



Sustainable Theatre



**Suggestions and recommendations for
publicly funded theatres, policy makers
and funders at the local, national and
European level**



This paper distils ideas and recommendations for Sustainable Theatre.

In 2021, at a General Assembly meeting in Graz/Austria, the European Theatre Convention (ETC) network of theatres made an ambitious pledge to become climate neutral by 2030. This was a commitment to work together to reach net zero emissions across all areas of work – specifically Productions, Buildings, and Operations.

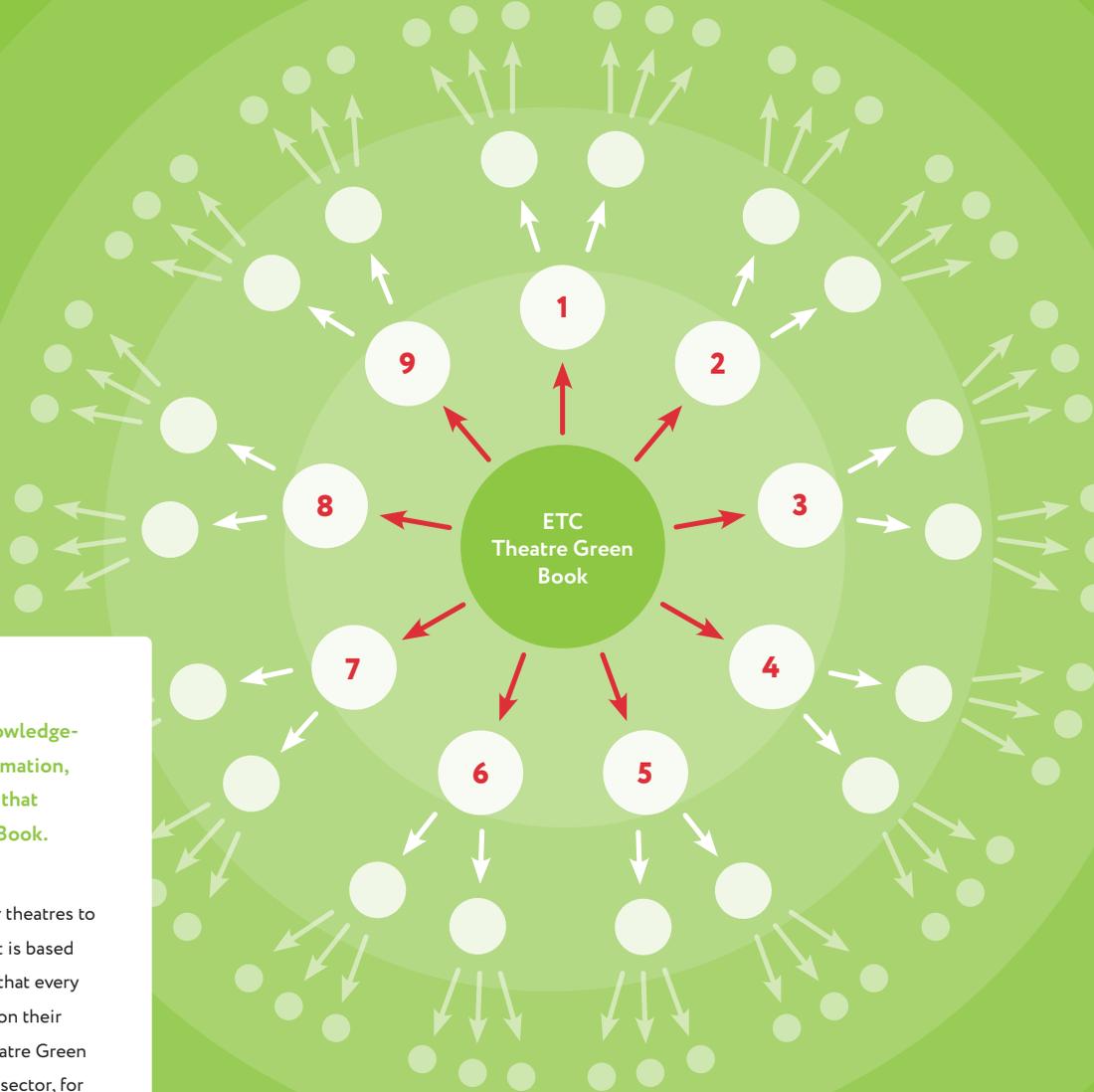
Since then, the network has conducted extensive research on the topic of sustainability in a European theatre context. Through “TRANSFORMATIONS – Recharging Theatre for Audiences”, ETC’s three-year programme for European theatres co-funded by the European Union (2021-24), ETC established a partnership with Renew Culture, the creators of the highly-regarded Theatre Green Book tool for sustainable theatres.

In addition, ETC explored the latest trends and sustainable needs of theatres through the European Theatre Forum 2023, an event organised by the European Commission and curated by ETC. This resulted in a high-level policy document and roadmap for the European Theatre Sector, the Opole Recommendations, which included a call for a shared assessment tool for a European Green Theatre Certification.

The result of these collaborations has been the ETC Theatre Green Book. This is a step-by-step guide for European theatres to reach net zero emissions by 2030. It is the European version of the Theatre Green Book and has been extensively tested by 9 ETC ‘Focus Group’ members during the 2023/24 season. It is now available for any European theatre to use for free.

The lessons learned from this journey – and particularly the remaining challenges and obstacles – are detailed in an accompanying document, ‘Sustainability & Theatre: ETC Theatre Green Book – Applied Research Study.’

These policy recommendations complete the offer. In a world conditioned by the accelerating energy and climate crises, and the return of conflict on European soil, they reveal the key policy interventions for European theatres to sustainably transform their productions, operations, and buildings. The policy recommendations are a valuable knowledge resource for theatre practitioners and policy makers alike to inform necessary decision-making on a pan European level.



Net Zero by 2030

The method for sector-wide knowledge-sharing and sustainable transformation, starting with the first 9 theatres that trialled the ETC Theatre Green Book.

The ETC Theatre Green Book is an empowering, step-by-step guide for theatres to reach net zero emissions by 2030. It is based on knowledge sharing and the idea that every theatre can help others to advance on their sustainability journey. The ETC Theatre Green Book is a tool driven by the theatre sector, for the theatre sector.



General Policy Recommendations for theatres, policy makers and funders at the EU level

- » Support the use of the ETC Theatre Green Book as a common standard across European theatre, so as to give theatre-makers a common language in the challenge of climate transition.
- » Support the adoption of ETC Theatre Green Book targets by funders and governments, to help instil sustainability as a widely-accepted parameter for successful theatre-making.
- » Support the connection of different theatre networks to share knowledge, offer peer-to-peer learning, and spread best practice.
- » Support the development and sharing of learning tools such as case studies and toolkits, to make best practice available to all theatre-makers.
- » Support webinars, conferences and events to spread learning among theatres and theatre-makers.
- » Support a mentoring system to help experienced theatre-makers accelerate the transition of newcomers, so multiplying the impact of change.

Policies to support sustainable productions

- » Support theatres in reducing their output so as to improve quality, and develop the skills needed for sustainable theatre-making.
- » Support new thinking in the handling of Intellectual Property so as to protect artists' rights while unblocking theatres' ability to reuse and recycle standard materials and components.
- » Support the development of tender regulations to allow sustainability to be scored as a primary criterion alongside cost.
- » Support procurement practices that allow greater engagement between creative teams and production teams.
- » Support the development of storage infrastructure to allow more materials and components to be stored for sharing and reuse / recycling.
- » Support the development of asset management tools that permit theatres to make assets more easily available to creative teams, and to support sharing between theatres.
- » Support the development of transport infrastructure for sustainable touring, including charging points, heavier electric vehicles, and rail connections.



Policies to support sustainable operations

- » Support the continued acceptance of plant-based food options.
- » Support a waste infrastructure that sustains a high degree of waste reuse and recycling, and minimises disposal.
- » Support collaboration between building owners and operators to give theatres more control of their building systems management.
- » Support collaboration with public transport operators to help audiences make sustainable choices.
- » Support the development of infrastructure for sustainable audience travel, such as bicycle racks and electric vehicle charging points.
- » Support tender rules that permit theatres to prioritise sustainable practices alongside cost.

Policies to support sustainable buildings

- » Support financial prioritisation of public funds to upgrade public buildings such as theatres to be fit-for-purpose in the context of the climate emergency.
- » Support collaboration between building owners and operators to help theatres achieve the necessary upgrade of their buildings to minimise climate impact.
- » Support a progressive heritage approach that continues to protect historic buildings, but recognises the need for them to be adapted sensitively to suit the reality of the climate crisis.



Conclusion

In general, funding and support schemes at European, national and regional levels should take into consideration that the transformation into net-zero theatres – particularly in theatre buildings - will require additional investment and policy changes.

The **policy recommendations** contained here within set out these needs in detail. They also draw on the context of the Opole Recommendations, the policy outcome from the European Theatre Forum in 2023, which is the overarching guide for European theatres to become net zero by 2030.

ETC's goal is to show that working on sustainable initiatives (across productions, buildings and operations) enables deep change among individuals and professionals involved, as well as other organisations at a national level. When these sustainable initiatives take place with a European dimension, they can reach and inspire wider groups of citizens in the process too. It is therefore essential to enable and support international collaboration and the exchange of work practices.

Continued and expanded international cooperation is necessary to create theatre for the future. ETC has committed itself to working in this direction while continuing to address the question of sustainable theatre in its programmes and advocacy actions.

About ETC

As the largest network of public theatres in Europe, ETC has 63 members from 31 countries, reflecting the diversity of Europe's vibrant cultural sector.

Founded in 1988, ETC promotes European theatre as a vital platform for dialogue, democracy and interaction that responds to, reflects and engages with today's diverse audiences and changing societies.

ETC fosters an inclusive notion of theatre that brings Europe's social, linguistic and cultural heritage to audiences and communities in Europe and beyond. Powerful and professional ETC governance ensures that the network will thrive and grow, taking into consideration the latest trends and developments.

The ETC's current three-year programme of activities, "TRANSFORMATIONS – Recharging European Theatres and Audiences in a Post-Covid World", offers Member Theatres many opportunities and project possibilities. This comprehensive, groundbreaking programme is supported by the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union.

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