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Strategic consultancy and mobility of the performing arts

POSITION PAPER

THE NEW CHALLENGES OF EUROPEAN CULTURAL NETWORKS

Strategic analysis and proposal in the face of systemic crisis

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INTRODUCTION: GENESIS OF THE DOCUMENT AND THE IMPERATIVE OF INTELLECTUAL COHERENCE

The contemporary cultural ecosystem represented by European cultural networks, historically conceived as a space for innovation, intellectual friction, and the advancement of human rights, is currently undergoing a profound structural and identity crisis. The genesis of this document arises from my desire to provide intellectual rigor to the dialogue generated following the recent publication on Facebook of my resignation from IETM, transforming the responses received and the assessment of my extensive experience as a member of the network into a strategic proposal for the future.

The decision to end a thirty-year trajectory as a member of the International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts (IETM), which included two terms on its Board of Directors—first in the 1990s and later in the 2010s—is not an impulsive act, but a reasoned political conclusion.

It is not so much the reaction on digital platforms, but rather my professional experience combined with the observation of how political and social events of recent years in the world are affecting our society, that has led me, after careful analysis, to propose the need for a comprehensive rethinking of our spaces for connection and collaboration, and to deepen independent critical reflection within the cultural sector.

In this text, I seek to establish new dynamics regarding the evolution of European cultural networks towards a solid discourse that reflects a renewed strategic vision. As a consultant for the strategic development of the arts and their mobility, my unavoidable priority is intellectual soundness and the maintenance of a long-term strategic vision; attributes that require the message to focus on rigor and honesty, which are the core of my professional practice.

A rigorous analysis of the situation leads me to maintain that the ethical commitment to respond to the social, geopolitical, and climatic urgencies threatening Europe and the entire world today requires approaches that established networks seem to have difficulty integrating. At this stage of the global systemic crisis, it is imperative for me to seek more incisive avenues for action. Frameworks of thought and modes of transnational connection must evolve at the same pace as the crises they aim to address; otherwise, they lose their operational and moral justification.

In this document, I exhaustively examine the symptoms of what I identify as a distortion of the network: from the bureaucratic drift imposed by funding models, to the perpetuation of colonial logics and linguistic hegemony, ending with a proposal for a series of strategic lines of action for the emancipation of future cultural structures.

Through direct observation, I note that professional networks, which originally acted as independent spaces for debate and connection among creators, have seen their capacity for independent critical thought diminished. Today, these organizations often subordinate themselves to institutional agendas, becoming sounding boards for government policies and dominant geopolitical discourses that blur their original identity and purpose.

“This assessment arises from a very valuable personal experience, as IETM has represented a great deal to me over the decades; it has been a vital source of inspiration and a key space for connection throughout my career.”

THE STRUCTURAL TRAP: FROM INFORMAL NETWORKS TO PRODUCTION AGENCIES UNDER THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

This distortion is, to a large extent, the result of a profound structural and financial mutation linked to the institutional frameworks of the European Commission. To understand the current situation of European cultural networks, it is essential to analyze the evolution of their funding models over the last three decades. In their origins, during the 1990s, the informal nature of these networks was the key to their success and legitimacy; in this context, the term "informal" was synonymous with "independent." The organizations functioned as points of connection and intellectual friction for professionals, funded through mechanisms—fundamentally based on their members' fees—that respected their operational autonomy.

The great leap towards bureaucratization and loss of direction was brewed in the 2010s, coinciding with a radical transformation in the European Commission's cultural policies. The defining milestone was the implementation of the Creative Europe program, which consolidated the old Culture and MEDIA programs under a significantly expanded budget. This program instituted a paradigm shift: the European Commission ceased to prioritize the funding of structural and operational costs of network secretariats through operating grants, moving instead to a project-based funding model.

Under this new competitive regime, the European Commission began to unilaterally establish the thematic, strategic, and impact priorities that projects had to meet to be eligible for funding. Horizontal priorities such as the digital transition, environmental sustainability, and social inclusion became indispensable requirements for applications.

Cultural networks, faced with the need to secure their funding, were forced to transmute their nature: they moved from being independent platforms for professional

connection to becoming production agencies for projects designed to satisfy Brussels' directives. This adaptation triggered a pernicious spiral of institutional growth: to manage the enormous administrative burden and ensure economic viability under the Creative Europe model, networks had to expand their technical secretariats by hiring more staff. In turn, a larger technical structure required the incessant capture of a greater number of European projects to pay salaries, creating a complex bureaucratic dynamic that is difficult to escape.

The impact of this trend towards the homogenization of structures has been documented in reference studies such as the Culture Action Europe report on the Creative Europe program. According to this analysis, 60% of European networks were forced to adjust and alter their founding priorities to fit the requirements of the program, generating chronic tensions between the Commission's requirements and the true artistic and social needs of the grassroots members.

Critiques from the sector have pointed out the economic bias of the program, which prioritizes the quantitative development of audiences and business competitiveness, often treating culture primarily as a consumer good or a service, and marginalizing its critical and intrinsic value. For the network to be economically sustainable, the leadership of these organizations often accepted institutional impositions, adopting bureaucratic semantics and accepting as priorities what were external mandates. Today, there is a trend to prioritize the status of a privileged interlocutor before the Commission and institutional validation—the prestige of being at the table—as well as fluid access to public funding, over independent reflection. Networks adopt agendas and bureaucratic forms by inertia, satisfying funding institutions, but sometimes lacking a real or autonomous sense of purpose.

The analysis demands severe self-criticism: part of the responsibility lies with the professionals of the cultural sector themselves—including myself—who have not always shown the necessary firmness to resist a system that favors intellectual accommodation and the loss of critical vigor of artists and society as a whole.

THE MIRAGE OF DIVERSITY: COLONIALITY, GLOBAL CONNECTORS, AND INSTITUTIONAL PATERNALISM

If the financial analysis reveals the influence of continental political agendas, the scrutiny of global dynamics evidences even deeper contradictions. A clear exponent is materialized in flagship projects conceived to build more inclusive networks, projecting them towards previously underrepresented continents and cultures.

A representative example of this trend is the Global Connectors project, promoted by the IETM network, which aims to invite voices and perspectives that are not yet sufficiently heard in international artistic discourse. These initiatives are perceived on the surface as a laudable and genuine effort towards global cultural justice. However, a rigorous analysis of their funding structure reveals the delicate nature of these proposals, which often depend on Associate Members with much higher membership fees.

This is precisely the case with IETM's Global Connectors, where these Associate Members are fundamentally official entities, ministries, arts councils, and state agencies specifically conceived for the projection of their own cultures and agendas geopolitical.

This dependence exposes a profound dissonance between aspirations for cultural diversity and the structural axis of coloniality. State agencies maintain a geopolitical agenda and an exercise of soft power that has been central to the foreign policy of the European Union and allies, functioning as tools for geopolitical dominance. These institutions operate from a cultural diplomacy approach to cement their global cultural hegemony.

The ethical and political contradiction becomes evident when diversity efforts are funded by the same States that, in turn, maintain dynamics of coloniality or practices of domination directly. Inaction in the face of devastating humanitarian conflicts lays bare this structural hypocrisy. Recent geopolitical events such as the genocide in Gaza, the

invasion of Lebanon, the war in Iran, the operation over Venezuela, or the constant threat over Cuba—perpetrated with the involvement or silence of the same powers that financially support these networks—show that the discourse of diversity stops where the interests of the funding states begin.

Furthermore, the inability of some powers to resolve their historical debts reinforces this sense of injustice, as is the case with the Spanish State, unable to assume its historical responsibility regarding its colonial legacy. For this reason, the diversity encouraged in forums sponsored by Western state agencies hinders the true emancipation of the participants.

This assimilation is complemented by what I identify as an infrastructure of academic validation: the training of professionals and creators from the Global South in Northern universities. By acquiring academic degrees that legitimize their practice under Western standards, these profiles often adopt the culture and conceptual frameworks of the dominant powers. This process largely neutralizes their original critical potential, turning integration into a form of cultural assimilation accepted by the system.

LINGUISTIC PREDOMINANCE: ENGLISH AS AN INSTRUMENT OF CULTURAL HEGEMONY

Institutional efforts to reinforce equity and diversity are insufficient when the vertebral column of cultural predominance is ignored or hidden: the language. In the context of pan-European cultural networks, the English language has consolidated its position as the sole and non-negotiable vector for communication and decision-making. This monolingual hegemony represents an exercise in intellectual exclusion against those who do not operate natively within Anglo-Saxon frameworks of thought and communication. It is vital to remember that language is never a passive vehicle; language structures thought, filters conceptual nuances, and prioritizes certain worldviews over others.

When English assumes the entirety of the space for professional relations in a transnational network, global cultural diversity is diminished and the pre-eminence of the Anglo-Saxon sphere of power is consolidated. This dynamic forces professionals to simplify their arguments and reduce the depth of their analyses, which excludes divergent voices and intellectually subordinates those who do not possess the advantage of a native language. Although the logistical advantages of a lingua franca cannot be ignored, administrative inertia must not prevent the necessary effort to tangibly show the equality of the world's cultures.

The trajectory of the IETM network illustrates this regression in a paradigmatic way. What in its origins was a bilingual reality—a balance between English and French that allowed for a greater diversity of frameworks of thought—has progressively drifted towards absolute monolingualism in English. This involution represents a lost historical opportunity: the natural evolution of a European cultural network should have been the transition from a bilingual model to a fully multilingual one, integrating the richness of multiple languages.

However, the path of administrative simplification has been chosen, sacrificing the depth of transnational dialogue, the equality of the world's cultures, and the richness of cultural diversity.

The linguistic subordination described above represented, during decades, a limitation dictated by insuperable logistical restrictions. Nevertheless, Artificial Intelligence (AI) today provides effective tools that definitively dismantle the pretext of forced monolingualism. The implementation of real-time translation technologies and advanced generative models is not just a technical option, but an ethical and political requirement for equity. For a network that receives transnational public funding, multilingual modernization is the only way to guarantee that knowledge circulates in conditions of true equality of power, allowing each professional to express themselves in their mother tongue without being intellectually penalized.

CONCLUSION: A PROPOSAL FOR THE FUTURE

An inevitable moment arrives when we must leave behind macro-structures that no longer provide value and seek new spaces dedicated to real transformative action. The future of the sector depends on the collective capacity to execute the following strategic lines of action:

1. Immediate bureaucratic emancipation:

We must forge new spaces and fabrics for collaboration that manage to decouple themselves from the spiral of growth of competitive government projects. Without renouncing public funding, it is imperative that this is not the majority to preserve autonomy of criteria. Networks are thought laboratories, not cultural markets.

2. Independence and autonomy of criteria:

Cultural organizations must preserve their independence from the pressures of external media or government agendas. Public positionings must be the result of rigorous internal analysis, avoiding ideological following and ensuring the protection of the plurality of perspectives of its members.

3. Ethical review of cultural funding:

Initiatives aimed at global diversity cannot depend exclusively on state agendas that exert asymmetric influences or coloniality. A model of horizontal and decolonial diversity that eliminates European paternalism in cross-border alliances must be promoted.

4. Institutionalization of multilingualism with AI:

English must be overcome as the exclusive language. It is non-negotiable to implement real-time AI technologies in all debates and governance spaces. Every professional has the intellectual right to communicate in their mother tongue without being penalized in a network that advocates for equity.

Facing the grave challenges that threaten our societies today requires ceasing to merely reflect the current institutional mandates. By embracing intellectual coherence and seeking answers beyond bureaucratic complacency, the arts sectors will regain the essential political impulse to forge the European cultural ecosystem of tomorrow.