run. An example that initiates change is the Ice Hot Nordic Dance Festival, which took place between 26 June and 3 July 2022 in Helsinki, Finland. On their [website](#), participants are encouraged to travel ecologically by train or boat, rather than flying. By showing land and sea connections to Helsinki on a map and sharing resources about finding a sustainable stay, they start to create a public awareness about ecological alternatives.

Earth Care, People Care, Fair Share

As the direct threats of the climate crisis become more pressing, action is needed and raising awareness in the art scene about those urgent issues becomes increasingly important.

Mariela Nestora, choreographer and researcher based in Athens, Greece, worked on an active gesture to highlight the impact that dance and the care of a garden can have on the individual and society. Together with an interdisciplinary team, she co-curated the project [Moving Ground](#) at the [Duncan Dance Research Centre](#). The Duncan Centre is located on a hill, with a direct view on the Acropolis and on the ocean. Because of a disused water depository, the grounds surrounding the Duncan Centre were suffering. Airiness, erosions and degraded topsoil characterise the area. Many people littered there, and no one took care of the area. By responding to the needs of the place, the landscape and the community, the goal of the project was to create a communal garden in the area through a series of actions, care, citizenship and nurturing a culture of sharing goods.



Moving Ground was thought to be a platform for dance, education, environmental and research activities by integrating the practice of permaculture: earth care, people care, fair share. Permaculture is the philosophy and practice of designing regenerative ecosystems and its principles can be applied to communication, exchange and organisation of our institutions and communities. Permaculture design can be used to better understand the world around us and transfer the patterns we see in nature to our social landscape.

The 12 principles of permaculture:

1. Observe and interact.
2. Catch and store energy.
3. Obtain a yield.
4. Apply self-regulation and accept feedback.
5. Use and value renewable resources and services.
6. Produce no waste.
7. Design from pattern to detail.
8. Integrate rather than segregate.
9. Use small and slow solutions.
10. Use and value diversity.
11. Use and value edges and the marginal.
12. Creatively use and respond to change.

The Moving Ground project focused on developing along four pillars: dance, education, community and garden. Permaculture is a design system, and in order to be effective, the design must meet the field. Focusing on the first pillar of dance, the following question was raised: A field could be a garden or a farm, but what if the field is the body? The notion of self-care is raised when looking at the human and dancing body as a field of work and production. Monthly workshops on dance and permaculture discussed the following questions: How do we observe, experience and interact with our dance community? How do we care for each other, and how does that shift yourself? What social impact do you intend your work to have? How do we keep on learning from each other?

The second pillar of the project concerned education. Intergenerational workshops called 'Bodies and Garden' were offered to the community to strengthen social relationships between generations through embodied experience. The third pillar of the project was the community. Gatherings with the local community were scheduled for every Sunday, either outdoors on site or in the garden, where the work outside followed the seasons and the weather conditions. The main aim of those gatherings was to share knowledge, apply hands-on practices, and explore the site from a new perspective to create a community, as this connection between people is necessary to care for a garden. The fourth pillar of the project was the garden and the space. A garden can open the door of an institution to the broader public and invite the local community to enter a dialogue. By taking care of a microcosm, a garden connects us with the world. The work around the garden must be in line with the seasons and requires care, persistence and patience. An understanding of possibilities and limits that natural materials and conditions pose are part of the learning procedure. Out of that, one of the driving questions of the project emerged: If we view artistic practice as a garden, what can we derive from the microscale that can be transferred to the macroscale? The communal garden brought people together to create, sustain and work with each other. By taking care of the multiple gardens involved in the project, such as the co-curation team, the artists, volunteers and the community, the garden also acted as a metaphor.

Local dance artists were invited to come up with project ideas to raise ecological awareness and to support the development of a communal garden. The artists were then inspired to rethink the projects they initially proposed through the principles of permaculture. „As a participating artist of Moving Ground, my first encounter with the permaculture principles affected both the concept and the creation process of my projects in multiple ways,” says Mariela Nestora. In the scope of the design of permaculture, she created the Fieldwork Scores. People often tend to overlook plants and take them for granted, and the Fieldwork Scores focus on strengthening our relationship with the plant world by practicing thinking and moving in the presence of plants. The leading question of this project was, if humans can form temporary collectives with plants and learn from each other. The scores offer different perspectives on relationships and interactions and address the body, movement and dance. Participants receive a score, the experience is captured through different mediums, such as text, drawings or movements. Another score can be received after completion. (If you would like to participate, please contact [Mariela Nestora](#))

Turning the once littered and forgotten place into a blooming garden changed the behaviour of those who used the place. Now they enjoy or even participate in the process of developing the garden or attend the art projects presented there. „I felt that my collaborations with everyone involved in the project was different, more friendly and

warm attitudes were developing effortlessly,” concludes Mariela Nestora. Moving Ground developed into an initiative rather than a project with a specific endpoint. It offered new perspectives and indicated a path to cultivate potential.

Putting it all together

As a wrap-up for the intense and inspiring 2 day-workshop, the whole group met together to share ideas and thoughts that had inspired and moved them the most. Everyone could then vote how important that idea was to them. The idea about an international wardrobe, where clothes, costumes and props from finished productions could be collected, inspired most of the participating artists and practitioners. Developing productions can check with those places if there are any materials and costumes that could be used for their production. Internationality in this sense means having fewer borders, as it is more sustainable to connect cities in different countries when they are closer to each other than cities in the same country. When a production is on tour, the wardrobe that is there on site can be used, so you use what is available in the closet. This prevents additional packages to be transported or even new material to be bought.

Another idea that was stuck in many participants’ heads was that of slow production houses. Artists that are present for around six weeks during a residency will have more opportunities to settle, connect to the local community and find a creative mindset to research and rehearse. „Often, there is now already a conflict in schedules on the artist’s side when planning residencies”, says **André Schallenberg**, programme director at HELLERAU in Dresden, Germany. This shows that time is a very precious resource, and that our values must shift to implement changes that are more sustainable both for the individual, and for the planet. Changing habits for the environment to behave more sustainable also means treating one’s own resources as finite.

Many participants therefore also saw great importance in the idea of being able to work where they live and not having to create more than one project per year. That way, the artist can explore more, make the most out of the local resources, focus on local problems and everything else that is there at the moment. However, staying local as an artist can only be a part of the work and the process, because creativity and progress need exchange, and, sooner or later, exchange forces us to leave our local space. This is necessary for artistic exchange, and the goal is not to get rid of that valuable resource. To make a step towards more environmental sustainability and implement a change, we have to rethink our structures and effectively use of the resources that are available. „Artists are sometimes so occupied with producing, that they forget to see what impact their work has. This is out of balance,” says **René Alejandro Huari Mateus**, freelance artist. Artistic work must reach the audience, otherwise it’s almost useless. The question

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is about how to find the audience, and how to reach and invite them. „We as an institution can also offer space to be used for other purposes than performance and art, through this we also invite the audience into our house,” says André Schallenberg.

The climate crisis is a threatening problem with impact in so many different places, and we often feel overwhelmed when thinking about it. Focusing on the local problems and solutions is therefore a good starting point. After sharing a great number of experiences, thoughts and issues, and discussing sustainability and climate change, the necessity for action is obvious. No one can and wants to continue with their work as usual after this atelier, and the dance and production sector is now at a point where pressure on politicians is necessary to induce a change.



An overview about all the mentioned resources

– A pilot project for measuring carbon footprinting in cultural institutions initiated by the German Federal Culture Foundation.

https://www.kulturstiftung-des-bundes.de/en/programmes_projects/sustainability_and_future/detail_1/carbon_footprinting_in_cultural_institutions.html

– A funding programme in the UK that supports cultural organisations in taking environmental sustainability.

<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/environmental-programme>

– A funding programme by the German Federal Culture Foundation that supports artistic productions that try out sustainable performance and work on a low carbon footprint.

https://www.kulturstiftung-des-bundes.de/en/programmes_projects/sustainability_and_future/detail_1/programm_zero.html

– Franziska Pierwoss' Eco Rider, a tool that helps to start working sustainably in organisations, institutions, and personal work. It focuses on ecological sustainability and looks at the most important questions in one go.

<https://darstellende-kuenste.de/aktuelles/bfdk-eco-rider-zum-download>
only available in German, English version is being developed

– A German non-profit organisation that calculates how much compensation is necessary for a flight. The donations go into green projects and the development of renewable energy.

<https://www.atmosfair.de/en/>

– A practical tool and method to generate an agenda of important topics democratically, to get participants discussing and increase productivity.

<http://leancoffee.org>

– A network that connects interested people from all over Germany to gather and share knowledge about sustainable work in the theatre and arts sector.

https://theaternachhaltig.miraheze.org/wiki/Performing_for_Future

– The climate festival 'endlich' from 17-22 May 2022, at Staatstheater Augsburg, Germany, which was all about knowledge transfer, workshops, talks, performances, and discussions about environmental sustainability.

<https://staatstheater-augsburg.de/klimafestival>

– A 19-day relay race organised in the context of 'endlich' climate festival (see link above), where participating theatres and freelance artists were assigned a route and organised creative interventions, discussions and events along the way from Kiel to Augsburg, Germany.

<https://staatstheater-augsburg.de/staffellauf>

– The ManifÖST (Manifest für ökologisch-soziale Transformation in den Darstellenden Künsten/manifest for ecological-social transformation in the performing arts) written by the Performing for Future Network. This document presents a framework for sustainability in the performing arts and could serve as a building block for creating a policy.

<https://theaternachhaltig.miraheze.org/wiki/Hauptseite>

– The Creative Green Tool for the arts and culture industry which calculates carbon emissions and environmental impacts of events, festivals, productions or institutions to set goals, evaluate and adjust the environmental strategies.

<https://juliesbicycle.com/our-work/creative-green/creative-green-tools/>

– A tool for the German culture sector that calculates carbon emissions and environmental impacts. It is still being developed, tested and expected to be launched soon.

<https://aktionsnetzwerk-nachhaltigkeit.de/projekte/pilotprojekt-co2-rechner-in-deutschland/>

– An interdisciplinary network dealing with operational ecology and initiating and supporting projects dealing with sustainability.

<https://aktionsnetzwerk-nachhaltigkeit.de>

– EMAS (Eco-Management and Audit Scheme) is a label that supports organisations to report and evaluate the impact of their actions on the environment, which was developed by the European Commission.

<https://ec.europa.eu/environment/emas/>

– A good example of a dance festival that actively encourages participants to travel slowly and sustainably.

<https://www.icehotnordicdance.com/ecological-ways-to-travel-to-helsinki/>

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– A project initiated by the Duncan Dance Research Centre that indicated a path to cultivate potential. The doors of the institution were opened through a local community garden and invited people from the community and the arts to connect to each other.

<https://www.facebook.com/duncandanceresearchcenter>

– The Duncan Dance Research Centre based in Athens, Greece, provides space for inspiration, experimentation and creativity among the dance community.

<https://www.duncandancecenter.org/en>

<https://www.facebook.com/DUNCANCENTERATHENS>

