

Report

# Culture and sustainability

## The challenge of eco-conditions in Europe

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with EventChange



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# INTRODUCTION

## **The state of cultural policy at the European level and the question of eco-conditions, by Hermann Lugan (independent eco-advisor)**

For several years now, the European Union (EU) has been crafting a strategy on climate change adaptation. The speaker identified many key milestones: the Paris Agreement in 2015, the European Green Deal in 2019 and the European Climate Law in 2021. Concurrently, overall, European policies are reviewed in order to incorporate a climate change adaptation dimension.

Two significant developments in cultural policy are noteworthy:

- A 2023 report focused on ‘greening’ the Creative Europe programme, whose findings, however, remain inconclusive. A roadmap has also been drafted, which sets out formal objectives for the period between 2035 and 2043,
- The launch of the New European Bauhaus, which is the cultural translation of the European Green Deal. Nonetheless, the ecological objectives are still unclear, and there is little discussion of their impact.

Overall, although the approach to eco-conditions is not a central component of European policies, the EU legal framework can have an impact. One illustrative example is the selection of the European capital for 2028, namely the town of Bourges in France. In its bid submitted to the European Commission, Bourges followed the guidelines of the European Green Deal by outlining strong ecological ambitions for itself.

Yet, the sector visibly lacks support on these issues. Certain projects introduced by European networks are aligned with this aspiration, notably Shift Culture, which provides training offers for cultural leaders to help them face the challenges of climate change. IETM’s actions are also worth mentioning. They produce publications on these issues, for example ‘Climate Justice: Through the Creative Lens of the Performing Arts’ (November 2023).

In addition, across Europe, countries have also taken the matters into their own hands and implemented proven policies.

England is a trailblazer in this field. In 2012, the Arts Council took the step of introducing eco-conditionality in grants. To achieve this, they invested in an ambitious support plan for the sector, which was entrusted to Julie's Bicycle and entailed the construction of a joint tool for the sector, awareness-raising, training and support. Outcomes are measurable and highlight a 35% reduction in carbon emissions among industry players between 2008 and 2020. Since 2015, the scheme has also been introduced in Scotland.

The model is now inspiring Germany, where a national agency for the transition of the cultural sector was established in 2023, enabling the development of shared tools and resources.

In France, public authorities have set out several plans since 2011. However, financial support for the sector is insufficient.

These examples show that a support programme for the sector is a prerequisite before any conditions for funding opportunities are introduced.

## **Overview of the situation in Belgium, by Lili Brodbeck (EventChange) and Finn Van Dinter (Pulse Transitienetwerk)**

Pulse Transitienetwerk, founded in 2010, and EventChange, founded 10 years later in 2020, aim to support and accelerate the sustainable transition of the Dutch- and French-speaking cultural sector.

Both experienced a massive expansion of their networks in recent years, with an increase in the number of members, subscribers, participants in meetings and workshops, and requests for support. Such influence is testament to the cultural sector's ambitions in the area of sustainability.

Indeed, over the last decade, the Flemish cultural landscape has become a genuine laboratory of good practice, from small to large venues, arts and artists' organisations, sociocultural work and heritage organisations. For example, the 4AD concert club in Diksmuide is the first climate-neutral concert venue. The club spearheaded the adoption of reusable cups back in 1999, long before this became mandatory. Furthermore, its venue was built from circular materials.

In the French-speaking region, the sector also shows a growing interest in sustainable transition, which is, however, more recent than in Flanders. The work of several cultural federations in the field of sustainability is particularly noteworthy. To illustrate, the FEAS (Fédération des Employeurs des Arts de la Scène) has drawn up a sustainable action plan, and the CCMA (Comité de Concertation des Métiers des Musiques Actuelles) has included sustainability criteria in its industry contract. And this month, Aires Libres has initiated a reflection involving artists and companies on 13 topics related to sustainability, with a view to drafting a collective policy document.

Whereas sustainability is increasingly integrated into the cultural sector at various levels, the issue of eco-conditions in Belgian cultural policy is still in its early stages.

At present, only the Belgian film industry seems to have made some headway in the realm of eco-conditions, especially on the Dutch-speaking side. The VAF (the Flemish Audiovisual Fund) is strongly committed to sustainability. It has developed a methodology and practical tools for sustainable production: from transport, energy, catering, waste and materials to post-production. Filmmakers and operators applying for funding must draw up, implement and assess an ecological action plan. Moreover, 10% of the grant's allocation hinges on this plan. Throughout the process, they receive support from the VAF's sustainable development coordinator, who provides them with tools and inspiring examples.

For Wallonia and Brussels, it is also worth citing the examples of ScreenBrussels (which promotes eco-filming), Wallimage (which proposes a common model for supporting sustainable audiovisual productions) and the Cinema and Audiovisual Centre (which has just published a sustainability factsheet aimed at raising awareness in the industry).

Furthermore, the Wallonia-Brussels Federation (FWB) has also included references to ecology in certain decrees. This is particularly true of the 'Décret des Arts de la Scène' (Performing Arts Decree), which was modified in July 2022 and includes terms such as 'sustainability' and 'pooling'. Sustainability is defined as 'the lasting and sustainable nature of a project from an artistic, economic, social and environmental perspective.'

The challenges of eco-conditions in the FWB were discussed in a round table during the latest Forum on Sustainable Culture, organised in December 2023 in the city of Charleroi (Belgium), along the following main strands\*:

- Self-evaluation is not a solution, public authorities need to surround themselves with experts and define a clear framework for cultural operators,
- Setting a framework does not have to be infantilising, it can empower people and hence facilitate collective progress,
- Actors need tailor-made support and tools based on multi-year action plans,
- Public authorities and advisory bodies need training in topics related to the sector's sustainability.

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\* This round table on 'Eco-conditions in public funding: what prospects?' brought together Isabelle Jonniaux (playwright, curator, researcher), Rolan Van Der Hoeven (deputy director general, General Service for Artistic Creation), Samuel Chappel (director of Pastoo asbl) and David Irle (independent eco-consultant) as moderator. Cf. Report of the Sustainable Culture Forum 2023, p. 43-47 (in French).

# CASE STUDIES

**The case of France: the Nouvelle-Aquitaine region, by David Irle (independent eco-consultant)**

**David Irle outlined his work in Nouvelle-Aquitaine, a region in France with which he has been working for two and a half years. His endeavours have resulted in a roadmap and an eco-conditions strategy. His presentation focused on the performing arts sector.**

First, a framework was established in collaboration with the Nouvelle-Aquitaine region in order to build a strategy around eco-conditions. Its development followed several stages:

Upstream, there are a number of points to bear in mind, such as:

Contextualisation: different actions in urban and rural environments

Proportionality: differences in size and resources

Progressive nature: the need for an incremental process

Throughout the process, creative and programming freedoms also need to be protected.

Two questions must be raised in addition:

- Is this a matter of eco-conditions or regulations?

Eco-conditions apply to subsidised structures only. They are not the most impactful solutions, nor the ones with the best leverage. In the meantime, regulations can govern an entire private/public value chain, particularly on a European scale, in order to limit distortions. In both cases, there is a strong need to support the sector.

- Is there a change in standards or in values?

As we drive transformation in the sector, we impose standards. However, this goes hand in hand with a challenging shift in the value system. In Nouvelle-Aquitaine, the first stage was to educate the regional departments about the rationale behind the work on eco-conditions.

The next stage consisted in targeting priority projects, analysing where exactly we could take action within regional jurisdictions, including in areas not directly linked to culture. For example, in France, mobility is a competence of regional authorities. Finally, the objectives were identified and broken down into three areas:

Area 1: Develop a robust, crisis-resilient cultural sector:

- Develop sustainable mobility for the general public and professionals,
- Encourage eco-design of artistic and cultural projects.

Area 2: Support the ecological transition through cultural activities:

- Support the agroecological transition in New Aquitaine,
- Foster the development of low-carbon and responsible digital practices.

Area 3: Organise the conditions for the sector's ecological transition:

- Train for the skills and jobs of the future,
- Contribute to a flawless administration.

This overall strategy will thus transform and re-examine all regional schemes: what they support and how they support it. This is the case for the Performing Arts Intervention Regulation (Règlement d'Intervention Spectacle Vivant), which involves introducing eco-conditions. In this particular case, these are eco-conditions of means. Cultural players are asked to conduct a mandatory energy audit, collect data on mobility and have a sustainable food strategy by 2028.

The region does not have the skills to analyse these data. They are passed on to the agency responsible for monitoring cultural activities. This body examines them with several objectives in mind, including:

- Energy: steering the energy transition journey,
- Mobility: engaging with the authorities responsible for transport.

All this work is done in a collaborative manner. For each objective, working groups have been set up consisting of members of regional authorities and professionals. The underlying ambition of this experimental initiative is to disseminate the outcomes and best practices among national, departmental and local authorities.



## **The case of England, by Graciela Melitsko Thornton (Julie's Bicycle)**

**Graciela Melitsko Thornton outlined the experience of Julie's Bicycle (UK). Since 2008, its mission has been to mobilise arts and culture to take action against the climate, nature and justice crises. The non-profit is a pioneer in the area of eco-conditions.**

Julie's Bicycle works with a wide range of stakeholders, including the Arts Council England, Creative Europe and, recently, the British Film Institute.

Culture is key to the climate change response because it helps shift the narrative in a creative and innovative manner. This is why there is a need to engage the cultural community.

In 2012, the Arts Council England started making environmental requirements a condition of funding. These obligations have pushed professionals in the sector to take action on climate change at their own level. Yet, the sector has not been left to face these objectives alone. The Arts Council has partnered with Julie's Bicycle to support the various players.

In this regard, the Spotlight programme aims to reduce the energy consumption of the buildings of 30 organisations that own large facilities and work together to carry out net-zero, science-based target initiatives. Since the programme began, their electricity consumption has fallen by 19% and their gas consumption by 32%.

Julie's Bicycle's support role encompassed a number of areas:

- Carbon calculators,
- Review of the statements made by organisations receiving support from the Arts Council (almost 900),
- Case studies intended to promote the exchange of best practices,
- Provision of resources, organisation of webinars, technical support and more.

## **The case of Germany, by Jacob Bilabel (Aktionsnetzwerk Nachhaltigkeit)**

**In Germany, Jacob Bilabel is a member of the Aktionsnetzwerk Nachhaltigkeit (Sustainability Action Network), which promotes sustainability in the cultural and media sectors. The network is supported by the German federal government's Commissioner for Culture and the Media, and its mission is to support outstanding pilot projects and document and communicate the outcomes.**

From the point of view of Aktionsnetzwerk Nachhaltigkeit, eco-conditions are a prerequisite for competitiveness. The cultural sector needs to integrate these obligations: they are increasingly relevant, and the sector needs to be ready. The network aims to protect the world of culture, which will be put at risk if we fail to establish a clear and fair framework.

In Germany, around 2 million people work in the cultural sector, so many jobs could be at risk.

Therefore, the introduction of eco-conditions can protect these people from future transformations. Establishing a clear framework (legislation or eco-conditions) can create supply of and demand for sustainable innovations.

In addition, setting up eco-conditions ensures a safe space for artists to practise their art.

Finally, in Germany, cultural infrastructure is having a difficult time: prices have skyrocketed whereas public budgets have shrunk. The sooner we decide to face this danger, the sooner we will be able to understand how to balance and reduce these costs.

## **The case of Belgium: Screen Brussels, by Noël Magis (managing director of Screen Brussels)**

**In Belgium, the film and audiovisual industries have already made significant headway in eco-conditions. Noël Magis works for ScreenBrussels, one of three regional funds that finance audiovisual productions.**

Three levels of audiovisual funding exist in Belgium:

- The federal level: tax shelter,
- The linguistic level: the French-speaking fund (CCA, Film and Audiovisual Fund) and the Flemish fund (VAF, Flanders Audiovisual Fund). Both funds' interventions are mostly based on cultural criteria,
- The regional level: ScreenBrussels (Brussels), ScreenFlanders (Flanders), Wallimage (Wallonia). Here, funding is based on economic criteria.

Each fund has its own project screening processes. ScreenBrussels, in particular, has integrated a multipoint grid.

Since 2022, ScreenBrussels' grid has included 2 eco-bonus points. This may not seem like much, but the fund has a limited budget (€3 million per year) while demand is high. Therefore, every point counts, and these bonus points can make all the difference in the selection of a project.

Project leaders can obtain the 2 points in two ways, which can be combined:

- 1 point if a sustainable project management officer is included in the project,
- 1 point if the Brussels-based audiovisual company has an eco-dynamic label. This label, which was launched by Brussels Environment, a public authority, applies to the management of the company's facilities. They do not check the production process but scrutinise how the company is managed sustainably. As the label is awarded after only one to two years, an incentive has been introduced: the audiovisual companies that have initiated the certification process can obtain the extra point. Should companies located outside the Brussels capital region provide evidence that they hold an equivalent label, they will also be awarded the bonus point.

The idea is to make public support conditional on some criteria, although this is just the beginning of the process in the audiovisual industry.

Other ScreenBrussels initiatives have been launched:

- A reminder of best practices,
- An 'advice and resources' section on the website,
- Participation in the 'green shooting' working group, which brings together individuals at various levels of authority,
- Support for other initiatives, particularly by institutions of higher education, such as the Cinécolab initiative,
- Membership in a European network of 54 regional funds, which has set up a 'green region' sub-working group, and the signing of a manifesto which commits to accepting that expenses incurred in the territory in terms of responsible project management practices are eligible.

# ROUND TABLE

## Assessment indicators and criteria

Following these country case studies, a couple of questions were put to the various speakers. They focused on the nature of the framework to be established, the types of criteria and indicators to be applied, and the methodology and process necessary to ensure that policies embrace eco-conditions and related challenges in the most effective and relevant manner.

Several speakers took part in the round table: **Solweig Barbier** (Arviva, FR), **Jeanne Brunfaut** (Deputy Director General of the SGAM, General Audiovisual and Media Service, BE), **Graciela Melitsko Thornton** (Julie's Bicycle, UK) and **Jacob Bilabel** (Aktionsnetzwerk Nachhaltigkeit, GE).

The moderator was **Nadia Mirabella** (researcher, IT)

**Question for Jacob Bilabel: Which type of eco-condition do you think is an essential enabler of the transition?**

The first step consists in understanding the purpose of eco-conditionality.

During the presentation of his case study, he emphasised that there are two possible objectives:

- Ensuring that the sector thrives and avoiding the risk of job losses,
- Supporting the sector by creating demand.

Eco-conditions should prosper along both perspectives and be aligned with existing regulations. A 5-year transition period should be contemplated, after which a no-claims bonus (NCB) mechanism could be applied.

**Question for Graciela Melitsko Thornton: Could you explain more clearly the environmental criteria that you have defined? Which non-carbon indicators and criteria could be added?**

We use a selective framework based on the Net Zero trajectory, which guides our actions. However, our self-assessment goes beyond the criteria of carbon emissions and is based on the Green Deal policy. It includes biodiversity, the agro-ecosystem and the circular economy of materials, among others. We are also beginning to look at other aspects, such as the impact of digital technologies and governance.

**As far as collective intelligence is concerned, particularly in the UK and Germany, how is this reflected in funding? How did this process start?**

**Graciela Melitsko Thornton.** In England, it is the sector that introduced governance. From the very first Julie's Bicycle guides, our work was developed with a collaborative approach, sector by sector. Governance was promoted within each sector, the latest of which to join the process is the book industry. A collaborative mindset is needed.

**Jacob Bilabel.** It was not ideas that were lacking. And at this stage, our challenge is no longer having ideas but how to structure the sector. This is why we are working on key objectives covering the whole sector. Obviously, the process is not perfect, because cultural structures do not have the same size nor face the same reality. In addition, funding the sector's transition must also come from the budgets of other ministries, which is why we are currently looking at how to obtain financial support from other sources. The transition cannot be made from the budgets allocated to culture. The most relevant question is therefore: how can we get more money for the cultural sector?

**Jeanne Brunfaut.** In terms of collective intelligence, the Centre du Cinéma et de l'Audiovisuel de la Fédération-Wallonie Bruxelles has provided small-scale support for workshops run by the sector. Involving the sector was decisive: public authorities are powerless if the process does not involve the reality on the ground. The government cannot impose any solution on the sector. The process needs to build on co-creation.

To apply for a film fund, a form must be filled out. It includes a section on the environmental concerns addressed in the project. It does not impose any reference to direct impact but merely to a commitment to include some reflection on these issues in the process. Projects that show how they will address such challenges will receive more attention.

### **How has eco-conditionality already been embedded in the process?**

**Jeanne Brunfaut.** There are no such criteria at this stage, only the editorial part of the process is involved. Applicants need to expand on the measures aimed at mitigating their ecological impact. That is the only eco-condition that needs mentioning on the form. The idea here is to encourage rather than impose. Yet, eco-conditions remain necessary, and having a complete and coherent programme for the entire sector is still fundamental. Public authorities have set up a new department that is responsible for this.

### **You have said that you do not want to force anyone. Yet, the goals are very clear. How do you manage both?**

**Jeanne Brunfaut.** There is nothing compulsory about it, but it is strongly encouraged. The challenge today is to have the human resources necessary to provide support to the sector, which needs tools, ideas, best practices and guides, among others.

**Question for Solweig Barbier: what has changed at Arviva since 2022, when ‘Where to Land’ took place in Strasbourg?**

‘Where to land’ was a great example of collective intelligence. These moments of reflection help people develop their skills. Unfortunately, today, not giving up is challenging, and no one has the answer. The current growth model and its impact are unquestionably not sustainable. The community must reflect on degrowth. Today, inaction is a token of political courage. This should be transformed into the courage to act.

In terms of obligations, we need to collect data, measure it and be able to produce a proper assessment, because two carbon footprints are not comparable. Training must also become mandatory, particularly for management and advisory bodies. For example, the Centre National de la Musique (National Music Centre, CNM) requires that all teams attend a one-day training course on sexual and gender-based violence as a condition for receiving a grant. The CNM also requires gender-disaggregated data on wages.

**Certain concepts need to be connected, such as limited growth and the availability of data allowing for innovative insights. In your opinion, what should politicians keep in mind?**

**Solweig Barbier.** Thresholds must be set. What is more, in France, cooperation is a key element in discussions, so we have to find ways to finance it. People are given money to carry out projects but not to think collectively, which unfortunately is currently seen as a worthless way to spend time. However, such moments must be valued.

**Graciela Melitsko Thornton.** Europe is made up of remarkably diverse systems. Therefore, policymakers need to talk to each other.

**Jeanne Brunfaut.** In Belgium, the various regional and federal funds cooperate in some areas.



**Jacob Bilabel.** At the moment, following all the talk about sustainability, there is a perception that achieving economies of scale is possible and hence that reducing the cultural offer would be logical. Yet, an absence of culture is not sustainable, and there is clearly no such thing as climate-neutral culture. So, we have to find a balance.

**Indicators are not just a technical issue. Technical criteria can be set, though the economic paradigms must also be challenged. Are large concerts that bring in crowds by plane still sustainable?**

**Jeanne Brunfaut.** It is difficult to know what to give up. Also, this reflection should not be limited to the cultural sector. For the public authorities responsible for culture, it is very painful to have to make proposals along these lines.

**Solweig Barbier.** Such decisions must be made before the planet decides for us. Can culture still grow in economic value? The approach cannot lead to bankruptcy. Let us organise the downturn instead of looking at who or what is going to close.

# ROUND TABLE

## The role of European cultural players

Eco-conditions are thought out and introduced at a local and territorial scale, specific to each country and each context of the cultural sector. However, they must also be challenged and contextualised at the European level by focusing on the role and missions of the European federations.

Around this table sat **Anita Debaere** (PEARLE, Performing Arts Employers Association League Europe), **Martijn Winkler** (FERA, Federation of European Screen Directors) and **Simone Dudt** (EMC, European Music Council).

The moderator was **Nadia Mirabella** (researcher, IT)

**In your organisation, which eco-friendly behaviour has been adopted? What are its values and its struggles?**

**Anita Debaere.** Pearle is a European federation whose mission is to follow developments at the European level and ensure that its members can ‘digest’ them. It also focuses on supporting the main EU and UN principles. For example, it has produced a practical book on the Green Deal. The federation has also launched an overview of European compliance legislation.

**Martijn Winckler.** Eco-conditionality goes hand in hand with the concept of ‘ecological opportunity’. We must not be afraid of limits: without them, creation is impossible. FERA remains frustrated that the measures are very restricted to production and advocates for a broader vision. One question is paramount: what kind of stories do we want to tell? Our industry has a huge footprint, so we need to think about how we tell our stories.

FERA has produced a manifesto that outlines 10 rules for creating films within a particular genre. The first rule, for example, focuses on drawing a circle on a map with a 100 km radius within which the whole story must unfold.

**Simone Duts.** The European Music Council (EMC) is a network of music organisations. The EMC is based on the 5 ‘musical rights’ developed by the International Music Council (IMC). The sector can contribute to the debate based on these values.

The EMC is also reflecting on the EU initiatives in this area. What is the role of music in the New European Bauhaus policy? What are the criteria?

The EMC is part of the ‘Shift Culture’ project, which seeks to mainstream the sustainable development goals (SDGs) in European cultural networks. However, conditions will differ greatly from one structure to another.

**What criteria could be a relevant catalyst? And how can we ensure a fair comparison?**

**Simone Dudt.** It is impossible to say what would be fairer, but solutions need to succeed both in Sweden and Bulgaria. We are imposing many things, but the various stages have to be achievable. The situation can only change at the political level.

**Martin Winckler.** Innovation is about creating solutions that do not yet exist. By definition, introducing a regulation is unattainable before a concept itself comes up.

**Anita Debaere.** This is a sensitive topic: as an organisation, can we meet all the criteria when we have to comply with both European and local regulations? We have to work introspectively: the cultural sector is in the best position to define the criteria that would apply to it. It should be noted, however, that while we are focusing on these issues, the world is changing rapidly. The criteria imposed on other sectors could inspire us. We need to look at how we have developed in the past and how we want to move forward in the future. The idea is not to shrink, but to review how our sector develops.

**Let us imagine that eco-conditions are a reality. Would you be ready?**

**Anita Debaere.** It is a matter of process, and the only possible approach at the European level is to talk about process. How do you embed new behaviours in your daily practice? And how do you communicate with your audience?

**Martin Winckler.** The fund included a special bonus for LED lighting adoption. So we were not eligible for this premium. The process rests on dialogue. Qualitative criteria must take precedence over quantitative benchmarks.

**Simone Dudt.** For EMC, eco-conditions are more of a safety net than a fear.

# CONCLUSION

EventChange launched the debate on eco-conditions in the FWB at the Forum de la Culture Durable (Forum of Sustainable Culture) back in 2023. This one-day event at the Théâtre National broadened the scope of the debate by bringing together relevant players involved at the European level. It provided an opportunity to lay the foundations for the discussion, review concrete examples of case studies, discuss the issues, set a framework and reflect upon the limits.

The issues concerned remain complex, and the reality on the ground varies from country to country, from municipality to municipality and from sector to sector. It seems crucial to delve deeper and better apprehend the actual and concrete implementation of these eco-conditions by conducting a practical and thematic analysis. The dialogue must continue, and the examples in Europe must be mutually reinforcing.

It is now essential to keep on working on eco-conditions, these new milestones will soon become the norm. Rather than having to cope with arbitrary obligations, we need to address challenges by bringing together cultural operators, policymakers, managers, experts and specialists in order to work together and outline the contours of a fair and appropriate process.

The momentum is underway. We hope that other meetings will be organised, in different formats: working groups, sector-specific, thematic approaches (energy, mobility, etc.) and more. It is imperative that we keep on joining hands and build these eco-conditions for a fair and sustainable cultural policy.