

Summary of input and positioning 21. March 2026

Asociacija and EAIPA working session Trigger Festival:

Beyond Performance: Sustainable Artistic Careers and the Need to Reinvent Oneself.

Session exploring how performing artists navigate precarious working conditions by adapting their careers over time, drawing on European support structures and artists' perspectives on sustainability, health, and long-term professional development.

When we talk about artists transitioning into other professions, we often frame it as a problem.

But I'd suggest we reframe it: it's actually a model for the future of work.

Because artistic careers have always been non-linear, project-based, and driven by constant reinvention.

1. Transition is not just professional—it's identity

For artists, especially performing artists, a transition is not simply changing jobs. It's a deep identity shift.

You're not just leaving a role—you're redefining who you are.

This involves:

- Letting go of a singular identity
- Translating your value into a new language
- And accepting that a career is no longer one continuous line, but a series of phases

The important point is: **artists are already trained in transformation.**

They just need systems that recognize it.

2. Artists are ahead of the labour market

What we call "new work" today—portfolio careers, freelancing, hybrid roles—has been the reality for artists for decades.

But the problem is:

Our systems—education, pensions, unemployment structures—are still built for linear careers.

This creates a mismatch:

Artists are living the future of work,

but without the structural support others are only now beginning to need.

3. Transferable skills are real—but often invisible

Research, including work supported by the European Commission, shows that dancers and performing artists develop:

- High adaptability
- Strong communication
- Emotional intelligence
- Discipline and resilience
- These are exactly the skills demanded in:
 - leadership
 - healthcare
 - education
 - and innovation-driven sectors

But these skills are often **not recognized**, because they are described in the wrong language.

So the challenge is not a lack of skills—
it's a lack of **translation and recognition**.

4. Artists create measurable value for society

Through frameworks promoted by organizations like UNESCO, World Economic Forum we increasingly understand that artists contribute to:

- Social cohesion
- Health and wellbeing
- Education and critical thinking
- Cultural identity

And also economically:

The creative economy in Europe contributes around **4–5% of GDP** (Gross Domestic Product) and employs millions.

So investing in artists is not cultural luxury—
it is **economic and social infrastructure**.

5. Real-world impact examples

We already see powerful cross-sector impact:

- At CERN, artists collaborate with scientists to translate complexity into human experience
- In healthcare, dance programs for Parkinson's patients improve mobility and quality of life
- In education, artists entering schools transform how young people learn—
towards creativity and interdisciplinary thinking
- With older populations, artistic practice reduces isolation and supports cognitive health
- These are not side projects— they are **blueprints for future professions**.

6. The real challenge: structural conditions

Despite this value, many artists face:

- High living and insurances costs (Switzerland)
- Irregular income
- Limited access to social security
- Systems not compatible with freelancing or retraining
- This makes transitions harder than they need to be.

7. What could solutions look like?

We need to think structurally:

- Lifelong learning models—imagine a sabbatical every 10 years for retraining
- Flexible pension systems that allow gradual transition into new roles
- Better recognition of portfolio careers
- And bold ideas like basic income—discussed, for example, in the Swiss basic income referendum 2016 (CHF 2'500)
- Irland “Basic Income for the Arts”, starting in September 2026. Approximately 2'000 selected artists and creatives will receive 325 euros per week over a three-year period.

8. Final thought

Performing artists are not just workers in one sector.

They are:

- Role models for adaptability
- Experts in continuous development
- And pioneers of multi-career lives

In a world where people live longer and will have multiple professions, this is not a niche issue.

It is a **societal question**.

So the real shift is this:

We should stop asking how artists can adapt to the system—

and start asking how systems can adapt to the reality artists already represent.

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