

Arts. Environment. Sustainability.

An Overview of ASEF Projects



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Image credit (front page): Image of the Mobile Artistic Platform (M.A.P.) project, 2010 (India). Image courtesy of Maraa Media Collective and Reloading Images.

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Arts. Environment. Sustainability. An Overview of ASEF Projects

Four Years of Connecting Art and Environmental Sustainability

Connect2Culture Core Programmes

ASEF Collaborative Follow-up Projects by Alumni

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Four Years of Connecting Art and Environmental Sustainability

In answer to the increasing recognition of the important role culture has to play in society, in 2008 the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) initiated a four-year programme called *Connect2Culture*. Its main objective was to investigate the role of arts and culture in society by bringing together professionals from different sectors to address pertinent issues from their perspectives in Asia and Europe. The programme fostered cross-disciplinary networks through supporting artistic projects, workshops and policy meetings. The following document outlines all ASEF's art and environment projects conducted from 2008 to 2011.

The projects are divided into three main areas.

The **core programme** is made up of three activities which were held alongside significant international events. The first was the 7th ASEM Summit in China in 2008, the second was COP15 in 2009 and the third was the 5th World Summit on Arts and Culture in 2011. Each of these events were selected in part because of their capacity to gather together experts on a large international platform which has the potential to influence policy decisions.

Out of the 2008 meeting at the 7th ASEM Summit, five **follow-up projects** were supported as part of the *Connect2Culture* programme. The concept behind supporting these smaller projects was to extend the reach of the programme to a broader range of events and communities through artistic residencies, targeted workshops, public presentations and summer schools.

The **other art and environment projects** that ASEF has supported have included those from the *Asia-Europe Cultural Partnerships Initiative Programme*, the *Connecting Civil Societies: Sustainable Creative Cities* workshop and through the commissioning of a research project of art and environment initiatives in Asia.

All these projects were united in their aim to connect the arts and culture sector with topics related to environmental sustainability issues. A variety of structures were chosen in order to reach out to a diverse range of publics.



Connect2Culture Core Programmes

Name of project: Dialogue on Arts, Culture and Climate Change

Date: 9 – 12 October 2008

Place: Beijing, China

Partners: China Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA), Beijing, China; Danish Cultural Institute (DCI), Beijing, China

Structure: Public forum, workshops, artistic projects

Objectives:

- Raise awareness of climate change and sustainability among cultural and arts communities in Asia and Europe
- Strengthen the role of culture and the arts in the discussions related to climate change
- Forge creative connections for joint action in finding climate change solutions through cross-disciplinary perspectives

Description:

The *Dialogue on Arts, Culture and Climate Change* was organised as part of the Asia-Europe activities along the 7th Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Summit of Heads of State and Government.¹ This project gathered together 45 artists, cultural practitioners, scientists and sociologists to discuss connections between culture, the arts and pressing global issues like climate change. The *Dialogue* was the first project initiated under the *Connect2Culture* programme.



Exhibition held during the Dialogue.

Some key concerns raised during the *Dialogue* were surrounding the concept of climate change as an abstract idea: How do we translate factual information on climate



Workshop session with the participants.

change into actual experiences? How can the field of arts and culture offer ways to understand this new reality?

The *Dialogue* enabled the exploration of multi-disciplinary approaches to climate change through a public forum held in conjunction with intensive workshops and artistic projects. During the workshop various formats were used, such as world café-style discussions and open space technology interactions.

Important lessons learnt from the *Dialogue* included two key points: 1) the need in Asia to close existing knowledge gaps of best practices that intersect the arts and environmental sustainability; and 2) the need for dialogue on arts, culture and the environment to progress from the individual to the institutional level.

From this first year of the *Connect2Culture* programme, ASEF recognised a need to search for alternative ways to support art and environment initiatives. As a result they called for proposals of follow-up projects from the participants of the *Dialogue*. The majority of the participants were already very active in this field, and therefore there were many projects that were being conceived and developed. In 2009 and 2010 ASEF supported a further five of these projects that addressed environment issues through artistic practices.

Links:

ASEF project page, where the full report can be downloaded.

¹ The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) is a dialogue process among Heads of Governments currently representing fort-six countries as well as the ASEAN Secretariat and the European Commission. The inaugural meeting of ASEM leaders was in March 1996 in Bangkok (Thailand). Since then, ASEM Summits have been held every two years.

Name of project: Connect2Culture 2009

1. CultureIFutures: The Transition to an Ecological Age 2050
2. Arts, Culture and Sustainability: Building Synergies between Asia and Europe

Date: 7 – 10 December 2009

Place: Copenhagen, Denmark

Partners: Danish Cultural Institute, Copenhagen, Denmark; Khoj International Artists' Association, New Delhi, India

Structure: Conference, virtual circle of contributors, vision group

Objectives:

- Connect artists and cultural operators through online and offline interdisciplinary collaborative projects
- Address pertinent themes in the arts and in society through these channels
- Actively engage the cultural sector in environmental issues at the levels of practice, networks and policy



Brainstorming from the Vision Group participants.

Description:

The second year of the *Connect2Culture* programme brought together cultural experts from Asia and Europe for a symposium and a workshop that took place alongside the 15th Conference of Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (Copenhagen, December 2009).

1. Culture|Futures: The Transition to an Ecological Age 2050 (7-9 December)

The *Culture!Futures* event consisted of a symposium followed by a working seminar. It brought together experts from various sectors including environment, culture, engineering and media to explore

interconnections between arts, culture and the environment.

2. Arts, Culture and Sustainability: Building Synergies between Asia and Europe (10 December)

Arts, Culture and Sustainability was a workshop that gathered together cultural leaders to discuss personal and institutional visions for the cultural sector's engagement on environmental sustainability issues. This group of 16 experts was called the "Vision Group" and they each drafted a vision paper in preparation for attending the workshop. The vision paper outlined their views for an environmentally sustainable future and the role that the arts play in this. Out of the workshop a discussion paper was commissioned which drew out the main points raised by the vision group.

In addition to the symposium and the workshop, ASEF also engaged a virtual circle of contributors who connected with the debate online via ASEF's cultural portal culture360.org. The virtual contributors wrote concurrently online about the discussions taking place at the conference.

The key topics that arose out of the symposium, workshop and from the online exchanges, were: What is the role of the arts and culture as an active player in society? How do arts and culture engage with sustainability issues? What are the similarities and differences of the needs and approaches between Asia and Europe?

Although the result of COP15 was seen as disappointing, there were participants of the ASEF project who felt energised by the meetings because they saw the potential of civil society actors. As part of the above mentioned discussion paper from the vision group, the editor returned to interview four of the workshop participants to learn what had happened to their vision one year later: did they still believe in their original vision? Had they continued working in the fields of arts and environment? On reflecting on the process of the 2009 programme, one of the participants noted that: “It was inspiring and a great relief to meet a group of good people with deep concerns and creative articulation on the subject...This has seriously made me go on.”

Links:

ASEF Project Page



Name of project: Connect2Culture at the 5th World Summit on Arts and Culture

Date: 3 – 6 October 2011

Place: Melbourne, Australia

Partners: International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies (IFACCA), Sydney, Australia

Structure: Roundtable

Objectives:

- Explore themes that link arts and environmental sustainability
- Support a platform that presents these issues to a wide audience that includes policy makers
- Increase impact of ASEF's activities in the area of art and environmental sustainability

Description:

The *5th World Summit on Arts and Culture* in Melbourne (Australia) brought together cultural practitioners from countries worldwide – from policy makers working in national arts councils and ministries of culture, to researchers, artists and community leaders.

With the theme of *Creative Intersections*, participants explored the relationships between the arts and culture and the wider sectors of society. From environment to health, social inclusion, technological innovation and education, the *Summit* looked at how the arts can be a catalyst for change and examined the ways policy can provide the pathway for these intersections.

During the *Summit*, ASEF hosted a roundtable on the topic, *A Climate for Change?*. At this roundtable, they presented a summary of their *Connect2Culture* programme in order to debate topics connecting the arts and environmental sustainability.

Links:

[ASEF Project page](#)

[5th World Summit on Arts and Culture](#)



ASEF Collaborative Follow-up Projects by Alumni

These Follow-up Projects were selected through an open call for proposals circulated among the alumni of the **Connect2Culture** programme. The criteria for selected initiatives included collaborative projects involving Asian and European alumni.

Name of project: Ecolocated: Littoral Lives

Date: July – September 2009

Place: United Kingdom & Ireland

Partners: Media Art Research Interdisciplinary Network (M.A.R.I.N.)

Structure: Travelling residency

Objectives:

- Investigate marine ecosystems and human impact upon them
- Instigate avenues of action by bringing together artists and scientists, as well as various local communities, to combine research with local concerns

collect data, and interacted with local marine biology and oceanography institutes as well as with various communities.

M.A.R.I.N. is an initiative that has worked extensively in this field. Their focus is on research that integrates artistic and scientific practices in the investigation of cultural and environmental ecosystems. Since this residency, M.A.R.I.N. have organised other such projects that further this research and artistic practice.

Links:

[ASEF project page](#)

[M.A.R.I.N. project page](#)



M.A.R.I.N. residency vessel in Belfast.

Description:

Ecolated: Littoral Lives explored geo-political and ecological issues posed by human impact upon marine ecosystems (especially around harbours). The project comprised of a mobile residency and expedition on the Irish Sea.

As a pilot project beginning in 2009, *Ecolated* was produced for the Irish Sea, and for two festivals: the International Symposium on Electronic Art (ISEA) and the Abandon Normal Devices (AND) Festival. On board the mobile residency, the Media art Research Interdisciplinary Network (M.A.R.I.N.) researchers and artists made an installation and workshop as well as creating an on-board laboratory. Over the residency period, the participants of the project used sensors to



Name of project: Climate Leaders: Release your Creative Powers. How can art enhance our ability to think and act differently?

Date: 12 – 19 October 2009

Place: Bangkok, Thailand

Partners: British Council (East Asia)

Structure: Workshop

Objectives:

- Explore how creativity can be used to encourage people to think and act differently
- Explore and develop leadership skills required for working in cross sector and cross cultural project groups
- Encourage the development new project ideas that work collaboratively across regions
- Support peer to peer learning and networking



Participants sharing at the workshop.

Description:

Climate Leaders: Release your Creative Powers. How can art enhance our ability to think and act differently? was a capacity-building workshop for 30 young leaders from ASEM countries. The workshop encouraged the participants to develop climate change solutions for local communities with an emphasis on the role that culture and creativity can play in finding these solutions. A schedule was designed based on Linked Environments for Atmospheric Discovery's (LEAD) existing experience and previous involvement with the British Council's Climate Cool workshops run in 2007 and 2008. Over the six days the workshop incorporated a variety of formats that included group presentations, buddy groups, creativity workshop/theatre sessions, participant-led energiser sessions, "show time" sessions, sharing sessions and project clinics.



Contributions of the participants.

The workshop enabled participants to develop personal project plans for their future initiatives. Another outcome was the development of a network of peers as well as a sense of belonging to a wider community of climate leaders felt by the participants.

In the format of the workshop, there were several structures that were quite successful in enhancing the learning experience of the participants. The first was the buddy groups, which provided a safe space for participants to raise any concerns and points for clarification while also serving as a tool for reviewing the day. A second useful tool was the creativity workshop (theatre session) which effectively demonstrated how theatre can be used to explore climate issues.

As a result of the workshop, a discussion paper was developed by cultural practitioners David Haley and Jaya Iyer. This paper, entitled *The Art of Sustainable Living: A Creative Approach to Global Social and Environmental Crises*, encourages further debate by presenting theories and giving examples of artistic practice while at the same time questioning how we view our own way of life. This paper has since been used as an educational tool.

Links:

[ASEF project page](#)



Name of project: Making Our Futures: The Art of Sustainable Living

Date: 1 Oct 2009 – 30 April 2010

Place: Manchester, United Kingdom & Beijing, China

Partners: China Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA), Beijing, China; Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), Manchester, United Kingdom

Structure: Workshop

Objectives:

- Galvanize the relationship between MMU and CAFA as an Asia-Europe network platform for arts-led cultural research into critical futures studies and sustainable living
- Consider how future artists may contribute to the work and lives of city communities and authorities in Manchester and Beijing
- Create a dialogical programme of web wikies, master classes, and satellite conferences

Both the workshops gave students opportunities to develop a plan for future alternatives that promote sustainable living. The students in the workshop in China worked in two groups that allowed them to develop these ideas systematically and in-depth. The students in the UK workshop analysed past traditions and their value within the context of the Chinese folk art of paper cutting.

Links:

[ASEF Project page](#)



Participants learning the art of paper cutting.

Description:

Making Our Futures: The Art of Sustainable Living involved collaborative research between Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) and the Central Academy of Fine Art (CAFA) that explored how artists can contribute to the work and lives of the city communities in Manchester and Beijing. The overall theme of the project was to tackle the issues surrounding contemporary lifestyle choices and the challenge of living more sustainably. It consisted of two workshops (in Beijing and Manchester) where the students of each institution engaged with the theme of sustainable living. The workshops debated issues such as urban waste management, sustainable design, community based carbonless future, folk art, contemporary technologies, global farming and climate change.



Name of project: First International Summer School of Arts and Sciences for Sustainability in Social Transformation

Date: 21 – 27 August 2010

Place: Gabrovo, Bulgaria

Partners: Cultura21, international; International Council for Cultural Centres (I3C), Sofia, Bulgaria

Structure: Summer School

Objectives:

- Gather together scholars, researchers, communities and arts practitioners working with culture for sustainability
- Engage practitioners working with culture for sustainability in dialogue and a mutual learning process
- Provide a platform for participants to inspire each other through workshops and new friendships, leading to potential new projects and collaborations
- Encourage inter-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary practices

Description:

The *First International Summer School of Arts and Sciences for Sustainability in Social Transformation* brought together scholars, researchers, arts practitioners and local communities in order to address a range of environmental issues through dialogue and cooperation. Each day of the summer school featured at least half a day dedicated to the topic of walking. The other sessions were related to communities, arts and social



Walking sticks of the Summer school participants.

Topics raised by the participants of the Summer School included: trans-disciplinary practices; the use of artistic and scientific practices to reflect on issues of sustainability; the necessity for complexity in developing cultures of sustainability; and the difficulty in meeting the needs of external, internal, local and trans-local interests. The summer school encouraged the participants to think differently about their practices and approaches in their everyday work.

Links:

[ASEF project page](#)

[Summer School project page](#)

Article on [culture360.org](#), “Walking for social and ecological transformation”



Participants gather after the bread-making session.

transformation, cultural city development and methodological empowerment. During the seven days of the summer school, encounters, workshops, seminars and a walk through the town were set up with the local population.



Other ASEF Art and Environment Projects

These projects were selected through an open call for proposals circulated to the alumni of the **Connect2Culture** programme as well as to the public.

Name of project: Asia-Europe Knowledge Exchange towards Sustainable Development

Date: August – October 2009

Place: Hong Kong, China & Berlin, Germany

Partners: Community Museum Project, Hong Kong, China; Kunst-Stoffe, Berlin, Germany

Structure: Interviews, research, presentation, online publication

Objectives:

- Conduct interviews in order to reach out to practitioners in Berlin and to talk about their practice
- Conduct a residency in Hong Kong to create a database of practitioners
- Learn from established models and adapt and apply these models to the context in Hong Kong
- Create a manual for Making of a Used Material Centre in Asia

Description:

Asia-Europe Knowledge Exchange towards Sustainable Development involved research in order to create a manual on the feasibility of a Used Material Center (UMC) in Hong Kong. The idea of a material centre is quite simple: collect materials that are being thrown away elsewhere, store them some place and make them available for reuse. The researcher for this project, Corina Vosse, worked with the Community Museum Project to investigate the feasibility of setting up a material centre in Hong Kong. She based this research on her experience at the Kunst-Stoff organisation in Berlin. After this research, Vosse presented her finding in an open presentation in Hong Kong and reported on these findings in a *Manual for the Making of a Used Material Center (UMC) in Asia. Recommendations based on a case study in Hong Kong*, available online.

As a result of this research it was identified that Hong Kong is ready for a UMC. Judging from experience and drawing on findings of the case study, it was found that the initiative is well placed to effectively address a variety of challenges of contemporary urban societies in Asia (and throughout most of the world): waste accumulation, scarcity of certain natural resources, lack of environmental awareness and insufficient facilitation of creative skills throughout society.

Links:

Put Garbage Back to Work downloadable publication



Name of project: Expert Meeting on New Media, Civil Society and Environmental Sustainability

Date: 19 – 24 July 2010

Place: Bandung, Indonesia

Partners: Common Room Networks Foundation, Bandung, Indonesia; Transmediale, Berlin, Germany

Structure: Expert meeting

Objectives:

- Gather together new media industry experts to discuss the state of the industry in Asia and Europe
- Provide a platform for developing networks for new media practitioners in Asia and Europe
- Produce the *Bandung Declaration of Open Cultures, Technologies and Ecologies* as a common statement of shared values, goals and principles for sustainable and open cultural practices



Description:

The *Expert Meeting on New Media, Civil Society and Environmental Sustainability* brought together new media professionals from Asia and Europe to formulate strategies related to environmental sustainability and empowerment of civil society actors. The five-day programme included open discussions, site visits and public presentations at leading cultural centres in Bandung. The meeting took place in conjunction with the *Nu-Substance Festival of Open Culture, Technology and Urban Ecology*.

Sessions from the programme included: a presentation of the “Mekong Project” by Arthit Suryawongkul; a discussion on creative industry, environmental responsibility and the role of government support; and an extensive debate on practices and principals of working in the new media sector in Asia and Europe.



The *Expert Meeting* created valuable opportunities for future collaboration and networking among the participants who were practitioners of new media in Asia and Europe. The *Expert Meeting* also created a conducive atmosphere for cross-cultural dialogue and raised awareness amongst the participants of the need to look beyond the stereotypes of Asian and European identities.

At the conclusion of the *Expert Meeting*, the *Bandung Declaration of Open Cultures, Technologies and Ecologies* was signed and presented by the group at the Museum of the Asian-African Conference. Consequently it was published for distribution, sharing, free use and active practice under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license.

Links:

ASEF Project Page (where the Bandung Declaration can be downloaded)

Article on culture360.org, “New ways of promoting artistic and cultural expressions”

Nu-Substance

Common Room



Name of project: Mobile Artistic Platform (M.A.P.)

Date: 15 October – 15 November 2010

Place: South India

Partners: Maraa Media Collective, Bangalore, India; CitySpinning, Bangalore, India; Reloading Images, Berlin, Germany

Structure: Travelling residency

Objectives:

- Foster dialogue between Asian and European artists through participatory creative tools, such as film, photography, new media, visual arts, writing, theatre and performance
- Provide a platform for knowledge sharing and creative collaborations
- Build capacity and networking opportunities between artists in the field of new media in Asia and Europe

Description:

Mobile Artistic Platform (M.A.P.) was a multidisciplinary, travelling residency project where participating artists worked on an experimental journey to different locations in South India. Together, they explored themes relating to environmental sustainability in local communities, sustainable tourism, cross-cultural exchanges, community-based practices and notions of hospitality.

The project began in Bangalore at a local independent arts space and was followed by a series of orientation workshops. The group then took to the road for 17 days. Specific topics discussed during this journey were related to local concerns in each of the locations visited and included sustainable tourism, natural heritage, local life and food culture. To conclude the project, the artists presented their creative findings over a two-day session of public talks, screenings and performances.

This residency implemented a structure that was first developed by Reloading Images and which took place in Damascus, Syria in 2008. In this edition in 2010 Reloading Images partnered with local host organisations in India and adapted the programme to this new context.

Encounters between artists and local communities enabled artists to learn about the local culture on a more intimate level, while the locations selected enabled the participants to focus on specific topics related to particular communities. The collaborations established with local host organisations across South India greatly enhanced the success of the mobile residency.

Links:

ASEF Project page

Article on culture360.org, “An experimental artistic journey through local communities of South India”



Participant working as local look on.



Participants in initial workshop.



Participants travelling through South India.



Name of project: 4th Connecting Civil Societies of Asia and Europe. Workshop 3: Sustainable Creative Cities: The role of the arts in globalised urban contexts

Date: 1 – 3 October 2010

Place: Brussels, Belgium

Partners: Institute of Cultural Theory, Research and the Arts, Leuphana University, Luneburg, Germany; Urban Research Plaza, Osaka City University, Osaka, Japan

Structure: Workshop with two months of preparatory online exchanges

Objectives:

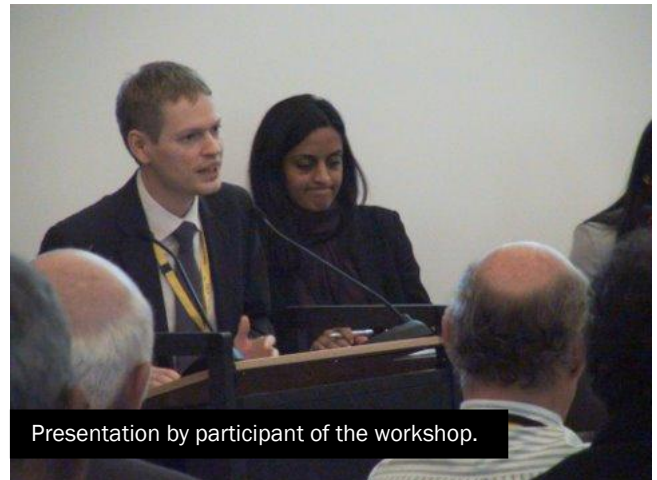
- Facilitate the emergence of local urban processes of social change in partnerships between artists, cultural practitioners and communities
- Engage in discussion artists and cultural practitioners, as well as architects, urban planners, cultural policymakers and experts of local governance
- Obtain an outcome that bore relevance for local governance and for ASEM cultural policy



Description:

Cities are becoming larger as populations increase and as people migrate from the countryside to urban areas. Environmental impacts of these growing cities is a topic that is being discussed across sectors in Asia and Europe. *Sustainable Creative Cities: The role of the arts in globalised urban contexts* was a workshop that discussed the roles of artists and creative workers in the evolution of cities in today's globalised world.

The preparatory phase for the workshop involved online exchanges between participating civil society experts in Asia and Europe over a period of two months. These exchanges were focused around an initial working concept paper prepared by the workshop hosts. This



preparatory work helped to define the parameters for the debate and identified the main focus points for the workshop.

The workshop itself involved a presentation on “Re-thinking the creative city theory” which was followed by facilitated discussions. The discussions focused on two key themes: 1) the notion of a sustainable creative city and 2) the role of the arts in this creative city. By the end of the workshop, the process of consulting civil society experts resulted in the creation of concrete recommendations for the development of a sustainable creative city. These recommendations were channelled to the 8th ASEM Summit of Heads of State and Government, held on 4 – 5 October 2010 in Brussels, Belgium. In addition to these recommendations, the participants developed a longer report that was disseminated online in 2011.

Links:

ASEF Project page

Article on culture360.org, “Interview: Sacha Kagan of the Institute of Cultural Theory, Research and the Arts”

Article on culture360.org, “Sustainable creative cities: role of arts in globalised urban context”

Article on culture360.org, “Culture experts urge ASEM governments to make creative cities more sustainable”



Name of project: Linking the Arts to Environment and Sustainable Development Issues (Asia, 2010)

Date: Throughout 2010 and 2011

Place: India, Thailand, Singapore, Mongolia, Vietnam, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia

Partners: ASEF-commissioned project

Structure: Mapping research

Objectives:

- Foster multi-disciplinary debate and dialogue
- Conduct field-based research on culture, environment and the arts
- Document research linking culture, environment and the arts
- Research and highlight innovative and sustainable solutions to local environmental challenges
- Provide access to information on projects that link culture, environment and the arts to the public
- Contribute towards policy inputs on arts and sustainability



This project involved researchers from eight countries in Asia. The research was conducted in two phases. The first phase consisted of broad research which mapped initiatives in a given country. The second phase delved deeper into a selected number of these initiatives concluding with a collection of detailed case studies. This second phase required the researchers to interview the initiators of the projects to explore the issues and themes involved, particularly as they related to the cross-section of arts and sustainable development. This involved considerations such as the sustainability of the projects as well as audience development.

Some of the projects profiled in this study were once-off initiatives that, although good case studies, had a limited on-going effect. This research then is most useful in evaluating structures and how best to apply the structures profiled in the case studies to an alternative context.

Links:

The results of this research will be presented on culture360.org in stages from the end of 2011.

Description:

In 2010 ASEF commissioned research – *Linking the Arts to Environment and Sustainable Development Issues* – that investigated good practices linking the arts to issues of environmental sustainability in a selection of Asian countries. The concept behind this research was based on the observation that carefully documented case studies can not only provide inspiration for networking and collaboration between Asia and Europe but also aid policy making and planning. The selected researchers investigated initiatives of the culture sector as well as civil society organisations working on environmental issues.



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ASEF's contribution is with the
financial support of the European Union