

Prototyping Sustainable Productions

Deutsches Theater Berlin / Germany



Identitti, a production in the Box stage at Deutsches Theater Berlin that achieved 'Basic' standard in the ETC Theatre Green Book
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The challenge

The DT is one of the largest and most well-known theatres in Germany. This season (2023/2024), we're premiering 29 productions across our three stages, for a total of over 700 performances per season.

So when we work with theatre-makers (directors, set, costume and light designers...), we are aware that it might represent a big opportunity, particularly for those who come to us for the first time. They naturally want to let their imagination flow and make a lasting impression, and

to build sets, create costumes and use lighting or video set-ups that may not have been possible in other contexts.

But committing to a sustainable approach to theatre-making requires thinking differently about our production processes. And when it comes down to it, one of the requirements is to use fewer new resources, and instead reuse existing resources.

First step: Analysis

We started by using the ETC TGB production calculator to analyse the productions that have premiered on our smallest stage BOX this season. We wanted to see what kind of environmental impact we were already having before we planned to add new rules or set new objectives for future productions.

Of the six productions analysed in this first step, we've found that four reached 'Basic' or even 'Intermediate' level. This means, among other criteria, that at least 50% of everything one can find on stage, from set to costumes to props, had been either reused or recycled, and up to 70% was to be stored or used again afterwards.

We had to invest some time and effort to adapt the calculator provided with the ETC TGB (finding all needed information about the used material, for instance) before starting this analysis process, but the good news is that you only have to do this work once. You then have an easy calculator that you can apply to all of your productions.

[SEE THE ETC TGB PRODUCTION CALCULATOR AND STANDARDS](#)

Working with artists

After the analysis, we started to think about how to apply the standards to our upcoming shows. Could we include the requirements for basic standard in our contracts with artists? How would they react? Would an artistic impact be noticeable for the productions made to this standard?

One of the challenges has also been our production rhythm, which can make it difficult to embed sustainability in our daily work, even if everyone is on board with the general concept.

So we have decided to trial this out next season, 2024/25, for all productions in the BOX. Sustainable production requirements have been mentioned from the very first conversations with the artistic teams and will be included in our contracts.

We're deliberately starting with the smallest stage to take the time to build up the personal relationships with the artists, theatre-makers and technicians involved and to address their concerns, whether they already embrace sustainability in its entirety, or whether more convincing work might be necessary.

We then plan to progressively expand to our two other stages, the KAMMER and the DT BÜHNE.

Bonus: Buildings and Operations

During the ETC TGB process, we also analysed our building and our operations. Thanks to recent renovations, we have either already reached basic standard for buildings and reach basic for operations possibly by summer 2024.

This was good to realise – we are already further ahead than expected, and we can now address the bigger, longer-term structural changes.

Overall reflections:

All in all, the ETC TGB basic standard is an achievable first goal. The ETC TGB offers a great instrument to analyse the status quo and raise awareness within the organisation, then set a foundation to work with. Getting started the calculators is a bit of work -- but it does set you up for using everything in the future.

A suggestion for the future:

There's a lot of changes that we would like to make, such as having an ozone cabinet and ozone laundry in the costume department, but this represents a larger investment that needs more time for implementation. This is the kind of question for which the ETC TGB network could represent a real benefit, for instance by highlighting relevant national or European funds that we could all apply for.