

## Nordic Bridges: A Conversation about Sustainability and the Arts at the Harbourfront Centre Theatre (Summary of the discussion by Joël Ndongmi)

On May 19th, policymakers, environmental activists, and other stakeholders in the arts and culture community across Canada and the Nordic countries gathered to discuss the intersections between climate change and the arts. They were asked the question: “As both Canada and the Nordic Region commit to zero carbon targets and a more sustainable future, how can cultural places transform to reduce environmental impact? What role can arts councils and government play in that transformation?” Given the open-ended nature of the question, the discussion that ensued was naturally interdisciplinary.

During the roundtable discussion, a few themes emerged: the importance of ground-up approaches, making green resources accessible, common responsibility, and the role of socio-economic factors in mitigating the climate crisis.

A ground-up approach is necessary to engage cultural places in sustainability practices. Many participants emphasized that, to reduce the environmental impact of cultural places, initiatives should come from within. The internal nature of these initiatives will make them more relevant and ensure they get implemented. From this point of view, the government serves to offer pointers and ideas that organizations can potentially enact. A strategy of this kind demystifies the process of sustainability and invites new participants in the green transition.

Funding is an important piece in making cultural and artistic hubs environmentally friendly. Simply put, artists and art organizations need money to incorporate sustainable practices in their work. Funding is especially urgent given the pandemic and the strain it caused on the arts sector. Participants elaborated on the difficulty artists face when navigating grants. Furthermore, they elaborated on the need for funding sources to engage in more outreach to local artists. Financially supporting artists is important because they play a major role in shifting our culture towards action on climate.

Common responsibility was a theme that emerged during the discussion. Participants engaged with questions such as “who should travel and who should not travel?” and “who should be ultimately in charge of the environmental impact of our shared facilities?” While a specific conclusion was not reached, there was an emphasis on minimizing the use of resources and being intentional with consumption.

The green transition also intersects with socio-economic factors. Participants mentioned that citizens are more likely to engage in environmental initiatives if they feel included in their communities. Building an environmentally friendly society relies heavily on people viewing their government as legitimate. The populace is more likely to legitimize an administration if they feel valued and included in their government’s outlook and initiatives. An approach that emphasizes engaging people of diverse socioeconomic backgrounds is key in developing societal involvement in fighting climate change.

In closing, there are many takeaways we can glean from this roundtable discussion. First, political administrations should encourage ground-up environmental initiatives in cultural places while making green resources accessible. Second, artists need funding to incorporate sustainable practices in their work. Third, as individuals and organizations, we need to be mindful of our consumption. Last, governments can focus on building an inclusive society as a means for greater participation in efforts to mitigate the climate crisis.