SUSTAINING THE INDEPENDENT SCENE

Report from the IETM Satellite Meeting in Kyiv, 21 – 24 June 2018

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Flanders
State of the Art

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It Starts at School

Summary

This panel explored the role of education and universities in bringing value to the arts within broader society. Imagine the road ahead of a young theatre maker. It is bumpy and capricious, filled with cultural biases, political and financial boundaries, and personal distractions. Central questions revolved around the following themes: If this theatre maker is an artistic traveller, then what "travel modes" are preferable? Should she/he travel as a pilgrim – straightforward, focused and contemplative? Or should she/he backpack around – hopping, shopping, and flip-flopping through codes, disciplines and genres? Whichever way, every artistic traveller needs to rely on a system of education methods, spaces, and coaches. But how can we develop such a system, a sustainable chain of talent development platforms? Of what links is such a chain comprised? And if, like several countries in Europe, you can boast having many theatre schools for teenagers, performing arts academies, postgraduate programs, and production houses for young professionals: how can we sustain and connect them?

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Speakers:

Caspar Nieuwenhuis, General Manager HKU School of Theatre, HKU-University of the Arts Utrecht; Artistic Director, Likeminds

Karima Mansour, Artistic Director, Choreographer, Performer and Teacher, MAAT for Contemporary Art/Cairo Contemporary Dance Center

Victoria Myronyuk, Independent Theatre Maker and Performer

Part I: Two Models for Coaching

Speakers Caspar Nieuwenhuis and Karima Mansour each presented their own ideas on how best to coach young artists, both starting from their own, very different, reality.

Caspar Nieuwenhuis (HKU-University of the Arts Utrecht; Artistic Director, Likeminds) screened a video of Dutch abstract painter Karel Appel (1960s) creating a portrait painting, deliberately neglecting all 'rules' of the craft. Nieuwenhuis then incited a discussion through which he illustrated his idea of "modes of artistic traveling." Alessandro Baricco's theory of the barbarian times and the pleasure of creation, eclecticism, and different forms of pilgrimage were the primary frameworks in what he calls "two modes of traveling" as a means for teaching and coaching artists.

The 'guide' plays a crucial role in his analogy of creative coaching as travel. Nieuwenhuis showed a short segment from the film "Good Will Hunting"(1997); the clip was entitled, "Direction is One Thing, Manipulation is Another." This clip features the actor Robin Williams playing a professor debating with a colleague on the best way to train and coach a young writer. Williams' character raises the example of Ted Kaczynski, the brilliant mathematician who enjoyed a successful career after graduation - but only a short one, because he then became the unabomber. This example, he notes, illustrates that "there is more to life than just a Field Medal (the most prestigious prize in math, ed)." The central question illustrated by the film segment was how to help nurture and balance the many shifting priorities of a young artist so as not to over-determine their direction

or life choices, and at the same time guide them. The main idea is that good creative coaching should take into consideration the whole person, not only their achievements.

A discussion followed centering on the best way of coaching young artists. The central idea emerging from this discussion was the importance of infrastructure. Mistakes made by young artists should be caught and covered by an infrastructure that protects young talent.

Further discussion concerned how to build a chain of talent development structures. These structures are to take off from the two main components:

- The several stages of development in an artist's life asking for different type of support.

- A diversity in the infrastructure comprising institutions, individuals, venues, publishers, and other sites of instruction and production.

Nieuwenhuis presented a map of Amsterdam showing all of the producers, companies, festivals, and venues involved in arts production and artist support, in order to illustrate how a landscape of artistic production has the ability to reshape itself into a supportive context, based on connections and dialogue between creative people.

Then, speaker Karima Mansour (MAAT for Contemporary Art/Cairo Contemporary Dance Center) presented another way of imagining coaching artists. She discussed her own life experiences in contemporary dance from a global perspective, having lived and worked in Egypt and several other countries. In a country with a clear lack of arts education, facilities and infrastructure, she focused on how coaching can strive to avoid imposing preconceived cultural models in such a different geopolitical, geographic, and other contexts.

Some approaches and strategies she outlined included:

- Inviting guest speakers into the arts production process.

- Including more international visiting artists at local residencies.

- Partnering with diverse funding sources: NGOs, governments, etc.

Mansour stressed the importance of sharing all possible information and knowledge, which helps to empower young artists to attain freedom of choice on their path. In other words, opening a young artist up to multiple possibilities can be more effective in coaching than pushing artistic development in a linear direction.

Part II: The Situation in Ukraine

After the general discussion on coaching, the panel moved to the specific situation in Ukraine. Victoria Myronyuk, (Freelance cultural manager, Independent Theatre Maker, Performer) shared her experiences based on her work with Ukrainian art institutions and extensive arts education outside of Ukraine. She presented the stories of three very engaged women professors and students of art working in the cultural education sector to illustrate the problem of gender inequality and "the glass ceiling"

in Ukraine. She highlights the precariousness of their financial situation (low salaries reflect the ingrained gender inequality in cultural institutions) as the number one demotivating factor among professors with regard to creative coaching, since nearly all of their energy goes toward basic educational tasks, such as lesson planning and grading, in order to receive their very small compensation, and does not leave time for more innovative curriculum development.

Myronyuk, who lived and trained in several countries, provided us a comparative overview of approaches to the topic of "becoming contemporary" in arts practices and management. She emphasized the need for more local autonomy and self-resilience among Ukrainian institutions.

Participants in the audience raised the question of the state's role in arts education. Myronyuk's presentation sparked a highly interactive discussion that resulted in a general consensus among Ukrainian audience members on the need for "more critical thinking" both inside and outside of state institutions, because the policy agendas set forward can have an unwanted impact on art. Several participants stated that educational institutions ought to play a more central role in the distribution and
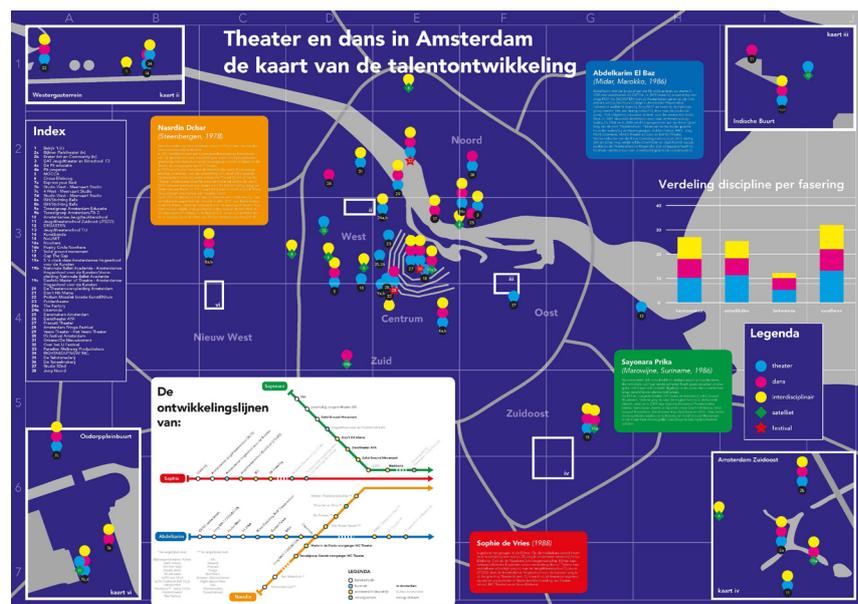
Map of Amsterdam's producers, companies, festivals, and venues involved in arts production and artist support

@ Amsterdamse Kunstraad

consumption of art, especially where market dynamics and state policy priorities are putting pressure on artists to create towards an aim. Participants from other countries illustrated that the question of state involvement in cultural production is increasing in several parts of the world - especially in former Soviet countries, threatening to turn the artistic process into an instrument of power, rather than an autonomous space for discussion and debate. So we can witness some similarities, but no direct parallel, to the Ukrainian experience of state dissolution in the post-Soviet and post-Maidan revolutionary context could be found.

Part III: Putting it Together

A final discussion allowed participants to respond to the general models for coaching, and to the specific context of training young artists in Ukraine. Audience participants focused on the absence of critical thinking in Ukrainian universities and in some milieus of the Ukrainian theatre scene. The idea of "decommunisation," a policy from 2015 at state and local levels that involves dismantling monuments and changing street names, inter alia, in an effort to remove the Soviet legacy, was mentioned by one participant as problematic for cultural policy. Decommunisation, the participant argued, silences the discussion on history as a critical part of the artistic process in Ukraine. The issue of "becoming contemporary" was raised with regard to the creation and display of art in Ukraine, and question came up if "becoming contemporary" was possible within the existing art educational system. Some spoke of the importance of critical thinking, while others challenged the very possibility or desirability of a global "contemporary". Mansour's idea of "perceptive structures" in critical thinking "learning not to become too rigid, or so overly flexible that you lose your idea and your way in completing a

project", found acclaim. She spoke about her own experiences in coaching and managing groups of artists in her dance collective as an example of how dialogue and community-based learning can help open up new points of view that facilitate creative work. Conclusions about critical thinking revolved around the importance of increasing the amount of choices available to young artists, and nurturing their ability to make more informed choices.

The session ended up with a discussion on systems in art production and how these systems impact the topics and themes in creative processes. For example: how do the different configurations of markets, curators, critics, etc. shape the final work of an artist and its interpretation and circulation? Many Ukrainian audience participants evidenced a very detailed understanding of state vs. private funding in Ukraine. Myronyuk mentioned the complexity of accepting funding from foreign state sources in the incidence of a mismatch between creative voices, versus policy priorities. Another participant discussed the challenges of creating her performances with full artistic autonomy given conflicting interests between multiple funding sources: local sources, state-level Ministry of Culture, foreign embassies, etc.

Make Space: Independent Venues within an International Context and Without Money

Summary

The panel discussed how venues shape creative processes, and how independent spaces are important places for social exchanges that bring meaning and purpose to art within broader society. The performing arts require spaces - physical, emotional, and social ones. However, Ukraine, similar to many other countries in Europe, still does not count enough spaces for the independent scene to rehearse and present work. Public (i.e. state) institutions tend not to recognise the increasing importance of the independent arts sector and are not willing to collaborate. The panel highlighted how this situation leaves no other choice to independent artists than to run their own spaces for creation, dissemination, and development of their scene. Starting with concrete cases from Ukraine and Bulgaria, this session aimed to reflect more broadly on the best strategies and practices to create and sustain spaces for the independent arts.

Visit of the future instalations of the Toplocentralata cultural center during IETM Sofia 2014 © Mihail Novakov

Speakers:

Vesselin Dimov, Chairman, ACT Association

Yulia Yun, Director, TEO: Theater Space

Volodymyr Sheiko, Creative Producer, Scena 6

Part I: Case Studies

The panel comprised three different case studies on space and artistic production. Each speaker understood "space" in a different way: how to maintain a space, how space shapes production, and how space can involve multiple institutions.

The first speaker Vesselin Dimov (ACT Association) presented his trajectory towards creating and running an independent arts space in Bulgaria as, partly a string of right moments / lucky coincidences (like a female Mayor in favor of the arts) and partly a string of challenges they managed to overcome. The emphasis was on how to sustain a budget by partnering with many different streams of funding and maintaining a wide social network across multiple countries.

Then, speaker Yulia Yun (Ukraine TEO) spoke about the central position of formats and spaces within the artistic process, focusing on her vision for - and the design of - TEO Theatre Space. "Our main message is that a place has been created where actors, directors, and musicians have the opportunity for free creativity. We organised the conditions to make European-level performances. As of today, five plays have been created. Exhibitions, lectures, and video shows of theatre productions engaged more than 7000 viewers in a short period (seven months)."

Volodymyr Sheyko (Scene 6, Ukraine) showed the achievements of Scene 6, a center for independent theatre, involved in performances of multiple companies and an international touring project between Ukraine and Finland. His presentation included three main topics: an overview of several local institutions in Ukraine and how these have changed since the Maidan revolution in a new wave of performance initiatives; the need to further institutionalise the independent sector; and the systemic challenges the independent sector faces, such as a lack of equal access to training and education, unsustainable funding, and a lack of solidarity and collective effort to pursue change.

Part II: Group Discussion

The case studies were followed by a discussion with all three speakers: Dimov, Yun and Sheyko. Sheyko spoke about the importance of online audiences in the local context, and their growth after Maidan. A longer conversation about the definition of "independent art" followed on this point, sparked by a question in the audience about whether or not an organisation or individual can be considered "independent" if they are receiving funding from the state. Dimov responded by historicising the post-Soviet context. He spoke about the changing function of the Ministry of Culture across different shifts in policies and leaders, and then asked: "Should art be made through institutions? Or on its own? In Bulgaria, in 2002 it was decided to subsidise the national and municipal theatres based on the number of tickets they sold, which lowered the price of tickets substantially. As it did with the quality of the work, which is now mainly commercial. One can go to the cinema for 6 euros and the theatre for 3 euros. Independence can and should mean autonomy from the sale of tickets. A production should not be valued by its popularity only (which is usually defined by the number of attendees, profit overhead, marketing), but should also be understood and appreciated as having academic and other kinds of value and richness." In that sense, cultural policy should honor the work of art from the beginning of its creation, as well as through the ongoing dialogue around the artwork and the processes by which it is valued by society.

Comparisons across different post-Soviet and post-socialist contexts involved audience participants' interactive commentary, drawing in examples and questions from Bulgaria, Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine. Challenges specific to the fact of corruption in government bureaucratic structures shaped the conversation in the direction of thinking about the link between individuals, interest groups, stakeholders, and the content of art. In Ukraine, for example, the history of censorship and propaganda underpins both the formal aesthetic contexts of many artworks, as well as the contemporary funding structures and policies that can prioritise certain content over others.

One important question was raised about the extent to which the state in Ukraine after Maidan has ceased to play a central role in the forms and languages of creative expression that are able to speak to local audiences. Globalisation of the funding structures supporting the arts in Ukraine was mentioned as a key achievement of the revolution, although skepticism around the sustainability of those structures remains.

"Official" vs. "unofficial" categories, and their interpretation and application in the spheres of creative production, furthered the conversation. Audience members stressed the importance of questioning what these categories mean at each stage of the production process. The intersection between art and politics is situated (as participants discussed) where NGOs and public institutions meet in "formal" vs. "informal" practices and organisational aims. Several Ukrainian participants agreed that the definition of "independent art" in the local context is one that can be both liberating and yet also limiting. It can open up a vulnerable grey zone for corruption and other issues mirroring the problems that the Ukrainian state is already dealing with at the level of the Verkhovna Rada (Parliament).

Building an audience: independent venues for the sake of local communities

Summary

"Audience" is a term used to cover the diverse and complex realities of many different people about whom we often know very little. This panel explored how an organisation can build an audience, as a process involving entertainment, social gathering, community development, and the need for a self-sustainable financial income. Our existing images of audiences are never as rich, confusing, diverse, inspiring, and surprising as the real world of people coming for a show. Is an audience people waiting in their seats for a show to begin? Or is it the crowd that performers imagine while preparing to step on the stage? Presenters considered how audiences exist before their representation: as a larger sum of people, or conversely, as a collection of diverse individuals that we imagine we have made come into existence? Does theatre make audiences, or are there moments and processes where audiences make theatre?

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Speakers:

Deborah Pearson, Founding Co-Director, Forest Fringe

Den Humennyi, PostPlay Theatre

Yaroslava Kravchenko, Theatrical Producer, Wild Theatre

Part I: Case Studies

The panel focused on three case studies each presented by practitioners from different ongoing theatre platforms, one from the UK and two from Ukraine. Each presenter has dealt with challenges involved in attracting, maintaining, and shaping an audience in the independent theatre context. The longest running example was the festival Forest Fringe, from the UK, which set the tone for the overall discussion and the other two case studies from Ukraine by focusing on the dynamics between individuals and groups in structuring audiences.

Deborah Pearson (Forest Fringe) gave an overview of Forest Fringe, an artist-run organisation founded ten years ago that creates a collaborative network between institutions, venues, and artists to support the creation of art outside standard commercial networks. Forest Fringe created this model as an answer to the high competitiveness and commercialisation of Edinburgh Fringe Festival, where many presenters charge artists high fees to perform. Forest Fringe, by contrast, worked with local arts organisations and business owners who gave them free or cheap performance space. Forest Fringe does not rely on government subsidies, but on private donations, small donativos from UK arts institutions, and crowdfunding. Pearson emphasised the challenges, conflicts, and achievements that arise in the process of aiming for such a network structure of collaboration, not simply with venue owners, but with presenting artists. She spoke about the difficulty of finding funding in a commercial market like Edinburgh Fringe Festival, offering a solution in the idea that a sharing economy between artists can help alleviate some uncertainty (as opposed to siloed individuals competing and paying for venue rental costs and accommodation on their own). One of the achievements of Forest Fringe has been a boom in creative experimentation at the Edinburgh Festival.

Asking artists who were performing at the festival to volunteer to help run the venue had the effect of increasing accountability, personal stakes in successful outcomes, and ongoing involvement at the grassroots level.

Yaroslava Kravchenko (Wild Theatre) spoke about the role of public dialogue in theatre. In order to reach that dialogue the theatre company/production centre decided to embrace controversy. "We create criticism and shock. We are interested in creating a theatre that goes beyond theatre." "We want to awaken the animal in our performance". Slogans used in Wild Theatre's campaign to (successfully) reach new audiences: Be Wild but Stay Human and Wild Audience: No Rule. The presentation also included a detailed discussion of the importance of transparency in working with local theatre organisations, groups, and individuals.

Kravchenko's intervention also included a detailed presentation on the increasing role of social media in creating an audience, both online and offline, and managing events. The presentation emphasised the advantages of independent marketing and networking, and the opportunities new media offer in keeping costs low for small theatres.

Den Humennyi (PostPlay Theatre) offered his view on the shifting political contexts in Ukraine and the roles that administrative and funding structures - state, NGO, private - play in shaping audiences within the social messages that artists want to craft. For example, he disclosed how he hoped to change his audience so that the play about transgender issues in Ukraine would reach a wider audience than simply those people who already attended the Pride marches. He emphasised the inter-generational differences in how younger and older audiences in Ukraine interpret the social function of theatre and art. For example, where prior state-funded performance venues under the Soviets involved artists' unions and entailed making "official" statements on the Party line, younger audiences are more open to experimenting with social issues in their work.

Part II: General Discussion

All speakers fielded questions from the audience about the social changes, media, and other structures that shape artist-audience exchanges in Ukraine, as both a local and rapidly globalising context with diverse venues for art. Participants focused the discussion around the responsibility of artists versus audiences in the contexts and platforms upon which theatre and performance are structured. What is the limit, if any, of audience members' participation in the theatrical event? What is the responsibility, if any, of audience members towards those performing? Den Humennyi noted that for PostPlay Theatre, the discussion after or around the show was more important than the show itself. Management, the role of academic and non-academic critics, and venues for discussion (museum spaces vs. non-museum spaces and independent publishing houses) were the primary focus points among participants' ideas on different ways for expanding or shaping an audience.

Public-Private Partnership

Summary

This panel discussed how the arts, in particular the independent sector, are funded. The central question was about the role of the state in funding culture. After all, under state socialism the state had a monopoly on cultural institutions. Today, what should the state's role be in funding culture, and how can artists negotiate private sponsorship from within state institutions or vice versa: attract state institutions as supporters? Ultimately, the panel focused on how state institutions and independent artists should work together.

Part I: From Independence to the State

The first presentation was by Vava Stefanescu (National Center of Dance Bucharest), who has managed to turn an independent private organisation into a public state institution.

Stefanescu told the story of CNDB. It was founded in 2004, thanks to a huge solidarity among contemporary artists all over the world, who clogged the Ministry of Culture's fax machine in a campaign urging the government to create a space for contemporary dance. CNDB was the result, and is the only state institution in Romania - for independent performing artists. Their goal is to empower artists by "non-conditional giving," supporting artistic work by creating an infrastructure of space, time, and promotion that helps artists manage the financial, political, and artistic precarity intrinsic to the independent sector.

At first, CNDB was located in the National Theater in Bucharest. In 2011, however, the National Theater underwent renovation and CNDB was kicked out, with nowhere to go — however, for 3 months artists and supporters created an "Occupy"

Sala Omnia @ Feeder

Speakers:

Vava Stefanescu, Managing Director, CNDB, National Center of Dance Bucharest

Yulia Fediv, Executive Director of the Ukrainian Cultural Foundation, Head of Creative Europe Desk Ukraine

Moderator:

Nan van Houte, Secretary General, IETM

protest. After 2 homeless years, CNDB in 2013 was able to rent a space to re-open. With a new government in 2016, they received Omnia Hall, a huge, centrally-located building that used to be the Senate under Communist rule. This building has a painful history, representing power; now independent artists will work in the building, hopefully the power will move on to them. The building is currently undergoing renovation and will open in 2020.

CNDB missions are: production and distribution (an annual National Season,

annual CNDB Awards, etc.), research and documentation (mediatheque, archive and publishing), education and formative programme (for professionals & non-professionals, including an artistic residency programme). CNDB is also a funder for contemporary dance at national level.

After this quick overview of her institution, Stefanescu raised several questions. Independent artists were considered "floating institutions", so what does it mean to become a public institution? How can the single / unique state institution for

contemporary dance operate for an entire artistic domain when dancers or choreographers are all freelancers and this in a context where all other domains, especially theaters, work within the employee status-system? "Why does contemporary art not have the same rights, to use the same budgets that "traditional" institutions like state theaters have is a question she asks the Ministry of Culture. As Nan van Houte pointed out, this means thanks to her status Vava as independent has access to decision-makers who can make real change. An example is how, instead of marking National Culture Day for Romania by doing a show, CNDB created a workshop of experts to talk about the new fiscal code and how it affected independent artists. Successfully: they were able to make changes in the law.

Part II: The State and Independent Artists

Yulia Fediv started by asking the audience whether they had heard about the Ukrainian Cultural Fund. Most had, although few of the Ukrainians in the audience were planning on applying for grants in this cycle. She started with a detailed overview: in Ukraine 2017 the Verkhovna Rada (Parliament) passed a law ("Pro Ukrainskyi kulturnyi fond") creating this fund, fundamentally changing the way the state funded culture. The main task is to create possibilities for representatives of both public (state) and private (independent) institutions to acquire state funding. The fund aims to promote expansion of audiences for the arts (in terms of age and social groups), spreading the Ukrainian language, and increasing the image of Ukraine abroad.

Fediv first went over the logistics: The fund covers eight spheres: visual arts, audio-visual arts, performance, literature, audio, design and fashion, cultural heritage, cultural industries (meant for interdisciplinary projects). Currently, applications for the very first round are due July 2 for autumn 2018 projects. Then the fund will have three cycles per year, eventually holding separate competitions for each sector. She explained that the fund wanted to collect feedback from artists and will hold meetings this year to gather comments on what each sector felt they needed. There will be 165 projects funded for a total of 156 660 000 hryvnia: individual projects, projects of national cooperation (between different regions of Ukraine), and projects involving international cooperation.

The challenge she raised was the time limit; that is, this first cycle's projects must be completed within three months. Possible projects to apply for include research, preparation, meeting with partners, representing Ukraine at a festival abroad, etc.

Part III: Asking Questions

A lively discussion ensued, mostly directed at Yulia Fediv.

Questions focused on such details, as jury selection, corruption, and regional fairness. Fediv stressed that for each sector experts had to apply for their positions and if corruption cases were discovered, they would be removed; Fediv promised next year they would spread the news about the Fund more effectively. One participant gave the example of Bulgaria, where such a fund was created in 1994, but, since independent artists were not prepared to write such grants, the programme in the end only supported state institutions that were already funded. Fediv noted that the state has cut all budgets, including from state institutions, as part of the major restructuring by the Ministry of Culture. So both state institutions and independent artists will be competing for state funds. She also asserted that artists in Ukraine have had to learn grant-writing already—there

was much agreement with this statement among Ukrainian participants.

Stefanescu asked about the model used to create the Ukrainian Cultural Fund. Apparently, they consulted Soros Foundation Ukraine, as well as the British Council and the Adam Mickiewicz Institute (Poland). Yet Fediv shared a problem. While these models were useful, the current government language does not have the capacity for a wide funding of culture. The word used is zakhody, events. So according to the language of the legislation, the only projects the Fund can support are events (festivals, performances, conferences, etc.), as opposed to renovations of an old building, for example, or acquiring new spaces. The other problem of the current government language is that it funds projects for only one year; she is pushing for 3-year projects.

Trans-Border Collaboration

Summary

This panel focused on the possibilities and challenges artists face in creating networks across borders and regions. What are the incentives to engage in international cooperation? What are the strengths of international cooperation? And why does international cooperation for Eastern European artists often only reinforces standard hierarchies of West/East, between those with resources and those without?

Part I: Introduction and Discussion

IETM Secretary General Nan van Houte introduced the panel, emphasising that IETM itself is a global network focused on international exchange and collaboration, in order to discover common needs and learn from each other. Although "trans-border" can mean simply "international," van Houte emphasized that the term "trans-border" suggests reaching across any border to create local, regional, and international networks.

Then, Rarita Zbranca moderated a discussion about international collaboration. She started by asking how many of the participants were involved in international cooperation, to which over half said that they were. All of the participants from Ukraine were involved in some sort of collaboration with partners. Then, Zbranca broke up the audience into five groups to discus possible motivations for engaging in international cooperation, and why such cooperation might be important.

After small group discussions, the entire audience re-gathered and shared their answers. Several common answers emerged. Collaboration...

- offers a counter-weight to political discourse; artists working together "can take politics away from the politicians," as one participant noted.

IETM Caravan to Romania 2012 organised in the framework of Balkan Express @ Michel Quéré

Speaker:

Rarita Zbranca, Director and Founder, AltArt Foundation (Cluj, Romania) and Board Member of Balkan Express Network

Moderator:

Nan van Houte, Secretary General, IETM

- prevents isolation and conservativism in making art; working with others keeps your own work fresh.

- facilitates learning. Different perspectives offer creative impulses. Confronting differences can clarify what you are doing yourself, even if this process of confrontation is difficult. This learning process also necessitates learning about diversity; collaboration forces you to "respect the creativity of other human beings."

- one participant noted, "We were too stuck in Washington, DC and had to go work somewhere else," and another participant noted that working with others allows you to "have a rest from your own family." The audience reacted to these witty responses with consent: indeed, getting out of fixed patterns and places is both restorative and necessary for creativity.

- builds capacity in an organisation. Collaboration increases the resources available for production, extends networks and contacts, and creates opportunities for institutions to develop and grow. Plus, it often raises credibility at home.

- forces you to think strategically and to think long-term. Working with others, and with other institutions, increases the necessity of articulating goals, deadlines, outcomes, and accountability.

- educates the audience, widens the audience for your projects because you are widening your network.

- "opens the window in the room, if the room is your local society," as one participant eloquently summarised.

For Rarita Zbranca, one of the reasons for collaboration is access to funds. She was surprised that no one mentioned "money" specifically, one of the most powerful resources. Participants suggested, however, that collaboration can cost money as much as it can bring in more money for creating projects.

Part II: Local and Regional Networks

Rarita Zbranca then gave a sketch of the organisation she started 20 years ago: AltArt in Cluj, Romania. The organisation is small, so they are always co-organising with other entities, and they focus on art in public space. They try to connect art and society to raise issues of social justice, such as the issues of the Roma community.

She picked up on several of the points raised in the small group discussions. For her,

international work is a "survival strategy" for resources, for ideas, and for legitimacy. Legitimacy from the international scene creates opportunities for local action. For example, Cluj was picked as one of the premier cities defining the visual arts for the future. Till 2009 the city of Cluj did not fund anyone in the independent sector; now the city has a budget of 3 million euro to be distributed to local artists. International recognition changed local possibilities. Another example of this was that city officials put in a bid for Cluj to be the European Capital of Culture. The AltArt team worked with local authorities, and succeeded in

changing the cultural strategy of the city, and in acquiring a new institution, Cluj Cultural Center.

Afterwards Zbranca presented a second institution, a network, started in 2002: Balkan Express. This network emerged from a desire to "explore local scenes across the countries": the artists, issues, and concerns. They created a series of "caravans," which involve spending a few days in different cities in the Balkan region discovering the local scene. They also created a "retreat," a week of no agenda, no goals, in a beautiful place, in order to take time to think about the bigger picture and prevent burnout. Independent artists, she noted, generally "self-exploit" and never take a break, and this means work is not sustainable. If sustainability is a focus of cultural production, surely it should be for cultural workers, as well.

Part III: Question and Answer Session

The group was immediately interested in when the next Balkan Express retreat would be. While this question was met with general laughter, Zbranca noted seriously that this issue of precariousness and overwork was endemic among cultural workers.

She shared several issues that concern her as she works on international collaboration:

- Geo-political dynamics and donors: how much do we "curve our agenda" to those giving us money?

- Obstacles to travel: border policies can mean restrictions for working with certain artists. Regional conflicts can create a problem, as well. In other words, international artistic collaboration may be about crossing cultural borders, but sometimes very real political issues prevent that from happening.

- Participating in international events: Whom (and whose politics) are we endorsing?

- Power and privilege awareness: language, gender, west/east, minorities, institutions / independent networks. There is always a power dynamic and artists must be aware of it.

- Sustainability: It can be cheaper (and less of a carbon footprint) for Eastern European artists to travel to Western European hubs than to Eastern European cities that might actually be closer. Resources can be unequal between Western and Eastern partners, so that it can be more difficult for an Eastern European partner to maintain collaboration.

Following up on this issue, in response to Zbranca's question about challenging experiences with collaboration, one participant shared a difficult experience working with a Western European partner. For reasons not entirely their fault, resulting from a series of misunderstandings, the Western European (that is, wealthier) partner had failed to pay their financial share of the project, leaving the Eastern European partner with a greater financial responsibility. While tensions between the institutions had smoothed, the experience raised issues of cultural misunderstandings between institutions. Another participant noted that it was easier to work with artists themselves, as opposed to organisations that could be unwieldy.

Nan van Houte wrapped up the panel, saying that we are all in favor of starting "bottom up", and this can mean that you start locally and nationally to collaborate and get stronger till "we can all come together again and work internationally."