

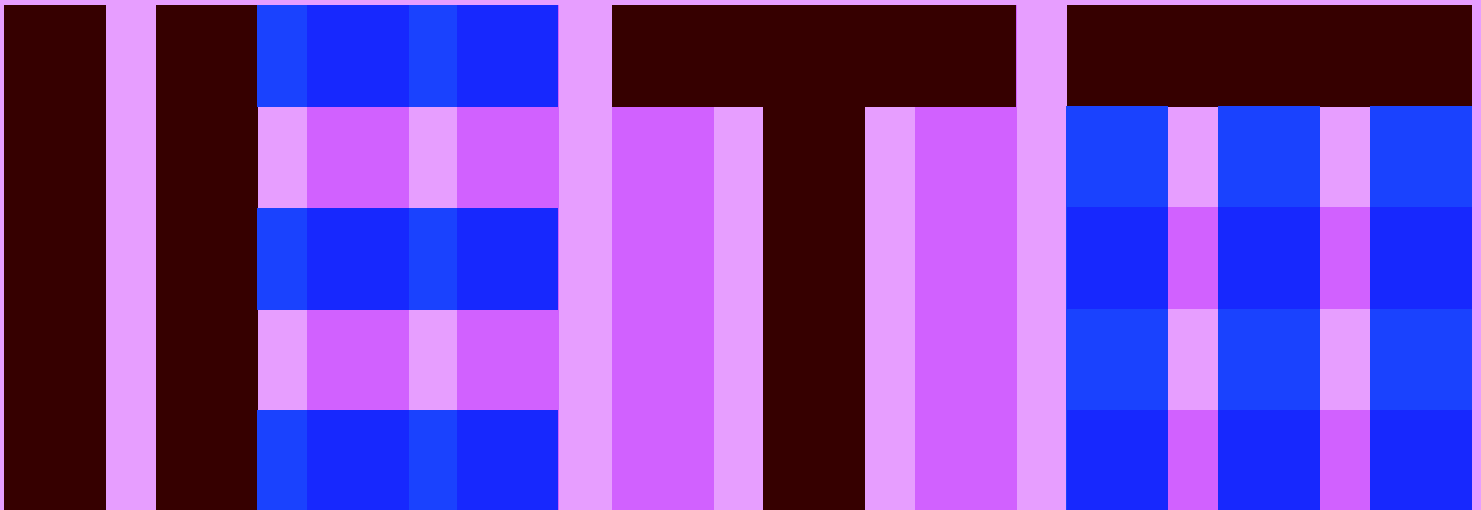


Report

# *A Priceless Price List*

from the IETM Belgrade Plenary Meeting

By Anastasia Patlay



**IETM Report**  
*A Priceless Price List*  
by Anastasia Patlay

**Report from the IETM Belgrade  
Plenary Meeting, 29.09 — 02.10  
2022**

**Editing and general coordination**  
Isabelle Van de Gejuchte

**Proof-reading and co-editing**  
Lottie Atkin

**Graphic layout**  
Milton Pereira (IETM) on a template  
by Formula  
[www.formulaprojects.net](http://www.formulaprojects.net)

**Published by**  
IETM — International Network  
for Contemporary Performing Arts  
Square Saintelette 19,  
1000 Brussels, BE  
+32 2 201 09 15 / [ietm@ietm.org](mailto:ietm@ietm.org)

This publication is distributed free of charge and follows the Creative Commons agreement Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives (CC BY-NC-ND). You are free to reuse and share this publication or parts of it as long as you mention the original source.

This publication should be mentioned as follows: A. Patlay, "IETM Report - A Priceless Price List", IETM, Brussels, December 2022.

[www.ietm.org/en/reports](http://www.ietm.org/en/reports)

For further information please contact:  
[ietm@ietm.org](mailto:ietm@ietm.org)

The publishers have made every effort to secure permission to reproduce pictures protected by copyright. IETM will be pleased to make good any omissions brought to their attention in future editions of this publication.

## Summary of the report

How do we charge for our work, and why are there no policies for the evaluation of artistic work in many countries? Using examples from different local contexts, this session explored specific cases that artists have gathered through institutional or independent initiatives, in order to secure predictable and suitable financial conditions of work in the arts.

# A Priceless Price List

FRIDAY 30.9 16.00 – 18.00

BY ANASTASIA PATLAY

**Moderator:**

**Danilo Prnjat**

*Artist, Serbia*

**Speakers:**

**Jelena Mijović**

*Dramaturg and screenwriter, Serbia*

**Jasna Žmak**

*SPID - Croatian Screenwriters and Playwrights Guild, Croatia*

**Vahida Ramujkić**

*A member of the Board of Directors of the Association of Fine Artists of Serbia (ULUS)*

**Unable to attend:**

**Amath Sarr**

*Jotay Culturel - IETM Global Connector 2021-22, Senegal*

The moderator, **Danilo Prnjat**, opened the discussion by introducing himself and the three panellists: **Jelena Mijović**, a dramaturg from the Serbian Theatre 212, was on stage with the moderator **Jasna Žmak**, a dramaturg from Croatia representing the Croatian Screenwriters and Playwrights Guild, joined via Zoom from Croatia. The third panellist **Amath Sarr**, a cultural project manager within the Académie Banlieue Culture ABC association from Nigeria, could not join the discussion due to technical reasons. He was replaced by a member of the audience, **Vahida Ramujkić**, from the Board of Directors of the Association of Fine Artists of Serbia (ULUS).

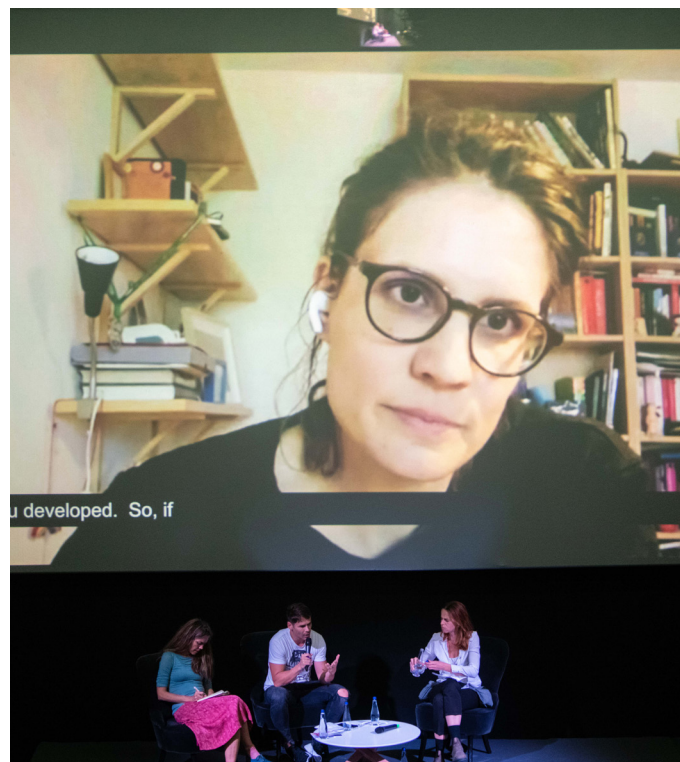
## Difficult question of price

The moderator opened the session underlining the high degree of dependence of the cultural sphere on the economical and political contexts of their country. Creative work is appreciated differently from country to country, and budgets supporting culture differ between States, as well as policies related to the sector. Besides the differences in cultural policies, wages for creative work also vary significantly, and co-authors of the same artistic work can have different wages. As well as this, artists who are able to sell their work on the art market often earn incomparably more money than those who are hired to deliver a specific piece of work. In addition, even if some institutions have a price list for a specific artistic work, the final amount of money a creative worker gets is sometimes unpredictable and untransparent. In some cases, artists are forbidden to share information about their fees and royalties, and accept these conditions because they are afraid of losing their job. Therefore, it is impossible to generalise the experience of creative workers, not only in different countries but also in different fields of creative work. As a result, artists around the world feel an urgent need to discuss the issue of the price list for creative works.

While concluding his speech, the moderator invited panellists to share their experience.

## Fight for price list

Serbian playwright **Jelena Mijović** began her speech by explaining that even though she tried to change the situation in Serbian theatres with her colleagues in the field of dramaturgy, they did not succeed. She was, nevertheless, courageously prepared to describe the attempt to fight for a price list for the work of Serbian playwrights.



The first way to try and raise the topic of dramaturgy price list happened in May of 2018 at the Sterijino pozorje theatre festival, which is the biggest theatre festival in Serbia dedicated to domestic plays and playwrights. There was a panel discussion on domestic dramatic texts performed in Serbian theatres, when Serbian playwrights formulated some problems related to their social and economical conditions. As Jelena claimed, the playwrights agreed that in Serbian society, the work of contemporary dramaturgs is almost 'invisible, unrecognised and unclear' even for people working in theatres. Therefore, Serbian playwrights constantly have to prove that the work of playwriting is a real one. Only a few Serbian playwrights had full-time jobs as house dramaturgs in Serbia's big cities theatres, such as Belgrade and Novi Sad. Others had occasional work for low fees.

The playwrights proposed the idea of establishing a price criteria and created a rough price list for their work. The designed price list was supposed to be proposed to all professionals in the field of playwriting and screenwriting, as well as to different institutions operating in the field such as theatres, television and production companies. They were planning on applying this price list as a basic regulating document for the industry. However, as Jelena stressed, "our plan was good, but its implementation was a disaster".

## A lack of solidarity, or a specific low-budget industry?

The cause of failure was that the industry professionals weren't able to follow the rules they invented for themselves. As Jelena underlined, "one by one they agreed to work for lower fees". They shared their doubts and reasons to agree to bad conditions. The main reason was the general economical situation of theatres in Serbia. Sometimes, playwrights accepted to be engaged in projects with almost no budget for the work they were expected to deliver because of their professional interest, or because they needed to receive not 'good money', but 'any money' to survive. Later, the pandemic crisis forced them to accept even lower-paid jobs.

The final attempt to solve the problem of being underpaid was to ask the Association of Serbian performing arts to help make the initiative of certain playwrights more general. To continue working together in this direction, the playwrights would have been required to do a lot of paperwork, and as it wasn't their main competence, they just gave up.

Jelena insisted that there are some specific local features of the Serbian context explaining why they could not accept these new rules. She also mentioned her positive experience of working in Slovenian theatres, where she constantly felt another kind of attitude towards creative work. In Slovenia, she was receiving good conditions and a significantly higher fee.

As a positive outcome of the attempt to change the situation, Jelena indicated that there is more transparency in the sector as they are now open to share the conditions of their work and explain to each other their reasons to accept low fees. The second positive outcome is that several playwrights have now set a threshold for salary and would not go below.

## The secret of Croatia

The next participant, **Jasna Žmak**, Croatian playwright and screenwriter, representing the Croatian Screenwriters and Playwrights Guild, presented a situation where Croatian playwrights and screenwriters worked together for seven years to reach a consensus. They started by founding the Guild in 2015, and two years later they made good progress in upholding the rights for tax benefits for creative workers. By 2021, they published the designed price list for playwriting, screenwriting, game design and other creative professions connected to writing. In 2022, they had 120 members of the Guild against 30 members at the beginning of the process.

What's the secret of their success? From the beginning, Croatian playwrights began to act from the foundation of the Guild, representing not individuals but professional associations of playwrights at the institutional level.

The organisation proposes to include advocacy, legal support, public programmes, professional workshops and including 'smaller members'. Therefore, it provided comprehensive support for its members and improved the level of knowledge in society about what creative work means and how much it costs.

While they were developing the price list, they involved their members. As a result, the Guild developed an agreed price list that could be implemented and accepted by the industry.

After Jasna Žmak's presentation, Jelena Mijović confessed that the Croatian price list has helped Serbian playwrights significantly. Jelena herself takes a look at the Croatian price list every time she starts negotiation on a new project, and the results of her negotiation are much better than it was before. Serbian playwrights use the Croatian price list for similar work in Serbia more broadly. Therefore, the Croatian cases helped Serbian playwrights as well.

## A perspective from visual art

**Vahida Ramujkić** provided a short insight on the specificity of the visual arts sector in Serbia. In her opinion, the working status of visual artists is very different from that of performing artists. Performing artists are more connected to the public and state institutions because they depend on cultural policies and state support. Visual artists work much more individually, and their status is less dependent on the state. In former Yugoslavia, performing artists had more opportunities to join different types of professional unions, providing them with guaranteed conditions of work and payment. Visual artists didn't have such opportunities. Even in modern Serbia, there is a confederation uniting different professional unions which represent different fields in the performing arts, but visual artists are still excluded from this movement because of the way they function. Visual artists can't create their own professional union, because in order to do so they need to have at least 10 percent of their participants employed in an artistic sector. As it is not the case, most of them have the status of precarious workers.

There is also the impact of the free art market on visual artists and we observe huge differences of income between different visual artists. According to Vahida, the Serbian art market does not have the classical infrastructure of the free art market: there is a lack of money, no education, no communication system, no visual arts infrastructure, no critics, etc.



IETM Belgrade Plenary Meeting © Dragan Mujan

Nevertheless, even in these difficult circumstances, the Association of Fine Artists of Serbia (ULUS) represented by Vahida tries to find the best way to help visual artists to develop a better environment and conditions for the sector. They have conducted research on different models implemented in several countries and they are in the process of formulating recommendations for the Serbian context. Among them are recommendations concerning criteria regarding payment. For example, they propose a price list, hourly wage, and payment for participating in exhibitions. Vahida noted that the implementation of this criteria of remuneration for visual artists poses a number of problems, including free market competition in visual art and therefore, these are just recommendations.

## How to succeed

After the presentation of the three panellists, the moderator concluded with a series of questions: *'What are the conditions for a successful implementation of any price list proposed to the industry? What is the role of such a price list? Should there be an agreement between professionals to follow it strictly without any compromises with the market rules? Or is it just a starting point for negotiating projects? Should such a price list be only a recommendation to workers and institutions in the field of culture?'* The discussion showed that all three strategies presented by the panellists were equally possible in terms of designing a price list, but their implementation needed to be supported by the professionals operating in the creative sector. The moderator suggested that one of these opportunities could be the creation of a trade union or syndicate. This option was discussed earlier, with the creation of the Guild in Croatia. In Serbia, where there is also an association of performing arts workers, the lack of solidarity and visibility of the work of playwrights leads to the impossibility of consolidated implementation of the price list.

The panellists came to the conclusion that the main problem is still the poor visibility of their work and misunderstanding, even in professional circles, about the essence of their work.

