



IETM PLENARY MEETING STOCKHOLM

Report

WG3: The Independent Story: Living and Working as an Independent in the Field of Cultural Management

*Friday, 18 April, 2011 in Norra Latin, Stockholm
Report by Brina Stinehelfer*

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Moderators: Brina Stinehelfer and Francesca Romana Ciardi
Speakers: Kris Nelson (Canada), Pelin Basaran (Turkey), Stephen Slater (UK), and international independent team Paola Ricart (Spain) & Sara O'Donnel (UK)

An impressive number of members (62) met at Nora Latin on Friday afternoon for this working group for independents working in the field of cultural management. The attendees were very diverse geographically, as well as well as in their ways of managing, their stories as to how they came to be where they are, and how they create/define their work as independents. However, they had one thing in common- all were very engaged and passionate about sharing their experiences, and hungry for hearing the experiences and advice of others.

The workshop moderators, Brina Stinehelfer and Francesca Romana Ciardi from Berlin began with a mini brainstorm session in which members were asked to write down something they wanted to share, and something they wanted to know more about from their colleges. The second question had many more responses than the first.

There were short introductions by speakers Kris Nelson (Canada), Pelin Basaran (Turkey), Stephen Slater (UK), and international independent team Paola Ricart (Spain) & Sara O'Donnel (UK) to get the ball rolling. Then the working group went off, with excited conversation and simultaneous note taking from the moderator which was projected on a screen, as an ongoing sampling of the conversation that all could follow.

Many people were interested in standards of pay and work for independents which were in place, and it was determined that nearly every country does indeed have a national set standard of pay, which managers and producers should receive. However, the governmental organizations which assure that these standards are met or provides the funding to do so, are rare or nonexistent.

The topic of why to work independently, and the benefits and freedoms of working outside a supported structure was also discussed at length. It was determined that not every independent is actually independent by choice, but that working this way does provide a noticeable level of freedom in choosing projects and ways of working. However along with this freedom comes great challenges and responsibility.

The main challenge, of course, is financial. Many members were hungry for tips and experiences- answers to the question of how one can support oneself through working independently. Some shared their techniques of creating legal entities for themselves as independents, to be eligible for the same funding and tax breaks allowed to larger cultural institutions. Several spoke of having side jobs as a way to provide supplemental income. The problem, however, seemed universal- the artists we work for can not afford to pay us enough to survive, the organizations with which we work with (such as venues and festivals) are not structured to pay our wages, and there is not enough governmental funding opportunities for sustaining independent managers. Funding to pay us is usually available on a project to project basis, if at all. So how do we survive in between?

The question of responsibility of being an independent, has, of course, to do with artistic integrity. Independents often have more freedom to choose which projects and artists they support than national funding organizations which have stricter guidelines about what they can and cannot support. So the question is, how we can balance being true to our artistic interests and earning enough money to survive? Several encouraged thinking as an entrepreneur- setting up long term relationships with other entities which have the ability to support, and finding the local

cultural need/interest and filling it. But it is a delicate balance to maintain.

The issue of a different kind of balance also came up again and again: the balance between the personal and professional. Many admitted that there is no separation between their personal and professional space/money/time at all. Many work from home, and draw from the same account to pay for administrative costs for a project they are managing, and to buy food for their own cooking at home. How can independents, who have no 9-5 working hours and use the living room as office and headquarters, find a healthy separation between work and personal? The recommendation from one independent: "Sometimes you just have to say "No" and turn off that computer".

This working group, as many often do, seemed far too short for the large and diverse topics which it brought up. The question of if/how independents can support each other more came up several times, and hung in the air waiting for an initiative to grab it. It is clear that the number of independents which make up the IETM family is constantly rapidly growing, and new initiatives should be taken to fulfill these interests and needs. I look forward to seeing what may develop by the continued coming together of interested and passionate independents.

*The moderators are creating a mailing group network to continue the brainstorming, information exchange, and support which happened during this working group. If you are interested in being included, send an email to brina@per-aspera.net.