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CONTEMPORARY PERFORMING ARTS IN BELGIUM: AN OVERVIEW



by Ingrid Vranken and Sylvia Botella

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Contemporary performing arts in Belgium: an overview

Mapping IETM

by Ingrid Vranken and Sylvia Botella

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Proof-reading and translations: Greta Holmer

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Behind its Eurocratic fame, Brussels is a city with a rich, original and mixed artistic scene, which reflects the diversity of its population. Brussels is also the capital of a small country at the heart of Europe, Belgium, with three historical language communities - Dutch, French and German and countless languages spoken in the streets.

Welcoming since the 1950s thousands of foreigners from virtually anywhere in the world, Belgium is both a place of encounter and paradox, a bureaucratic headache, and an immense source of creativity.

This mapping provides an overview of the Belgian artistic scene, being divided into a section about Flanders, one about Wallonia, and one about Brussels.

deal with the issues of diversity and cultural participation. Where Flanders tends to talk about interculturality, Federation Wallonia-Brussels chooses a different language speaking of social cohesion. Where the Federation Wallonia-Brussels is afraid of stigmatizing, the Flemish Community has a need to name the different societal groups and work on specific approaches. These very different visions of course create very different politics and policies for cultural participation. Similarly, it has produced very different arts fields and different artistic languages.

01. BELGIUM: A CROSSROADS OF PARADOXES¹

Belgium, a small country at the heart of Europe is both a place of encounter and paradox. In Belgium nothing is straightforward and where some see a frustrating administrative Kafkaesque story, others find opportunity in complexity.

Belgium has around 11 million inhabitants and three official languages: Dutch, French and German. The different communities have developed in distinct ways and it is this cultural and linguistic diversity that led to a complex political system.

Belgium is a federal state composed of three Communities and three Regions plus the Federal government. Through a series of government reforms, the different state competences were divided between these three governmental levels. It is important to know that the decision-making power is not exclusive to the Federal government, the country is governed by various authorities which exercise their competences autonomously in their respective matters. The Federal government, the Communities and Regions stand in a non-hierarchical relationship towards each other.

¹ text by Ingrid Vranken and Sylvia Botella

The Federal level oversees matters that concern the whole of the country such as the military, justice and social security, the Regional level (Flemish, Walloon, and Brussels Capital Region) is in charge of territory-bound matters such as the economy, job opportunity and public works, and the Community Level (Flemish, Federation Wallonia-Brussels, and German) refers to the people that comprise it and to the ties that bind them together, they govern matters such as education, culture and well-being. But the Flemish Community and the Flemish Region have merged into one governing structure. And oh yes, Belgium is a kingdom, but the king only has a symbolic function and no actual governing power. Each of these levels has their own governing structure and the Communities and Regions are competent to establish international relations in the context of the matters they manage.

It is this split government structure that led to the development of two very different and completely autonomous cultural policies with two very different arts' scenes as a result. It is important to understand that it is not just a matter of different languages, but truly different cultures, approaches and political visions. This division is enhanced by the fact that all cultural institutions and the whole educational system is completely separated, meaning the different communities are increasingly growing apart. This cultural difference can, for example, be seen in how both communities

02.

BRUSSELS, THE LABORATORY
OF ENCOUNTERS¹

Brussels is a crossroads. The city is the capital of Belgium, a regional capital and the capital of Europe, bringing with it countless national and international institutions. Brussels Capital Region was created in 1989 as an autonomous region, comparable to the Flemish and Walloon Regions. Brussels Capital Region encompasses 19 municipalities with about 1.2 million inhabitants. The whole urban area including the suburbs counts about 1.8 million inhabitants, making Brussels the largest city in the country.

Brussels is super diverse, counting over 180 nationalities. At the end of 2008 about 68% of the inhabitants of Brussels Capital Region was of foreign origin. About 35% of Brussels' inhabitants are of non-European origin and these numbers have been increasing since.

Brussels is also a young city with 25% of the population under 20. However, 1/3 of the youth is unemployed and 30% of the population lives below the poverty line. Brussels is a rich city, providing 30% of the country's economic activity, but there is a huge socio-economic gap between the inhabitants. Specific to the city of Brussels, is that the more central municipalities are considered 'poorer' while the richer inhabitants choose the green outskirts of the city.

In Brussels the complex government structure reaches a whole new level. Brussels Capital Region is officially bilingual. This means that both communities can exert their competences in the region, and culture is one of them. Leading to two distinct arts' fields operating alongside each other. This system, however, is

¹ text by Ingrid Vranken and Sylvia Botella



MIXITY Wall - 'LGBT' - Okuda San Miguel (© Visit.Brussels - Eric Danhier)

increasingly being questioned as it discourages collaboration between the communities and does not take account of the linguistic reality of the city that seems so obvious to its inhabitants. A study from 2012 shows that only 5.2% of Brussels' citizens speak only Dutch at home, 38.1% only French, 17% a combination of the two official languages and the remaining 39.7% speak a language other than the official national languages. It is obvious that a logic of entanglement, cooperation and contamination is at the core of daily life and reality in a city like Brussels. It is inevitable that the encounter and dialogue that is part of living as a Bruxellois will influence cultural politics, however slow they might be.

2.1. Cultural policy in Brussels, a kaleidoscope

The reality of both communities being able to exert their cultural competences within the Brussels Capital Region offers both opportunities and flexibility for cultural actors, as well as administrative complexity. As an example Brussels has a total of 47 parties responsible for matters related to culture (in the broadest sense) active within the Capital Region. This encompasses the Federal cultural institutions: operahouse LA MONNAIE / DE MUNT, the Belgian National Orchestra and BOZAR the centre for fine arts. They fall under the guardianship of the Prime Minister. Besides these, there are the ministers of culture from both Communities as well as a number of administrations, councils and representatives on the level of the 19 municipalities.

Cultural organisations operating within Brussels have to find their way in a complex institutional clew, characterized by a lack of a common vision when it comes to culture within the Brussels Capital Region.

2.2. COCOF and VGC

A majority of the Brussels art organisations is either supported by the Federation Wallonia-Brussels or the Flemish Community through their respective Arts Decrees. In addition, there are the Community Commissions (COCOF for the French side, VGC for the Flemish side) that are specifically active within the Brussels Capital Region. The specific arts funding of both the Francophone and Flemish community, and the different kinds of organisations that receive support will be discussed at length in the respective chapters of this publication.

Focussing on the funding mechanism specific to Brussels we see that COCOF and VGC answer directly to the Community level (though COCOF does have a legislative power where the VGC does not) and engage in supporting the presence of their language community in Brussels. Concretely, this means that artistic organisations or projects based in or focused on Brussels can receive money both directly from the Community level through the respective Arts Decree and through the COCOF or VGC.

COCOF focuses on social cohesion and diversity and mainly supports non-profit organisations (and not artists directly). They play an important role in the funding of the French-speaking Brussels cultural centres. The VGC on the Flemish side offers both structural funding to Brussels-based organisations active in the Flemish arts field and project funding to both artists and organisations, however mostly smaller amounts. Recently they started focussing on emerging artists as well by providing a one-off 'first time applicant' grant. Their focus lies on artistic innovation and in supporting artists' trajectories. VGC is also responsible for the funding and functioning of the 22 Community Centres. These resemble the function and programming of the Cultural centres scattered around Flanders that will be elaborated on further in this text.



Hopla! Circus festival 2017 (© Eric Danhier - Visit.Brussels)

Weaving the Brussels' network

The multiplication and interweaving of scales and responsibilities within the same territory suggests many perspectives for cultural cooperation. There is an eagerness within the cultural field to explore these possibilities and the opportunities nurtured by the freedom to be unattached to a single governmental structure. However, this eagerness and dynamic of the field is not always met with a similar flexible attitude by the different government levels. Up until now, there were two different systems, two distinct politics and cultural practices existing side by side without any active encouragement to interact. In recent years, there have been some careful attempts to promote more collaboration and dialogue, which have been met with enthusiasm by the arts field.

Here, it is important to mention the role of the network organisation BKO/RAB. BKO/

RAB unites both Flemish and Francophone arts organisations in Brussels around common concerns. It actively lobbies for a cultural policy made to fit the Brussels reality. In 2009 they published a Cultural Plan for Brussels with 34 bottom-up proposals for a cultural policy in Brussels. This played an important role in the development of the initiatives described below.

BKO/RAB is also involved in the Brussels Academy, an urban citizens' university created to disseminate all kinds of knowledge about Brussels. They offered two course-cycles explaining the Brussels cultural scene and its complexities.

An Agreement for cultural cooperation

In December 2012 an agreement for cultural cooperation was signed between the Flemish Community and the Federation Wallonia-Brussels, that would become

effective in February 2014. A long history of negotiations precedes this Agreement, with multiple attempts to reach a common engagement. The aim of the Cultural Agreement is firstly to enhance knowledge of the other community on both sides. This translates to an administrative level where government employees are encouraged to engage with the administrations from the other community, and to the level of the cultural players, where specific grants were created for projects that facilitate cultural exchanges between the two communities.

Even though many Brussels-based cultural organisations are very pleased with the possibilities this Agreement provides, there are also some points of friction. The autonomy of the different language communities remains a sensitive issue on both sides. On the Flemish side, historical tensions are still at play and there is a constant fear of oppression and 'losing the field' against the French-speaking culture. On the side of the French community there are certain voices that regret this Agreement does not encompass French-speaking citizens living in Flanders.

Promoting Brussels abroad

Interestingly, both the Flemish and French community have a minister appointed for the promotion of Brussels or 'Brussels affairs'. This is mainly an advisory function within the different communities, but, as has recently been shown, it can also lead to a common promotion of the Brussels arts' scene abroad. For instance, at the beginning of November this year, there was the joint festival RADIKAL in Berlin focussing on dance from Brussels. During this festival, artists from both the 'French side' and 'Flemish side' performed alongside each other creating an opportunity to meet and exchange. It is a great initiative to promote the exciting dance developments that are happening in Brussels, but it remains an interesting fact that Brussels-based artists have to go abroad to show their work in a joint context.



Flagey square and building in Ixelles - Brussels (© [Visit.Brussels](#))

2.3. Cooperation in action

So how does the arts scene embrace this openness for collaboration and what kinds of projects does it foster? In what follows we will zoom in on a couple of inspiring examples of bi-community collaboration.

Organisations supported by both communities

Officially the policy is that an organisation cannot be supported by both Communities. But as always in Belgium, there are exceptions to the rule.

The most well-known of the exceptions for audiences abroad must be Kunstenfestivaldesarts. This international festival focussing on contemporary performance art can count on the collaboration of Flemish and Francophone institutions making it a bilingual project capable of creating dialogue between the different communities in the city. Because of the festival's size and importance, positioning itself both as an international and a city-festival, it managed to obtain the support of the different Communities.

Recyclart is an organisation that calls itself a public space. The workings of the organisation are threefold: it is an Arts centre supported by the Flemish and Francophone Communities, it has an educational function (Fabrik) for people working in joinery, metal construction and building management and the catering industry.

The mission of the organisation is strongly connected to its location - in the abandoned train station of Brussel-Kappellekerk, in the Marollen area in the city centre. It reacts to a crack in the urban fabric, caused by the construction of the North-South railroad connection that cut the city in half. As an Arts centre, it brings a high-quality programme focussing mainly on music, the visual arts and work in public spaces as well as development support by offering residencies. They have a refreshingly open and non-hierarchical view on art and stay open to the latest developments in several subcultures around the world. They explicitly focus art as a tool for meeting, encounter and social cohesion. As a result (or maybe as a starting point) of this, Recyclart is boldly bilingual at all levels of the organisation.

When discussing initiatives around social cohesion in Brussels, one has to mention Zinneke. Zinneke is both a Flemish and a Francophone non-profit with an identical Board of directors in each of the organisations. This makes the internal coordination quite schizophrenic with different deadlines and policies to take into account for a single project. Historically, Zinneke was a parade project conceived as part of Brussels 2000, European City of Culture. Made up of residents and artists, it highlights the rich culture of Brussels and is the expression of a desire to build bridges between the municipalities and the city centre, between the people of Brussels, Flanders and Wallonia, by mobilizing the (socio)cultural associations. From that, it grew into a bi-annual project and a true Brussels institution that manages to get almost all cultural actors involved.

Bi-communal collaboration

The collaboration between TRISTERO and Transquinguennal for two theatre performances, is an interesting example of how theatre companies search for collaborations across the language borders. The position of these companies is quite meaningful, they are a true example of the multilingual experience of many Brussels citizens, mixing up languages on stage in a predominantly text-based work. TRISTERO is one of the few Dutch-speaking companies in Brussels. As a Brussels company they considered it important to build an audience in the French-speaking community and to interact with the French-speaking artistic scene. This led them to collaborate with Transquinguennal, with whom they have a shared love of humour and lesser-known repertoire as well as an actor-based approach.

Recently, there have been interesting examples of a bi-communal projects initiated by larger institutions. Flemish city theatre, KVS and their Francophone counterpart Théâtre National created the joint program 'Toerne General'. By selecting a series of performances together

and creating a joint promotion they aim to establish a long-term collaboration through which the audiences are invited to get to know the institution on the other side of the language border, while creating new partnerships and visibility to the artists.

Arts centres, Beursschouwburg and Les Brigittines engaged in an artistic identity confusion called B-swap. For four days, they swapped houses and invited their audiences to do the same. Both promoted the project BXL-SWAP The Game in which the people of Brussels were encouraged to 'swap' (jobs, clothes, plants,...) for any period of time they wanted. Beursschouwburg and Les Brigittines are situated approximately one kilometre apart and each (theoretically) represent a different circuit: the Flemish and the Francophone. They openly asked the question if they could speak of an artistic-language border and if art is different on the other side of it. By swapping houses the audiences of the Beursschouwburg and Les Brigittines respectively could discover the artistic practices present on 'the other side'.

2.4. Collaborative futures for Brussels

It is clear that the Brussels' arts field is ready for more cooperation across language borders, but it is also clear that politics is not always as fast to pick up on these trends. There are still some urgent issues for which political solutions are needed. For example, providing one central point of communication for all the cultural events in Brussels remained complicated, even though it has been requested by the field for years. And clear legislative frameworks for bi-community projects remain absent. But, as the examples above prove, the cultural sector is very creative when it comes to finding opportunity in complexity. There is a will to collaborate and a growing curiosity for each other's artistic and organisational expertise.

2.5. Resources

BKO/RAB, 'Cultuurbeleid in Brussel: een caleidoscoop', February 2014

'Les arts vivants à Bruxelles Un aperçu (incomplet)', Brussels Academy, 2015

G. Cochez, 'De Bruxelles 2000 à nos jours. Le secteur culturel face aux défis urbains', Brussels Academy, 2015

'Politiques culturelles et financement de la culture à Bruxelles (II): un kaléidoscope. Aperçu des différents pouvoirs subsidiants', Brussels Academy, 2015

G. Simons, 'Een kaart om op te verdwalen', RektoVerso, 2 december 2016

J. Janssens, D. Hesters, I. De Vriendtand France Lebon, 'Belgium/ 1. Historical perspective: cultural policies and instruments', Compendium of Cultural Policies and Trends in Europe, 2 December 2014

BKO/RAB, 'Cultural plan for Brussels', 2009

03.

THE PERFORMING ARTS IN
FLANDERS¹

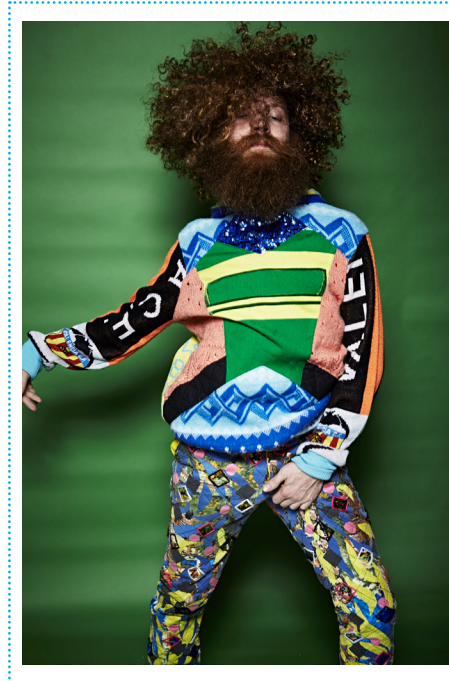
3.1. A landscape of relations

The Flemish arts' field prides itself on its international recognition, artistic quality and experimental diversity. Since the 1980's there has been a continuous development of excellent artistic work across the disciplines. Artists working in Flanders and Brussels are often welcomed guests on the international stage. The success of Flemish performing arts is not a coincidence, it is a result of how the sector is structured and supported.

We can describe the Flemish arts' field as a landscape of relations with a dense network of interdependent functions. Flanders is envied for the great diversity of its houses and institutions, including companies and production houses with or without their own infrastructure, art centres, art labs, management agencies, festivals, cultural centres, etc. Big and small organisations exist alongside each other and are often intertwined in a multitude of collaborations. There is a constant exchange between the different players. This horizontal, non-hierarchical architecture provides a strong incentive for initiative, exchange, involvement and responsibility on the part of each player.

This landscape of relations is constantly in motion and has its roots in the early eighties. At the time, the infrastructure for performing arts was old-fashioned. There was a Theatre Decree and Cultural Centres, but not much space for contemporary Performing arts, dance, music theatre or other more experimental forms. A new generation of artists and organisers felt the need to create new spaces for the

¹ text by Ingrid Vranken



'So You Can Feel', Pieter Ampe, Campo (© Bart Stadnicki)

production and presentation of innovative theatre and dance. This dynamic quickly caught the interest of diverse audiences and international venues which in turn started to change the management and programming of the more conservative city theatres and cultural centres in Flanders. These different players and functions in the field emerged within a short timeframe, and created a strong impact on audience participation as well as generating media attention.

Looking back, we can see that several needs for artistic creation were tackled collectively, including production, (international) co-production, presentation and promotion, advocacy, research and documentation... Collective production companies emerged alongside festivals and Arts Centres occupying abandoned buildings. These venues were almost immediately backed up by and involved

in the creation of international networks, exchanging information and creating international co-production structures at a time when there was almost no funding for these artistic practices in Flanders.

This international success was and still is a key factor in the lobbying strategies of the arts' field. Since the seventies, a defederalisation process took place in Belgium, in which more competences were gradually handed over from the federal level to the communities and the regions. In fact, culture was the first competence to be de-federalised. In this context, the bottom-up dynamics in the performing arts field was met with enthusiasm by Flemish policymakers. They picked up on this energy and eventually a Performing Arts Decree was created (in 1993). An important factor in the success of this decree is that it not only made multi-annual funding possible, but also highlighted and

celebrated the bottom-up spirit of the field. Anyone can apply for funding for an artistic project without too many qualitative or quantitative directions and is evaluated by a commission of professionals in the field of art.

The bottom-up philosophy of the Arts Decree, its distinct functions (support for development, production, presentation, participation and reflection), the importance of international collaboration, and the influence on the programming in cultural centres have remained the ingredients that define the organisation of the Flemish arts field until today.

3.2. Structuring production

The diversity and complexity of the arts field is perhaps most visible when we look at the organisations *producing work*. The spectrum ranges from city theatres and companies to individual job-hopping artists. Even though we can largely group organisations in the above-mentioned categories, each of them has a unique focus or strategy.

The evolution of the position and operation of the different city theatres is an interesting example showing both the diversity of strategies as well as the way in which the dynamics in the field and society are answered by large institutions. Flanders has three **city theatres**: Toneelhuis in Antwerp, KVS in Brussels and NTGent in Ghent. These are no longer the dominant classical institutions of yesteryear, but have transformed into open houses with very diverse artistic approaches, organizing themselves in different ways and taking on a unique position towards the changing urban societies in which they are embedded. For example, Toneelhuis opened up its producing and presenting facilities to a diverse selection of artists, enabling them to create autonomously within this context. Their focus on preparing young artists for the big stage, in collaboration with a smaller company, is a response to a lack of opportunities for emerging artists to create large-scale pieces. NTGent, on



'Belgian Rules, Belgium Rules', Troubleyn_Jan Fabre (© Wonge Bergmann)

the other hand, currently works with a fixed ensemble of actors and collaborators and has a clear ambition to produce and tour internationally. From the 2018-2019 season, the Swiss director and author, Milo Rau will take on the artistic leadership. He follows Johan Simons whose artistic curatorship will end. Rau and his team are aiming for what they call 'global realism', a theatre that connects the local with the European. They coproduce and tour internationally, but also branch out into collaborations with local artistic organisations including 'Action Zoo Humain' and 'Victoria Deluxe', infusing social diversity into the artistic landscape of the house. The mission statement of KVS reads that the intercultural urban reality of Brussels as the capital of Flanders, Belgium and Europe is central to their operations. KVS works with an open ensemble of theatre-makers, performers directors, choreographers and authors whom they support on a long-term trajectory. This model not only encourages the development of these makers individually, but also crosspollination between them. In addition, they stand out with their introduction of city-dramatists who are appointed actively to make the link between the stage, theatre and the new

urban reality.

Other **theatre companies**, often with a long history, also kept on evolving, differing in size, production capacities, with or without their own spaces, with fixed collaborations or a more loose-knit interpretation of collectivity. Mid-scale theatre companies such as ARSENAAL/LAZARUS, Antigone or Theater Malpertuis originated from chamber theatres in the 1950's and 1960's and have now developed into open production centres working with a range of theatre-makers. They are often strongly engaged in the cities in which they are based, presenting a distinct and recognizable artistic language that brings a faithful audience with it. They tour extensively throughout Flanders and their presenting facilities are not only used for their own productions, but opened up to younger makers with whom there is an artistic connection. These structures all have long traditions, but this does not stop them from continuing to evolve and change in relation to the rest of the field. Musical theatre ensemble such as Het nieuwstedelijk could be seen to function as a company but defines itself as a city-theatre from multiple (smaller) cities.

In the 1990s, **collectives** such as STAN and de Roovers marked the emancipation of the Flemish actor in independent working structures. These long-standing collaborations between actors emerged from the acting schools as a reaction to the director-based way of working. The young actors were not only looking for strategies on how to organise themselves, but mainly on how to create new works collectively. We continue to see their importance today as new collectives emerge with the same philosophy. Canonical texts and pieces, or, as in the case of de Koe original writing, are often their starting points, but as we see with young groups like FC Bergman the results of the intensive text-study can be highly cinematographic.



'The Fioretti Project', Lucinda Ra (© Stefanie De Clercq)

This enticing cross-pollination between different artistic languages that inspires new forms can happen because all these different organisations and artists operate within the same artistic space. There are no separate corners or parallel systems. **Youth theatre** for example is considered an equal player, making it possible for flagship organisations such as hetpaleis, KOPERGIETERY or BRONKS to thrive and have an engaged exchange with the rest of the field. Many houses that focus on children and young people have an active policy of encouraging makers also to create for a young audience. Similarly, production houses such as FABULEUS see it as their mission to elevate 'working with young people on stage' to a challenging artistic level. They collaborate with interesting and daring directors and choreographers and distribute their pieces throughout Flanders as well as internationally to both young and adult audiences.

The same aversion to separation and the eagerness to form 'unholy alliances' bred the rich dynamic and hard to define field of **music theatre**. The experimentations of music theatre also emerged from the dynamics of the 1980s, with organisations such as LOD muziektheater, WALPURGIS and Muziektheater Transparant at the forefront of this development. While those

three organisations remain closest to their relationship with opera, new companies like Het nieuwstedelijk or more recently Tuning People emerged throughout the '90s and 2000's experimenting with rock, pop, jazz and improvised music as starting forms. The landscape of music theatre is constantly shifting, going beyond 'explicit' music theatre by finding new fusions between sound, stage and narration. Flanders Arts Institute recently produced a separate publication (in English) focussing on the distinct developments of this segment of the field.

A notable place should also be reserved for dance companies. It is no coincidence that Flanders and Brussels are referred to as the '**Mecca of dance**'. Brussels is home to several renowned companies and choreographers like Rosas (Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker), Ultima Vez (Wim Vandekeybus), Damaged Goods (Meg Stuart). But also in Ghent and Antwerp choreographers and dance companies such as Alain Platel & les ballets C de la B and Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui & Eastman assume an important role in both the local and international development of dance. The

presence of these choreographers, but also the unique academy P.A.R.T.S., continues to inspire a highly dynamic and challenging development of new choreographic statements, attracting young and ambitious dancers from all around the world. As a result, we can see that next to these renowned names, there are many mid-scale companies such as fieldworks and Peeping Tom as well as individual makers who continue to choose Flanders as their base for operations. More established structures are responding to new dynamics by opening up their organisations to collaborations with emerging talent, crossing the disciplinary boundaries and broadening the relations they create with the rest of the field.

3.3. The project-hopping artist as producer

Alongside the manifold (funded) structures, there is another important stream of artistic activity that makes the Flemish arts field a vibrant ecosystem: **individually working artists**. More and more artists hop from project to project, weaving an intricate network of collaborations around them and playing with this landscape of relationships. This group is growing every year. Their way of working offers a useful insight into how different players interact to support the development of an artist or new creation.



'WOESJ', 4Hoog (© 4Hoog)

Let's imagine an individually working performance artist, on the brink of producing a new piece, a month or two away from handing in a project subsidy application. With some luck, they are operating under the wings of a **production and management structure** such as [Hiros](#) (Brussels), [Caravan Production](#) (Brussels) or [Klein Verzet](#) (Antwerp). These are often light and flexible organisations, with a structural funding base, leaning on a handful of team-members. They either offer long-term trajectories with artists or short-term project-based support, focused on administrative, management and production services, as well as sales and distribution depending on the focus of the organisation. These small and viable organisations essentially provide stability for artists who are not in a position to employ a continuous collaborator or producer. The structure of the Belgian job market makes independent producers very rare. These management structures often have an income base through their own structural funding, making their services financially interesting to artists working with small production or research budgets.

An often-made remark is that these organisations function as a first 'gate-keeper' and it is true that each has their own artistic identity that may not 'fit' with every artist. In the best cases they operate with transparency and serve as a hub for artists

to exchange knowledge, providing insight into how to create interesting production processes, tailored to their work. In the last seven years we have seen **artist-run** alternatives to these management offices emerge. In structures such as [Manyone](#), [SPIN](#) or [ROBIN](#), artists have huddled together to communalise resources and opportunities without abandoning the artistic autonomy of each of the makers and continuing a project-based approach.

Once this initial and intimate circle of support for the project is found, the weaving of partnerships begins. This is where the **arts centres, workspaces and international partnerships** come in. Few of these artists working independently will create their work in a single uninterrupted rehearsal period, provided solely by one partner. Most stretch out their development over chunks of two to three week residencies over many months and several workspaces scattered across Flanders and sometimes neighbouring countries. The use of these residency facilities is usually free and sometimes even accompanied by a small financial contribution. Places like [wp Zimmer](#) (Antwerp) provide studio spaces on a project-basis but are also the main producer for a handful of artists for whom they provide full circle support.

Organisations such as [Workspacebrussels](#) or [detheatermaker](#) (Antwerp) function as nomadic entities, focussing on the use of infrastructure provided by multiple partners within the city and mainly offering strategic advice, dramaturgical exchanges and visibility through work-in-progress presentation platforms. The **arts centres** offer co-production as well as presentation opportunities throughout Flanders. Again, there is no fixed template that makes an arts centre. Their similarities lie in their presentation function and in supporting artists by co-producing new work. They are free to define their own artistic identity and focus. Arts centres e.g. [Arts Centre Buda](#) (Kortrijk), [CAMPO](#) (Ghent), [Monty](#) (Antwerp), [Kunstencentrum nona](#) (Mechelen) focus on supporting creation through offering residencies or full cycle production support while [Kaaitheater](#) and [Beursschouwburg](#) (Brussels) or [STUK](#) (Leuven) have some artists in residence but emphasise programming, curatorial concepts and creating spaces for knowledge exchange and reflection. All of these arts centres look beyond performing arts, making connections with visual arts and music, either through specific festivals or by weaving different art forms into their seasonal programming. Many of them invest actively in the internationalisation

of the Flemish field, providing international touring opportunities through their engagement in European networks and personal and informal connections with programmers and curators.

3.4. Unique position of cultural centres

The cultural centres are another unique network in Flanders. Flanders is characterised by a dense network of venues that can professionally present performing arts, including outside the major cities. Most arts centres, workspaces and other organisations funded via the Arts Decree are located in the major cities, whereas the cultural centres can also be found in smaller cities and towns. Their activity is largely financed by these cities and municipalities, and not via the Arts' Decree. Their mission is more than the mere presentation of art. It also encompasses participation and community building. This means there is often a significant difference between what is being presented within arts centres and cultural centres. In fact, many of the production organisations known for touring abroad hardly show their work in cultural centres. Due to their community function as well as lower financial resources, the programming at cultural centres often favours a broader mix, including comedy and music, with only a limited space for contemporary theatre and dance.

3.5. Collective advocacy and support

A few final pieces of the puzzle are the network and support organisations that keep a finger on the pulse and follow up on the latest developments in the field, strengthening the connections or actively doing lobbying work. With over 200 members, Employers Federation OKO unites almost all arts organisations from Brussels and Flanders working professionally across the disciplines. Members meet on a regular basis in smaller working groups focussing on specific issues or segments in the sector. This approach makes it possible to keep the position of the arts strong and pro-actively to engage

with policy. Besides its lobbying function, OKO is also an important resource for the dissemination of juridical and financial knowledge. Since OKO is financed uniquely through membership fees, it can act quite independently from political pressures and policy changes.

The Flanders Arts Institute (or Kunstenpunt to the locals) is the interface organisation and expertise centre for the arts from Flanders and Brussels. Flanders Arts Institute stimulates the development of the arts and policy and feeds this debate about the arts into society. They are important allies for both artists and art organisations, mapping and studying the artistic ecosystem, connecting arts and policy and strengthening international relations.

In addition to those two major players, there is also Cultuurloket (formerly: Kunstenloket); a helpdesk for individuals providing commercial and legal advice around working in the arts. There are also several other organisations and/or networks focussing on the locality of a city or on knowledge exchange on a specific topic, e.g. Pulse Transitienetwerk Cultuur, a network that focuses on ecology and sustainability in arts and cultural heritage, or demos, a knowledge centre on audience participation and diversity.

3.6. Government support and tools

So what makes up the fertile soil for this variety of organisations? As already mentioned, the Flemish arts field functions as a single whole within the funding framework of the Arts Decree. This Decree, that was updated in 2013, provides the arts field with several instruments based on a flexible and tailored approach. It is open to all arts disciplines, but not to literature and cinema (which are supported by the Flemish Fund for Literature and Flemish Audiovisual Fund respectively).

Structural funding that provides a fixed subsidy for a five-year period is an

important instrument for the majority of organisations. This funding is accessible to both big and small structures and to all possible functions and disciplines. Proof of continuity and vision that goes beyond the accumulation of projects is important. Just before the summer of 2016, the results of the new structural subsidy round were announced. 207 organisations will receive structural funding from 2017 to 2021, of which 99 organisations are within performing arts. The total amount currently awarded as structural funding is about 84.7 million euros.

Project funding is a second important funding line. It can encompass projects from all disciplines that run for up to three years and is accessible to both organisations and individual artists. With three application rounds per year the demand for this kind of support is very high, however the budget available is considerably lower than that for structural funding, i.e. only about 7 to 8 million euros in total per year for all arts disciplines (excluding cinema and literature). In addition to project funding, the development grants prove an important tool especially for individual artists. They provide artists with the opportunity to focus on research and reinvention, without a specific need for results or outcomes. It has a lower threshold, making it an appealing option for emerging artists applying for the first time.

The Arts Decree also provides special attention for the internationalisation of the arts with specific funds for international touring and residencies, for which both artists and international partners can apply. When presenting work from Flanders, support can be requested in the form of a grant that helps cover travel, lodging and transport costs, connected to the presentation of a show. This type of support can be requested within a short timeframe (filed at least 2 months before the project takes place) and has a maximum limit of 7,000 €. For the presentation of a cluster of performances or the creation of a bigger project, a project subsidy

can also be requested. However, the Flemish Community decided that these types of support are only possible for the presentation of smaller or 'midscale' companies and artists, and the budgets for these kinds of support have also been shrinking.

All these funding options ask the applicant to define the precise DNA of their structure or project according to a matrix of *functions* (development, production, presentation, participation, reflection) and *disciplines* with an array of sub-disciplines. Applications are evaluated on their artistic quality by a large pool of arts' professionals. There are very few quantitative or qualitative restrictions, making the evaluation both an open discussion about each individual project as well as a difficult balancing task for commission members. The funding philosophy is that of a lever rather than a 'compensation for a deficit', providing core funding that makes it possible for an organisation to develop the continuity needed and go in search of additional resources via partners at home and abroad.

Besides the subsidies anchored within the Arts Decree, the Flemish Community has seven institutions that are directly funded through a management agreement, these include the large performing arts venues [Vooruit](#) (Ghent), [Concertgebouw Brugge](#) (Bruges) and [deSingel](#) (Antwerp). The total amount allocated to these seven large institutions is just under 54 million euros. They are expected to fulfil all the functions that the Arts Decree describes, leaving each of them free to define what that means for them.

Besides the Arts Decree the municipalities and provinces provide important additional support for some organisations, often focussing specifically on infrastructure or access to specific networks. But due to recent state reform, funds from the provinces are now flowing back into the cities and to the Flemish Community with great uncertainties about the exact terms of these budgets.



Autoctonos, Ayelen Parolin (courtesy: the artist)

The Ministry of Culture is currently working on a broader framework for additional funding, including a 'tax shelter', but this is still very much under construction. Many organisations receive additional funds from crowdsourcing and 'friends of' programmes, but Flanders does not have a culture or history of philanthropy, meaning these efforts only account for smaller amounts of an organisation's budget and are certainly not a viable income that could replace government support.

3.7. International intertwining

We have already touched upon the importance of international collaboration on several points. But truly to understand the complex entanglements of Flanders and Brussels in the world, it is important to stress that the development of the Flemish arts field since the 80's is deeply intertwined with the development of international relations and networks. This can particularly be seen in the development of dance. Since the beginning, the alternative art spaces that grew to become the arts centres and festivals of today were exchanging information with their peers abroad, creating international touring opportunities and co-production practices

for Flemish artists. In the past 15 years, the number of international partners and presentation venues grew exponentially resulting in growth of both productions and artists active in the field. But as every ecologist can tell you, there are limits to growth. We can look at the advantages of this transnational system of co-production, but must also raise critical questions about sustainability.

On the other hand, Flemish organisations have always invested in international artists and companies which means that unlike some other countries, there is a genuine interest from audiences in international work. The success of festivals like [Kunstenfestivaldesarts](#) and large institutions like [deSingel](#) is directly connected to their ability to bring big international names to Flemish audiences, and the appreciation for that is visible in the rapid ticket sales and sold-out venues.

And then there is a third sense in which we could interpret the 'internationality' of the Flemish arts field. Flanders, and especially Brussels has a very high density of emerging artists from all over the world choosing it as their base. This is partly due to renowned schools like [P.A.R.T.S.](#) and the

vibrant scene, but also because the funding or co-production system does not exclude artists on the basis of nationality. What counts is your active engagement with the Flemish field. In fact, one could ask what the name 'Flemish Performing Arts' means when such a large proportion of the artists come from abroad and when a large part of the financial resources that make creation possible come from international partners...

3.8. Pressures and challenges

We can hear something creaking in the machine that we thought was so well-oiled. Of course, the Flemish context is not immune to the growing economic pressure that can be felt everywhere in Europe. Here conservative and neo-liberal political thinking has also gained ground, bringing in a discourse of doubt around the need for arts and arts-funding in society. The challenges this brings are two-fold; the relationships that are so central to the functioning of the field are under pressure, as well as the relations built with the audiences.

Renewal and sustainability

The landscape of relations, that is so central to the dynamic of the Flemish arts scene, is under pressure. The field underwent a 7.5% budget cut in 2014 from which it has not yet recovered. Looking back, we can see that the current subsidy situation is very close to that of 2010 but the cost of living has increased since then. Clearly this has a major effect on the purchasing power of the arts field, with calculations made by [Flanders Arts Institute](#) showing a decrease of 48% for performing arts organisations in purchasing power compared to 2001.

There has been a significant decrease of subsidies for producing organisations and companies, probably pushing more artists into a project logic and preventing long-term thinking and planning for artistic practices. This also heightens the pressure on project subsidies as more artists and

organisations are applying for these funds and we see a decrease in success rates of receiving project funding.

These evolutions make international collaboration more important than ever. Producing organisations and independent artists rely heavily on their partnerships with international co-producers as well as on international touring. In the past decades, [Flanders Arts Institute](#) noted a relentless increase in international partners and presence on international stages. These increasing numbers are not only due to the popularity of Flemish artists, but also as a result of creation budgets increasingly needing international co-producers to step in because of declining subsidies and purchasing power of the Flemish arts scene itself. More and more partners are needed to keep up with the same level of production, revealing the effects from the decrease in government funding across Europe. This solution can therefore only be a short-term one.

These trends are bringing artists and organisations into a trepidatious situation, threatening the dynamic and renewal of the field. Organisations often only just have enough money to keep their heads above the water, leaving no room for risk taking and the introduction of new initiatives. Organisations often realise that they have to rethink their modes of producing and presenting, but with such high financial pressure, organisations often feel stuck in the logic of doing more with less money, instead of radically re-imagining how to work.

Individual artists are facing a similar challenge. The traditional vision of growth, where artists would work their way up from project funding to structural support over several years, has become increasingly unrealistic. We risk creating a highly competitive environment that is no longer able to nourish the values of collaboration and openness that made the field so interesting. As more and more artists are pushed into an increasingly unsustainable

and precarious situation, the gap between these artists and the institutions that are meant to support them continues to grow. So how can we develop new visions for sustainable and diverse artistic careers, and which role can institutions play in that?

Tomorrow's audience

We already mentioned that distribution within Flanders is a challenge in itself. Many theatre organisations see their performance series in the cultural centres shrinking. Cultural centres are more pressured to break-even for each performance, making it difficult to take risks and to pay the rising buyout fees. Lesser-known companies, young makers and more challenging formats are therefore pushed aside for 'safer' choices like comedy, and plays starring TV personalities. On the other hand, there is also a lack of interest from the subsidised arts for what could be meaningful exchanges with local audiences in these cultural centres, whose needs are different from communities living in urban areas. Cultural centres are interested in work that can interact with the realities outside the city and want to involve artists in this conversation. This demands an interest from the artist into questioning how they work as well as a policy that can support a different approach. The lack of dialogue within the field and subsequently on a policy level, creates a lag between what is supported within the Arts Decree and the needs and choices at a local level. This not only prevents artists from creating and distributing their work outside the bigger cities in Flanders, but also underserves the audiences outside these urban areas.

Artists and companies are desperately searching for solutions in response to the dwindling presentation opportunities, especially if they are financially dependent on finding sufficient venues. Theatre companies are increasingly making their infrastructure available for presenting the work of colleagues. Likewise, younger artists are organizing presentations themselves and are creating informal

presentation platforms, sometimes even in people's homes. But these solutions do not immediately increase their visibility among the mainstream public outside the cities. Reaching these audiences will be a core challenge in the coming years.

Simultaneously a continuous investment in audience building is also needed in the cities. The ethnically and culturally diverse population is growing and does not necessarily identify with what arts venues are offering and how they communicate. Inequality remains an issue in the arts. Social parameters such as the educational level and the socio-economic situation play an important role in cultural participation and despite various policy instruments, it remains a challenge for the arts to engage with people experiencing a lack of privilege.

3.9. Solutions in the making

Society is in the midst of radical shifts, which do not leave the arts untouched. The challenges in Brussels and Flanders are no different to elsewhere. Around the world, we see a growing, diverse urban population, communities that need to find their identity, together with newcomers who have difficulty finding welcome. This is all against a backdrop of environmental concerns and ever changing geopolitical complexities. Of course this doesn't leave the arts field untouched.

Both the internal relationships within the field as well as the relationships between the field and the audiences need some therapy. Luckily, there are already many initiatives, from both artists and organisations, figuring out ways to engage with these challenges. We see an increase in artistic work dealing with this shifting societal reality in a variety of ways. As so often is the case, solutions can be found within the artistic practices themselves. Institutions are slowly but surely directing their analytical gaze onto themselves, questioning the mechanisms with which they work. For the performing arts, the question is not so much how they can

improve, but rather what meaningful role they can play in a changing world.

Fair practice and fantastic institutions

A push towards questioning the fields' production and presentation habits is an interesting and hopeful development. Many organisations want to find a different way of working, and there is more and more eagerness to place artistic relations at the centre of decision-making instead of their own continuous institutionalisation.

The current discussion about fairer pay and fairer practices that was put on the agenda by the loose-knit artists' alliance [State Of The Arts](#) is a possible starting point. They are reacting to the precariousness of their flexi-worker situation as well as the discrepancy between the politics that art institutions present within their programmes, and the politics they actually practice within their working. The urgency of this topic was picked up by umbrella organisations such as OKO and by Kunstenpunt, each in their own way finding means to facilitate the much needed cultural shift that affects the whole sector. Currently, there is a charter for fair practice in the making, focussing on good practices for co-production, buy-out fees and collaborations. Artists have also sent out a signal for solidarity amongst each other with the initiative [handvest.org](#), by subscribing to this code they agree not to take any jobs that pay below the minimum wage of the collective wage agreement of the sector.

But this paradigm shift needs to go beyond fair pay alone. Some larger institutions are questioning their function, internal mechanisms and position both towards the artists and towards their audiences. The Arts Center Buda organised the symposium '[The fantastic institution](#)'. During three days of lectures and debates, concepts like power, money, space, time, curating, shared responsibility, exclusiveness vs. openness, flexibility vs. stability, soft vs. hard, small vs. big, quantity vs. quality were considered in all possible ways. Providing insight into

existing good practices and pondering how fiction can help us articulate future approaches. This message of questioning the values the field is instituting with its practices resonated widely, and institutions like [Vooruit](#) are taking these discussions further into reworking their organisational model.

Societal challenges at the core of new artistic languages

When it comes to reinventing audience relations, many new and exciting practices are being explored. Several artists are approaching the urban reality and certain segments of society with artistic interest and curiosity. Companies like Martha!tentatief or artists such as Jozef Wouters or Einat Tuchman draw inspiration from the urban context. Their approach often asks for a strong long-term commitment to a process, a place and to people. Collaboration and co-creation are at the core of their process and poetics. These initiatives are often called 'socio-artistic', but the images that come with this denominator don't do justice to these inventive practices that are deeply driven by the search for communal artistic languages outside of the familiar. These artists don't view the people around them as spectators or consumers but as critical citizens, co-creators of meaning and new possibilities.

To achieve this, they move their studios far away from the institutional beaten track, outside or to semi-public spaces, looking for a temporary home for their work, getting involved in the locality while providing some critical distance at the same time. By actively working in public spaces, they create new ways for citizens to interact, drawing from notions such as empowerment and community building. Artists like [Simon Allemeersch](#), commit to several year of engagement with a certain neighbourhood and its problems, figuring out what their artistic practice can bring to the place. Other artworks like [Sara Vanhee's](#) '[Lecture for Everyone](#)'

infiltrate daily life almost in a guerrilla style, creating space for thought, imagination and the unexpected. Moreover, fictional institutions and political parties have started to claim their place. These kinds of work, that are not always immediately recognizable as 'art', make us doubt the certainties of how democracy, institutions and history are organised. Collaboration with different groups in society, with young people, education, urban art forms, the elderly, ... is not a separate goal, it is at the core of the work and the artistic languages that are being developed.

Alongside these works that are exploring spaces radically outside known institutions, there is also a large appetite for documentary theatre, with artists like [Thomas Bellinck](#), and the appointment of the Swiss [Milo Rau](#) as new artistic director of NTGent. Their approach is very different from their peers working in public space. Using the full extent of the theatrical machine they address problematic issues head-on. The theatre space offers a framework for fiction that allows other viewpoints to arise that would otherwise be deemed too controversial.

3.10. A landscape of relations for the future

The Flemish arts' field managed to grow and flourish thanks to a culture of exchange and collaboration both within Flanders and abroad. This unique emphasis on relations and networks that emerged from artistic practices is the unique result of the bottom-up dynamics which began in the 80s. This movement was soon met with enthusiasm abroad, which paved the way for recognition and the development of policy tools in Flanders. The way of working that developed grew into a strong arts field. But as elsewhere in Europe, this landscape of relations is increasingly being challenged, both internally due to budget restraints and the questioning of old power relations, and externally due to new societal realities that demand a renewed commitment to our audience relationships.

But answers to these pressures are already wildly and abundantly in the making. Artists and small organisations are challenging the established order and the institutions that surround them. They are no longer questioning or critiquing ways of working, driven by an artistic pursuit they are 'just' doing it differently, and by doing so they force their institutional partners to follow. New organisational models and fair practice initiatives arise beside processes of co-creation and working in public space. All these initiatives question the artistic criteria and organisational procedures with which we are familiar. A new landscape of relations is emerging and as in the 80s it will once again be the artistic practice itself that will move the arts field into a shift.

3.11. Resources

'[Transformers, landscape sketch for the performing arts from Flanders and Beyond](#)', Flanders arts institute, 2014

'[Ins & outs, a field analysis of the performing arts in Flanders](#)', Institute for the Performing arts, 2011

'[Perspective: Artist. The position of individual artists in the performing arts in Flanders](#)', Institute for the Performing arts, 2012

J. Janssens, 'History and science fiction of performance art networking', 2017

Flemish Community, [Department of Culture, Youth and Media](#)

W. Hillaert, '[Subsidies beoordeeld: volstrekt onvoldoende](#)', RektoVerso, 5 July 2016

'[The only way is up? Cijferanalyse van de internationalisering van de productie en de spreiding van de Vlaamse podiumkunsten \(2000-2016\)](#)', Flanders arts institute, 2017

'[Perspective: Music Theatre](#)', Flanders Arts Institute, 2015

I. Vranken, '[Een nieuwe fictie voor het kunstinstituut](#)', Etcetera, 15 June 2017

'[The Fantastic Institution](#)', Flanders arts institute

'[Over Nieuwstedelijke Grond](#)', Flanders arts institute

S. Hendrickx, '[How do artists deal with the space in which their work is situated](#)', Courant 107, 2013

04.

ARTISTIC CREATION
IN THE FEDERATION
WALLONIA-BRUSSELS¹

If 'Utopia is not unachievable, it just hasn't been achieved yet' to paraphrase the explorer and humanist, Théodore Monod, then perhaps the artistic creation in the Federation Wallonia-Brussels (FWB) is a Utopia. Because it is young, still under construction – let's emphasize that! Polyphonic, it holds without detaining. On the world map of artistic creation and cultural policies, it has a very recent history – more broadly, it is important to remember that it was only in 1958 that the Belgian government, inspired by the action of the French Minister of Cultural Affairs, André Malraux (1959-1969), appointed its own Minister of Cultural Affairs: Pierre Harmel (1958-1960).

Since the 20th century, the history of artistic creation in francophone Belgium has consisted of individual and collective demands (or strategies), aesthetic and institutional conquests and social and political questions. The desire for the professionalization of artists finds a resounding echo in the history of artistic creation and the cultural policies of the FWB. It is in its DNA.

Today, the Belgian francophone cultural landscape is the most promising in this regard than it has been for a long while with the legislative reforms and institutional reorganisation currently underway in the wake (or not) of 'Bouger les lignes' ('Moving the lines') – the cross-consultation of artistic, cultural, creative and continuous education sectors, launched in January 2015, with a view to reforming the cultural policies in the Federation Wallonia-Brussels.

¹ Text by Sylvia Botella



'Rumeur et petits jours', Raoul collectif (© Céline Chariot)

And the burgeoning 'new wave' of francophone Belgium that has been confirmed in recent years: Anne-Cécile Vandalem, Fabrice Murgia, Raoul Collectif, le Nimis Groupe, Claude Schmitz, Ayelen Parolin or Louise Vanneste.

The Wallonia-Brussels theatrical breakthrough at Avignon is undoubtedly the main news of recent years. In the wake of Fabrice Murgia's production 'Notre peur de n'être' presented at the Festival d'Avignon in 2014 – which has, in some way, re-established the dialogue between Belgian francophone creators and the festival – at the 2016 edition, the public, critics and professionals were electrified by Anne-Cécile Vandalem and the Raoul collectif whose power of expression and lucidity unfolded around their respective productions 'Tristesses' and 'Rumeur et petits jours' finally to allow their rebellion to explode. Could this be a sign of a voluntary letting go of oneself? And the affirmation – finally! – of pride? But of a more *harmonious* than *hegemonic* pride.

It had been a long time since a Belgian francophone artistic creation had been so noted, except for, among others, the Heidelberger Stückmarkt, in May 2016,

which awarded Thomas Depryck the international playwright's prize.

Today, an inner strength seems to move artists from Brussels and Wallonia, making them appear perfectly *themselves*. Perhaps it could be time to finish with our greatest cliché, that of a Belgian francophone artistic creation that finds its respiration in the French text or artistic creation? Because the opposite is true. Perhaps it is time to learn how to pierce through the discourse? In 2017, Walloon and Brussels artists are advancing in leaps and bounds. As has always been the case, creating and nothing else drives them.

4.1. A complex articulation of cultural competences

As Christophe Pirenne writes in the collected conference papers 'Pour une histoire des politiques culturelles dans le monde', one must understand that 'since the Second World War, the history of cultural policies in Belgium is merged with the regionalization of the country. Belgium has changed from a unitary state into a federal state in an ever-changing process. Culture is at the centre of this evolution both in terms of matter (it was gradually

entrusted to the communities from 1968 on) and manner (it embodies the tensions between national unity and regional idiosyncrasies):

Cultural competences are defined constitutionally... but, in fact, very divided...

After several waves of constitutional revisions and reforms of the Belgian state in 1993, Belgium became a full federal state consisting of communities and regions. Culture is constitutionally under the exclusive authority of the Communities: the Flemish Community, the Francophone community (Federation Wallonia-Brussels since 2011) and the German-speaking community.

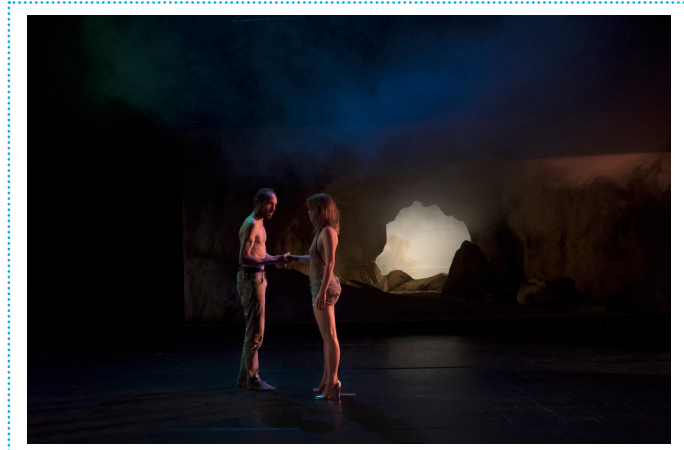
However, if one looks closely, all levels of Belgian public authority pursue cultural policies. The federal government, the federated entities – the three Communities and the Walloon, Flemish and Brussels Capital Regions – and the local authorities (provinces and municipalities) all act in the cultural field. To this hodgepodge, we should add the three authorities entrusted with community matters in the Brussels-Capital Region: the Flemish (VGC – Vlaamse Gemeenschapscommissie), French (COCOEF) and municipal (COCOM) Community Commissions.

Major consequences: between potentiality and limit

This reality means that culture can, from the outset, be set within plays on scale, which may be both positive and negative.

- *Potentiality or the Belgian creative ethos*

In fact, it is possible to reduce this hodgepodge of public authorities concerned with cultural affairs into a life-sized game of scale with an almost utopian dimension, as the artists are able to invent the rules rather than having to be subjected to them. In fact, they can escape the concentration of power and may solicit such or such level of power to finance their



'Darius, Stan et Gabriel dans le monde des méchants', Claude Schmitz (© Clémence de Limbourg)

artistic projects. This is even truer for the Brussels-Capital region where there are currently 47 people responsible for cultural affairs.

One might almost say that this stimulates the taste for action ('do it!'). This also explains the free, bubbling resourceful, spontaneous and plural nature of artistic creation in Belgium, which is so recognized and envied. Belgium, is the territory where anything is possible.

- *Limit or the constraining community*

However, it should be noted, that contrary to the aforementioned creative ethos, artists are often forced in practice to return to their cultural and linguistic communities or to their regions (territories) and to affix a 'made in' to their works: FWB or Flanders. To this we should add, in a broader scope, the limits that also form the dilution of cultural competences, the too often minimal collaboration at a political level and the lack of centralized communication in terms of cultural offers.

4.2. Artists and cultural policies

How Belgian francophone artists learned to fight...

Since the end of the Second World War, the history of aesthetics and artistic practices in francophone Belgium has been mixed up with the struggle of artists, both individually and collectively, and with the history of cultural policies and the country's ever-changing federalization process. To gain an overview and to understand what is happening in 2017, it is important to look back to the precursory periods to the renewal of the aesthetics and artistic practices of francophone Belgians.

- *The precursory periods*

From the end of the Second World War until the 1960s, francophone Belgian performing arts were characterized by the dominance of the Théâtre National – the first of the new post-war institutions created on 19 September 1945 by decree of the Prince Regent – and its artistic line reflected the deep concerns of its age that fascism and Nazism would never reappear: defence of cultural democratization both in

aesthetics and in the methods of production and dissemination. In other words, this was concerned with 'contributing to the dissemination of culture among the French-speaking population in the country, to spread a taste for quality theatre, to make Belgian theatre known both in Belgium and abroad (playwrights, directors, actors, set designers, etc.): In order to facilitate decentralization, the Les Tournées Arts et vie were created in 1950, which encouraged shows to tour, either by providing direct financing or by assisting programmers who presented them. The Théâtre-Action also developed in the 1960s. The Théâtre de la communauté, established in 1961 from a split with the Liège University Theatre, was one of the first companies to be formed.

In this context, the demands of the Jeune Théâtre emerged in the late 1960s – early 1970s – this was a name related to repertoire. Influenced by the international scene, new socio-political thought and art schools such as INSAS (1962) and IAD (1959), it opposed the humanist and universalist concepts in part embodied by the Théâtre National under the direction of Jacques Huysman.

Borne, each in their own way, by Marc Liebens, Jean-Marie Piemme, Michèle Fabien, Jean Louvet, Martine Wijckaert, Philippe Van Kassel or Philippe Sireuil, the Jeune Théâtre revolutionized theatrical practice and transformed the theatrical landscape by establishing companies that are often places; places that would later be acquired by the francophone public authorities. This is one of the peculiarities of the FWB cultural landscape.

New wave theatre breaks with the note of staging as a translation of a text into another code, signifies the empowerment of stage writing / dramatic literature, renews the theatrical repertoire, allows the discovery of little-known playwrights and established other Belgian writers (Paul Emond, Michèle Fabien, Jean-Marie Piemme, etc.) and influences the, more

complex, onstage presence of the actor.

New locations/companies flourished: the Théâtre du Parvis established in 1970 by Marc Liebens, Jean Lefébure (the Jacques Franck Cultural Centre); The Balsamine established by Martine Wickaert in 1974 and moved to the former Dailly Barracks in 1981, etc.

At the same time, projects that fit within the avant-gardes of the 1970s emerge and – said briefly – develop a *théâtre du corps* where the author is part of the creative process: the Théâtre Laboratoire Vicinal (1971 – 1978) founded by Frédéric Flamand, then joined by his brother, Frédéric Baal. And in its wake, Plan K, also founded by Frédéric Flamand and installed in the former sugar refinery in Molenbeek (now Charleroi-Danse), festive and alternative (William Burroughs, Joy Division were scheduled on the same evening), which would be acquired by the French community in 1980. Like Frédéric Flamand, Pierre Droulers and the Mossoux-Bonte company would change the vocabulary of dance. The same will do, each in her/his own way, Michèle Anne De Mey, Michèle Noiret, Bud Blumenthal, Thierry Smits, Claudio Bernardo, Erika Zueneli, José Besprosvany, Karine Ponties, or Thomas Hauert.

In those years something happens that captures Belgian francophone theatre in its entirety. It has never been so abundant. Jo Dekmine, plays a visionary role in introducing the most demanding new international aesthetics to Théâtre 140 (1963-): Living Theatre. INSAS will entrust the training of new generations of artists to many young creators.

Unlike the 1970s, the 1980s are a calmer decade. Nevertheless, the detour through what seems to be a form of immobility holds some amazing surprises, subtle eclectic waves in search of unique scenic writing. In 1979, Thierry Salmon established the Ymagier Singulier to re-examine dramaturgical materials in

more details – space, body, voice and text – and masculine and feminine identities in a kind of rapprochement. His search found an echo at its height in his creation of 'The Trojan Women' by Euripides. Influenced by Performance Art, Groupov, established by Jacques Delcuvellerie in 1980 redraws the map of political theatre in a stubborn and radical manner. His emblematic play 'Rwanda 94' presented in the form of a work in progress at the Festival d'Avignon in 1999 would be permanently branded on minds.

In 1982, the Théâtre Varia created by Michel Delval, Michel Dezoteux and Philippe Sireuil to achieve management savings (prefiguring pooling resources) was bought by the French Community in Belgium. In that same year, Isabelle Pousseur created the Théâtre du Ciel Noir company (which would later become the company/venue Le Théâtre Océan Nord) and the iconic plays: 'Je voulais encore dire quelque chose mais quoi' (1983) or 'Le géomètre et le messager' (1988-1989). In 1984, Philippe Van Kassel established the multidisciplinary venue the Atelier Saint Anne (which would become Les Tanneurs in 1999).

A new awareness emerges, in the generation of artists in the 90s, less to renew aesthetics but rather to create conditions to benefit access to the profession. Artists have difficulty finding their place in a recomposed artistic landscape occupied by the Jeune Théâtre of the 1970s. They particularly deplore the scattering of subsidies, the lack of real theatrical structures to meet the public, etc. So many critics will crystallize, amongst others, in the national culture summit (états-généraux de la culture) in 1994 and the creation in 1998 of Arsenic (Axel de Booseré, Claude Fafchamps and Maguy Jacot), the touring company used a tent as a venue in order to meet a broader audience with works the de-compartmentalized stage/hall.

The struggle would take time – artists from the 1990s would derisively call themselves ‘old youngsters’. Nevertheless, there would be some bright sparks in the black canvas: the opening of some theatres – the Balsamine or Océan Nord – and support for emerging artists that would benefit the next generation.

The most astounding element can be found elsewhere. A return to the dramatic text emerges in the second half of the 1980s. After the second state reform initiated in the direction of cultural communitarization, it is interesting to observe that a massive reflection on identity and a vast operation to support local Belgian francophone creation through the promotion of text and writing, were launched. In 1989, Émile Lansman established Éditions Lansman and one can see some artists put the text back at the heart of their creations. These include the directors, Michaël Delaunoy and Frédéric Dussenne. Educated at the Brussels Conservatoire and passionate about literature (or poetry), they alternate at will between plays from the repertoire and plays by contemporary Belgian writers: Paul Pourveur, René Kalisky, Paul Willems, Henri Bauchau, or Thierry Debroux.

New writers appear: Virginie Thirion, Philippe Blasband, Alain Cofino Gomez, Serge Kribus, etc.

In the 1990s there is an eruption of the trinity of writer/director/actor. Philippe Blasband (also a screenwriter and director), Virginie Thirion, Layla Nabulsi or Laurence Vielle are also writers, directors and actors. The most radical dissolution of the functions is undoubtedly expressed in the practice of the Transquinquennial company formed in 1989 by Bernard Breuse and Pierre Sartenauer (later joined by Stéphane Olivier and Miguel Declaire). Then all the duties and responsibilities were shared equally and still are.



'Études', Françoise Bloch (© Antonio Gomez Garcia)

- *Today: new forms, new writings*

In the 2000s, a new generation appeared: Armel Roussel, Claude Schmitz, le Groupe Toc, Françoise Berlinger, Jean Benoît Ugeux, Anne-Cécile Vandalem, Selma Alaoui, Antoine Laubin, Florence Minder, Jeanne Dandoy, etc. Unlike their predecessors and even if everything is not perfect because competition reigns, the emerging creation benefits from significant achievements and venues dedicated to them such as the Balsamine, Océan Nord or LL, centre for research and support to young creation. It may form a company, apply for grants, work on co-productions, benefit from the different schemes of the Centre des Arts Scéniques (CAS) supporting access to work for students right after their studies, or work with production agencies (Habemus Papam, Audience Factory or Entropie production), etc. But what is there concretely today?

In 2017, the artistic creation in the Federation Wallonia-Brussels is as multiple as the country where it flourishes. Among artists of such different backgrounds, there are as many ethnic Belgians and there are exiles (French, Italian, Spanish, South-American, Moroccan, etc.). And there are

many alumni of INSAS (Institut Supérieur des Arts – Higher Institute of Arts), of the IAD (Institut des Arts de diffusion – Broadcasting Arts Institute), of the ESAC (École supérieure des Arts du Cirque – Circus Arts College), from the Brussels and Liège Conservatoires, of ARTS² (arts au carré), of the Cambre (ENSAV), of PA.R.T.S. or even of Mudra (Maurice Béjart's school of dance, 1970-1988). 'Blending, that is our signature', recalls Pascale Delcomminette, General Director at the AWEX and WBI.

However, while the majority of plays are different, they are all in a sense 'made in Belgium' free, exploratory; they are connected with other scenes (visual arts, cinema, digital arts, concrete or electronic music, etc.).

For five years, the artistic creation in the Federation Wallonia-Brussels has changed dramatically. Artists Les artistes blur their tracks and their oeuvres only resemble themselves. They are not afraid, they like risk, they are increasingly searching for new forms (or aesthetic treatments). And this resonates with all artistic practice (including in their offer for young audiences); from dance (Ayelen Parolin, Olga de Soto, Louise Vanneste, Caroline

Cornelis or Leslie Mannes) to circus arts (Claudio Stellato, Poivre rose, Carré Curieux or Gaël Santisteva), and in the theatre (Marie Henry, Salvator Calcagno, Léa Drouet or Cie 3637), etc.

New ideas are needed to ensure the same dramaturgical readings are not replicated. And ideas, often you need many to have them. In the wake of the Transquinguennal or Groupe Toc (formerly), new collectives emerge such as the Raoul Collectif or the Nimis Groupe but they are contaminated and each artist has their own projects.

New writings (narrative ideas) are also springing up; often intimately linked to the creative process of the show and the production conditions, they have the taste of the investigation, the document, the accident without neglecting fantasy. The emblematic form of writing in this regard that may be called the 'script de plateau' as used by Claude Schmitz ('Darius, Stan et Gabriel dans le monde des méchants') and Françoise Bloch ('Études-the elephant in the room'). It is important to note in passing that today, writing has its place in art schools, particularly in the courses of the INSAS and ARTS² (arts au carré).

In FWB, political theatre has a successor. The political virulence, sometimes jubilant and poetic as in 'Rumeur et petits jours' of the Raoul Collectif or 'Décris-Ravage' of Adeline Rosenstein, indeed seems to be the most prominent line in current artistic creation, but avoiding the vintage of a documented theatre. Each detail is imbued with the necessity of telling the story and extending the reflection by finding resolution in the scenic device. The interest of these new forms of political theatre that draw on the field of art as a whole, is truly in this line, they are less inclined to 'impress' than to 'express'. As Olivier Neveux explains about the show 'Ceux que j'ai rencontrés ne m'ont peut-être pas vu' of the Nimis Groupe: 'It does not produce a humanist form. It scrutinizes the interests that organise the situation without ever letting go of any entry'. In 'Tristesses',

Anne-Cécile Vandalem inflects the theatre towards anticipation and the fable (in a daring cinematographic hybridization) and produces a scathing attack against contemporary populism.

This creative impulse of the FWB scene produces other brilliance such as those of theatre for young audiences, circus or Performance Art. In fact, in the wake of mythical companies such as the Cirque du Trottoir or Feria Musica, the circus is expanding in the Federation Wallonia-Brussels, due to the possibility of benefiting from residences in specialized creative and broadcasting venues (Latitude 50, L'espace Catastrophe, the Centre des arts de la rue, La Roseraie or les Halles de Schaerbeek), to its programming at festivals (Festival Up!, Festival de Chassepierre, etc.), to its promotion by Aires Libres (space for consultation and federation) and to the international reputation of the ESAC (the Circus Arts College). Since its creation in 1999, the ESAC in fact marks a real turning point in the renewal of highly diverse artistic generation in Belgium and elsewhere, thanks to quality and innovative training. The ESAC notably developed a certificate in circus drama in partnership with the CNAC from Châlons-en-Champagne. 'Circus creation is very eclectic. It is its strength and great quality. It certainly must not become dogmatic. It must be free from all affiliation', insists Virginie Jortay, director of the ESAC.

The same is true for Performance Art. From the fear of seeing this scene become stunted after the end of the legendary Festival Trouble in Brussels, the works of the artist performer, Gwendoline Robin, Gaétan Rusquet, Lucille Calmel or Anne Thuot sound like a scathing denial, by crossing the borders of the cultural and linguistic communities, by performing from the FWB to Flanders, from the Halles de Schaerbeek to the Kaaithheater and through the Festival Actus (Les Ricochets asbl), Signal (CIFAS) or La Fabrique de théâtre to the Crash Test soirées at Brass (Isabelle Bats and Mathieu Varenne). Performance

Art is reconfiguring our relationship with the living and ardently re-examining the actor's deportment. Many art schools such as the INSAS, the Cambre-ENSAV or the ISAC-Arba-Esa have taken to it by teaching its practices. This is the case for the universities, including the Université Libre de Bruxelles teaches its theory and raises the awareness of students about Performance Art by actively collaborating with festivals and art schools.

In addition, creation for young audiences is clearly a must in the Federation Wallonia-Brussels. The two dramatic centres Ékla and Pierre de Lune, Les Rencontres de Huy or La Montagne Magique, show some of the internationally richest and most ambitious performances for young audiences, including Tof Théâtre, Théâtre du Tilleul, Cie Felicette Chazerand, Cie Caroline Cornelis and others.

... and to influence cultural policies

Over the years, the artistic creation at the FWB has experienced constant institutional transformation, in successive waves, in view of an ever more assertive professionalization of the cultural sector; solely able to realise an equality between the forces involved, particularly between the artists and cultural operators. The artists understood this a long time ago. Moreover, wasn't the highly pragmatic defence of artistic employment the principal motivation for the demands of the protest movement Conseildead in November 2012? When the entire performing arts sector of the FWB unified and achieved the suspension of the decision to reduce the amount of the budget allocated - a cut of 45% - to the council of theatrical projects (CAPT), thus initiating a real reflection on the cultural policies in the FWB and undoubtedly bearing the seeds of the Chamber of Theatrical Companies for Adults (Chambre des compagnies théâtrales pour adultes - CCTA).

Here there are two keywords: Professionalization and the placement of

artists at the centre.

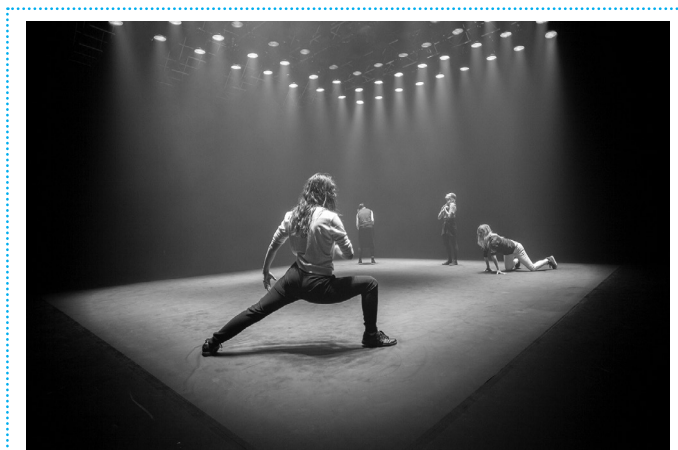
- *Group together! – The Chamber of Theatrical Companies for Adults (CCTA)*

Founded on 9 November 2014, the CCTA today bring together 75 FWB companies. Its aim is to make their concerns and needs better known and to participate actively in the ongoing dialogue that requires the development of a coherent cultural policy in the Federation Wallonia Brussels; a policy that works above all to bring together artists and the public, around a high idea of culture and live performance, and this, with the support of the subsidizing authorities. Since June 2016, the CCTA has been recognized as an ORUA (organisation représentative d'Usagers agrees – Representative Organisation of Approved Users). It is represented on the Board of Dramatic Art (Conseil de l'Art dramatique - CAD) and sits as an observer on the Performing Arts Coordination Committee (Comité de concertation des Arts de la Scène - CCAS).

- *Reorganisation of the general administration of culture*

On the initiative of the Director General of Culture, André-Marie Poncelet and inspired by the thinking on the ESS-net Europe network, the General Administration of Culture reviewed its organisation charge on 1st March 2015, restructuring various sectors by major cultural functions. The general department for performing arts became the general department for artistic creation.

Concretely, in 2017, the general department for artistic creation aims to encourage and support artistic creation and the production of live performances, their promotion and dissemination to the widest audiences. It comprises six functional departments: Live arts, music, Contemporary visual arts, interdisciplinary projects, broadcasting (notably including the coordination of Wallonia-Brussels



'Gone in a heartbeat', Louise Vanneste (© Arnaud Gerniers)

agencies: Wallonia Brussels Theatre/Dance; Wallonia Brussels Music; Wallonia Brussels Design Mode), and cross-functional support service.

Its priorities are:

- The professionalization of the sector
- Support for young creators
- The development of a proximity network and the recognition of professional venues, such as accredited cultural centres that remain privileged interlocutors for the dissemination of performing arts.

- *Move the lines*

In January 2015, 'Bouger les lignes' ('Move the lines'), the consultation process of the artistic, cultural, creative and continuous education sectors initiated by the Minister of Culture, Joëlle Milquet (2014-2016) began to reform the cultural policies in the Federation Wallonia-Brussels (FWB).

In collaboration with the Observatory of Cultural Policies (Observatoire des Politiques culturelles - OPC) and the General Cultural Administration

(Administration générale de la culture - AGC), six pillars (or working groups) organized reflections and participatory consultation around main themes covering the major challenges for the current culture in FWB: Artists at the centre, Democracy and Cultural Diversities, Cultural and Digital Plan, Cultural Alliance – School, Cultural entrepreneurship and financing methods, New cultural governance.

After two years of reflection and consultation with over 4,700 participants, the pillars presented their recommendations in May 2017 to the current Minister of Culture, children and continuous education, Alda Greoli (2016-), in a summary plan entitled '40 actions for a new cultural policy in FWB' ('40 actions pour une nouvelle politique culturelle en FWB'). Some actions have already been realized.

- *The new framework decree on the recognition and subsidization of the professional performing arts industry (12 October 2016)*

The first major achievement of 'Bouger les lignes' is the amendment, in 2016, by the Parliament of the Federation

Wallonia-Brussels of the Framework Decree (of 2003) on the recognition and subsidization of the professional performing arts industry. This was an act re-establishing the cultural policy in FWB. The framework decree aims at implementing a new framework for the entire professional performing arts industry, by introducing greater transversality between artistic fields and renewing a series of rules on governance that is decompartmentalized, clarified, simplified and more adapted to the realities of artistic practices.

Some of the new elements included in the framework decree are:

- Like theatre, dance, classical, non-classical and contemporary music, circus and street arts and the interdisciplinary arts, storytelling and public youth theatre are now always a part of the decree.

- All the performing arts are offered new types of structural aid – programme contracts for 5 years and one-off aid for projects lasting 1 to 3 years.

- The decree now also determines the elements constituting a programme contract that strengthen support for artists by having the obligation to define the support, promotion and dissemination policy for artists and creators. Authors are also included in the reflection.

- It lays the groundwork for better recognition of artistic professions and beyond that the defence of the 'artist status'. It is important to emphasize that unlike France which has a regime of intermittent shows (1936), there was not 'artist status' as such in Belgium. Only certain specific rules were applicable to artists. This does not preclude seeing regular threats to those rules.

The programme contracts are part of the new guidelines such as reinforcing artistic employment and the promotion of artists, as well as the transparency

and professionalization in terms of management. For the first time, the indexation of the subsidy is incorporated in the new decree and artistic employment is defined as being 'the employment of persons responsible for the artistic conception, performance or realization'.

4.3. Current mapping of the FWB cultural sector

Since the end of the Second World War, the Belgian francophone cultural sector has experienced real development, playing a role in the struggles, both individual and collective of artists and the implementation of cultural policies (see 4.2. Artists and cultural policies). There are multiple diffusion and creation networks.

Diffusion and creation network

On 14 November 2017, on the portal of the General Department for Artistic Creation, the current cultural sector in the Federation Wallonia-Brussels comprises:

- *Theatre*

Adult Theatre:

- 1 National theatre: [Théâtre national Wallonie-Bruxelles](#)

- 4 Centres for Drama: Regional Cultural Centre of Namur – Centre for Drama – Théâtre de Namur; [Théâtre de Liège](#) – Centre for Drama of the French Wallonia-Brussels Community – European centre for theatre and choreography; [Théâtre Varia; Mars-Monts Arts de la Scène](#)

- 15 production-diffusion companies and agencies

- 3 semi-professional theatres

- 13 theatres

- 2 touring theatre companies

Child and Youth Theatre:

- 22 companies – Theatres

- 2 centres for drama: Centre dramatique de Wallonie pour l'enfance et la jeunesse asbl; Pierre de Lune - Centre dramatique

Jeunes Publics bruxellois (Brussels Public Youth Centre for Drama)

Action theatre:

- 1 Centre de Théâtre Action

- 17 companies

- 6 Festivals

- Kunstenfestivaldesarts, Festival of SPA, IMPACT, etc.

- *Dance*

- 1 Centre for Choreography of the Federation Wallonia-Brussels / Charleroi-Danses

- 8 companies (with contract-programme or subsidized)

- *Circus, fairground arts and street performance*

- 13 companies

- 4 Venues for creation and promotional activities

- 12 festivals (with contract programme or regularly supported)

The unique position of Cultural Centres or the exercise of the right to culture

Established in 1970 by royal decree, the Cultural Centres sector is governed by the Decree of 21 December 2013 and its implementing decree of 24 April 2014.

Today, there are 115 cultural centres supported by the Federation Wallonia-Brussels.

Four main principles preside over the [cultural centre model](#):

- the parity that applies to management and financing

- participation of the population in the definition and management of the cultural project

- pluralism: through the representation of political trends within management and

decision-making bodies (respect for the cultural pact: diversity of social groups)

- versatility: the activities of the Cultural Centre may be realised in all artistic and cultural fields.

Cultural Centres contribute to exercising the right to culture of the people in a perspective of equality and emancipation.

Today, the role of the Cultural Centres as a dissemination network is intensifying and the reflection on the potential role of Cultural Centres as places for artistic creation is emerging. It is time for cultural centres to take a more active role in the cultural network so that artists and works, across all the artistic disciplines, will circulate to a greater extent in Wallonia.

The Choreography Centre of the Federation Wallonia-Brussels - Charleroi-Danse

Since its creation, Charleroi-Danse has held a privileged place in the landscape of the Belgian francophone dance sector. It is the only choreography centre in the Federation Wallonia-Brussels and is both in Brussels (La Raffinerie – legendary venue of the former Plan K) and in Charleroi (Les Écuries). In 2007, Charleroi - Danse under the new direction of Annie Bozzini realized what the FWB dance sector could only dream of: two artists in residence (Aylen Parolin and Louise Vanneste); a season that was both national and international; a recognized international dance biennial; artists in residence; mediation work with the public (in progress), etc.

Festivals: Spirit of vitality

In the Federation Wallonia-Brussels, a number of festivals are the driving force behind the promotion and dissemination of Belgian francophone artistic creation across all the disciplines (dance, theatre, digital arts), in Brussels and Wallonia: Kunstenfestivaldesarts, Festival XS (Théâtre National); Festival Emulation,

IMPACT and Festival Pays de danses (Théâtre de Liège); Festival de Liège; Festival International des Brigittines; Biennale de Charleroi Danse; Festival de Spa; Les Rencontres de Huy; Intime Festival (Théâtre de Namur), etc. So many cultural operators that are the source of the vitality of Belgian francophone artistic creation.

4.4. Production and dissemination

When creating a project, obtaining financing is a key element.

Assembling the production

- *Public subsidies and grants*

Today, there are numerous sources of public finance. As with the programme contracts and one-off projects for a period of 1 to 3 years, there are also a series of grants for one-off projects for theatrical performance projects (the Council for Theatrical Project Assistance - conseil de l'aide aux projets théâtraux CAPT), for children and youth theatre (The Council for children and youth theatre - le conseil du théâtre pour l'enfance et la jeunesse - CTEJ), for amateur theatre (the commission for amateur theatre - commission du Théâtre amateur

- CTA). And grants and financial support for dance (the council for the art of dance - le conseil de l'Art de la Danse); assistance for the creation of projects across multiple domains of the performing arts (Council for interdisciplinary performing arts - Conseil interdisciplinaire des Arts de la Scène).

- *Numerous grants for writing /SACD / Belgium*

Like the grants, it is important to emphasize that in March 2018, to reinforce the actions already taken by the SACD and the Scam in Europe, a new European House for Writers opened at 85, rue du Prince Royal. It will house a café, co-working spaces and meeting rooms. European creators can get advice and dedicated spaces to allow them to display their work, following training courses, attend professional or more festive events or create residences.

- *Co-production*

Today, in the FWB, co-production remains a major source of finance in artistic creation. Because, it is often one of the conditions sine qua non for granting public subsidy, the level of other co-productions and the highly pragmatic approach guarantees a first



'Ceux que j'ai rencontré...', Nimis Groupe (© Véronique Vercheval)

exploitation after the creation. It is clear that over time, in the context of austerity and increased competition, companies have found it increasingly difficult to complete their production budget and the number of co-producers on a project has multiplied. In other words, there is a fragmentation and dispersion of the co-production amounts.

Mobilizing more and more co-producers, maintaining interpersonal relations and having to renew co-producers the majority of the time for each creation are all necessities that require companies to increase their working time in the search for potential co-producers and, ultimately, to increase their volume of activity and salary costs.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the co-producers in FWB have reached the limit of saturation and are increasingly obliged to resort to 'arbitration'.

Hence the urgent need for a company in the FWB to diversify its sources of funding (public and private) and focus on international diffusion in its development project.

And to consider pooling? For instance: BOCAL, the project of pooling spaces and experiences, created by the companies MARIEDL, Transquiquennial, and Zoo Théâtre.

- *The 4X4 project*

The 4x4 project brings together the four Centres for drama each season in a joint work around the creation of an artist or a company. In turn, each of the Centres for drama is an executive producer and its financial contribution is greater. The four partners agree on the artist to co-produce or support. Each schedules the program in its season, which guarantees a good first operation in FWB. Not to mention the multiplication effect of the exchanges between artists and creators, between technical, production and dissemination teams.

- *The Tax Shelter, new funding*

The Tax Shelter, the tax mechanism that encourages Belgian companies to invest in audio-visual production has been extended to performing arts, to an original stage production (theatre, circus, street arts, opera, dance, cabaret, etc.) since February 2017. Like a various of specialized start-ups, 17 companies and theatres have already come together to form a non-profit organisation serving the entire performing arts industry: the COOP asbl. Which has 40 members and to date has raised 2,250,000 euros in funds for 36 creation projects.

Despite the phenomenal success of this tax mechanism in the film industry, many questions remain, precisely the same as those raised by crowdfunding: will the Tax Shelter precipitate the state's disengagement from culture? Would it be one of the figure criteria for public subsidy? Will bankable stage production primarily benefit?, and so on. For now, the report is rather reassuring. If we take the example of the COOP, the creations financed in part by the Tax Shelter are very diverse: 'Retours à Reims – Sur fond rouge' by Stéphane Arcas, 'Le Noël de Mr Scrooge' by Thierry Debroux, 'Arctique' by Cécile Vandalem, 'Last Exit to Brooklyn' by Isabelle Pousseur or 'Amor' by Michèle Anne De Mey and Jaco Van Doermal.

Note: In the difficulty of closing a budget, you should see the risk of seeing many solo projects flourish, shows with 2 or 3 performers, short formats or *work in progress*. And finally, to undermine the diversity of works and to curb the aesthetic renewal in the longer term.

Dissemination

- *Tools for dissemination*

Due to their geographic proximity and the common language, France and the Federation Wallonia-Brussels have a long

established lasting connection. Many of the venues and agreements testify to this.

Created in 1979, the Centre Wallonie Bruxelles in Paris is a decentralized department of Wallonia-Brussels International. Near the Marais and the Centre Pompidou, it has a 160-seat auditorium, a 99-seat cinema and a 200 m2 exhibition hall. Today, this multidisciplinary venue, directed by Anne Lenoir, represents an open window on Belgian francophone creation – live performing art, literature, cinema or visual arts – by actively collaborating with the various WBT/D agencies, WB Musique, WB Design/Mode and WB Architecture but also increasing with French cultural actors and operators.

2016 was a flourishing year. It held 171 performances and had an audience of 23 836. 12% more than in 2015

Formed in 2002 in Avignon, the Théâtre des Doms is the Southern Centre for Belgian francophone creation. Its mission is to contribute to the influence of artists, creations and projects of the Federation Wallonia-Brussels mainly in France.

Under the direction of Alain Cofino Gomez, it is open to all performing arts but also to the visual arts (drawing and still photography). If the time of the festival d'Avignon is its peak time, it also acts continuously and offers a season centres around artists in residence and projects with local, national, European and Euro-Mediterranean partners such as the Festival du Centre Chorégraphique – Les Hivernales, the Festo Pitcho, the Biennale des Ecritures du Réel, etc. The Doms affirms in Francophile character by organising the Festival Francophonique.

In 2016, in figures, the Doms represents: attendance of 16 027 entries including 2699 professionals and journalists; 11 shows scheduled during the festival (or 182 performances), 11 scheduled shows during the festival (182 performances); 5 scheduled shows in the season (7

performances); 15 creative residences (15 work stage presentations); 5 Events (Fête de la musique, exposition-film, etc.); 25 Lectures, meetings, debates, artist exhibitions, during the Festival.

Thanks to the agreement signed in 1999 with the Government for the French Community, The Minister of the French Community, Wallonia-Brussels International, La Chartreuse can accommodate a dozen playwrights and francophone Belgian translators awarded a grant in Villeneuve lez Avignon.

Like many international festivals with which FWB maintains continuous relations, it is clear that the years 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017 signified a return of Belgian francophone artistic creation to the Festival d'Avignon, both in terms of programming - Anne-Cécile Vandalem, Raoul Collectif, Gwendoline Robin, the festive XS/Bruxelles au Sujets à vif, etc.) and at the media level such as RTBF (recording performances; daily TV magazine - in the Mood for Avignon; public meetings on performing arts/media links, etc.) That is to be welcomed! And that will continue.

Wallonia Brussels Theatre/Dance (WBT/D) is the official agency for the international promotion of performing arts in the Federation Wallonia-Brussels - a centre for expertise in export. It is co-managed by Wallonia-Brussels International and the Minister of the Federation Wallonia-Brussels. And it is supported by the Wallonia Agency for Export and Foreign Investment (Awex) and Brussels Export & Invest. More than a public counter, WBT/D wants to be a partner in innovative and creative initiatives.

Its main objects are to stimulate exports of performing arts productions and to contribute to the professionalization of the sector. To do this, WBT/D drives, amongst other things: the contemporary dance platform Objectif danse that aims at the promotion and development of professional artists and companies



Tristesses, Anne-Cécile Vandalem (© Phile Deprez)

recognized in the Federation Wallonia-Brussels; the operations of Bons Baisers in collaboration with Kunstenpunt; the reception of international programmers at Propulse, Factory @Festival of Liège, etc.; an international focus.

In 2016, WBTD, represented in figures, 12 development grants and promotional dissemination tools: 6 international focus (France, Germany, Japan, Morocco, Egypt); 2 Bons Baisers operations (Festival Up! and Kunstenfestivaldesarts), over 100 marketing advertisements abroad, etc.

The Federation Wallonia-Brussels is part of the CITF (The International Commission of Francophone Theatre) delegations. Formed in 1987, the CITF aims to promote the realization of multilateral creation and theatrical touring projects. It offers two programmes: the Regular programme to support co-productions at all levels of creation, production and dissemination and the Exploration programme to support an exploratory phase for artistic encounters that could lead to co-production.

- *Mobility assistance*

The purpose of the Service for the Dissemination of Performing Arts at the General administration of Culture is intended to promote the dissemination, in Brussels and Wallonia of performances (theatre, music, dance, fairground arts, circus and street arts) by artists or artistic groups from the French Community.

Its action revolves around two programmes: The Tournées Art et Vie and the programme 'Spectacles à l'école' which allows recognized artists or groups artists to benefit from a grant 'for representation' when they perform with organisers, which, are also recognized.

In order to promote the influence of artists on the international scene, Wallonia-Brussels International offers various support s aimed at theatre, dance, circus and street artists, for instance, to take part in an event abroad or to explore foreign cultural markets.

4.5. New paradigms of artistic creation

Artistic creation in the Federation Wallonia-Brussels is today at the intersection of multiple upheavals related to cultural policy, the renewal of aesthetics, trans/inter/intradisciplinarity, cultural diversity, mediation of audiences, the promotion of artists and œuvres, etc., which places it at a complex and exciting turning point. Rarely has artistic creation in the FWB been struck with such an avalanche of questions. However, as we write one question teases the mind: the Minister of Culture, Alda Greoli, will soon have to decide between the 310 applications for programme contracts and multi-year grants in the performing arts. What will her answer be? ¹Will she be able give scope to the ambition of the cultural policies so that they are able to transcend their time and truly interact with today's artistic creation in the FWB? This is not a case of cultural surety nor of spreading thinly but of dialogue.

¹ On November, 23rd 2017, the Ministry of Culture of FWB Alda Gréoli has announced the list of cultural operators and entities who will benefit of a contract-programme

4.6. Resources

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