

keõja Think Tank – Touring network for the Nordic-Baltic region

3rd Meeting (Stockholm, SE)
6–7 December 2013

MEETING REPORT 6–7/12/2013

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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 organizing two Think Tank activities within the keõja 2012-2015 project:

- keõja Think Tank 1: Sustainable strategies for the Nordic-Baltic dance field
- keõja Think Tank 2: Touring network for the Nordic-Baltic region

These keõja Think Tanks work toward 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 Nordic and Baltic countries have some national touring activities for performing arts, but the area is lacking a touring network for dance, that would encompass the whole Nordic-Baltic region. The value and need of such a network has been discussed for a long time.

The task of the keõja Touring Think Tank is to find out whether a Nordic-Baltic touring network for dance can be established and develop a plan or a model for it. The aim is to lay the groundwork for a functioning touring network.

The keõja Touring Think Tank, consisting of representatives of Nordic and Baltic venues and festivals, will meet several times during 2012–2014 to work toward its goal. The participants have been gathered based on an open invitation that was distributed to all Nordic and Baltic venues and festivals in the beginning of the Think Tank process.

1.1 Previous meetings

The first meeting took place in December 2012 in Helsinki, Finland, during the ICE HOT Nordic Dance Platform. The aim of the discussion was to kick start the process toward the formation of a Nordic-Baltic touring network for dance. Among the topics discussed were the benefits, possibilities and challenges of a touring network as well as existing models and possible structures of the network. It was agreed that a

touring network is needed to enhance both artistic development and audience development in the Nordic-Baltic area.

The second meeting took place in Klaipeda, Lithuania, in June 2013. The aim was to move from words to actions, i.e. from theoretical discussions to addressing practical issues, such as structure, funding options and overall coordination. Also the possibility of a small-scale pilot tour was introduced and elaborated further, as it would be a way to try out a touring network model in practice. The participants decided on putting up a pilot tour and fundraising for it as well as closing the Think Tank from new participants at this stage in order to get ahead with the work process.

1.2 Third meeting in Stockholm

The third meeting took place in Stockholm, Sweden, in December 2013, during the new contemporary dance festival Dance <3 Stockholm. The theme of the third meeting was “making it real”, meaning that it was time to start outlining the proposed network model and forming a plan for sustaining the future network.

Moderator:

Alan Rivett, director, Warwick Arts Centre, and chair, Dance Touring Partnership, Coventry (UK)

Participants:

Raido Bergstein, general manager, Estonian Dance Agency, Tallinn (EE)

Anne-Sofie Ericsson, general manager, SITE Sweden, Stockholm (SE)

Maija Eränen, producer, Zodiak – Center for New Dance, Helsinki (FI)

Amy Fee, production manager, Dansens Hus, Stockholm (SE)

Gunnar Gunnsteinsson, manager, SL – Association for Independent Theatres in Iceland, Reykjavik (IS)

Audronis Imbrasas, director, Lithuanian Dance Information Centre and Arts Printing House, Vilnius (LT)

Ib Jensen, director, Baltoppen LIVE, Ballerup (DK)

Jørgen Knudsen, artistic director, DanseFestival Barents, Hammerfest (NO)

Harri Kuorelahti, artistic director, Zodiak – Center for New Dance, Helsinki (FI)

Susanne Næss Nielsen, managing director, Dansearena Nord, Hammerfest (NO)

Jukka-Pekka Pohjola, producer, Regional Dance Center for Eastern Finland, Kuopio (FI)

Annika Sillander (Regional Dance Center of Ostrobothnia, FI), **Hanne Svejstrup** (Dansehallerne, DK) and **Siri Leonardsen** (Baerum Culture House, NO) were not able to participate in person.

Katarina Lindholm from Dance Info Finland coordinated the meeting.

2. Overall agenda

The aim of the third meeting was to start outlining the proposed network model and making some decisions regarding it. How will the basic structure look like and what will the membership entail? Which will be the main activities of the network and how will the tours be coordinated?

The main questions addressed during the two meeting days were the following:

- Returning to the question of why we want a touring network
- Describing the characteristics of the network
- How will the network define “Nordic-Baltic”
- Membership – what does it mean?
- Describing the mission and the goals of the network
- How will the selection process and criteria look like
- Fundraising and the upcoming applications
- The pilot tour – how to proceed

Furthermore, as the end of the kedja Touring Think Tank is approaching, also the envisioned end result was briefly introduced. Regardless of how the members of the Think Tank will proceed with coordinating the pilot tour and starting up an actual touring network, the Think Tank will wrap up its work in 2014.

The outcome of the kedja Touring Think Tank will be an end report, written and published by Dance Info Finland and disseminated as part of the outcome of the kedja 2012–2015 project. The end report will consist of an overview of the work process during 2012–2014, key content from the discussions as well as the proposed model for a Nordic-Baltic touring network.

3. Working sessions

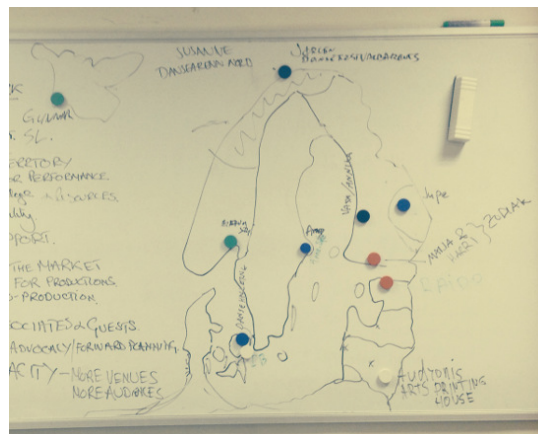
The meeting was started with a presentation round that allowed all members to place themselves on a map. Consequently it was noted that the geographical scope had become quite large, as all countries except for Latvia were represented around the table.

3.1 Why a network for touring?

For the sake of reaffirming the purpose of forming a touring network, the Think Tank returned to the question of why they want and/or need a network for touring in the Nordic-Baltic area.

First and foremost, touring was perceived as an opportunity for **audience development** as well as **artistic development** of both artists and the art form itself. Touring would also by creating more possibilities for the art form **expand the territory** for performances in general. However, getting new audiences for dance was seen as an integral purpose of touring activities because it benefits the dance field as a whole. In conclusion, audience development was placed before artistic development when defining the main purpose of forming a touring network for the Nordic-Baltic region.

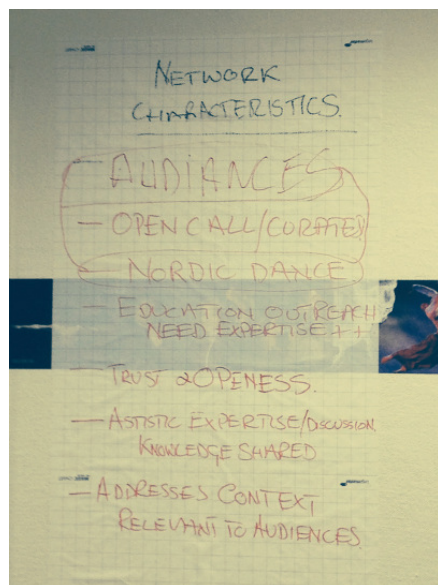
Sustainability was seen as an important reason for touring as well as for operating a network. Touring would increase the amount of performances for works as well as increase opportunities for the artists to perform more. In this way, touring would **expand the market for productions**. Operating within a network would also help organisations to **share resources**, financially but also in other ways, especially for those operating in the regions and outskirts that have a more difficult time in receiving performances.



Many ways were found in which a touring network could provide **mutual support** among its members. **Cross-border advocacy** was considered important when taking into account the differences between the Nordic and Baltic countries in terms of infrastructure, policies and contexts. It was also noted that, as times get tougher, **co-producing** will become more important and networks make that more efficient. Being part of a network supports also **forward planning**.

For its members, a touring network could work as a way to **share knowledge**, i.e. to find new and interesting artists and performances. The need for trust among the partners and the fact that it takes time to build that trust was mentioned several times.

3.2 Network characteristics and main focus



The Think Tank discussed different characteristics that the envisioned touring network should have. The choice of characteristics will determine how the network will describe and define itself and which resources it will need. Many examples and ideas came out from discussing existing networks.

The decision made in the second meeting in Klaipeda about **presenting Nordic and Baltic** work was reconfirmed, not the least because of funding reasons but also in order to increase the opportunities for Nordic and Baltic artists to perform more.

How Nordic-Baltic is described and defined was a recurring topic throughout the meeting. If the network will have a Nordic-Baltic profile, this needs to be carefully articulated.

Although it was acknowledged that the opportunity for more money is an important reason for collaborating as a network, it was agreed that this was not going to be the primary motive.

The question of whether to find work for touring through an **open call or a curated process** was also discussed as a characteristic. Open calls were seen as more interesting and transparent, but also as much more laborious. Then again, a closed selection process would be guided by the personal taste of the network members who would also have to carry the responsibility of making choices and therefore excluding a large number of artists.

Discussing the selection process led to a conversation about quality measurements. It was suggested that the **artistic expertise** of the network members and the **knowledge shared** among them could be perceived as a kind of a quality measurement. In other words, instead of defining what kind of quality the network is looking for, they could define the process of selecting works.

Everyone agreed that the main characteristic, or even lead focus, of the touring network would be on **audiences and audience development**. Therefore it was decided that the aim of the network would be to present good performances regardless of which Nordic or Baltic country they are from. However, the work being presented needs to **address the context** and be **relevant** for the local audiences.

It was noted that focusing on audiences would also require **outreach activities** from the network. It was suggested that a disseminator would be hired to follow the tour and take care of the outreach activities, such as workshops and talks.

Other characteristics that the group wanted to attach to the envisioned touring network were **trust and openness**.

3.3 Membership and structure

The envisioned touring network could easily grow to be very big, as there will probably be a lot of interest in being a partner. The possibility of having a network structure with core members and associated or guest/buddy members was discussed on several occasions. However, it was felt that a core network, consisting of **core members**, is needed in the beginning.

It was suggested that in order to become a member organizations do not necessarily have to have a venue of their own, but they need to bring an audience (or partners with an audience) of some kind with them.

It was decided that the core members should **commit to being part of the network for a fixed time period** (e.g. 2 years) and sign up to a statement of principals as well as some engagements and decision-making processes. This commitment was regarded as important in order not to jeopardize the trust between the network members by having partners coming and going.

Also the structure of the network, i.e. how the network should operate and be coordinated, was discussed. The option of forming a legal entity consisting of some or all network members was ruled out due to the fact that this might not be possible for a cross-border network to do. It was concluded that **one of the network members should take on the role as project leader**, which would mean acting as the legal entity for signing contracts, administrating the funds and hiring people to take care of administrative tasks, marketing, tour coordination, etc. It was acknowledged that coordinating a network and touring activities is a significant workload. Therefore, the network budget should include funds for buying those services from the project leader. Furthermore, it was noted that the network not only needs a significant amount of **capacity** but also **expertise** to operate and fulfil its mission.

It was suggested that the network would meet twice a year, preferably also connected to visiting each other's venues and festivals.

3.4 Mission and goals

The discussion about **defining a mission and goals for the envisioned touring network** became an important one, as defining that means stating what it is that binds the network members together and what the selection process will be based on, among other things.

Finding a **definition or description of Nordic-Baltic** was seen as a central part of defining the mission. It was discussed whether the nationality of the company or individual artists should be Nordic or Baltic, or whether any kind of link to the region would be enough. Also the fact that the network members would be from the Nordic and Baltic countries would account for the Nordic relevance or dimension, as far as the Nordic funding bodies are concerned.



The Think Tank worked in groups of four in order to formulate a proposal for a mission, after which each proposal was looked at and dissected together.

Among the contested words and phrases, **the meaning of “contemporary”, “dance”, “local”** as well as **“audience development”** were debated. It was decided that the compound word **Nordic-Baltic** should be used instead of Nordic to signify the eight countries.

In the end, everyone agreed on the following **mission statement**:

Description of the network:

A network for touring contemporary dance in the Nordic-Baltic countries

Aims of the network:

- To present Nordic-Baltic contemporary dance to new and existing audiences
- Through art to expand cultural understanding between the Nordic-Baltic countries
- Enhance Nordic-Baltic dance by providing expanded touring opportunities
- To provide production related outreach activities

3.5 Selection process and criteria

The mission statement was applied to the following discussion around the selection process and criteria for finding and bringing productions to the table.

Instead of having either one big open call or a closed and curated selection process among the network members, a combination of the two options was suggested. According to this hybrid model, there would be **one local open call in each country**, but based on the same criteria and requirements. All network members would then bring a couple of proposals to the table from their own country (in countries with two or more network members, the members would collaborate). Additionally, all members could bring **one "wild card"**, i.e. something that does not have to fill the criteria but is perceived as interesting and fulfilling the purposes of the network and its mission.

The Think Tank also spoke of **criteria and requirements** for applying and for being selected. It was considered important that the mission of the network would be somehow included in the criteria, but also that the criteria would not be so strict that they exclude interesting, new things. It was decided that the **work should be finished** and have premiered, and be **available for touring** during an allocated time period. Furthermore, the applications should come with **a technical rider and a budget**. Proposing some **outreach activities** would be ideal, but should not be considered obligatory, as it would be the task of the network to provide those.

3.6 Upcoming applications and the pilot tour

The Think Tank members also spoke of some practicalities concerning the next, concrete steps toward an actual touring network.

Before this third meeting, Anne-Sofie Ericsson from SITE Sweden had volunteered to make the **applications for the Nordic funds to put up the pilot tour and start up the network**. The next deadlines of the Nordic Culture Fund and the Nordic Culture Point are in February 2014 and she will write those applications on behalf of the partners.

All Think Tank members present expressed their interest in **being a member in the future touring network**, except maybe for SITE Sweden due to the fact that it is neither a venue nor a festival and therefore cannot receive and present work.

The Think Tank had discussed different options for a suitable **pilot tour** piece in the second meeting in Klaipeda and after some further discussion everyone was content with looking into the possibilities to

tour Gunilla Heilborn's *This is not a love story* as a pilot for the future touring network. It was agreed that the pilot tour does not have to include all countries and partners; the main point of organizing it is to prove that the network functions. At least six Think Tank members expressed their wish to take part in the pilot tour, and a few others would look into their possibilities to join in.

The pilot tour will probably kick off in the autumn of 2014 and some evaluation and advocacy activities will be attached to it as well. These will be elaborated further in the next meeting.

4. Outcome

All in all, the third meeting was very productive when looking at the number of decisions made and how much the work toward a model for a touring network advanced.

The envisioned touring network started to take shape as the Think Tank listed the different reasons for forming a touring network and the different characteristics that would describe it. Overall, the Think Tank put emphasis especially on audiences, Nordic-Baltic dance, trust and expertise.

Audience and audience development was pinned down as the main purpose of forming a touring network for the Nordic-Baltic region and this influenced much of the decision-making process throughout the meeting. The Think Tank decided that the lead focus of the envisioned touring network would be on audiences and that its core mission would be to get new audiences for dance.

The focus on audiences was elaborated further in the mission statement, which was refined and worked on in detail. The main aims of the envisioned touring network would be to present Nordic-Baltic contemporary dance to new and existing audiences, to through art expand cultural understanding between the Nordic-Baltic countries, to enhance Nordic-Baltic dance by providing expanded touring opportunities, and to provide production related outreach activities.

The preferred selection process was seen as a combination of an open and a closed process. The Think Tank decided to opt for a model where the network members in each country take responsibility of arranging a local open call, after which they choose a couple of proposals to be brought to the table. Additionally, all members could bring one "wild card" to the table as well. The network members would then make the final decisions on which work(s) will be invited to tour. It was also decided that the touring network would present finished work only, which would also be available for touring and could provide a technical rider and a budget, i.e. meet certain requirements of professionalism.

The Think Tank agreed that a network structure with core members who have certain obligations is required, especially in the beginning. It was decided that the core members should commit to being part of the network for a fixed time period (e.g. 2 years) and sign up to some of its activities and decision-making processes during this time. The Think Tank members present in the meeting expressed their interest in committing to being a core member of a future network. Most of them will also look into their possibilities of taking part in the pilot tour.

Furthermore, the Think Tank agreed upon a structure where one of the core members takes on the role as project leader. This would mean acting as the legal entity on behalf of the network for signing contracts, administrating the funds and hiring people to take care of administrative tasks such as marketing and tour coordination.

5. Next steps

The next step toward a pilot tour and an actual touring network will be to make the applications to Nordic Culture Fund and to Nordic Culture Point in February 2014. Anne-Sofie Ericsson from SITE Sweden will take responsibility of this task with the help of Gunnar Gunnsteinsson and Susanne Næss Nielsen. She will also advance the plans around the pilot tour to the extent that it is needed for making the applications. Who will take over the actual tour coordination and network coordination after the applications are made, is yet to be determined.

The Think Tank members and future network members will also look into their possibilities to add capacity or perhaps take on the role as project leader in the touring network.

The dates for the fourth and last Think Tank meeting were set to 22–23 May 2014. The place will be decided later on.

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This project has been funded with support from the European Commission.

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