

## Arts Festivals Summit 2025 Edinburgh

### Workshop on Festivals and environmental sustainability: Green Travel & Transport

29 April 2025, 10.30 AM - 12.30 PM, Edinburgh

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**Facilitated by:** Tamar Brüggemann and Peter Florence, the initiators from the European Festivals Forest.

**Contributors:** Megan Best - Native Events; Rozan Dikkat - Enjoy Jazz; Tijn Couzij - Into the Great Wide Open

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### Introduction

The first part of the workshop concentrated on green travel and transport. It aimed to share practical ideas and inspiring experiences of how to (and how not to) travel lightly in the frame of small, medium, and large-scale festivals.

The second part of the workshop consisted of a walkshop: it combined a collective action to pick up trash in the streets and parks of the city of Edinburgh while walking and talking about initiatives and projects led by participants within their festivals.

### Presentations of the Green Up survey results

Peter Florence and Tamar Brüggemann started the workshop by introducing the green survey and reminded that a similar survey has been done in Galway in 2021. These are the main takeaways:

- The results are encouraging and interesting because everybody is thinking more about reducing their environmental impact.
- Festivals are more interested in this topic. Four years ago, the survey asked: “Do you have to report on this for funding issue to your authorities?” The answer concerned 15% of the respondents. This year, the answer to the question: “Do you get any funding where climate action is required?” 83,3% replied yes. More and more public funds require a Climate Action Plan. It's becoming an absolute necessity. Festivals should regard this as a tremendous opportunity to get ahead of the curve.
- Question Caveat: “What is the biggest problem holding festivals back from climate action?” 29% of respondents answered human and financial resources, and 25% said they don't know what's best to do.
- 47% of festivals said that climate is not their top priority, but 83% said it is an important topic.
- EFA and the European Festivals Forest will develop a simple, clear, and free greenprint plan to help festivals implement climate action strategies while generating income.

## Presentations of inspiring practices

There are 3 reasons for which people come to festivals:

- 1) People love what festivals do.
- 2) The location has an impact on the local population going to festivals with their family and friends.
- 3) Audience involvement. 27% of festivals involve their audience, collecting info on questions such as: is the festival at the right time of the year for the locals, audiences, artists? Can you increase the audience by putting a festival on a bank holiday? Commuters are more numerous these days.

The session invited to think about the ease with which people can travel. Everybody understands and accepts that it's better to travel by train than by plane, even though the cost can be prohibitive.

Today, visitors tell extraordinary stories about means of transport. Whether they travel for 3 hours or 30 minutes, transport is part of the festival experience. Festivals can create podcasts for the journey, which would increase their opportunity to sell tickets, or encourage visitors to buy local products upon arrival.

Festivals are embedded in a society that already exists, with specific travel infrastructure already existing in that location, and must build on this. Peter explained that when he ran the Hay Festival in Wales, 130.000 cars had to park over the ten days of the festival. The only people who could manage the car parking were local organisations. He also involved football clubs, the air ambulance and other community organisations such as scout movements, religious groups, young farmers, etc. Social cohesion has encouraged many people to take part in the festival infrastructure, which contributes to the net benefit. Festivals can play a key role in the sustainability of their communities.

Peter then introduced the speakers, pointing out that Megan Best and Tijn Couzij would have had to fly, but thanks to online tools they could give their presentations remotely.

### Megan Best - Native Events (UK)

Native Events is doing a range of activities, including consultancy on environmental actions about strategy and policy development, training and advocacy towards environment, blockchain for culture and creative industries, events and festivals. Native Events also organises events and looks at ways of recycling its furniture and helping others to reduce their impact on the environment through its own events.

Megan is also the director of Julie's Bicycle Europe, which is a partnership between the UK Creative Climate Action Charity and Native Events.

Mobility is crucial for the cultural sector: artists, production crews, sets of artworks, programmers, curators, audiences: festivals involve a great deal of travel and transport, and it's important to acknowledge that. Travel and transport make a significant contribution to climate change, yet they are very difficult to decarbonise because they are based on the fossil fuel sector.

Emissions from transport continue to rise worldwide even though modes of transport are becoming more energy efficient. Technological improvements alone will not save us: the world needs changes in behaviour, and that's where the arts, events and festivals can come in. We need to reduce air travel, have better quality public transport and introduce more versatile and hybrid travel systems.

The impact of suppliers and contractors for the retail cycle and heavy infrastructure such as staging, sanitary facilities, generators, sound systems, etc. must also be taken into account.

Although much attention is always paid to aircraft, in reality, the estimated share of CO2 emissions from the transport sector is largely attributable to cars, as it remains the most convenient mode of transport due to the lack of public transport infrastructure. Many climate action plans require to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions by 50% and there is still a long way to go.

Native Events has invested in the Active Travel and Greenways project. In recent years, the company has been able to develop 40 kilometres of infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists.

Carbon emissions is a matter of climate justice issue: 1% of the world's population are posing 50% of the commercial aviation emissions and 80% of our population have never set foot on an airplane. Megan took the example of Ireland, an island not efficiently linked with the continent and with very limited train services. Festivals are, so to speak, caught between a rock and a hard place.

Festivals are testing solutions: setting cap emissions, supporting their travel wherever possible, eliminating domestic flights, having artists perform at several venues in the same country, offsetting carbon emissions, etc. Transport options and implementation of some of these ideas have massive financial and budgetary implications: on a small island where festivals are already competing with each other, this hinders sustainability implementation measures.

Over the years, Native Events has carried out the analysis of the carbon footprint of their festivals as a consultant. For example, the carbon footprint assessment was huge because of a show that came from the US to be performed at four major Irish festivals. You cannot realise the impact of transport and travel without undertaking a carbon footprint assessment.

Unlike public travel, which is more complex, festivals have a certain amount of control over the travel of their staff and this is an aspect over which they can exert a certain amount of influence, put in place a policy by involving their team.

Megan gave 2 nice examples of festivals' actions:

- **West Cork Music:** It includes three festivals organised each year in very rural, remote locations in West Cork. They have decided to decrease their emissions by 8% annually (Megan underlined that it's good to have targets). They do this by raising awareness, arranging their flights and travels, doing audience surveys including some sustainability questions. The festival has been publishing its carbon emissions footprint annually for five years now on its website. The festival also undertook a slow travel study in 2023: they asked musicians to travel by land and sea with their instruments. The journey was way longer and a little bit more expensive, but they produced 40% less emissions.
- **Dublin International Film Festival** is doing a partnership with Volvo (one of their sponsors): last year all the festival ground transport was done with their electric vehicles.

### Rozan Dikkat, Enjoy Jazz (Germany)

Rozan Dikkat is sustainability manager at Enjoy Jazz.

The festival was founded in 1999. It is a decentralised festival that takes place in 20 different venues and welcomes an audience of between 20.000 and 30.000 people. Enjoy Jazz works closely with the venues to see how the audience gets there.

Rozan also coordinates a regional sustainable network with over 30 organisations sharing their experience of how culture can be more sustainable. The network was part of the Green Culture Festival in Germany.

**Programming:** The festival tries to increase its environmental sustainability by booking artists who are already on tour. To help reduce travel-related emissions, artists are offered various mobility options. However, this isn't always possible due to the size and amount of their instruments and equipment. Collaborating with venues is essential to implement new sustainable ideas. The festival also partners with local bike rental companies near the venues and hotels, and provides shared shuttle buses for artists and journalists. For the social aspect, initiatives are being organised for the programme that focus on social and cultural responsibility.

**Audience transport:** 6 years ago, Enjoy Jazz started to collaborate with public transport companies. A public transport ticket is now integrated into the festival to encourage visitors not to use their car: the festival pays around €1.07 for each transport ticket, a cost which is put on top of the price for the festival ticket. It's an attractive partnership on both sides: the travel company earns, and Enjoy Jazz supports the use of public transport. However, it's difficult to know exactly how many people use these combined tickets: to obtain information on how the public arrived, the festival calls on the visitor reception services, cloakrooms, info stands, etc. This information is more difficult to obtain for tickets booked online, for reasons of personal data security in Germany. They do collect the postcode, but the festival's long-term aim is to obtain more information via the ticketing system.

As Enjoy Jazz is a jazz festival, the audience is a little bit older - this is one of the reasons why they take their cars. Enjoy Jazz started a collaboration with Match Rider app for carpooling for concerts in Heidelberg - people can share a ride to the concert, and it's also a way to try to build a community.

The team also tried to change the time of the concerts. Instead of starting at around 20.00 PM as usual, they listened to the audience feedback: it's easier for people to take public transport if they hold a concert on a Sunday at 17.00 PM. As the festival runs for six weeks in October, with concerts every day, it's possible to rethink, test and implement new approaches.

### Tijl Couzij, Into the Great Wide Open (Netherlands)

Tijl Couzij is part of the organisation Lab Vlieland, and one of the founders of the festival Into the Great Wide Open, which started in 2009. The festival takes place on a small island in the Netherlands and is limited to 10.000 people. Most of the audience is coming from bigger cities and travels from the mainland before taking a ferry.

The setting inspired them from the beginning to put into place a management policy based on the ecological cycles and the ecosystem in which the festival takes place. The initiators wanted to keep this environment as beautiful and pleasant as it was when they discovered it. Their vision of becoming a healthy and regenerative part of the local and global ecosystem stems from this.

They put this into practice in their festival's goal to become a circular, climate-positive festival, and accelerating this transition by informing and influencing the rest of the world: the festival becomes a laboratory, a place to catalyse the transition, placing more sustainable issues into the marketplace, an opportunity to tell the story and show what is already possible.

Tijl started to define what he means, as these words are used quite broadly today.

**Circularity.** He divides this concept into two parts: one relates to purchasing and the other to waste, from an ethical point of view. As a minimum, all products and materials purchased must be made

from reused, refurbished, biobased or recycled materials. The festival respects this purchasing rule for all materials acquired. Secondly, they try to stop burning waste, throwing away or dumping it on landfill sites: the festival aims to no longer produce residual waste. They're not there yet, but the festival is getting closer every year.

**Climate positive.** It is not just a question of the festival's goals, but of achieving positive global goals. The festival is reducing its current greenhouse gas emissions as far as possible. They realised that they had been emitting greenhouse gases since the beginning of the festival, and that they had not cleaned up after themselves. Therefore, in the second phase, they aim to eliminate unavoidable emissions now or in the past, taking into account its historical emissions: a retrospective clean-up each year of the emissions produced during previous editions of the festival. They started doing this restoring project in 2010 and today they managed to remove from the atmosphere their historical emissions from 2009 and 2010.

**Mode of transport.** Looking at the breakdown, it's typical to see that travel and transport make up a very large proportion of the festival's total emissions. For Into the Great Wide Open, this share reached 63%, releasing 210 Tonnes of CO2. There's a lot to be gained in terms of energy and reducing CO2 emissions by making the right choices. The festival tries to focus on certain aspects of improving sustainability and developing new programmes. The aim is to reduce CO2 visitor travel by 100 tonnes, and to get everyone to give up their fossil-fuelled cars.

To get audiences to start using environmentally friendly modes of transport, they are encouraging fossil-free modes of transport (which are not always 100% fossil-free, but are mostly fossil-free). In addition to each ticket sold, the festival charges an extra 15 euros, which visitors can claim back if they use fossil-free transport. This is a financial incentive for people to travel with fossil-free options and a good way for the festival to influence travel.

There are fossil-free festival buses, and partnerships with car-sharing companies equipped with electric motors. This makes the journey much cheaper than using a fossil-fuelled car. 12% of the public have adapted their mode of transport thanks to the Green Travel Programme. At first glance, 12% doesn't sound like much, but getting 12% of your audience to change their behaviour with just one incentive is quite something. This is part of a wider package of incentives to achieve substantial change. Festivals are not intended to frighten or threaten - they can have an impact on social norms and promote strong behaviours.

52% of visitors still come by car. In 2018, this figure was 72%, a drop of 20% (this is not enough for the festival). The other main modes of transport are train, bicycle, walking and sailing.

The festival has also introduced a penalty policy and uses the money collected to eliminate all residual emissions. This is a way of creating financial space to eliminate all residual and historical emissions, and to develop sustainable innovations for the festival's impact on its environment. The festival is therefore financing its own sustainable development programme and the elimination of residual emissions that it cannot yet prevent.

The team is working to develop a festival that moves from a fossil-free system to one that is emission-free in a broader sense, and electric too. The entire festival was built using emission-free construction materials. The big question was whether this equipment would be able to do all the work and the result was positive, with zero emissions.

Financial support for sustainability is provided through sponsorship and grants, which cover the higher costs (around 30% or more). As a downside, the equipment is not yet easy to hire, and the technology is not fully developed yet. Loading poses problems, and requires extra effort.

## Q&A

How do people prove their means of transport?

Tijl: People have to prove their means of transport, but the festival doesn't take it too seriously. If they come on foot, they can take a selfie of themselves on the way. They can prove that they're using an electric car, and so on. Into the Great Wide Open has a broad definition of green transport.

Megan: In terms of incentives, there are better things to do than a green tax.

## Conclusions

Peter Florence concluded the session by reminding the audience that festivalgoers are already, in a way, activists.

7.500 trees have been planted in the European Festival Forest this year, helping to eradicate historical emissions (A total of 20.000 have been planted since the beginning of the project).

He urged festivals to go ahead and use every possible means to promote what they do, because it can be cheaper and there are additional benefits. What works for festivals can work for their audiences, and motivate them. He underlined that it's also a question of generation. Thinking long-term today is a good investment so that it costs less in the long run.

He ended by saying that several topics had been proposed for discussion in groups of three or four people for the workshop, to highlight what participants are doing well in their work.

### WALKING, TALKING TOPICS

#### Short-term questions

- If you could change one travel habit in your own work or at your festival, what would it be?
- Do you think festival visitors would be willing to pay more to offset their travel impact to your festival?
- What incentives can you think of to persuade your audience to travel more sustainably?
- How can we make greener travel options more attractive to our festival-goers?
- Have you ever tracked how your audience travels to your festival? What did you learn?
- What's the easiest win your festival could achieve next year in terms of greener travel?
- Could your volunteers or staff be part of piloting greener travel alternatives?
- Could you imagine a year without flying for your festival? What would that look like, and what would you miss?

#### Long-term questions

- How can we join forces to persuade rail companies to offer our audiences a discount across the EU?
- the EU uses the European Emissions Trading System (ETS) to regulate emissions from businesses. What do you think about applying such a system to cultural institutions?
- If festivals had a CO2 limit for their travel, what would be an acceptable cap for you?
- If you had to align your festival with an emissions cap, what choices would you make?
- Could local collaboration replace long-distance traveling artists?
- What are the biggest barriers to making your festival truly circular?
- could technology play a role in reducing travel while maintaining international artistic exchange?
- Would real change only happen if funders or governments enforced a "Green Code" for festivals?
- Should there be minimum environmental standards for publicly funded cultural events? We know this is coming, so why not set them together now? :)

## Pictures







## Credits

*This workshop was part of the Arts Festivals Summit 2025 of the European Festivals Association's (EFA) hosted and co-organised with the Edinburgh International Festival, Festivals Edinburgh, and the City of Edinburgh Council.*

