

keõja Think Tank - Sustainable strategies for the Nordic-Baltic dance field

2nd Meeting (Lund, SE)
5-6 April 2013

MEETING REPORT 05-06/04/2013

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1. Introduction

Think tanks are activities where a certain theme or topic is discussed and elaborated by leaders and professionals from different fields and with different viewpoints. Think tanks gather competent and motivated people asking them to analyze different issues within the scope of the overall theme or topic.

Dance Info Finland is organising two Think Tank activities within the keõja 2012-2015 project:

- keõja Think Tank: Sustainable strategies for the Nordic-Baltic dance field
- keõja Think Tank: Touring network for the Nordic-Baltic region

These keõja Think Tanks work towards finding concrete action plans, models, suggestions and recommendations for improved practices in order to develop the infrastructure of the dance field in the Nordic and Baltic countries.

The Sustainability Think Tank will gather several times during 2012-2014. In this timeframe, a group of creative policy-makers, leaders, arts professionals and artists will gather to discuss the topic and elaborate it further. The overall aim is to provide concrete suggestions for more sustainable operational strategies for the Nordic and Baltic dance field.

1.1 Previous meetings

The first meeting took place in September, 2012 in Tallinn, Estonia. The aim was to discuss and define the topic and set the overall framework. As an outcome, the concept and its meaning within dance was articulated through five principal themes, focusing on the life of productions, communicating value, artistic practices, the funding and support of dance as well as the structures in the dance field. The 2-day kick-off consisted of roundtable sessions followed by a public session, during which the key issues were discussed and the Encounter participants were invited to take part.

1.2 Second meeting in Lund

The second meeting of the keõja Sustainability Think Tank was organized April 5-6, 2013 in Lund, Sweden. The Think Tank welcomed three new members, including the facilitator **Sanna Rekola**

(Director, Dance Info Finland). The meeting consisted of working sessions as well as a visit to The Creative Plot (<http://thecreativeplot.se>), a hub for creative businesses in Lund.

Participants:

Tove Bratten, Norway
Director of Performing Arts Hub Norway

Riitta Heinämaa, Estonia/Finland
Director of the Finnish Institute in Estonia

Audronis Imbrasas, Lithuania
Director of the Lithuanian Dance Information Centre and Arts Printing House

Sari Palmgren, Finland
Freelance choreographer and dancer

Sanna Rekola, Finland
Director of Dance Info Finland

Torsten Schenlaer, Sweden
Head of the Cultural Department of the city of Lund

Think Tank member **Ragnar Siil**, Undersecretary for fine arts at the Estonian Ministry of Culture, was forced to cancel his trip, but participated by sending in some input by email.

The meeting was coordinated by Sanna Rekola and **Katarina Lindholm** from Dance Info Finland.

2. Outline and agenda

One of the aims of the second meeting was to sharpen and further elaborate the key themes that were articulated in Tallinn with consideration for the wider impact of the art form and its reception in relationship to its environments. Particular focus was going to be put on the questions of sustainable mobility, sustainable funding and sustainable structures in the dance field. Furthermore, the envisioned outcome and concrete results of the Think Tank were to be looked at more closely.

Friday 05/04

- Introduction and overall action plan
- Definitions of sustainable art
- Refining and sharpening the five key themes
- Theme 1: Sustainable mobility

Saturday 06/04

- Theme 2: Funding
- Input from the artist community
- Reviewing the overall action plan

The first meeting day was started off by a visit to the Creative Plot, which sparked a fruitful conversation around creative solutions and structures. In order to allow for that discussion to go on, the meeting agenda was adjusted so that the topic of sustainable mobility was postponed to the next day. Funding, on the other hand, ended up being a recurring topic throughout the two meeting days.

3. Working sessions

3.1 Definitions and dimensions of sustainability

As there was agreement on the fact that the concept of sustainability would need to be described in the final document, the Think Tank group returned to the different definitions of sustainability to begin with. Also the five key themes articulated in the first meeting were reviewed.

It was outlined that sustainability has ecological, economical, social and cultural (artistic) dimensions and that any of these can be considered a central viewpoint when speaking of sustainable development. One **suggestion for a definition** was that art is sustainable when it has a long-lasting and wide-reaching impact. It was also pointed out that sustainable art can be understood as what the art form has to offer to the society in order to make the society more sustainable, or as how the art form itself can be made more sustainable.

The key themes (*understanding and managing the ecosystem; long-term planning with readiness for change; out of self-governance and inviting more people in; communication and plan; value, process and work-in-progress*) were found to be intertwined and overlapping as well as possibly too vast to be stated in a concrete action plan. Nonetheless, the key themes had been formulated based on what were felt to be very fruitful discussions, so it was deemed to be a matter of sharpening and further elaborating them.

Especially the **notion of an ecosystem** in the field of dance was elaborated further, as it was often linked to the concept of sustainability. The word “ecosystem” was found by some to be an even better word than “sustainability”, because it transmits the notion that everyone should find his/her place in it. It was also pointed out that in an ecosystem one needs to make use of his/her resources in the most efficient way and these are different for each artist. Furthermore, it was also asked whether it would be possible for an artist to “rest” in the ecosystem, i.e. not being active in the field but all the while staying within the system.

3.2 Identifying sustainable practices

When speaking of the sustainability of artistic practices, several measures based on experience and practical work were brought forth. These were the following:

- **Having enough time** to do things well and using the time efficiently
- **Opening the doors** to different groups and include them in the process
- **Shifting the dynamics** within the working group so that everyone can have an input
- **Sharing** as part of the performance or after it

In general, sustainability was considered to be **a process rather than a goal** and strongly linked to a sense of responsibility, sharing and trust. Sustainability was also identified as “slow profitability”, as it takes time (and thus also money) to work sustainably.

Furthermore, it was noted that the dance field is suffering from people in management (e.g. producers) getting tired from having too much work and often working alone, which means they easily move on to other fields. In order to maintain a sustainable dance field, also these people need better means of survival. The above-mentioned problems might be mitigated by for example adapting tools from the creative industries (e.g. incubators, help desks, hubs).

3.3 Communication and the relationship with society

The relationship between the dance field or the individual dance artist and the rest of the society was a major theme throughout the meeting and often discussed as a social or a mental contract.

Communicating about dance and being able to define it in a way that people from outside the field understand was seen as an important part of a sustainable dance field. In particular, opening up the dance field by **inviting more people in** was seen as necessary in order to survive in the future. For example, boards of dance organizations should include people from other areas of the society as well.

Attention was also given to the fact that the dance field easily uses a **defensive and negative rhetoric** that marginalizes dance and makes it seem “young and poor”, when instead its strengths and spill over effects (e.g. physical health) on the society should be emphasized. It was concluded that the negative rhetoric has to do with expectations put on the society and particularly the welfare state. It was also suggested, that instead of using negative rhetoric, the dance field should reposition itself in a new way towards the society and the state and **establish a new relationship/contract** with them.

Furthermore, emphasizing the fact that dance has its own language (as often when speaking of mobility and the internationality of dance) was also seen as a problematic rhetorical feature, as it implies that there is something to be understood and learned in order to watch and enjoy dance.

3.4 Sustainable mobility and internationalization

The issues around of mobility and internationality in the dance field became another major theme throughout the meeting. In general, mobility was seen to be something very concrete in the context of sustainability.

The effect that the mobility and internationality of the dance field has on its relationship with the society was discussed. The question was posed whether the fact that we stress mobility and internationality make dance lack locality and a social contract.

There was agreement on the fact that mobility could be regarded as more sustainable if it was **contextualized**, i.e. if something more was added to the touring/visiting than only a few performances, for example workshops or staying in the region for a longer time. It was also suggested that “hub thinking”, i.e. that all regions, countries and singular organizations could act as hubs and share information and costs when applicable, should be encouraged. All of this would, naturally, cost more in time and money and would have to be enabled by suitable funding.

The ecological viewpoints of sustainability were discussed with particular regard to mobility. The present-day **ecological challenges** were estimated to have a concrete impact on mobility policies and activities in the future. It was questioned whether mobility and touring is, in fact, sustainable at all. It was also doubted that these activities could be made more sustainable at all. It was suggested that the Think Tank would acknowledge the economical and ecological crisis that the world is facing and argue for a way of preparing for it, i.e. create a sustainable basis on which to build a new system for when money is needed for other things than culture.

Nevertheless, different practical ways of making mobility more ecologically sustainable were brought up, e.g. travelling by train whenever possible. It was concluded that in order to make mobility ecologically and economically more sustainable, time and flexibility – the possibility for long-term planning - would be required, which again is dependant on funding structures.

Mobility and internationalization was also discussed in terms of income and **business opportunities**. It was pointed out that for some companies international activities (licensing, branding, etc.) form a big part of their economy, even if it is a return of investment (i.e. comes with a lot of expenses for the company). However, it was acknowledged that while internationality is essential for some companies, the local market is more important for others, and many operate somewhere in between. It was also pointed out that far from all artists are interested in branding themselves and thinking in terms of business. It was concluded that the message would have to be that there are **many kinds of mobility and different reasons for it**, but that dance should be included in the domain of business opportunities, since there are those who would benefit from it.

Mobility and internationalization was also discussed from the point of view of the artists and companies in terms of **income opportunities**. It was acknowledged that mobility could be seen as a redistribution of means, especially for Baltic artists looking for work and income opportunities abroad. The increasing mobility and internationalization of artists should also be looked at from a funding point of view. Where does an artist living and working in many countries find funding? Furthermore, it was stated that mobility is affected by the national funding systems, which are very different in the Nordic and Baltic countries.

In general, it was concluded that there exists a **diversity of mobility**, as mobility is connected to cultural cooperation, cultural exchange, artistic exchange, travel and research grants, go-and-see grants, international co-productions, studio and residence programs, etc. These activities are very scattered in the different national systems as they have different purposes and answer to different needs. It was pointed out that to politicians, mobility might resonate as export.

Lastly, it was noted that mobility is sustainable when it's about artists coming together and that **residency activities** should therefore be considered important. Therefore it was suggested that there would be mobility programs specifically for residency activities and work done with the local community.

3.5 Funding and criteria

Funding matters could in general be seen as somewhat of a red thread during the two meeting days, as these were repeatedly brought up almost no matter the issue. Funding and sustainability were linked to each other when speaking of artistic practices, rhetoric, the relationship with the society as well as mobility and internationalization. Therefore funding matters are addressed in many chapters of this report.

As funding systems are support structures, they would have the possibility to create awareness and induce certain kinds of activities. This could be done by **setting or modifying the criteria** used in funding decisions. It was asked whether emphasis should be put on sustainability and sustainable practices in funding decisions, for example by taking into account or rewarding certain sustainable aspects in addition to the main criteria. On the other hand, it was felt that the funding system already incorporates many standards and requirements, and that it should rather be made as flexible as possible.

It was in general agreed that one funding system or structure is not enough; rather, **many parallel systems/structures are necessary in order to generate flexibility**. The same thinking was applied to funding criteria; a **set or combination of funding criteria** was considered to allow for more flexibility than a static list of criteria and in that way be more sustainable. In summary, the Think Tank called for an **ecosystem of grants** instead of grants with a lot of criteria.

It was furthermore suggested that all **restrictions for making a profit would be dismissed** so that the profit instead could be used for the next project. It was additionally suggested that all grant regulations that demand for the money to be spent during the same budget year would be taken away.

Lastly, it was clear to all that the **different economical and structural realities in Nordic and Baltic countries** need to be addressed when speaking of funding and sustainable strategies. It was therefore considered important that the suggestions and recommendations that the Think Tank will make would be realistic. The national funding for dance in the Baltic countries (especially Latvia and Lithuania) is very scarce and does not allow for long-term planning. It was, however, pointed out that even on a general level the Nordic and Baltic funding systems are not encouraging or enabling long-term planning. This was seen as non-sustainable.

It was proposed that the Think Tank make concrete suggestions toward politically and bureaucratically **harmonizing the different national systems**. The Nordic-Baltic funding system was seen as a good model, as it welcomes applications twice a year and the grants can be used for up to

two years. There was some doubt, however, that harmonizing the different national systems toward this direction would be possible due to different fiscal systems and administrative reasons, for example.

3.6 Workshop, overall plan and final document

The possibility to organize a **workshop** related to the Think Tank work in the upcoming keđja Encounter in Klaipeda was discussed and briefly planned together. The workshop would be an opportunity to not only present the work of the Think Tank but to also get input from the dance field and engage it. It was proposed that the workshop would be aimed at dance artists and that it would include a brief introduction but focus on two questions in particular: “How to make my art more sustainable” and “what is my contract with the society”. It was seen as an important thing that the workshop is about empowering instead of guidelines.

The discussion about the **overall action plan** for the Think Tank work during 2012-2014 as well as the possible outcome was started on Friday and continued on Saturday. Different **possibilities of getting input or an outside point of view** were discussed. It was deemed to be very important to get someone from outside the group – and possibly from outside the dance field – to go through and review the content of the think tank work done and the material produced so far. Observations and feedback was deemed to be necessary already the upcoming fall 2013.

The possibility of being present in one way or another at the IETM Meeting in Athens in October 2013 was discussed, since the theme of the meeting will be Future. Presenting the Think Tank work in some way was seen as an opportunity to get reactions and feedback from other countries that might have similar plans or processes going on.

The Engine Room Europe project of Trans Europe Halles was also mentioned, as it is working with sustainability. Although their project is more environmental, it was felt to be a good idea to contact them and possibly share information in some way.

The possibility of producing a **final document** as an outcome of the Think Tank work was elaborated throughout the meeting. It was suggested to be a concrete tool in the form of suggestions and guidelines that the Nordic-Baltic dance community could use when communicating with their authorities. The *Charter for a sustainable and responsible cultural mobility for policy- and decision-makers at local, national and EU level*, published by On The Move in 2013, was looked at as an example of a paper that communicates to different groups.

The Think Tank planned for the final document to be finalized and distributed during fall 2014. In the mean time, it was agreed that the work towards compiling the final document should be started already in the fall of 2013. The last keđja Encounter in Mariehamn in August 2014 was seen as a possible moment to present a draft of the document to the public.

4. Outcome

The aim of the second meeting had been to sharpen and further elaborate the key themes as well as focus on sustainable mobility, sustainable funding and sustainable structures in the dance field in particular. While the definitions of the concept of sustainability were elaborated further, no definitive formulations were made. It was however agreed that this should be done in the final document.

Meanwhile, issues regarding mobility, funding and the operational environment of the dance field were devoted a lot of attention. Some key outcomes that concerned all of these interrelated issues had to do with the general notion of having enough time and flexibility. For example, the message that with enough time, granted funding will be used wisely and give more in terms of results and outcome, was expressed in several ways. Another fundamental precondition for sustainability was

considered to be flexibility instead of regulations and restrictions. These general thoughts were enforced toward the end of the meeting.

Funding played a significant role in almost all issues and might therefore be regarded as a core matter in the process toward sustainable strategies for the dance field. Many of the concrete suggestions for sustainability guidelines had to do with funding, such as taking away certain restrictions regarding the use of grants, adjusting the funding structures to enable long-term planning and harmonizing the different national systems.

The overall work plan of the Think Tank was elaborated and a final document was set as the concrete outcome of the Sustainability Think Tank. The content and style of the document was also roughly outlined during the course of the meeting and as a result, a draft was to be compiled and distributed among the Think Tank members.

Regarding the work process itself, it was decided that someone will be asked to go through all the notes and reports from the meetings that have been held with a critical eye and give the Think Tank feedback before the third meeting in the fall 2013. It was furthermore planned that some outside people would be invited to the fourth meeting in spring 2014. These would give their comments on the first feedback and reflect more widely about the work and the final document.

5. Follow-up

The next Think Tank event will be a workshop for dance artists in the programme of the keđjaKlaipeda Encounter in June 2013. The workshop would be prepared and held by Sari Palmgren together with Dance Info Finland.

The third keđja Sustainability Think Tank meeting is preliminarily scheduled to September 27-28, 2013 in Helsinki. Before that, the Think Tank members will look for an external evaluator, who could go through the notes and reports produced so far and give feedback.

Additionally, the options of taking part in the programme of IETM Athens in October 2013 will be looked into.

A draft of the final document will be compiled and shared among the Think Tank members in order to start the work process around it already in the fall 2013.

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