



| Report

IETM

Multi-location Plenary Meeting

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A live meeting in pandemic time

Organised by the local members Liv.in.g, Associazione Etre, Fattoria Vittadini, Progetto C.Re.S.Co. and Effetto Larsen, IETM Multi Location Plenary Meeting's Italian Hub was presented live in Milan at La Fabbrica del Vapore on 1st and 2nd October 2020, with a two-days' programme of panels from external experts, working groups' sessions and talks, together with the digital sessions curated directly by IETM.

The meeting was possible also thanks to the support of Cariplo Bank Foundation and the hospitality of Milan Municipality.

The Italian Multi-location was attended by 65 professionals and artists from all over Italy, representing the larger of this experimental IETM event.

The aims of the meeting were:

- sharing updates about the current situation from the international context, challenges, opportunities and fundings for the cultural sector;
- discussing the most urgent issues within the arts after the complex spring we all experienced both at a professional and a social level.

As announced by the local coordinators, "first to be hit by the pandemic and still one of the countries that suffered it the most, Italy is facing a challenging time - and the performing arts sector was not spared". The Covid-19 crisis has in fact underlined some old weaknesses of the Italian cultural system, while making the performing arts professionals discover new possible models that can lead to long-awaited changes.

The Italian Plenary Hub, strongly desired to be on-life after a long period of virtual meetings, wanted to focus both on reconnecting and strengthening the relationship between local artists and professionals and the international community, and offering to newcomers a space to enter the IETM community to build a larger, wider and a more diverse Italian delegation within the network, as well as a stronger lobby in Italy on international topics in these exceptional historical times we all are facing.

Opening session: a dialogue between national and international communities

The central topic of the first roundtable was the relationship between the national and the international communities, together with the effectiveness of a multi-layered stronger advocacy to push the institutions in paying attention to the cultural sectors' struggles and proposals, even at a local level.

This opening session was in fact dedicated to the new members to introduce themselves, asking questions about the network and hearing from the experience of the "old" members. This first discussion strongly recognized European networks and IETM for their essential role: not only in supporting local battles, where the performing arts clash with the limits of a very specific local context (with often little recognition and protection of the artistic work), but also in providing models of inspiration and a space for comparison that can strengthen the Italian sector at a local level as well.

The international frame provided by IETM for the Italian members is identified as a fundamental support for local advocacy activities, especially in

these critical times.

The horizon of debate can no longer be just the emergency we experienced in spring (and that we are dramatically experiencing today), but the need for a paradigmatic change toward a better future for culture in a broader sense.

Cristina Carlini, IETM advisor, pointed out that the help of the international colleagues and the network is really crucial to not go back just the way we were before: a time when our work was not protected or valued, nor a time when cultural professionals had embedded the concept of "sustainability" in their habits and methodologies.

This needs to be a time of strong, definitive breakup: to be a network means to have more courage in making difficult decisions and the Multi-Location Plenary meeting aims exactly at being a place where both exchange opinions and act as a compact sector, facing our contemporary social context and challenge.

Panel session: digitalization, environmental sustainability, IDEA, European policies

Starting from the panel proposed by IETM on October the 1st and the issues brought to the members through the meetings of “Rewiring the network”, the Multi-location Plenary in Milan focused on relevant international topics not fully explored in Italy yet and that could be the center of the future change.

With the valuable contribution of external speakers, the panel focused on: the digitalization’s effects and potential impacts on the cultural sector (Luisella Carnelli, Fondazione Fitzcarraldo); environmental sustainability (Katia Costantino, Eco Reverb Sustainable Consultancy Agency); diversity, gender equality, access to culture (Giorgia Ohanesian Nardin, Fra De Isabella and AlexMcCabe, artists) and ageism (Riccardo Bernocco, Clash of Schools); European policies and Recovery Fund (Gabriele Rosana, Culture Action Europe).

1. What did we learn from the pandemic: the lesson from the digital

Luisella Carnelli, researcher from Fondazione Fitzcarraldo, shared some datas about the effects of Covid-19 emergency on the cultural and performative sector (Osservatorio Culturale del Piemonte).

The economic losses have been huge and severe for museums, theaters, cultural institutions: we find ourselves in a “perfect storm” (as defined by Canadian sociologist François Matarasso) within which the loss of canonical orientation points of reference has opened to re-reading our possible futures.

This is a moment of great change: not only the cultural sector, but the whole world is profoundly shaken. If there will be no return to normality nor to the status quo, then we must learn to “coexist the present”, quoting the artistic director of kunstenfestivaldesarts in Brussels, Daniel Blanga Gubbay.

The present situation puts us in the perspective of reformulating the present towards a new temporary reality and a fluid future: we indeed face a set of possible scenarios and we have the power to choose our priorities. We do not yet have the tools nor the visions for an adequate interpretative approach about the recent past and today’s situation, but this crisis is an important opportunity for the cultural world to reshape meanings and solidarity agreements with other sectors: in this context, it’s crucial to redefine ourself, equipping with new tools and learning to set long-term goals.

What role can digital technology play for performing arts? What was the potential of digital tools during the pandemic? In Italy and all around the world we have witnessed the proliferation of spontaneous virtual activities: a proactive manifestation of the

cultural world that was a strong reaction to the closure of theaters and artistic spaces that quickly adequate to virtual standards and innovate the cultural products, in order to respond, with quality, to the needs of the audience (IETM meetings, for instance, demonstrated an amazing capacity of aggregation among its members worldwide experimenting new formats).

However, digital must be recognised as a problematic environment, with a specific language that requires adequate skills and knowledge. We have to think about a strategic empowerment of our current organisations’ staff to face this new challenge and exploit its positive impacts.

Something to learn in the near future is how “digital membership” differs from the physical one and how new business models may include monetising it alongside live events. Furthermore, rethinking membership for the digital means rethinking our relationship’s dynamics, our capability of activating empathic processes in a new “environment” and shaping a new aggregative dimension, in balance between the need to contain contagion and a rich and worth living sociality.

This can lead us to define different role of culture in our society, learning about recognizing new audiences and mediums of expressions and building different business and sustainability models of producing and proposing art.



2. It's not only about economics. "Sustainability" in the cultural contexts

Talking about sustainability, the experience of Katia Costantino, founder of EcoReverb Sustainability Consultancy Agency was a brilliant one to hear about. Her work in the field of live music and her long professional experience in the UK put in an international and inter-sectoral perspective the Italian current approach to sustainability in the cultural sector.

According to the definition proposed in the report "Our Common Future", published in 1987 by the World Commission on Environment and Development (Brundtland Commission) of the United Nations Environment Programme, "sustainable development" means development that "meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

So said, why do we talk about sustainability thinking only about economy?

The concept of sustainability is instead composed of three interconnected parts: economic, environmental, social, as three concentric circles that cross businesses, the environment, our human contexts of interactions and organization.

We are afraid of change, but the health crisis demonstrated to be indeed interconnected with climate change; more and more frequently we need to become conscious of our responsibility in taking care of reducing the cultural industry's impacts on the environment. Immediate actions are needed and artists can be both change makers and influencers for changing habits and behaviors.

Presenting the experience of Musica Che Gira, a group of music industry professionals who, in a time of crisis within the music industry, wrote a document about the difficulties the music industry was experiencing, Katia reflected on the figure of the Sustainability Project Manager within business companies and cultural organizations. This profile, frequently present in the UK context but whose competences are less recognized here in Italy, is a business consultant that focus on, for instance, reducing the carbon footprint generated by an event, the energetic conversion of an organization, and help in planning a greener budget within the production process.

The document signed by Musica Che Gira was also demanding the institutions to take responsibility in this debate, in order to implement and sustain these good practices on a wider level; support the



pioneer organizations that want to make a difference; share and promote the idea that environmental sustainability is no more a luxury, but should be a priority in the cultural sector as well.

3. Accessibility and inclusion: gender, disabilities, age

Sustainability from a social perspective bring us to the third topic, presented by the artists Giorgia Ohanesian Nardin, Fra De Isabella, Alex McCabe and by Riccardo Bernocco from Clash of Schools: gender equality, inclusion, accessibility to culture, agism and discrimination within the cultural sector.

Giorgia Ohanesian Nardin, traditionally trained in the Western ballet world and within the main dance networks in Italy and abroad, focused on the concept of "decolonizing the body and choreographic practices": this practice is at the center of her artistic research as a transfeminist and queer activist, sharing this political and esthetic engagement with the

artistic partner Fra De Isabella, founder of Strasse Company and Chiara Bersani's collaborator. Joined the conversation the artist Alex McCabe, from UK based Mark Brew Company, and Riccardo Bernocco, funder of the organization Clash of School that focus on accessibility for young professionals within the cultural sector.

They shared with the audience their thoughts about the lack of inclusiveness and the presence of accessibility's barriers for non-binary and non-western artists in the cultural production world, underlining how often the white and cis-gender majority maintain power structures: that generates both a problem of non-representativity of all the social groups, but also dominant narratives that subordinate some subjectivities in their stereotyped dimension. Starting from their personal experiences, those barriers can be observed from the very texts of the calls for proposals addressed to performers (which often exclude other subjectivities that differ from the male-female division), to the absence of translations that can make job and training opportunities more accessible to linguistic or ethnic minorities.

Contrary to "quotas" as a representation tool for those who are considered "minorities", Giorgia Ohanesian Nardin and Fra De Isabella described their practice on empowering their colleagues to a proper use of language, starting from sharing with them the personal pronouns that they consider preferable in a non-binary connotation.

The problem of representativeness and legitimacy to self-representation was also presented to the audience by Alex McCabe regarding to people with disabilities, analyzing equal opportunities policies in the dance field; Riccardo Bernocco spoken about the discrimination of the younger generations of cultural professionals entering the sector, often in Italy considered not reliable for a pure matter of age.

4. European policies for the cultural sector: what place for culture in The Recovery Fund?

Gabriele Rosana from Culture Action Europe introduced the topic of The Recovery Fund, trying to answer a question that has been at the centre of the political debate in recent weeks both at a national and international level: is there a place for culture within those funds?

Gabriele Rosana underlined the importance for those who deal with macro-politics and supranational policies to not lose contact with reality and with the territories, where the concrete implementation of the issues discussed so much between Parliament, Commission and Council at European level takes place.

He presented the interesting process of how the fund moves from the European decision-making level to the national implementation level, showing to the participants the crucial role that a bottom up advocacy could play in Italy.

He argues that the Recovery Fund (by type of intervention and functioning) is the most unusual tool we could imagine to be born in a political organization that has existed for more than 60 years: the Fund is really recognized as a new solidarity tool and it also has a profound symbolic meaning.

The Fund provides 750 billion between grants and loans to finance European States recovery from 1 January 2021 to 2023. Part of the Recovery Fund, the Recovery Resilience Facility, i.e. more than 80% of the Recovery Fund, will be allocated directly to member countries. The allocation criteria will be that of both the most affected areas and the most affected sectors (and among these is the cultural sector, as



datas collected through surveys and statistics show). Each State must present a detailed national resilience and recovery plan to obtain the RRF money. The dialogue between governments and Europe will begin on October, 15 to assess the national plans drawn up by member states. Europe has provided national governments with guidelines, flagship projects, such as “reskilling - upskilling”, “energy efficiency”, “energy implementation”. There is also the expressed indication of confronting with “stakeholders”: this could be the link to strongly demand to the Ministry the be involved in the process.

Although culture is not explicitly mentioned, there is plenty of room for immediate support for the cultural sectors within the guidelines given for the recovery projects. The cultural sector is also part of the macro areas of intervention identified: CAE expects the Commission to make this point when interfacing with national governments, taking into account the consultations with stakeholders that took place at European level.

In Brussels, the cultural sector is demanding the allocation of an express percentage of the Recovery Resilience Facility: the Parliament is a strong ally of this request. Italy, France and Germany are already declared themselves willing to devote the 2%, promoting a similar action to the other member States..

The money is there, cultural networks are trying to understand how and in what way these resources can respond to concrete needs: there will be time for a sectoral call to action until mid 2021, that is the deadline for submission of national plans.

Moreover, the debate on the working conditions of cultural workers continues within the React EU plan, an instrument to support workers and small and medium-sized enterprises: the cultural sector is requiring the extension of the redundancy fund to atypical workers, freelancers, etc..

With IETM and the Parliament, CAE is working on the artist’s statute so that there could be a proposal to improve the working conditions of the cultural professionals within the frame of a new interest in social policies.



Toolkit: a concrete proposal as output of the working groups

After the panel programme, the Italian participants identified several thematic working groups in order to identify:

- a precise topic of action;
- a practice to be abandoned;
- a practice to be implemented;
- a suggestion of policy.

All those inputs were then schematically collected on a Mirò board in a moment of public presentation of the works made by the groups. This wanted to be a concrete exercise with the aim of writing a concrete Italian toolkit and to collect ideas to face these challenging times with new inspiration.

WELLBEING:

what are the conditions that allow artists to work with sufficient care towards themselves and their audience.

To be abandoned: the common habit of saying “yes” to any working condition, for visibility or for fear of losing job opportunities.

To be implemented: the knowledge of working rights among artistic and cultural workers, in order to be able to demand adequate treatment.

Policy suggestion: for institutions, introducing criteria to assess the level of welfare that cultural organisations guarantee internally and externally; for the cultural organizations as a sector, providing themselves with a common and recognized ethical rating.

SUSTAINABILITY:

environmental sustainability within the cultural sector.

To be abandoned: excessive waste of plastic, excessive use of water. Importance to pay attention to artistic mobility's impact on the environment when programming.

To be implemented: informing and sensitizing artists, professionals and audience about environmental sustainability and the various possibilities to be more green. Investing in green energy in cultural venues; offering discount to spectators using green mobility; planning longer presence in the same place instead of one-day-only shows, also engaging more with the local communities.

Policy suggestion: taking into account environmental sustainability in calls for proposals, especially promoting lasting time over quantity, fostering green and slow mobility, giving support to green investment. Also, mapping the national context to understand the state of the art on the topic.

TERRITORIES AND COMMUNITIES:

the relationship with the local communities and the context of our action.

To be abandoned: not taking the needs of the community for granted, but listening and regenerating the relationship every time.

To be implemented: about the audience, actively engaging the community and taking it into consideration when proposing a practice/a programme. For the artists, creating process to get to know the community; providing materials about previous local projects; publishing about the artistic projects in each community. For the organization, sharing methodologies of community based process.

Policy suggestion: creating criteria about local community and territories, paying attention to the legacy of the projects and the enhancement of existing resources.

Toolkit: a concrete proposal as output of the working groups

ADVOCACY:

how to use the resources of the Recovery Fund.

To be abandoned: banning clientelism, avoiding the division between Ministries; eliminating our “psychological subordination” as cultural workers.

To be implemented: asking for a consultation table not only with Ministry of Culture but joined also by Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Education, with priority goal the Recovery Fund; filling the data gap about the sector; defining the role and functions of each part of the sector in the contemporary context.

Policy suggestion: establishing a new regulation within the sector following the definition of functions, related also to other sectors/EU and with long-term approach; evaluating through criteria matched with the new functions.

ACCESSIBILITY and DIVERSITY:

implementing accessibility and diversity within the sector.

To be abandoned: avoiding male/female binomio in every context, making this choice visible through communication about non-binary identities; not fearing of specify details in every document/context in order to be more clear and inclusive; dismissing age criteria.

To be implemented: awareness about the fact that there is always someone excluded, even in the best case scenario; technical rider including gender/diversity issue; communication about the topic and the choices made by each organization; asking partners to subscribe this practices when working with us.

Policy suggestion: funding a research project to define an IDEA toolkit to be implemented in Italy; funding the role of “IDEA ambassadors” to train the organizations of the sector; defining process of turnover for the key role of the sector, promoting the access of younger generation.

ARTISTIC RESEARCH:

to communicate the dignity of artistic research as a necessary part of production.

To be abandoned: the idea that research is a secret; overproducing to follow grants; incapacity to give an economic value to artistic product/process.

To be implemented: creating an archive of our works; defining and communicating my artistic research as a peculiarity.

Policy suggestion: defining artisti research as common value; funding an organization/project focused on supporting artistic research and making it visible, also interacting with other sector.

Italy

Milan

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