



## IETM PLENARY MEETING STOCKHOLM

### Report

#### **WG 1: EASY ADMIN- Administrative Support for Independent Art Workers**

*Thursday 14 April 2011, in Norra Latin, Stockholm  
Report by Anna Zaher*

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**Moderator:** Ruth Collier (Kunsten Festival des Arts – Brussels)

**Participants:** Julek Jurowicz (SMART Belgium and France)

Sabine Kock (IG FREIE THEATERARBEIT - Austria)

Jaan Kolk (TEATERFORBUNDET – Sweden)

Denis Miklavcic (SUKI – Slovenia)

About two weeks ago the Flemish Theatre Institute in Brussels ([www.vti.be](http://www.vti.be)) published a book called "De Ins & Outs van podiumland". It stated that there has been a big change in the way that artists are working today compared to twenty years ago. Today many artists are not attached to one company. They are "job hoppers", even across borders and most artists are freelance. To work as a freelance artist you have to be flexible, but it also gives you a lot of experiences. It is however a fragile situation and artists will often be lacking work rights. Most of the time freelance or independent artists lead a professional life on a project basis. Therefore the income comes and goes and the irregular income brings uncertainty.

What kind of administrative support, in terms of taxation, social contributions and fiscal advice do these art workers need and how do they get it? In some countries the state provides help or at least funds it, in others it is up to non-governmental and non-funded organizations to offer such support services. Moderator Ruth Collier (Kunsten Festival des Arts, Brussels) encouraged us all to be creative and think of alternative or new structures that can benefit the freelance or independent artists. The artists need to be able to develop their artistic potential but in a sustainable way.

Around 35 people came to the workgroup and there was a variety of professions representend. Among them were performers, choreographer, professor, art producers, managers, theatre directors and cultural management

students. The discussion in the meeting was inspired by a few interesting examples. The speakers Jaan Kolk (Teaterförbundet, Sweden), Julek Jurowicz (SMart Belgium and France), Sabine Kock (IG Freie Theaterarbeit, Austria) and Denis Miklavcic (SUKI, Slovenia) presented their organizations or work. After this they received some questions from the IETM participants in the room.

#### **THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLES AND SITUATIONS WERE DISCUSSED:**

##### **Teaterförbundet (Swedish Union for Theatre, Artists and Media), Sweden**

**[www.teaterforbundet.se](http://www.teaterforbundet.se)**

-In Sweden there are three kinds of employment status; you are either an employee with a permanent contract, have a short-term contract or you are an entrepreneur. A freelancer can be an employee with a short-term contract or employed as an entrepreneur (or combine the two). "Independent" or "self employment" are not legal terms in Sweden. If you are an entrepreneur you are outside the unemployment insurance that many artists are depending on to survive. In these times there is a pressure from employers and the government to go towards entrepreneurship. A big problem is when people are entrepreneurs but unwillingly so.

-Teaterförbundet are representatives for freelance/independent artists and have 8000 members (actors, dancers, singers, directors, stage designers,

technicians, administrators).

-The union encourages employers to respect the collective agreements covering freelancers, give individual support, professional development and legal services to the artists. The union also has a billing service, works on cultural as well as social and labour-market policy and have created a copyright/collecting society within the union.

##### **SUKI (Union conference of Freelance workers in Culture and Media), Slovenia**

**[www.suki.si](http://www.suki.si)**

-In Slovenia there is something called "student work". This is a way for students to get some money while they are studying and for employees to get cheap labour or get professional skills but for very little money. This makes the situation difficult for the "true" freelancers, because they are now competing with the students who will do the job for less money.

-In Slovenia, since 1994, freelance culture workers became self-employed. If they are workers without an employer there is no one to pay social contribution and taxes. Now they have to pay themselves and they have lost their workers rights. They are for example not allowed to make a trade union and they cannot get sick leave.

-The legal status of the artist in Slovenia is "self employed in the field of culture (freelance artist)". Out of 2400 there are 1400 who have the right to state subsidy from the ministry of culture. They have to prove their work and renew the application every three years. The problem here is that they

usually have a minimum salary, which means a minimum pension. They will lose their subsidy if they earn too much.

- In Slovenia, SUKI have been fighting for the legal rights for freelancers for fifteen years. One of the most important things they are working with is for artists to get proper pay for their work.

### **IG Freie Teaterarbeit (Association of Independent Theatrework), Austria**

**[www.freietheater.at](http://www.freietheater.at)**

-In Austria there is a union with a sub-union for artists, but they are conservative and don't open up for the special working conditions of freelance artists.

-There is an actors law (since 1922) that states that everyone who is on stage have to work as an employee. In reality the situation is the contrary. For example, many small theatres don't have the money to employ all actors. So the actors who are freelance are working illegally or in a gray zone.

-IG Freie Teaterarbeit is a small NGO that support and does lobbying for artists in the independent sector. In 2005 they organized an informal platform and invited politicians and ministry workers.

Since then they have had continuous meetings up to three times a year. In 2008 the ministry of culture and education initiated a study about the the situation for the artists. After getting dramatic results out of it they agreed to start a process with

eight interdisciplinary working groups to improve the situation. The process was huge, but now the problem is that they are still waiting for results. As there was no reverse of the funding policies, the IG Freie Teaterarbeit at least tries to get formal security for the working modes of the independent artists in the performing sector. In addition to that a new law was created, which hopefully makes it easier to switch between freelance and employed work.

-During the process the working groups have proposed several best practice examples and models from other European countries. One of the examples was from the Netherlands, where there is an interesting system for the independent artists. There is a way for them to get social aid and still earn some money. The condition is that they increase their income during a four year process.

-There is an instrument in Austria that is supposed to benefit the independent artist called the Künstlersozialversicherungsfonds. It however has many restrictions. The IG Freie Theaterarbeit administrates a small funding pot to give subsidy to freelance artists as well as employers of freelance artists.

### **SMart, Belgium and France**

**[www.smartbe.be](http://www.smartbe.be) [www.smartfr.fr](http://www.smartfr.fr)**

-Belgium is one of the countries where artists are presumed to be employees and the user of the artists is supposed to be and employer. This system grants artists rights. Like Slovenia, up

until 2002 this was a law but was not followed in reality. Unlike Slovenia, now it is applied to every day life. Most members of SMart live in this context.

-In Belgium SMartBe is an attempt to make the situation better for the employed or freelance artists. It is not a union and it is not linked to the public authority; it is a self organization from the field. They serve their members (artists, technicians, people who lead a professional life on a project basis.).

-SMartBe started 13 years ago and now counts 37 000 members that is increasing with almost 600 every month. So it is obvious that the service responds to a real social need and the services have a real social utility. SMartBe works as a third part when artists and users agree on a budget. SMart helps with the agreement and converts the budget into a salary. For this system to work SMart had to be accepted by the social security system.

-The Beligan team went to France and adapted the tools to work in the French system and legal environment. The basic problems are the same in both countries (and many more countries) but the working details are different. SMart is not just a solution in each country, but it eases the mobility across borders for the artists.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

Today we can see that there are alternative organisations created that focus on projects and project based artists. Some of the new organisations work with services for the artists, like training sessions, professional advice and other kinds of support.

We should get together and talk more. We should learn from each other and get to know the structures in other countries and see if there are solutions used there that might work in our own countries. In the future the situation for the independent artists would be easier if the national laws were at the same level. It would simplify the mobility for the artists.

The important thing now is for us to be advocates for a change. The independent artists need social security, sustainability but also need to be able to develop artistically. What we have done today is one of the ways to go about. We listen to each other and it is important to stay in touch and keep discussing and broadening the subject. Hopefully we will be part of changing the situation. Ruth encouraged us to take a deeper look into our own societies and see how we deal with these matters and get involved.

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