

Sustainable Innovation 2023

Accelerating Sustainability in the Creative Economy and Creative Industries

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Business School for the Creative Industries

University for the Creative Arts

Epsom, Surrey, UK

Sustainable Production in the UK Theatre Industry.

Professor R Mock, University of London, UK

As one of the creative industries sub-sectors most severely affected by Covid, the UK theatre industry is currently working toward recovery in ways that also begin to systematically reduce its environmental impacts. Sustainability requires new ways of working, and theatre tends to be conservative in its professional practices and characterised by precarious labour and under-resourced infrastructures that demand quick and paradoxically costly solutions. Furthermore, new theatre-making models that reduce carbon emissions must also meet the challenges of extending audience reach, maintaining economically viable organisations and retaining artistic quality.

This presentation will share the findings of a research project entitled “Transitioning to Sustainable Production Across the UK Theatre Sector” (March-December 2022), a co-commission by the Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre (PEC) and Arts Council England (ACE). The project revolves around the first volume of the *Theatre Green Book* (2021), which was developed with and supported by all leading UK theatre bodies and sustainability organisations, and created by an unprecedented coalition of UK theatre-makers, including freelancers, venues, companies and producers. The *Theatre Green Book* presents an ambitious statement of shared and negotiated values, draws together current best practice in sustainable production, and sets out collective standards for achieving change in response to climate crisis.

The proposed paper will discuss three theatre productions, made in 2022, that followed the *Theatre Green Book*: Theatre Alibi’s *River Land*, National Theatre of Scotland’s *Exodus*, and the Royal Shakespeare Company’s *All’s Well That Ends Well*. It will analyse the impact of voluntary industry-wide standards and guidelines on their carbon footprints and approaches to embedding circular economy principles (as well as the tensions between them). Reflecting upon the outcomes of these three case studies – in addition to the analysis of questionnaires, conversations with theatre industry professionals, and an extensive grey literature review undertaken by the author for the AHRC-funded “Sustainable Materials in the Creative Industries” project (2021) – this presentation will outline the key training and professional development requirements to support the making of low carbon and low waste productions; the compounded impact of Covid and Brexit on sustainable theatre-making practices and business models; and, the additional/alternative modelling of resources, time and costs associated with sustainable theatre production in a variety of theatre-making contexts.