

Our Stories of Change

VOL. 3

Our Stories of Change

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From 'Danse Macabre' at JK Opole Theatre.
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The Value of a European Approach

It is my pleasure to introduce you to the third edition of our ETC publication, *Our Stories of Change*.

This is the publication that brings you stories from ETC colleagues – artists, dramaturgs, directors and theatre managers – about the impact that participating in ETC activities over the past 12 months has had on them. It aims to bring a personal overview of our current programme of activities: *TRANSFORMATIONS – Recharging European Theatres and Audiences in a Post-Covid World*, which is only possible thanks to the support of ETC Members, and co-funding from the Creative Europe Programme of the European Commission.

At ETC we organise many types of projects and opportunities, split across three strands of activity: Artistic Collaborations, Professional Development, and Theatre Advocacy. Activities include large-scale international artistic projects (such as *Young Europe IV*); our regular ETC International Theatre Conferences; and cutting edge research on theatre across the continent ... Each of these activities also fits into one or more of our key themes of work: diversity, sustainability, and digital readiness.

As we get to the end of *TRANSFORMATIONS*, and we evaluate our activities further, we realise that one of the most important benefits of participating in ETC activities is the multiplying effect afforded by taking work and concepts to a European level. We also know that participating in just one ETC exchange

or session can have a transformational impact on a personal and professional level. So we have teamed up with our partners at *On The Move*, the European network for cultural mobility, to conduct a series of interviews to discover ETC's 'Stories of Change'.

In this edition we're excited to share:

- » The impact of working on a cross-Europe project to highlight invisibilised plays, through *Young Europe IV*
- » The importance of nurturing artists through opportunities for professional development on a European level
- » The impact of hosting the ETC International Theatre Conference and European Theatre Forum 2023
- » Why participating in the second edition of the ETC study on diversity and gender equality in European Theatres had a big impact on the "Marin Sorescu" National Theatre of Craiova
- » Thoughts from 6 member theatres on using the ETC Theatre Green Book as part of the goal to become climate neutral by 2030

I hope you enjoy reading the final 'Stories of Change' to emerge from our *TRANSFORMATIONS* project. It is important for us at ETC to discover the real impact of our work, and to share the learning so that others can benefit in similar ways.

As the world around us changes at an unprecedented pace, our stories keep changing. Enjoy the read!

Heidi Wiley
Executive Director, ETC



From 'Top Secret Research. New Constructive Ethics',
directed by Norbert Rakowski, at JK Opole Theatre
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Widening Voices and Stories on Stage

—
with
Teunkie van der Sluijs

Teunkie van der Sluijs, Head of Artistic Development at the Young Vic, explains why collaborating on ETC’s Young Europe IV project on marginalised voices has been so important for the theatre.

“From seeing the need to address something that’s historically been awry”. That’s how Teunkie van der Sluijs, Head of Artistic Development at the Young Vic, explained the motivation behind the extensive hours and the intense dedication poured into the Young Europe IV project. Young Europe IV ran from 2021 to 2024 and focused on the non-dominant voices in theatre. Nine theatres from eight countries participated in the project, resulting in eight new texts on diverse and inclusive themes written for young audiences. The playwrights were guided in their writing process by mentors from across the European theatre scene. According to Teunkie, the project was not merely about producing new plays, but about rethinking the very fabric of what constitutes the theatrical canon to be more reflective of the diverse world we live in.

From ‘No Exit (Lucky)’, the Young Europe IV production by Olya Voronkova and produced by Belarus Free Theatre and Young Vic.
© Kolya Kuprych

We are not doing our jobs well if the faces and stories on our stages do not correspond to those we see in our daily lives.

Joining the European Theatre Convention (ETC) in 2022, the Young Vic was already familiar with the network through various events. However, the Young Europe IV project, with its focus on addressing underrepresentation in playwriting, particularly for classroom settings, resonated deeply with the Young Vic team. This initiative aligned perfectly with their goal of broadening the scope of voices and stories presented on stage. Teunkie emphasised, “There’s a very important principle that we maintain at the Young Vic: we are not doing our jobs well if the faces and stories on our stages do not correspond to those we see in our daily lives.”

Teunkie explained that – besides the confusion that might arise due to their name – the Young Vic does not produce in-house work for young audiences. Nevertheless, they were interested in collaborating with the Belarus Free Theatre (BFT), a Young Vic associate company at that time, that had already committed to the project and had identified Olya Voronkova as the writer they wished to work with. Olya worked on a play about Ukrainian teenagers at the start of the Russian invasion based on interviews she conducted with some of them who had made their journey to the UK. The partnership felt logical and timely. “We thought it was a really exciting prospect for a play, and a very urgently needed piece of writing for the now”, explained Teunkie. Their work focused on advising Olya in her writing with the support of her mentor, the Berlin-based playwright Patty Kim Hamilton. The play was produced by BFT in Poland. So what is the added value of this participation in Young Europe IV for the Young Vic itself? Teunkie answered with a critical question to that: “What is your metric for success? Is it putting something in big letters on a poster or the facade of your building? Or is it reaching schoolchildren in Poland, who are seeing a massive influx of Ukrainian refugee teenagers?”

Teunkie explained that in their particular UK context, they know which diversity elements they need to be focusing on, but this might be different in each country, and their collaboration with BFT was important exactly for this. “In Young Europe IV we’re talking about writers who have been underrepresented because of their socioeconomic background, ethnicity, gender, disability, or historical contexts like the Soviet bloc. For instance, in the case of Olya, having a young female writer from Belarus is a massively underrepresented category,” he explained.

The Young Europe IV project included a robust research component led by the Invisibilised Plays Committee. This committee’s mission was

to highlight structural exclusions and ongoing devaluation of works by marginalised writers. They asked “What are we missing from our thinking of what the theatrical canon is, in our individual nations but also across the European theatre sector?”. Their research revealed significant overlaps in underrepresentation, primarily along lines of ethnicity and gender, although these varied by country. The result of this research is evident in a curated list of 20th-century plays from the UK, Germany, Slovenia, Slovakia, Cyprus, and the Netherlands that serves as an alternative repertoire, challenging and expanding the traditional notion of the theatrical canon. Teunkie underlined the power of collective action and shared learning from working on the European level on a topic like this: “There is strength in numbers and inspiration in seeing how other nations and theatres tackle underrepresentation. It’s fascinating to learn about plays from different cultures and to see what kinds of themes and narratives these writers explore”.

The Young Europe IV project exemplifies how theatres can leverage their platforms to foster cultural shifts. Teunkie underlined that by rethinking what they programme, develop, and showcase, theatres can address fundamental discrepancies in representation and the way that Young Europe IV theatres have been supporting writers of underrepresented backgrounds can cause a culture shift. “This has been our process, and hopefully to the other theatres in the network, this process is the thing that gets them thinking about what representation means for their country,” he concluded. ■



From ‘No Exit (Lucky)’, the Young Europe IV production by Olya Voronkova and produced by Belarus Free Theatre and Young Vic.
© Kolya Kuprych



Keshia Palm, a participant in the 2023 edition of ETC's European Theatre Academy programme for emerging artists.
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Nurturing Artists Across Europe

—
with
Isabel Andreen

Isabel Andreen, International Development Manager at Théâtre National de Bretagne (TNB), explains how an ETC Development Grant helped several ETC Members to nurture artists across the continent.

The Théâtre National de Bretagne (TNB) is a European Center for Theatrical and Choreographic Creation, with an expanded mission that includes dance and music, a festival, a cinema, and a higher school of dramatic arts. At the heart of TNB's initiatives lies the TRANSMISSION programme, set up by the TNB Drama School during the TNB Festival. It is a genuine opportunity for training and exchange and is aimed at young artists, both French and international, at the start of their professional careers or while they are still studying, as a commitment to lifelong learning. In short, TRANSMISSION is intended as a total immersive experience at the heart of the festival, during which the participants follow workshops, attend shows, conferences and artistic talks.

Isabel Andreen, International Development Manager at TNB, emphasised the advantage of being part of the European Theatre Convention (ETC)

We have to invest in the young. There are people that are still discovering the world, and we are giving them a legacy that they should use.

network. “One added value of being members of ETC was to share an important specificity that we have inside of our theatre, which is the question of the professional integration of actors,” she noted. TNB’s approach is distinctive due to its in-house national drama school, which prioritises practical artistic training over theoretical instruction. This commitment bridges the gap between academic training and professional theatrical practice.

Isabel recounts the inception of an enriching collaboration with Charlotte Orti von Havranek, Curator and Artistic Director of the Fast Forward Festival at Staatsschauspiel Dresden. This festival presents performances from all over Europe by artists who are still at the beginning of their careers as directors. The collaboration was facilitated by an ETC Development Grant in 2023, a scheme to support ETC Member theatres working with at least two other partner theatres on an international project. Charlotte had envisioned a special segment within Fast Forward that would bring young professionals from the ETC network theatres together for a workshop that would serve as a forum for students and young artists to watch performances, engage with European mentors, and exchange ideas. This initiative aligned perfectly with TNB’s mission of fostering artistic practice through immersive experiences and supporting emerging talent.

The ‘Fast Forward Festival Forum,’ as it came to be known, brought together ten young artists from various countries, including Slovakia, Romania, Greece, Germany, and France. Each participant benefited from the guidance of mentors and experts from their respective countries, fostering a rich environment of peer-to-peer learning and critical dialogue and sharing perspectives on theatre practice. TNB invited a graduate actor from their school for participation. And while the impact may have been small in terms of numbers, Isabel stressed the importance of creating spaces that nurture young artists’ growth and the necessity of forums, which not only showcase talent but also emphasise development. “It’s really about development. It’s about peer-to-peer learning. It’s about soft skills. It’s about discussion, conversation, developing a critical point of view in an international setting,” she explained. “We have to invest in the young. There are people that are still discovering the world, and we are giving them a legacy that they should use. It’s essential to travel to develop your vision and creativity.”

Isabel highlights that the impact of collaboration programmes such as this ETC-supported Festival Forum extends beyond individual participants to

foster lasting partnerships and disseminate innovative ways of thinking among collaborating theatres. She believes that organising these forums is not overly complex for institutions already adept at producing events, suggesting that the challenge lies in expanding the format to accommodate more participants and deepen the exchange. She underscored the importance of strong ethics in hosting such formats. “You really need to take care of the safe space that you’re creating for young people. If you create it just for the sake of creating it, it has no meaning. There has to be an event where you are immersed in something exceptional.”, she said. For Isabel, the transformation within the theatre where she works is tangible. Her colleagues at the Théâtre National de Bretagne (TNB) recognised the significance of the ETC network and valued the connections it facilitated. Their TRANSMISSIONS programme was projected on an international stage. For the graduate student who participated in the Fast Forward programme, it fostered links and connections with peers across Europe, offering a mind-opening experience.

For Isabel, this was just the beginning of a more meaningful and ongoing dialogue with European colleagues about the careers of emerging artists. “With Charlotte, we really developed a conversation beyond just the framework of producing this forum,” Isabel explained. They aim to continue this discussion within the ETC and explore ways to develop a format that can multiply such opportunities, enhancing support for young artists across Europe. ■

Isabel Andreen is the International Development Manager at Théâtre National de Bretagne/France (TNB).



Top: John Livesey, a participant in ETC’s Artists in Residence programme, speaks at the ETC International Theatre Conference in Nova Gorica/Slovenia in 2024. © David Verlič



Bottom: The full group of attendees at the ETC International Theatre Conference in Lisbon/Portugal in 2022. © Filipe Ferreira



Realising Our Strength Within a European Network

with
Norbert Rakowski

What impact does hosting an ETC International Theatre Conference, and a major event like the European Theatre Forum 2023, have on a theatre? Artistic Director of the JK Opole Theatre, Norbert Rakowski, shares his thoughts.

In Spring 2023, around 200 representatives of the European theatre sector gathered at JK Opole Theatre in Poland for the European Theatre Forum 2023 organised by the European Commission and curated by ETC. The Forum showcased the diversity and depth of the European theatre landscape, resulting in a new policy document, the 'Opole Recommendations'. This outlines a roadmap for policy makers to support the European theatre sector in the coming years and focuses on themes such as democracy, international collaboration, sustainability, and the working conditions of theatre professionals. In the same period, the theatre also hosted the ETC International Theatre Conference. What does it mean for JK Opole Theatre to have hosted these two high-profile theatre events? What change has it brought? What does it mean for the theatre world to associate a future vision of European theatre as reflected in the Opole recommendations with the name of their city?

*Gaining knowledge
from other countries'
perspectives has
been invaluable.*

Hosting the European Theatre Forum 2023 was a significant moment for JK Opole Theatre. It underscored the theatre's role, not only within its local community, but also on the European stage. Opole, a small town in southern Poland, holds a special place in theatre history thanks to Jerzy Grotowski, who founded a small laboratory theatre there in 1959. Grotowski's innovative approaches to performance training laid the groundwork for a unique vision of theatre. JK Opole Theatre proudly carries forward this legacy and takes pride in the fact that Grotowski worked here before becoming a renowned artist. Pride that comes also with a sense of responsibility. "And this is probably the hardest work, you know: to build the consciousness of our responsibility, of our work. This is really important for us," said Norbert Rakowski, Artistic Director of JK Opole Theatre.

Despite Opole's modest size—home to just over 100,000 residents—JK Opole Theatre is a significant player in the Polish theatre scene. "It's important to show that theatre isn't confined to metropolitan cities. It's worthwhile and responsible to do theatre for people in smaller areas like Opole. This can be an example for smaller entities to create another kind of theatre system," Norbert explained.

The local community's realisation of their strength within the European theatre network has been transformative. Norbert feels that there is now even higher expectation for what the theatre can achieve. But also they have acquired more experience in organising and curating policy oriented talks. "We hosted a lot of people from different countries and it was really nice and we were really prepared. It was, of course, an adventure, because, we hadn't organised before a conference and a forum like this", he explained. And this experience built further confidence in playing a role in initiating policy conversations within the Polish ecosystem. In March 2024, JK Opole Theatre organised a showcase featuring discussions on theatrical systems with participation from the ETC. The event facilitated dialogue about the Polish theatre system, particularly as the national regulations pertaining to theatre work are outdated from 1991. "I invited every Polish association, professional guilds, and people from the Ministry of Culture. We started to talk on a basic level: how can we change and repair our systems?", Norbert explained. The Opole Recommendations served as a guiding framework for these discussions, helping to propel JK Opole Theatre's mission and elevate its status within the Polish theatre ecosystem.

Norbert's role on the ETC board, where he serves as Vice President, further consolidates his efforts. Reflecting on his journey, he recalled his initial apprehension about navigating the ETC. "I remember thinking, 'I will be totally lost, I don't know how to swim in this ocean.' But gaining knowledge from other countries' perspectives has been invaluable," he shared. Rakowski is now committed to encouraging more Polish theatres to join the ETC, reinforcing the importance of international collaboration in enhancing the sector.

In the words of Norbert, "Theatre should be a little bit kind of moral compass for the people. So the most important thing is to figure out what for we still do theatre, for who we are doing theatre for and what kind of function we serve". ■





From 'Reconstituirea' by 'Marin Sorescu' National Theatre of Craiova
© Albert Dobrin

A Chance to Explore Our Diversity

with
George Albert Costea

The “Marin Sorescu” National Theatre of Craiova participated in both editions of ETC’s cross-Europe research study on Gender Equality and Diversity in European Theatres. Actor George Albert Costea reflects on the value of this research for his theatre.

In 2021, ETC published a major study on gender equality and diversity in the European theatre. Three years later, this study has been revised to produce more updated and accurate data and highlight changes that the sector has gone through in recent years and the results will be presented at the ETC International Theatre Conference in November 2024 in Liège/ Belgium. But is there something more about a study on diversity in theatre than an insightful report?

The “Marin Sorescu” National Theatre of Craiova participated in both the initial and current phases of this research. For the second round of data collection, George Albert Costea, an actor with the theatre since 2009, was entrusted with the task. George’s involvement with the European Theatre Convention (ETC) dates back to his participation in the ETC

We need to be examples of artists and theatre professionals who are engaged with these topics.

Summer Academy in Avignon in 2016, a pivotal moment that deepened the theatre's engagement with the network. Following this, he played a key role in the "European Theatre Lab Goes Digital" project, which ran from 2016-2018. His extensive experience with ETC made him the ideal candidate to lead the research on diversity.

This initiative, conducted in partnership with researchers at the University of Louvain/Belgium, represents a structured approach to understanding diversity in theatre, aligning with broader European Union efforts. George explained that the ETC facilitated this formal discussion: "It is the first exercise we do in a structured way, through research with a specific methodology. And it's also linked to what ETC is doing for diversity, and what the European Union is promoting," he stated. Although George himself did not participate in the first survey, he quickly recognised the need to engage with various levels and departments to gather the necessary data. The research questions prompted a deep introspection into the theatre's fabric, aiming to illuminate the diversity of its creators, workers, and contributors, and to address previously seldom-raised questions.

"I think that this study was the first time when we were invited to actually look at different dramatic authors, at the directors working for the theatre who are collaborators, and to ask these questions about the identity of the employees. This is quite novel. It is the first time that we are asking these questions to ourselves and to the whole organisation", remarked George. He also explained that some challenges remain, particularly in ensuring broader awareness and understanding. "For example, some of my colleagues needed more information about the different categories of gender," he explained.

Despite these challenges, there is a growing recognition of the need for diversity across all aspects of theatre, not just in terms of gender. "We are working with an equal number of female and male directors, although I am not sure about playwrights," he explained. "But it's not only about gender; it's about the diversity in theatre in general." George also emphasised the linguistic changes aimed at fostering inclusivity within the theatre. "In Romanian, we have masculine and feminine forms. In public debates or interviews, we try to mention both actresses and actors, female directors, and male directors," he highlighted.

George explained that considering diversity in theatre involves not only examining the current state but also reflecting on historical contexts and societal shifts. "There is a new generation of artists who are more preoccupied with these issues. There have been tensions worldwide and within Romanian theatre regarding these aspects, especially from the voices of women artists and women directors," he expressed. Moreover, he noted that recent discussions in Romania offer a new read on women's historical roles. "Researchers, historians, and theatre artistic teams are beginning to re-evaluate the role of various women artists during and after the Communist period," he added.

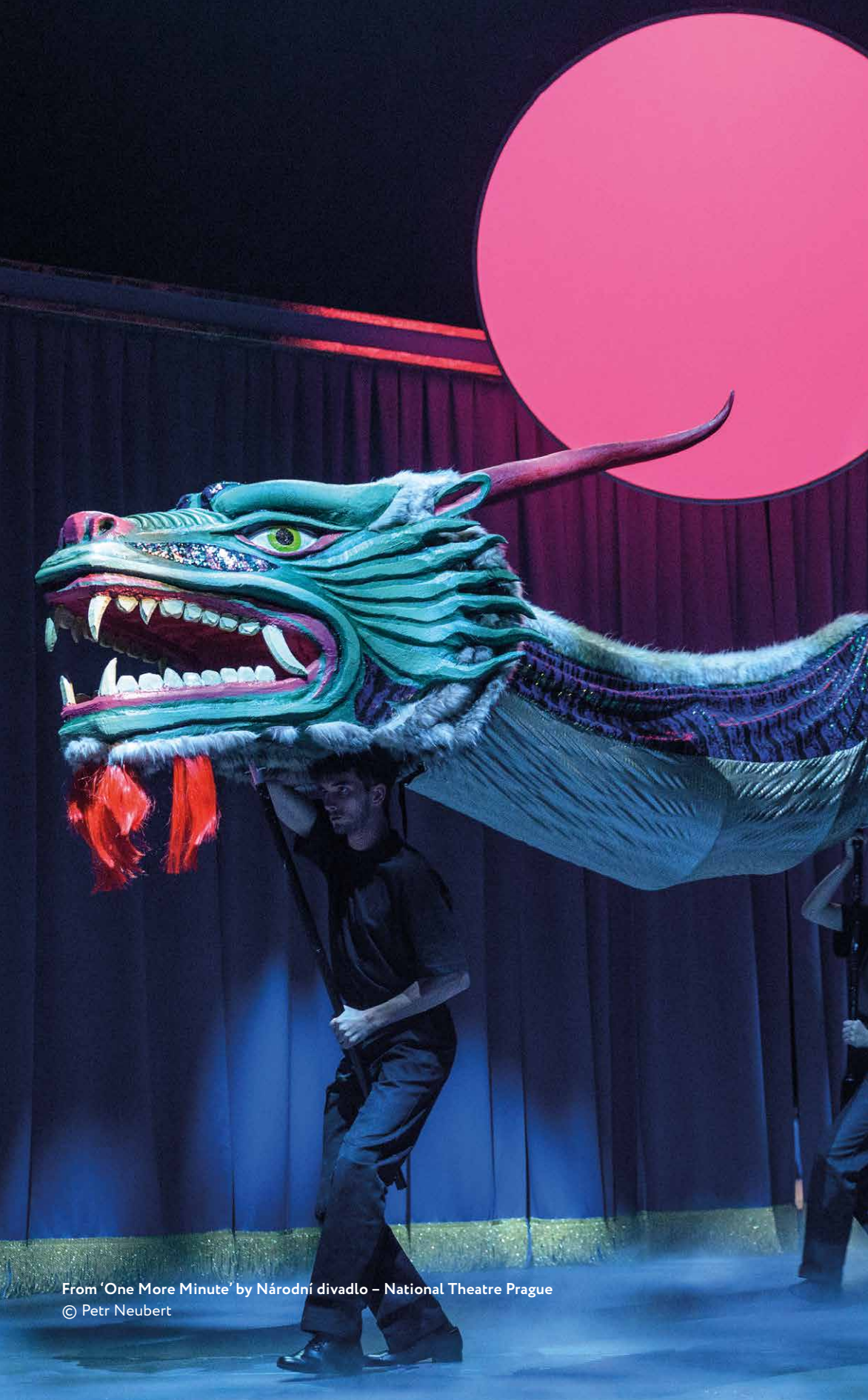
George acknowledges that while the National Theatre of Craiova is well-positioned to initiate these conversations, there are concerns about how far this reflection reaches beyond major theatres. "We are talking about the National Theatre, which is a big theatre. But I don't know what's happening, for example, in small towns or cities with state-funded theatres. I'm not sure how information about these changes reaches smaller theatres," he remarked. However, George believes in the necessity of the National Theatre of Craiova to lead by example and help raising awareness. "For the moment, I think that's what we need to do. We need to be examples of artists and theatre professionals who are engaged with these topics," he emphasised.

As the study progressed, it became clear that the changes needed are not isolated but systemic. "It's a very system-rooted problem," he underlined. In the evolving landscape of theatre, the ETC study represented an opportunity, urging the sector to reflect, adapt, and strive towards a more inclusive and diverse future. ■



George Albert Costea is an Actor and Project Manager at "Marin Sorescu" National Theatre in Craiova/Romania

From 'Reconstituirea' by 'Marin Sorescu' National Theatre of Craiova
© Albert Dobrin



From 'One More Minute' by Národní divadlo – National Theatre Prague
© Petr Neubert

The Path to Climate Neutral by 2030

with

Sanne Liebrechts, Serge Rangoni, Sarah Moeremans, Joachim Klement, Raquel Castells, and Martin Kukučka

The ETC network has pledged to become climate neutral by 2030. Here, 6 ETC member theatres share thoughts on using the 'ETC Theatre Green Book' - a new tool to help our network reach this ambitious goal.

In 2021, the European Theatre Convention (ETC) set an ambitious goal: to become a climate-neutral network by 2030. The 8-point Sustainable Action Code for Theatres adopted by the network called for changes across the entirety of the theatre's activity, including buildings and productions. Since then, the network has embarked on a collective journey of transformation, establishing a Green Theatre Committee, and collaborating with UK-based Renew Culture to launch the ETC Green Book - a new version of the highly-regarded Theatre Green Book, designed to guide theatres step-by-step towards net-zero emissions.

During the 2023/24 season, a 'focus group' of 9 ETC theatres tested and refined the tool, aiming to reach baseline sustainability standard by summer 2024. ETC curated various moments for these theatres to share

Applying the Green Book parameters did not compromise the artistic excellence of the production.

their experiences with the wider membership. The following text draws from one such occasion, during a session on the ETC Green Book (ETC TGB) at the the ETC International Theatre Conference in Nova Gorica in April 2024.

The path to climate-neutral network in 2030 is neither straightforward nor easy. It demands dedication, reflection and commitment at multiple levels. Sanne Liebrechts from De Toneelmakerij/The Netherlands emphasised that while everybody cares about the environment, embedding sustainability into an organisation and ensuring it informs artistic practice and decisions is a different process altogether. For Serge Rangoni, from Théâtre de Liège/Belgium, already involved in the STAGES project, being part of the first ETC TGB focus group complements their existing work and fosters collaboration with other theatres. He stressed the importance of engaging all artistic staff early on, noting that the ETC Theatre Green Book is an excellent tool for this purpose.

Sarah Moeremans from Het Zuidelijk Toneel/The Netherlands echoed the sentiment, highlighting the necessity of having a unified tool to propel the sector forward. She explained that although other valuable tools exist, advancing conversation and practices is challenging if theatres use different frameworks. “It’s like one is playing Scrabble and the other Monopoly—it’s very difficult to join the game together if we all use different tools,” she said.

Joachim Klement from Staatsschauspiel Dresden/Germany acknowledged the uncertainty and even fear that accompanies new information and the need to adapt theatre practices. He underscored the benefits of being part of a network and working alongside colleagues facing similar challenges. “What we forget is that we have to start, and it’s working, I think. It’s very helpful to have colleagues who are also having the same experiences, and we can be connected and in dialogue,” he emphasized.

Raquel Castells from Teatro Arriaga/Spain shared their experience of testing the ETC Theatre Green Book parameters in an in-house opera production, co-produced with two other Spanish organizations and directed by Calixto Bieito, the theatre’s artistic director. “We ensured that all staff involved in the production were familiar with The Green Book parameters and consciously applied them in the creative process,” she explained. This approach led to a production that exceeded their initial expectations,

meeting 'Advanced' rather than 'Basic' requirements. "Applying the Green Book parameters did not compromise the artistic excellence of the production," she emphasized. The production recently received national recognition as the 'Best New Contemporary Lyrical Creation' at the VI Opera XXI awards. Since then, Teatro Arriaga has developed a code of good practices for sustainable productions, shared with the artistic team at the start of each new project, ensuring that all teams understand and respect the theatre's sustainability commitments from the outset.

Martin Kukučka, Co-Artistic Director, Drama at Národní divadlo – National Theatre Prague/Czech Republic explained that while 2030 might seem a short timeline for such profound change, it is achievable. "You just need to find the people who will move forward, check on everything, search for possibilities, and inspire others. And when others see that it is possible, they start to be proud," he explained.

The journey towards a climate-neutral network by 2030 is challenging but not impossible. With tools like the ETC Green Book and a commitment to sustainability embedded in every level of theatre operations, ETC is paving the way for change towards a more sustainable future in European Theatre. Together. ■



Sanne Liebrechts is Producer at De Toneelmakerij/The Netherlands. **Serge Rangoni** is Artistic Director at Théâtre de Liège/Belgium. **Sarah Moeremans** is Artistic Director at Het Zuidelijk Toneel/The Netherlands. **Joachim Klement** is Artistic Director at Staatsschauspiel Dresden/Germany. **Raquel Castells** is Head of Internationalisation at Teatro Arriaga/Spain. **Martin Kukučka** is Co-Artistic Director at Národní divadlo – National Theatre Prague/Czech Republic.

From 'EinQuan' by Det Norske Teatret,
one of the 9 members of the ETC Theatre Green Book Focus Group
© Monica Tormassy

AUTHOR

Author and Researcher of this publication:

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ETC PUBLICATIONS

Our Stories of Change is a collection of best practices from European theatres by the European Theatre Convention. It is the latest in a long line of ETC's artistic research and publications on European theatre developments.

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**Membership as of June 2024*

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