

small is better



Context

This advocacy is the result of a collective effort led by the partners of the Better Live, Footprints and Landscape projects — bringing together music networks, venues, festivals, universities and ecological experts from across Europe.

In a time of global warming and shrinking resources, it calls on the music sector to rethink live music through a systemic transformation — one that finally recognizes the key role of small venues (under 300 capacity) and medium-sized venues (under 2000).

1. A model running out of steam

Behind the extravagance of mega-concerts in stadiums and arenas lies a huge logistical machine, **generating the travel of audiences over hundreds of kilometers.** These events weigh heavily on the carbon footprint of the cultural sector and concentrate a large share of budgets, fees and media attention on a handful of already overexposed artists.

Meanwhile, **all across Europe, thousands of small venues and festivals host the vast majority of concerts,** sustain artists and support them from creation to performance.

Yet these structures face a double challenge: attracting and retaining their audiences, while dealing with chronic financial difficulties. **In a world facing an unprecedented climate crisis, maintaining such an imbalance is no longer justifiable.**

Live music now stands at a crossroads. Faced with ecological, social and economic emergencies, it is not only a matter of transforming the model: it is up to all of us — audiences, artists, organizers — to rethink our practices, make a conscious choice and actively shape the future of music.

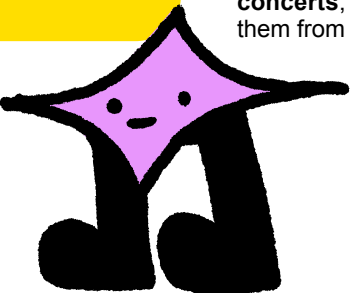
Choosing small venues means bringing music closer to people — and reducing concerts' carbon footprint.

2. The economic arguments

1% of concerts capture 34% of live music revenues.

Like global inequalities — where the richest 1% own nearly half of the wealth¹ — the live music market is polarizing.

A handful of mass music events concentrate budgets, resources, fees and attention on a few already overexposed headliners.



Human-scale venues sustain artists.

In Europe², the vast majority of concerts are held in small venues and local festivals. These places are vital anchors for cultural life and for artists' careers: they sustain musicians, provide spaces for creation and offer accessible programming.

Unlike the big arenas run by the entertainment industry, they nurture welcoming and inclusive spaces, foster intergenerational social ties, and remind us that culture is a pillar of social life. Yet despite their essential role, these places remain fragile³.

3. The ecological arguments

An ecology of small venues

Studies⁴ show that audience transport accounts for up to 80% of a concert's carbon emissions.

The bigger the music venue, the farther audiences travel, which significantly increases mobility-related emissions.



Reinventing tours means putting cooperation between artists, audiences and venues at the heart of live music.

Shaping the future of touring, together

Today, too many international tours still rely on an intensive model: repeated plane trips, scattered itineraries and only a few concerts once on site.

Yet another way already exists. All across Europe, venues and festivals are cooperating to group concerts together, reduce travel and bring artists closer to audiences. This human-scale model reduces the carbon footprint while allowing more artists to play, more often, in more places, for more people.

International touring is vital for artists to share their music and build connections across borders — and it is precisely small venues that make this circulation possible and sustainable.

But this future — as desirable as it is — will only last if the live music sector acts collectively, at local, national and European levels.

Choosing gigantism is to forget that 99% of concerts take place in human-scale venues.

Defending small venues means defending the future of live music everywhere, for everyone.

CONCLUSION

Supporting small venues is a political choice.

Today, few people realize that preferring mega-concerts over small venues is already shaping the future of live music. As the climate warms and political uncertainty grows, one question stands out: what live music do we want for the future?

A — Live music serving gigantism, for just 1% of concerts?

B — Or live music that lets more artists play, across more territories, for everyone?

You already know our answer.

Supporting small venues means choosing:

- a lively, diverse culture accessible to all unwavering support for artistic diversity and for artists themselves.
- a long-term model built on proximity, cooperation and fairness welcoming, inclusive spaces that put people and community first
- a fairer distribution of resources, benefiting more artists
- a concrete response to the climate challenges ahead
- a better spread of cultural life across all territories

Another live is possible. Let's build it together.

¹ — CNM Report — [Live Music Performances in 2024](#)

² — The Guardian - 25 July 2025 - ["The Guardian view on global inequality : the rising tide that leaves most boats behind"](#) LIVE DMA - Mai 2023 - ["Survey Facts & Figures of the Live Music Sector"](#)

³ — LIVE DMA - Mai 2023 - ["Survey Facts & Figures of the Live Music Sector"](#)

⁴ — Rising costs, pressure from gentrification, regulatory constraints, declining attendance, and the consequences of recent global crises (pandemic, inflation, climate emergency, political instability) - LIVE DMA - Février 2025 - ["Live Music Challenges in European Cities"](#)

⁵ — Landscape Study - September 2024 - ["Audience travel in live music venues"](#)