Biennale de Paris

Decentrings manual, Updated working, version, Nov. 2026

Principles, methods, organisation, economies, evaluation.

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Preamble - decentring is not exporting, p.4

The Paris Biennale decentres itself in order to shift the conditions under which art is conceived, practised and recognised. A decentring consists neither of transporting a Parisian exhibition to another country nor of reproducing a ready-made cultural model abroad. It consists of building, from within a given territory, an artistic and institutional configuration that could not have emerged elsewhere in the same way. Decentring is a tool for experimentation and transformation. It makes it possible to identify local singularities, establish horizontal cooperation, challenge dominant mechanisms of legitimation and generate consequences that extend beyond the event. The Paris Biennale does not act as a centre dispensing its legitimacy: it makes available a history, a method, a network and a capacity to connect people and organisations, all of which may themselves be transformed by the host territory.

Definition and terminology, p.5

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DECENTRING: activation of the Paris Biennale within a singular geographical, social, cultural and institutional context, through a project developed with local actors and equipped with its own team, programme, economy and evaluation procedures.
The term “relocation”, used in historical publications, is retained when referring to archives, document titles or period quotations. For new programmes, the recommended designation is “Paris Biennale in [territory] — decentring”.
The word “decentralisation” is not used as a synonym: it usually refers to an administrative redistribution of powers, whereas “decentring” here denotes a transformation of perspectives, power relations and conditions of creation.
A decentring may take the form of a programme of encounters, collective research, an action in the real world, a protocol, a temporary institution, long-term cooperation or a combination of these formats. It is not required to produce an exhibition or an artwork.

Objectives, p.6

Decentring pursues five complementary objectives: to invent forms of art that do not necessarily depend on the artwork; to activate a territory's resources and singularities without reducing them to folklore; to strengthen the autonomy of artists and local initiatives; to establish reciprocal international relationships rather than a one-way transfer; and to document observable transformations, including after the public programme has ended. What matters is not attendance figures or media visibility alone. It is the project's capacity to bring new possibilities of existence into being for art and for the people involved.

Non-negotiable principles, p.7

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SINGULARITY. The project is formulated around a locally identified problem or potential. No edition is a copy of another.
HORIZONTALITY. Local partners participate in strategic decisions and in defining content.
AUTONOMY. Each decentring builds its own team, budget, partnerships and means of continuity.
INVISUAL ART. The programme must make possible a form of creation that exists otherwise than as a material or immaterial artwork.
TRANSVERSAL ECONOMY. The economy is not merely external funding: its mechanisms can be part of artistic research.
RESPONSIBILITY. Respect for people, local law, safety, working conditions, linguistic diversity and ecological resources.
TRANSMISSION. Methods, decisions and results are documented in an intelligible and reusable manner.

Who can propose a decentering?, p.8

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A proposal may come from an artist, a collective, an association, a university, a research centre, a cultural institution, a municipality or a coalition of actors. The prestige of the proposer is not a determining criterion. The initial proposal sets out: the territory concerned, the initiators, the reasons for choosing this context, the artistic question, prospective partners, available resources, known risks, desired effects and an initial provisional timetable. A letter of intent of two to four pages is sufficient to begin the dialogue.

Implementation cycle, p.9

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PHASE 0: LISTENING (indicatively 1 to 3 months). Mapping actors, interviews, territorial diagnosis and formulation of questions.
PHASE 1: PREFIGURATION (1 to 3 months). Formation of a core coordination team, agreement on a shared intention, initial budget and cooperation protocol.
PHASE 2: DESIGN (2 to 6 months). Artistic research, partners, possible calls for participation, methodologies, logistics, insurance and documentation strategy.
PHASE 3: ACTIVATION (variable duration). Implementation of actions and encounters, collective decisions, daily adjustments and risk monitoring.
PHASE 4: CONTINUATION (3 to 12 months or longer). Publication, transmission, follow-up of collaborations, analysis of effects, possibility of a structure or a new stage.
These durations are planning guidelines, not obligations: a short activation may be relevant if supported by genuine preparation and credible continuity.

Governance and responsabilities, p.10

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Each decentring appoints a local lead and a coordination team. An agreement defines relations with the Paris Biennale, rights to use its name, editorial approvals, mutual commitments and withdrawal conditions. Recommended division of responsibilities: local direction (vision and arbitration), artistic coordination (methods and participants), administration and finance (contracts, budget, compliance), partnerships (resources and relationships), communication (translations, press and archives), documentation and evaluation (evidence, consent and assessment). In small teams, one person may fulfil several functions, but responsibilities must remain identifiable. The principle of horizontality does not eliminate legal responsibility. Important decisions must be recorded; expenditure authorised by identified individuals; conflicts of interest declared.

Programme and artistic methodology, p.11

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The programme begins with a question, not a list of disciplines or an inventory of artworks to exhibit. It may combine an introduction to invisual art, exploration of the context, collective-intelligence research workshops, public experiments, encounters with non-artistic actors and critical presentation of findings.
For each action, specify: hypothesis; participants; method; real-life situation to act upon; resources; expected results; documentation arrangements; possible unintended effects.
A presentation of findings may take the form of a change in practice, a new relationship, a service, an institution, a protocol, an agreement or a collective dynamic.

Collective intelligence, p.12

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Collective intelligence is not merely a consultation meeting. It is a creative process in which contributions genuinely alter the project. Workshops must accommodate a plurality of viewpoints, make disagreements explicit and retain a record of decisions. Recommended protocol: individual formulation of problems; sharing; grouping of hypotheses; critical confrontation; reasoned selection of experiments; formation of temporary groups; real-world testing; revision; public presentation of results and limitations. Provide translation or linguistic mediation when necessary for participation.

Economics of a decentring , p.13

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Each decentring has a separate, balanced and auditable budget. Resources may be financial or in kind: partner contributions, services, donations, shared use of venues and skills, patronage, grants compatible with the project’s independence, and economic arrangements invented by participants.
The budget distinguishes preparation, salaries and fees, travel, accommodation, catering, venues, technical requirements, accessibility, translation, insurance, communication, documentation, contingencies and continuation. No remuneration may be promised without contractually secured funding.
Transversal economy encourages the design of mechanisms specific to the project and its effects, beyond the art market, patronage and grants.
All in-kind contributions are valued and documented.
A contingency reserve is recommended.
Rules on expenditure, supporting documents and reimbursements are established before activation.

Partnerships and independance, p.14

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A partner is chosen for what it makes possible, not merely for its logo. Collaborations may involve any type of structure: schools, laboratories, local authorities, associations, social actors, companies, environmental organisations, legal institutions, informal networks and others. Agreements specify contributions, the timetable, responsibilities, use of distinctive signs, reproduction rights and cancellation conditions. Partnerships imposing censorship as a matter of principle, political instrumentalisation, arbitrary exclusion or dependence incompatible with research are refused.

Communication, languages and identity, p.15

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Recommended designation: “The Paris Biennale in [city]” or “The Paris Biennale in [country]”, followed by a programme-specific subtitle. Materials must clearly indicate the territory, dates, local team, partners and a verifiable contact. Communication describes what is actually being undertaken, without presenting funding, attendance or results that remain hypothetical as confirmed. Translations are reviewed by competent speakers. The institutional visual identity favours Biennale de Paris red, black, white and shades of grey, with a clear typographic hierarchy; local adaptations may be negotiated without erasing the Biennale’s identity. Images of participants require appropriate authorisations. An invisual programme need not produce artificial images to become understandable to the media: texts, testimonies, maps, diagrams and traces of action can provide relevant documentation.

Ethics, law and safety, p.16

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The local lead checks the rules applicable to events, contracts, visas, labour law, taxation, insurance, data protection, copyright, image rights and public safety. Requirements vary by country; this manual is not a substitute for local legal advice.
Participants must know the objectives, risks, financial conditions and their right to refuse recording or participation. Any intervention in a social or institutional environment requires appropriate consent and attention to power imbalances.
A designated contact receives reports of concerns; an incident-response plan is established.

Ecology and local grounding, p.17

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Limit non-essential travel, prioritise local resources, reuse equipment, reduce unnecessary material production and measure the main sources of environmental impact. An international decentring is not automatically ecological: its relevance must be weighed against its environmental costs. Local grounding is also measured by reciprocity: skills transferred, lasting collaborations, access to results, resources left available and the ability of local actors to continue without permanent dependence on Paris.

Documentation, archives and evaluation, p.18

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Document hypotheses, methods, choices, controversies, agreements, expenditure and effects, without confusing visibility with success. Possible indicators include: diversity of actors genuinely involved; number of new collaborations; initiatives still active six months later; increased economic autonomy; institutional transformations; new methods formulated; lessons learned from failures. The report includes a narrative summary, a financial statement, a list of partners and consenting participants, a documentary corpus, a critical analysis and recommendations. Distinguish what was announced, achieved, abandoned and continued. Archives are organised with minimum metadata: author, date, place, rights, description and provenance.

Decentrings and precedents, p.19

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Documented precedents are methodological resources, not models to reproduce: Nicosia (art terminology); New York (dialogues with universities and institutions); Bujumbura; Réunion Island; Beirut; Guatemala (art and education); Luxembourg; Bangkok (making space to rethink art); Torun (art collection of the future); Tunisia (multiple projects and venues). Projects under development, notably Berlin and Yerevan, illustrate distinct orientations: the economy of practices and venues for the former; experimental transition from visual art to invisual art and collective intelligence for the latter. Dates and statuses must be checked against each territory’s own programme before publication.

Exemple format : four-day laboratory, p.20

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DAY 1 — Presentation of the Biennale,
invisual art, facilitators and research framework.
DAY 2 — Formation of groups, local
investigation, formulation and testing
of invisual projects or dynamics.
DAY 3 — Public presentation of projects, methods,
objections and possible continuations.
DAY 4 — Critical feedback, evaluation, follow-
up decisions and transmission of archives.
This model, inspired by the Yerevan
decentring project, is an adaptable example,
not a compulsory programme.

Application and approval procedure, p.21

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1. Receipt of a letter of intent.
2. Exploratory interview.
3. Context and partner assessment.
4. Detailed project and provisional budget.
5. Agreement specifying responsibilities
and rights to use the name.
6. Approval of materials and timetable.
7. Implementation.
8. Report and archiving.

Approval of a decentring must not be inferred from an initial contact alone. Public communication follows written agreement by the authorised parties.
The precise signing and authorisation conditions must be set by the management of the Paris Biennale.

Minimum documentation to prepare, p.22

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LETTER OF INTENT: context, problem, singularity, ambition, initiators.
ARTISTIC FILE: methods, participants, formats, timetable.
GOVERNANCE FILE: organisation chart, roles, partners, decision-making.
ECONOMIC FILE: budget, confirmed and prospective resources, commitments.
OPERATIONAL FILE: venues, insurance, authorisations, accessibility, safety.
COMMUNICATION FILE: texts in French and local language(s), authorised visuals, contacts.
TRANSMISSION FILE: documentation plan, report, archiving, follow-up.

Pre-launch self-assessment checklist, p.23

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Does the project respond to a real question specific to the territory? Do local actors have genuine decision-making power? Does the proposal change the conditions of art rather than merely reproduce an event? Are the team and budget credible? Are legal and ethical commitments explicit? Are participants paid or informed of their conditions? Is there a strategy for transmission and continuation? Does communication distinguish achievements from intentions?
A negative answer does not necessarily rule out the project; it identifies an issue to resolve before approval.

Appendices — Working templates, p.24

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FORM A — Letter of intent: title / territory / initiator / issue / context / singularity / method / intended effects / partners / timetable / contact.
FORM B — Budget: item / forecast / confirmed funding / funding sought / person responsible / supporting document.
FORM C — Action: hypothesis / people involved / location / protocol / resources / risks / documentation / result / next steps.
FORM D — Meeting: date / attendees / items discussed / decisions / persons responsible / deadlines / disagreements.
FORM E — Report: activities carried out / deviations from programme / accounts / tangible and intangible results / difficulties / follow-up at six and twelve months.

Biennale de Paris

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Biennale de Paris
Registered office
229 rue Saint-Honore
75001 Paris
biennaledeparis.fr/en
info@biennaledeparis.fr