

# ENCATC IN CONTACT



*For this edition of ENCATC in Contact, we sat down with Iphigenia Taxopoulou, Associate Partner at Julie's Bicycle and General Secretary at mitos21. She will be our coach at the ENCATC Breakfast Training "Cultural Management and Environmental Sustainability" on 14 December in Brussels. We wanted to learn more about her background and what participants can expect from the training.*

## **How did you get interested in the topic of environmental sustainability?**

As a cultural manager working primarily with public cultural institutions, I've always identified efficient management with "good house-keeping" and with an acute sense of social responsibility. Through my working experience (in the theatre sector mainly), I had begun to feel increasingly uncomfortable at how "carelessly" cultural institutions were run in respect of their environmental impacts: tons of paper, energy and water wasted; endless supplies to create new sets and costumes; buildings which operated like environmental minefields, etc... Natural resources, materials, but also public funds, were spent as if there was no tomorrow... I was convinced that this could be reversed if only we became aware of the environmental impact of our sector and, most importantly, if we knew how to bring about change. It was back in 2009 when I started to conduct research. I came across the work of Alison Tickell and Julie's Bicycle which had been founded the year before. This pioneering initiative provided the precise framework, the data, the arguments and the tools, which would enable the cultural sector to embed the principles of environmental sustainability in its overall ethos and daily operations. Our paths crossed in 2013, when we, as mitos21, organised the first



Photo of a work by artist Andy Goldsworthy taken by Nichola Smale CC BY 2.0

international conference on "Sustainable Cultural Management" – we have been working together ever since. Currently, we are in partnership for a new educational project, the EU funded Creative Climate Leadership training course.

## **What is your role in the mission of Julie's Bicycle as an Associate Partner?**

As an organisation, JB is a charity based in London. You will be surprised to know how small the core-team is, in relation to their immense achievements in bridging environmental sustainability and the creative sector, not only on a national level (in the UK, where they practically helped create a new framework for the national cultural policy), but also on an international level. Part of this international work is done through a network of associate partners,

individuals who are, so to speak, the ambassadors of JB worldwide. JB is by principle a very decentralised organisation – the idea is to reach out to as many people and institutions in the cultural sector as possible, to inspire action, provide the knowledge, the tools and the resources, so that they can then pursue this new approach independently (and, hopefully, inspire others!).

## **In your role as Secretary General of mitos21, what are some of the changes you have established in the network to make a positive impact on the planet? Have you been successful in getting your members to also adopt any practices?**

As I mentioned before, among our other mitos21 projects, in 2013 we organised an international conference entitled "Sustainability and Culture / Sustainable Cultural Management";



Photo of a Trashion 2011 Exhibition taken by Mary Ann Enriquez via Flickr CC BY 2.0

and then, in 2016, together with JB, we organised the first International Intensive Summer Course on Sustainable Cultural Management (SCM Course). Both initiatives came about because the members of mitos21, representing some of the most prestigious and influential theatre institutions in Europe, are fully aware of their responsibility to operate in an environmentally responsible manner. There are different degrees of integration of sustainable management in our member-theatres. Some, like the National Theatre in London are truly "examples to follow". Others are beginning to develop their "green" projects, others are half-way through. For this reason, we have set up an internal network of mitos21 "green managers", to provide mutual support, share knowledge and exchange expertise. In addition to that, in June 2018, we will be organising an event on Sustainability in Cultural Policy and the Arts, at the Academy of Performing Arts in Baden-Wuerttemberg.

**What are some of the obstacles you think are impeding cultural managers from implementing policies, tools, practice for environmental sustainability?**

The main problem is lack of commitment, most importantly on behalf of the higher levels of administration. Experience shows that once the top administration is committed to make the change, there will usually be a wealth of good will and enthusiasm to be found across any organisation. The narrative is in place, the methodology and the tools

are available, training and support can be provided... it's just a matter of getting started. So far, surveys prove that engaging with a project of sustainable management enriches the creative life, as well as the team-morale of organisations.

**What do you say to people who think they can't make a difference because they are "just one individual" or "only one institution"?**

Well, here is the good news: we are no longer "just one individual" or "only one institution". Currently, there is a large wave of creative people worldwide who are actively engaged in doing their part against the devastating effects of climate change and environmental degradation. I do not necessarily refer to direct activism, as there are many artists working in this direction. I am talking about individuals and institutions that continue to create art and culture, only that they do so via a different mind frame.

**What about the cultural sector makes it an ideal platform from which to engage and inspire action on climate change? What advantages does it have that makes it different from other sectors?**

The creative and cultural communities – more than any other sector per se – define, design, develop and affirm social values. Be it through the arts, theatre, music, film, or fashion, the cultural sector is a powerful driver of values and life styles, which has direct access to the minds and hearts of people across the globe.

**What are the top three things you hope Breakfast participants leave with after the training?**

I hope they will have found replies to the "why", the "whether" and the "how". We will endeavour to show why it is important to engage; to inspire a desire for commitment; and to provide an introduction to basic knowledge and the tools that would allow our participants and their organisations to embark on their own sustainable project.

**Register to ENCATC's Breakfast "Cultural Management and Environmental Sustainability":**

[www.encatc.org/en/events/detail/cultural-management-and-environmental-sustainability/](http://www.encatc.org/en/events/detail/cultural-management-and-environmental-sustainability/)

**Julie's Bicycle:** [www.juliesbicycle.com](http://www.juliesbicycle.com)

**Mitos21 European Theatre Network:**

[www.mitos21.com](http://www.mitos21.com)

**Sustainable Cultural Management**

**(training course):** [www.scmcourse.com](http://www.scmcourse.com)

**Creative Cultural Leadership (training course):**

[www.creativeclimateleadership.com](http://www.creativeclimateleadership.com)



**Iphigenia Taxopoulou** is a founding member and the General Secretary of the European theatre network mitos21, representing some of the most prestigious national and public theatres in Europe. She has served as Associate General Secretary of the International Association of Theatre Critics and has collaborated, as artistic advisor and international projects manager, with theatre festivals and cultural institutions in Greece and abroad – among which the National Theatre of Strasbourg, the Royal Dramatic Theatre of Sweden-Ingmar Bergman International Theatre Festival, the International Film Festival of Thessaloniki, the Athens&Epidaurus Festival. From 1995 until 2009, she was in charge of the International Relations at the National Theatre of Northern Greece, where she also worked as a dramaturg and head of the publications department. She has served as cultural advisor to the President of the Hellenic Parliament, as a Board member of the Thessaloniki Concert Hall, as well as a member of the artistic committee of the Dimitria Arts Festival of Thessaloniki.

Read her full biography here:

[www.encatc.org/en/events/detail/cultural-management-and-environmental-sustainability/programme/87/](http://www.encatc.org/en/events/detail/cultural-management-and-environmental-sustainability/programme/87/)