

FLEX SPOTLIGHT SUMMARY: COLLABORATING WITH SOCIETY

FLEX SPOTLIGHT SERIES – COLLABORATING WITH SOCIETY

The FLeX Spotlight Sessions were part of the [FLEX: Collaboration](#) training program. This 3-part series was geared towards those interested in learning more about how Canadian arts & heritage festivals can build and implement stronger collaboration strategies through international and local examples. Recordings of the entire series are available on [WorkInCulture's YouTube Channel](#).



Originally held on April 16, 2022, in this third session, **Collaborating with Society**, featured guests from inspiring examples of collaborations beyond the arts & culture sector including EVII in France, 64 Million Artists in the UK met with Ontario-based “context translator” Keving Matthew Wong of Broadleaf Creative (formerly Broadleaf Theatre). Together they explored the questions: Can festivals transform the world? Can they lead social change by experimenting with equitable structures, environmental responsibilities, power redistribution? Can they inspire new collaborations with society, beyond the arts & culture sector?

Featuring: Charlotte Rotureau, Founder of EVII (France), Chris Rolls, FRSA, Head of Training for 64 Million Artists (UK), and Kevin Matthew Wong, Co-Founder and Artistic Director of Broadleaf Creative (Canada), and Fanny Martin, Art of Festivals, and Stephanie Draker, WorkInCulture as co-hosts and facilitators.



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FLEX SPOTLIGHT CASE STUDIES

1 – Chris Rolls, Head of Training & Development, 64 Million Artists (UK)

SPEAKER BIO: Chris is Head of Training and Development for 64 Million Artists in the UK. He works with organizations and community groups across the nation, helping them to engage creativity and embed person-centred and community-led processes in their work. Chris has worked with Coventry City of Culture 2021 on their community engagement strategy, as well as co-designing and co-facilitating several place-based programmes which give participants the confidence, skills, and tools to develop their own local community projects. Chris also runs 64 Million Artists' training programmes in facilitation and culturally democratic processes. He has a background in community arts, as a theatre and opera director working on large-scale performances. Chris is also a UKCP, EATA, psychotherapist working in private practice with individuals and groups. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts (FRSA).

ORGANIZATION OVERVIEW: Founded in 2014, [64 Million Artists](#) is a social enterprise that works with schools, universities, whole cities, workplaces, cultural institutions and health and government bodies to experiment with ways of reconnecting people with their innate creativity. Their mission is to catalyze the creativity of everyone in the UK, and to shift culture to being co-created and culturally democratic.

64 MILLION ARTISTS: WHO, WHY & HOW

64 Million Artists operates with a small core team of **six full time staff members** to act as a **network multiplier**: they're developing **networks of creative communities across the UK**. They work with client organizations in the Higher Education (universities), cultural sector (galleries, museums, libraries, theatre companies...) and third sector (local authorities, libraries, councils, prisons, schools, care homes, and many other charities and voluntary sector organizations), and they receive project grants from Arts Council England and Trusts & Foundations interested in community engagement, creative community engagement and co-creation.

64 Million Artists works with a research partner, [tialt](#), to ensure that they contribute to evidence-based co-creation practice. **How do we know that what we're doing has an impact? How do we measure what we're doing when we're talking about very qualitative relational processes? What does measurement look like and mean in those contexts?**

To achieve these goals, 64 Million Artists partners on bespoke public engagement projects and offers training and development programs to help people think through models of co-creation. They also run large-scale creative challenge programs, such as the January challenge, offering everyone in the UK mini creative challenges every day for 31 days that people can complete individually and share on social



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media, and that are also facilitated in contexts like schools, care homes, prisons, workplace environments, and with friendship groups on Facebook.

3 project examples (all live at the time of presenting)

- **Coventry Community Connectors:** Coventry is currently the UK City of Culture 2022 (a huge challenge during a pandemic). 64MA co-created a framework to help local community members develop a project with their own community – “community” being defined by people themselves in whichever meaningful way they want to choose. Those may be communities who have shared lived experience around issues like mental health, faith-based communities, communities of the same race or ethnicity or even location-based, like a specific set of streets, or in an area of social deprivation in particular housing projects. 64MA provides a peer learning structure with monthly training sessions, grants to run a project, signposting on to continuing professional development opportunities, and all sorts of networking, to develop the seeds of a local peer support network where people can share their own experiences, resources and skills with each other.
- **Royal Docks London:** within a massive cultural regeneration project in the Royal Docks and City Airport area in London, along the eastern part of the Thames Estuary, 64MA is developing a Creative Connector network, helping local creatives have better professional training development opportunities and connect more with their communities.
- **Bexley Collective:** in Thamesmead (South London), 64MA is facilitating collaboration between four different local charity and voluntary sector organizations: a charity hospice, an employability employment service, a black and minority ethnic hip hop dance company and a mental health charity, all getting monthly training to co-create a cultural project. This project is really about peer support: they are sharing resources and skills and creating a networked way of sharing their equity with each other to truly co-create. Some core principles that emerged from this research include: **facilitating rather than leading, working with your stakeholders, employing professional artists to work with communities to co-create ideas, enabling young people to play an active role, and considering everyday creativity rather than funded artistic activity.**



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2 – Charlotte Rotureau, Founder, EVII (France)

SPEAKER BIOS: After an international career as sailing event organizer that took her all over the world, flying over 50 times a year for 5 years, [Charlotte](#) undertook a personal and professional change to center her work on what is commonly referred to in French as “the ecological transition”. As part of her Masters researching event sustainability, she cycled over 1,000 km through France to meet innovative festivals and interviewed them for her YouTube channel spotlighting ideas, people and practices. With her consultancy EVVI, she accompanies change in the cultural and sports sector at organizational and policy level.

ORGANIZATION OVERVIEW: Launched after obtaining a master’s degree in Tourism, Innovation and Transition, [EVII](#) (acronym of ‘Alive event’ in French) Charlotte’s consultancy supports sport, cultural and tourism's organizations to engage their own transition.

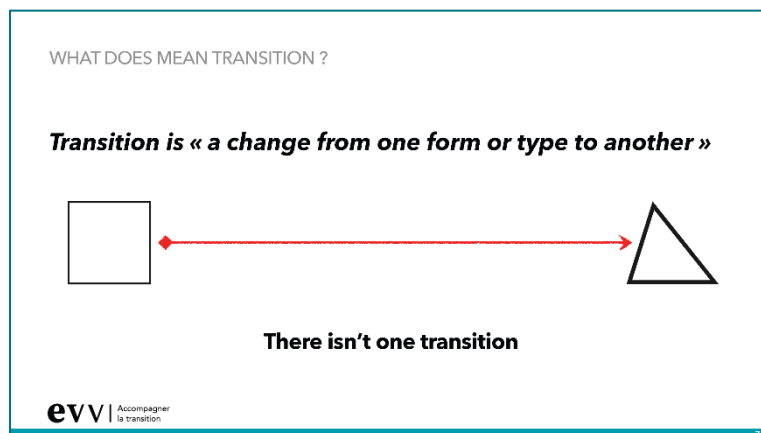
INTERSECTIONS OF TOURISM, INNOVATION AND TRANSITION IN FRANCE:

France is big on festivals, and they come with different types of carbon footprints, usually measured across different categories:

- mobility of artists and audiences
- food and beverage
- logistics and energy (including water, electricity and materials)
- communications (flyers, banners...)
- waste

“Transition”

Transition is a change from one form or type to another: it takes time and multiple pathways. In France, carbon footprint measurements are now widely used in France to guide or measure ecological transition, but they are a simplistic tool that hide other factors and may contribute to a diminishing impact, for example on biodiversity.

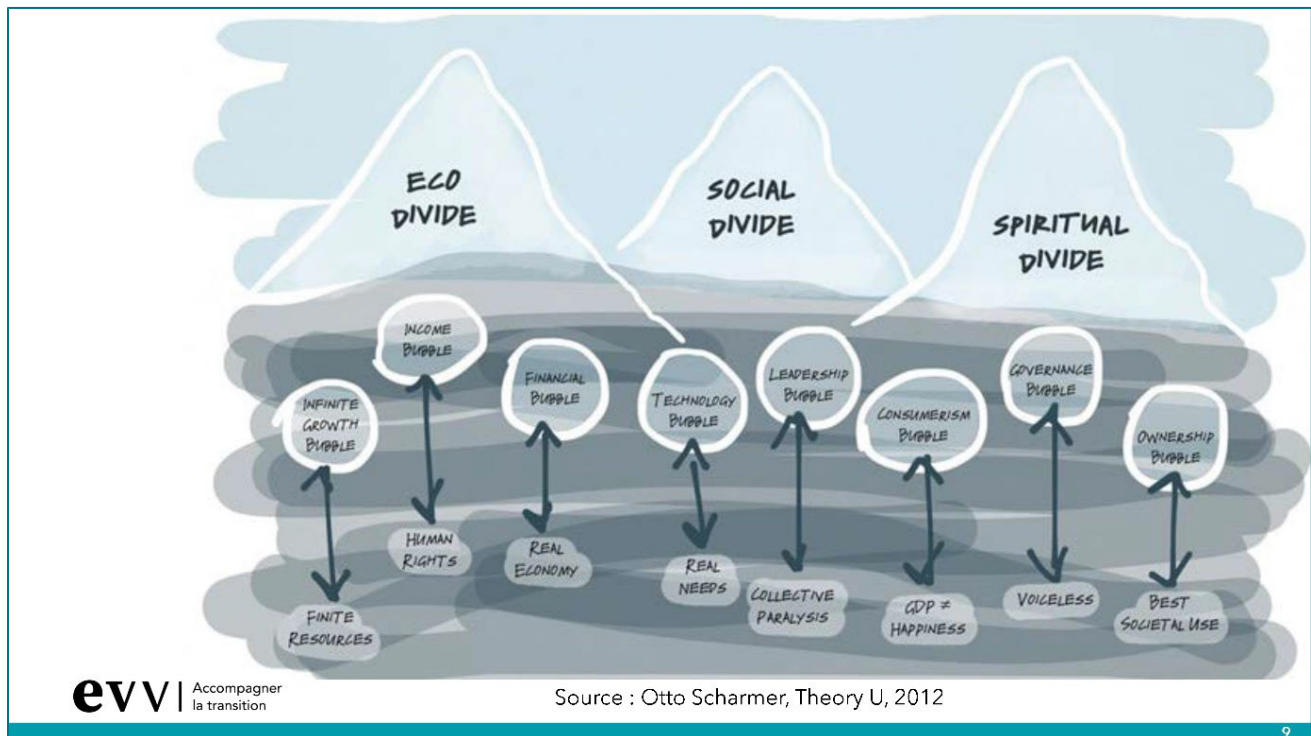


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Ecological, Social & Spiritual Divides

According to Otto Scharmer's U Theory, we are experiencing **3 types of divides**: **ecological** (between me and nature), **social** (between me and others) and **spiritual** (between me and myself). These three aspects are key to our future: it's not enough to work on biodiversity or reducing the carbon footprint if we don't work on democracy or help people to have a better quality of spiritual life.

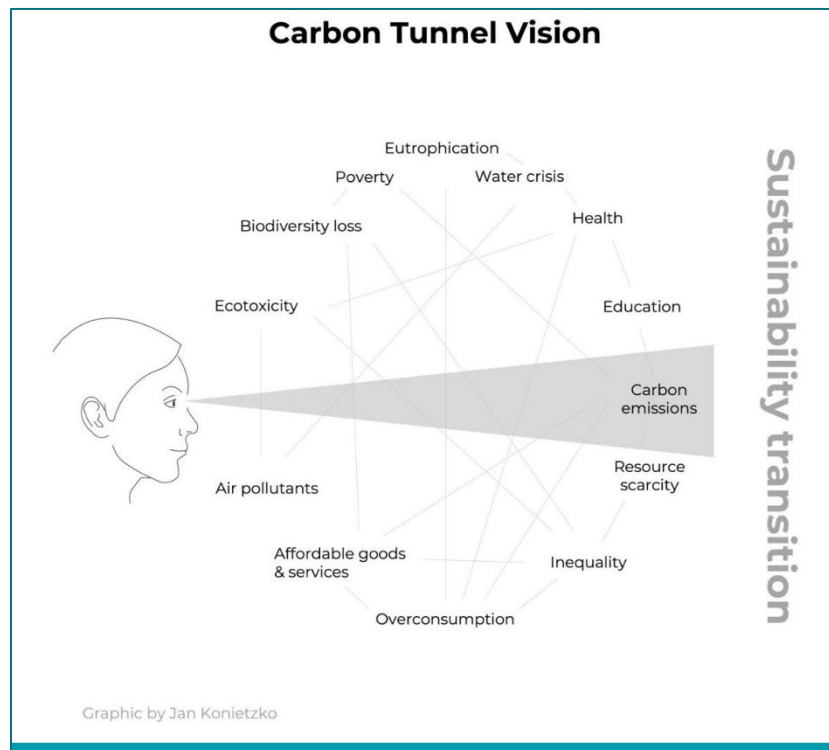
A crucial paradox to seize is that, for all the measurements and logic models we try to impose onto it, this **ecological transition is not a rational process**: it is **emotional**, based on **deep-held values** that may be different for everyone.



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Carbon Tunnel Vision

The Carbon Tunnel Vision image demonstrates the inextricably and multiplicity of factors at play, all too easily reduced to a simple “carbon footprint” quantitative measurement, when in fact social interaction, social justice, and trust in institutions are crucial to our necessary transition process. **What kind of life do we want? How can festivals contribute to this transition movement?**



3 – Kevin Matthew Wong, Co-Founder and Artistic Director, Broadleaf Theatre (Canada)

SPEAKER BIO: Kevin (he/him) is a Hakka Chinese-Canadian theatre creator, facilitator, performer and producer. Kevin is the co-founder and Artistic Director of [Broadleaf Creative](#) (formerly Broadleaf Theatre), a company that merges environmentalism and live performance. His documentary-theatre solo-performance *The Chemical Valley Project* - a collaboration with co-creator Julia Howman and Aamjiwnaang First Nation Water Protectors Vanessa Gray and Beze Gray - tackles environmental racism in Canada. Kevin has collaborated with companies such as [Theatre Passe Muraille](#), [Cahoots Theatre](#), the Macau-Toronto music theatre company [Music Picnic](#), [The Shaw Festival](#), [The Stratford Festival](#), and the American social justice residency [The Gardarev Center](#). Kevin is also a



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Producer at [Why Not Theatre](#), leading its MAKE platform including projects and tours such as Mahabharata, Prince Hamlet, and What You Won't Do For Love, starring Drs. Tara Cullis and David Suzuki.

ORGANIZATION OVERVIEW: Founded in 2014, [Broadleaf Creative](#) (formerly Broadleaf Theatre) creates multidisciplinary performance based on local, national and global issues, making little-known topics entertaining and accessible.

KEY INSIGHTS FROM DIALOGUE

1. *First steps: how do we start, especially when we have such big visions?*

- **Open a space for honest and authentic dialogue** in your organization or festival team to discuss what transition means for everyone involved.
- Most organizations are set up to decide at the top and deliver as quickly as possible, so this space for dialogue must be protected and underpinned by shared values.
- Start with the why rather than the what, and start with yourself: **Why do you want to be here?** What are **your values?** What are you **bringing to** and **expecting from** this project or organization?
- Assess right from the start the systems, networks and distribution of power at play: if liberal arts institutions try to “engage” people because they lack agency but without really surfacing the implicit power structures within those networks, they risk rushing into very linear modes of delivery.
- Use an intersectionality lens: we're often very good at looking at diversity and difference and marginalization, and not so good at looking at privilege in ourselves and our institutions, because it's makes us all feel anxious, defensive and fragile. Who has power?
- We need to be able to listen truly, with the understanding that it may change us. Festivals have the huge benefit of being able to reinvent themselves through their cycle and to adjust their form to fit with emerging needs. However, this is a real challenge for large institutions that are built on a more or less rigid architecture to deliver results. **How do we keep a decision-making structure in a constant feedback loop to understand and shape the effects it has on its local environment?**

2. *Getting to yes: How do we convince people to come into this dialogue through which both parties are changed?*

- First, who is the **guest** in the relationship? When facilitating and creating bridges between institutional structures and communities, we often see different expectations on each side - a desire for expression and belonging on the community side, and a need to meet funder or stakeholder requirement on the institutional side. When the values and intentions behind a program run shallow, facilitators are often put in the position of protecting the institution in



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order to engage participants. The power held at institutional level can be hard to yield and programs can easily fall into lip service to co-creation and community engagement.

- We can't wait for permission: we are doing this work regardless, around these big structures, until they are finally worn down and include themselves in the co-creation and process of change.
- We can create spaces for dialogue where people who may be resistant to change get to feel safe about specific aspects of a transition project to start with, and grow the confidence and desire to do more.

3. *Changing the metrics: How do you know what difference is made in the world through your projects and actions?*

- The cultural industry tends to use measurement to prove social return on investment, or in other words, to prove success to a funder – which contributes to producing evaluation based on “bad faith data”.
- A more useful way of undertaking evaluation is to understand it as a process **of letting information flow through a network**: asking questions such as what the community is learning about itself and its place in the world, and feeding back this information into the system so that it undertakes a learning loop. **How do we measure co-creation?**
- Beyond numbers, we can observe the **quality of relationships** that are created and maintained by the activities of a festival - for example, their density, how they form into a live network that conducts energy and information between individuals and groups.

KEVIN'S OPENING CONTEXTUALIZATION:

I want to acknowledge how deeply **empathetic** and **visionary** both of our speakers have been. The intention of FLeX is to **supercharge** our festivals, and this session in particular is really about how to **super change** our festivals. Chris and Charlotte have been talking about **theories of change** and in particular about changing ourselves - including themselves - as individuals. They are both involved in national conversations about how to make change happen, and the work they presented today is aspirational and visionary. **It's not always – and probably not yet – how we are envisioning community arts and programming in Canada.** Often, as the facilitator of community parts in programming, I feel that we're the awkward younger sibling of the exciting bit of programming, and there's a **very particular pocket of funding** for this kind of activity over here. There's also a particular pocket of staff over here, often on contract. And so **the knowledge and investment in the work that happens over here isn't really at the core of what our institutions do.** The kinds of changes that we're talking about and the kinds of programming that Chris and Charlotte are talking about really **need us to get philosophical about what's at the core of our institutions and who's at the center of those**



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conversations – and how do we great a route for different people to be actively at the centre of those conversations.

Sometimes, as artistic institutions, we think of ourselves as leading the way in political conversations, but in this conversation about collaborating with society, I'm hearing that **we need to clear the way for community members to actually be making change in our institutions**. And then hopefully, our institutions can make space for change to happen in society through the individual community members.

Charlotte mentioned greenwashing and the need for **climate consciousness**. I think one thing that maybe we can chat about is a **vision of change**. There was that diagram of the **square that transitions into the triangle** – and **that triangle is an aspirational shape**. Similarly, I think we're just in the beginning stages of this climate conversation in our artistic institutions. It doesn't feel quite organic yet. It feels like we're trying to fit in these particular metrics into how we should do things, but **they haven't yet infused into the why we do things**. And that, I think, is really something that we should talk about. **The climate is one example of many types of different transitions that our institutions are going through, whether it's involving new voices from marginalized communities, accessibility, or support for caregivers, both in our audiences and amongst our collaborators as artists**. What I'm hearing is that **collaboration really has the power to change our institutions themselves in a very deep way – if we allow collaboration to do that**. There's a very different conception of society when we think of society as a set of patrons or as a kind of wallet, versus if we think about **society as our participants and as our collaborators**.

KEVIN'S CLOSING CONTEXTUALISATION

To attempt to summarize our transition conversation:

- We established that our first step should be to ensure that we have the means to realize our values: time, space, commitment. Value alignment is not enough: we need to have adequate resources.
- We then considered *how* to move into a transition process:
 - listening to understand, being open to be changed ourselves by these conversations.
 - changing our evaluation metrics from numerical and anecdotal to **mapping and measuring relational quality** (including within institutions, and between institutions and communities).
 - adopting an **intersectionality lens**, rather than an 'inclusive' approach (which implies an 'inside' to be included into, rather than a co-created open space for everyone to bring their full complex selves into).



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- Let's not wait until another tragedy happens to launch our processes of change, and let's embrace an **empathetic, spacious, visionary, generous way of thinking about change**, including truly striving to do less.
- Our standard conception of "sustainability" is too static and rigid to let emergence happen, whereas the process of transition calls for nimbleness, responsiveness, aliveness.
- One way to enable this nimbleness could be for institutions to constitute a "**community change fund**": discretionary funding distributed through conversations to surface and define needs.
- And finally, let's not forget to celebrate the real successes: **people buzzing because they're together in a creative process**, saying they can't wait to do it again!



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ON CULTURE DAYS



WorkInCulture would also like to acknowledge and extend our deep thanks to our Curriculum Consultant, Fanny Martin of Art of Festivals, for summarizing and synthesizing this information.



Fanny is an international creative producer & facilitator specialised in festivals, networks, interdisciplinary projects and art in public space. Born and educated in France, she developed an eclectic freelance project portfolio in the UK before moving to Canada and founding [Art of Festivals](#), a creative company that designs transformative events to spark change and enchant everyday life. In collaboration with artists, educators, researchers, technologists and activists, her work focuses on producing memorable shared experiences, shaping change strategies, experimenting with participatory frameworks and designing learning & evaluation programmes.

