



Everyday innovators

*Developing innovative work
organisation practices in the
cultural sector in Europe*

An **IETM** publication

Researched and edited by **La Belle Ouvrage**

Introduction

Introduction by IETM

We believe that the contemporary performing arts sector is a creative one - fuelled by the imagination and innovation of both artists and the people who support them in various ways from administration to logistics. We believe that this creative environment leads to creative thinkers both in the artistic and the supportive teams. We want to see how they actually influence the way we look at the world and the way we act in it.

In 2010, IETM conceived a new three-year plan for the period 2011-2013. It was built on IETM members' input, comments and reports during IETM meetings, reflections with the IETM Board and after undertaking some 'future-vision' exercises.

On basis of this, we decided to focus the plan on the sustainability and the current and potential future evolution of 3 fields: art (artists and their visions), arts organisations (human and economic resources) and the network itself (looking internally to see how our own practices should evolve).

However, we wanted IETM to look at things in an unfamiliar way, to approach them from different angles. We hoped that by changing our own perspective, so familiar that we sometimes take it for granted, we might be able to develop fresh argumentation for our work that was neither exploitative nor instrumentalising the arts.

Our thesis was: we know the arts have something special to offer to society, and the unique qualities of the arts produce this magic. It is often said in the sector that the arts cast fresh light on how we understand our existence. We need concrete cases to illustrate this.

We were committed to looking at a wide range of issues, and to using real case studies (“stories”) of our members and colleagues to illustrate the fresh perspectives that artists and our sector bring to the daily issues that make up the local and global society today. We also wanted to take a fresh look at our own management practices in the sector.

IETM therefore planned a series of small publications aiming to prove these beliefs by reversing our lens and looking at our arts practices through the mentality of social, or political or economic experts rather than via the arts as we normally do. Some will be thematic, under the banner of our ‘Fresh Perspectives’ series and some - like this one - will be stand-alone studies.

‘Work’ is a logical place to start, especially in view of the dominant discourses that place financial profit (or indeed ‘austerity’) above the well-being of workers. When money is tight, can our sector’s creativity show good working practices linking efficiency with solidarity? How do the often-cited values of the arts such as intellectual curiosity, teamwork, generosity... translate in the workplace? Our arts projects aim to inspire the public to reflect on life; do our work practices do the same for the people with whom we work everyday? How does the older generation exchange knowledge with a younger one, while protecting the value of both?

Simultaneously with this study, the same questions were being asked in the IETM Secretariat as a stimulus to positive change in our own work practices, an analysis of how to better serve our members and obviously as a practical confrontation in the Secretariat to some of the same issues affecting our members.

We are delighted to have undertaken this in close collaboration with La Belle Ouvrage, whose knowledge of the sector stems from its own dedication and concentration on supporting it, whose understanding of IETM stems from its long-time membership and partnership with the network and whose *raison d’être* is, in fact “work”.

This publication, by and for our members, as all IETM publications and actions, is intended both as a tribute to their ingenuity and a further inspiration to collective self-reflection.

Mary Ann DeVlieg
Secretary General, IETM

Introduction by La Belle Ouvrage

La Belle Ouvrage is a space dedicated to working relationships at the service of professionals in the artistic and cultural sector. In 2006, based on our observations in the cultural sector and discussions with several professionals, we felt it important to create this unusual space. It is neutral, welcoming and without complacency and allows professionals from the cultural sector to analyse, challenge and improve their relationship with work. We want to encourage debate and the exchange of knowledge and competencies. Based in Paris, we work primarily with French professionals, but we also have a view of what is happening elsewhere in Europe through the training of European professionals, participation in projects such as Space and DanSCe Dialogues and our involvement in the IETM network.

In the course of our various activities, we choose to look at professional practices in order to understand the workplace situations faced by professionals in the sector in all their complexity. Far from providing formatted instructions, they show us how each professional experiences his or her work in an individual way, linked to context and aspirations. Each story is remarkable, but these stories also provide the basis for learning from one other. Professional practices are central to our projects.

In this publication, we find it important to give an account of work organisation initiatives taking place in Europe and to contribute to clarifying the actions introduced by these professionals that express our sector's vitality and its contribution to society.

It is an innovative initiative for a network like IETM to raise these issues, often considered as internal.

Albane Guinet-Ahrens

Co-director, La Belle Ouvrage

Innovative practices

Why have we chosen the theme of innovation – something rarely associated with human resource management in the way the term is commonly understood? The notion of innovation allows us to think about the kinds of practices that introduce new ideas in order to deal more effectively with issues raised by observing how a group of people – a team – functions. The people introducing these practices are not directly seeking to innovate. First and foremost they want to transform their environment to deal more effectively with the particular preoccupations, values and questions they face. The French sociologist Norbert Alter has written a great deal about these innovators who transgress certain established rules first in order to subsequently be able to transform them more effectively. According to him,

"Innovation is always a story, a story about a process. It allows a discovery to be transformed into new practices, whether it concerns a technology, a product or a conception of social relationships. Innovators are not always entrepreneurs or researchers, but they always have a capacity to transform the order of things."

These are the stories and accounts this publication aims to relate.

Evidence from the inside

We have collected accounts from thirteen of these 'everyday innovators' who operate in very different countries and environments – a company, an arts centre, a network, a public agency, a provider and a venue – in nine European countries. This document takes us through Belgium, Denmark, Spain, Poland, France, the Czech Republic, Germany, the United Kingdom and Austria.

These professionals have agreed to talk about what is happening within their teams, about their aspirations and motivations and what specifically they are doing, but also about their dissatisfactions, difficulties and doubts. These views are not disclosed very often, even though they lie at the heart of the cultural projects being championed by our organisations. We would like to thank them for talking to us.

Organisation of each account

As Norbert Alter points out, innovation always starts from a context, from an observation in situ, from a story. However, the source of an innovation can also be found in the questions, aspirations and motivations of the people initiating it. Innovation can therefore be understood and its relevance evaluated by exploring its background and the innovator's perspective.

This is why a major part of each story here includes the inspirations and the contexts of each of the initiatives. Following that, we give a detailed description of the practice, highlighting how it is rooted in the daily work of the team. We then describe the effects of the practice by examining the different parties involved: employees, organisation, artists, partners and so on, before exploring the conditions themselves that made the new practice possible. Focusing on the conditions often allows us to understand how the innovators sought to ensure the success of their initiative and also lets us measure to what extent their reflections have found concrete form in their everyday work. It is also about giving the possibility for enthusiastic readers to be inspired by practical advice about the conditions needed for them to innovate as well.

Encouraging experimentation

By providing these accounts, we would like to contribute to encouraging people involved in the cultural sector to seize upon the vast issue of work, and more particularly of working together, and turn it into an area of experimentation in which they can translate the core values of their day-to-day activities into the artistic and cultural projects they oversee.

Contributions by IETM members

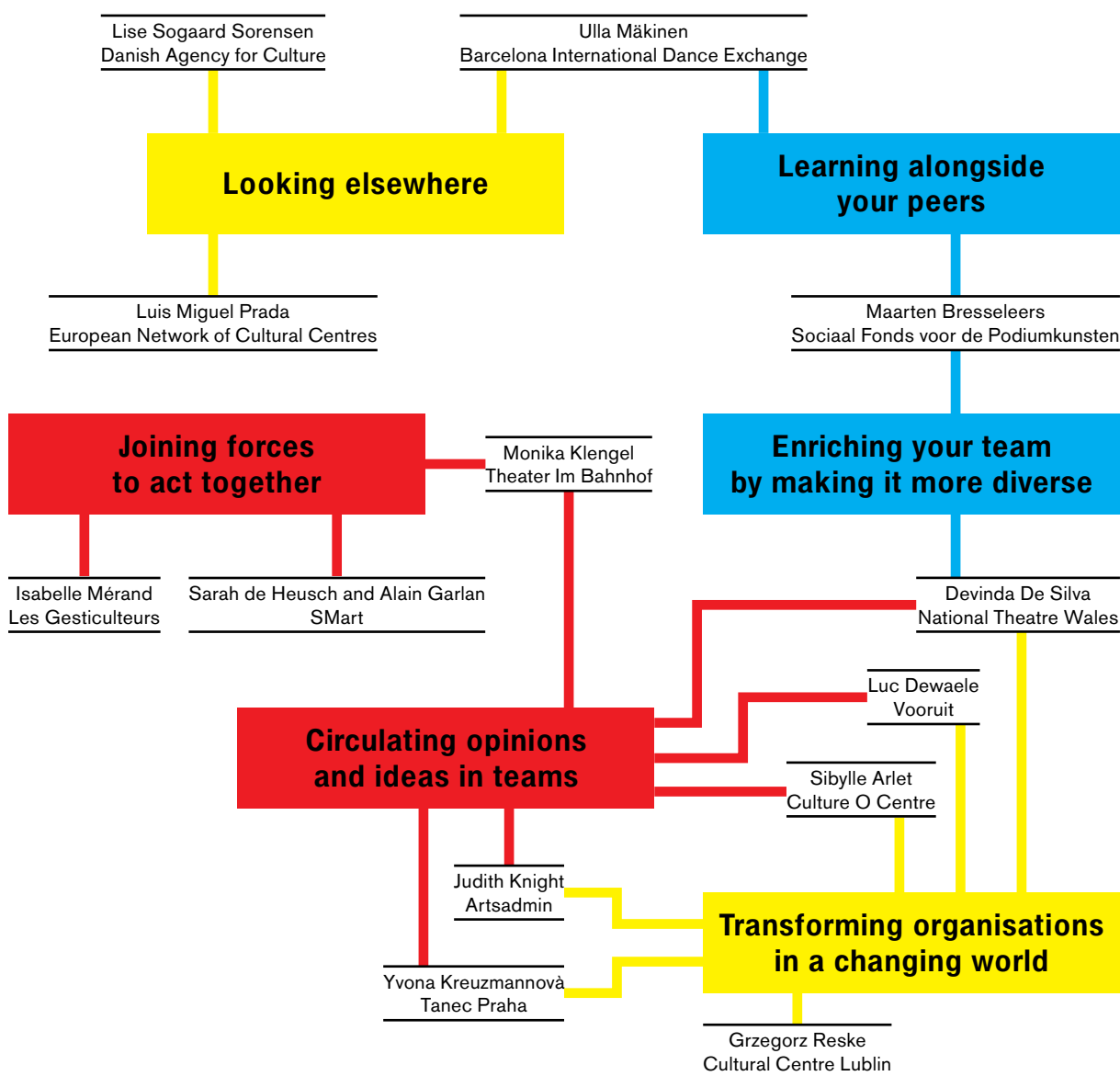
In March 2012, IETM members were asked for contributions highlighting innovative work organisation practices within the cultural sector. This request was made at the IETM Plenary Meeting in Copenhagen in late March 2012 and through members who helped us identify examples. 40 responses were received by the IETM. These were then collected, compiled and organised by the team in the office. A full list can be found at the end of this publication. Starting from this broad overview, IETM and La Belle Ouvrage selected thirteen propositions which went on to form the basis of interviews conducted by La Belle Ouvrage. These interviews provided the material for this publication. We have chosen to stick closely to the words used by the people who introduced these initiatives into their organisations.

Finding your way around the document

Six different themes emerged from the interviews:

- Looking elsewhere
- Learning alongside your peers
- Circulating opinions and ideas in teams
- Transforming organisations in a changing world
- Enriching your team by making it more diverse
- Joining forces to act together

The interviews have each been allocated to a main theme, but also offer a perspective on other areas too. The illustration below shows how these are linked. A summary also allows readers to follow the document in a more linear way.



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Looking elsewhere



*This section covers staff exchanges that have been introduced in different types of organisations. **Lise Sogaard Sorensen** talks to us about the exchanges set up between a public agency and its supervising authority, Denmark's Ministry of Culture, while **Luis Miguel Prada** gives an account of the staff exchange programme devised for a European network. We learn about their discoveries, mirror effects and changing perspectives.*

A staff exchange programme

between partners to work

together more effectively

Lise Sogaard Sorensen,
HR manager

Danish Agency for Culture.
Copenhagen, Denmark

Background to this initiative

*Express
wish of
leaders*

“In 2009, the Danish Ministry of Culture launched a project of cooperation between its different agencies and the Ministry itself. Senior figures wanted staff in these different organisations to work more closely together.

*Lack of
coordination
between the
ministry and
its agencies*

We all serve the Minister, drafting speeches, answering questions that come through the Parliament and writing reports, but there was a lack of communication, things were sometimes done twice and there were no procedures about how to coordinate work. The senior leadership wanted to establish a clear line of communication on how to cooperate and ‘who does what’. The general idea was to serve the Minister better and learn from one another.

*A project
preceding
a merger
between
agencies*

A merger was being planned which eventually took place on 1 January 2012 between three different agencies: the Agency for Libraries, the Agency for Heritage and the Danish Art Agency. It gave rise to a new agency called the Danish Agency for Culture. It is a context involving a great deal of change for people! We are now a large agency with 270 people working closely with the Ministry of Culture.”

Account of an innovative practice

*Staff
exchange*

“In the context of a move towards greater cooperation in 2009, we set up an employee exchange programme between the Ministry and its agencies. The idea was for people from either side to spend time in the other institution and learn about the other institution’s culture, establishing a closer connection with it and getting a much broader overview of the other institution’s work. It was not just a way for employees to learn from the host institution, but for each institution to learn from the other as well.

*Application
policy*

We had six three-month exchanges involving 12 people. The first ones took place two years ago. Candidates had to write an application explaining why they wanted to take part in the exchange programme and what they expected to get out of it.

*Three
employees
in every
exchange*

The first exchange was between an employee from the music section of the Arts Agency and an employee from the Ministry. The employee from the agency wanted to understand how people immediately around the Minister work and the employee from the Ministry wanted to see how the

agency worked more closely with the artists in the literature section. This first exchange also led to an internal exchange within the agency because a person from the literature section went to the music section to cover the job of the employee taking part in this programme. This kind of internal adjustment is usual because it is very hard to find people who can swap directly into each others' jobs. The usual move is in a triangular shape."

Effects and transformations

Greater shared identity

"It might look like the Ministry and its agency are close partners and that their work is very similar, but seeing it from the inside allows people to understand where there are gaps and different points of view in these institutions. This programme gives people working in both institutions a greater shared sense of identity.

Understanding the tempo in the world of politics

For example, the team around the Minister always has a very tight schedule and things happen very quickly. Sometimes when you are working in the agency, you don't understand why the team around the Minister is suddenly so busy dealing with one subject. In the agency, we usually work with a longer-term outlook.

Benefits for all, but for the organisation too

This programme brought the institutions closer together and was useful for the employees as well. Those who took part in the programme (12 to date) comment on the benefits for them in terms of training and changes in their everyday life, but also for the institution: the people from the agency say, for example, that they have a much better understanding of the demands made on them by the Minister's entourage and that the personal contacts established during the programme have been extremely useful in the collaboration between institutions. To some extent, it is one of the best ways to learn. You learn so many things that you wouldn't get from a normal course."

Advice to inspire you

Convince managers

"First you need top leadership to be convinced that this is a good idea; they should want it. The managers, the heads of divisions where people are being exchanged, should also accept the model.

Hold three meetings: before, during and after the exchange

We have also made changes to the programme. We now hold three meetings with the employee taking part in the programme, the head of the host department and someone from human resources: one before the exchange, one in the middle and one at the end. This means we're able to adapt the tasks, perform an evaluation midway and find out if there are any problems that should be addressed before the end of the exchange. After the first exchange, we found out that some adjustments were necessary because the employee wanted to have more varied tasks, but the exchange was only evaluated at the end when it was too late to make the relevant changes.

Lighten the administrative burden

Another point is to have an agreement on the salary. We have decided that people should keep the same salary and be paid by the 'home institution' so there is no tiresome administrative work involved with the exchange.

Make a real break from the original job

When you leave your position, you should no longer perform any tasks for your 'old' organisation. You are not supposed to respond to e-mails.

Be prepared to immerse yourself in a completely new environment

On the employee's side, people who have taken part in the exchange emphasise that you have to be prepared to start from scratch and not be afraid of showing that you are not an expert from day one.

Stabilise the working environment

One final condition is that the environment should be quite stable. We went through this huge merger to form this large new agency in 2012 and decided to stop the exchange programme for a while. The merger has already been such a huge change for people that they would not really be able to benefit from the exchange programme in the form in which it was organised before."

**A staff exchange programme
within a network to encourage
cooperation between members**

Luis Miguel Prada,
Project Coordinator

ENCC, European Network
of Cultural Centres, Berlin,
Germany

Background to this initiative

Need for mobility

"We are a network of national networks of cultural centres, founded in 1999. We have around 3,000 members in 15 countries. Four years ago, we observed that there were many exchange programmes for artists, but none for cultural workers. At the same time, our members were demanding greater mobility; they wanted to develop shared projects and to be able to apply for European funding. They really wanted to establish international contacts.

Belief that nothing beats hands-on experience

We believe that the best way to experience and learn from European cultural diversity and determine for ourselves how local centres add to a common European identity is to go out there and experience it hands on."

Account of an innovative practice

An exchange open to all occupations in the cultural sector

“We developed the Bridge Between European Cultural Centres programme, BECC for short, a Europe-wide staff exchange programme. It aims to help locally-based cultural workers go abroad for a short stay in a cultural organisation in another country to exchange good practice, acquire new skills and knowledge and foster long-term partnerships. We started the programme in 2008 and have had four rounds of exchanges with 80 people taking part. Every member of staff in a cultural centre can take part, regardless of whether they are managers, technicians, artists, project coordinators, freelancers, trainees or volunteers.

A four-step exchange process

The BECC programme consists of a preparation seminar, the exchange itself in two steps (one going on the exchange and one hosting someone), and an evaluation seminar. The most important thing is to focus on the process and not on getting specific results.

Seminars to create strong links between staff

The two seminars allow participants to get to know each other and bring not just two, but twenty centres into contact. The seminars include group-building activities, the participants get to meet one another and eventually even become friends. In the seminars, they receive information, but also work together, create things together.

Two periods of in-depth exchange

Then there is the exchange phase. It is another step in the process, a more in-depth step in two centres. They go on an exchange to one centre and receive someone in their own centre. The duration and tasks covered depend on each situation. In my experience, it often lasts around two weeks. If they want to get involved in an activity, it can last longer, but if they prefer to do job shadowing they might stay for a week.

Projects for tomorrow

Then there is the evaluation seminar where we also concentrate on any future projects the participants can develop together. The whole process is conceived so that this experience is more solid. Each of the different steps is very important.

Financial aspects of the exchange

In terms of funding, we fund the travel and accommodation expenses of the seminars and the travel expenses of the exchange. Each centre has to finance the accommodation for the people visiting them and pay a participation fee to take part in the programme.

Candidates from all over Europe

We have around 120 applications for each session, with a good mix of jobs (technicians, producers, managers) and centres (performing arts, museums, galleries etc). There are no restrictions in terms of where people come from.

Linking up with activities in the ENCC network

Recently, we decided to combine the seminars with our organisation's other two meetings so that people can also attend them and have contact with the rest of the network."

Effects and transformations

Reflection on their own work and organisation

"I think this programme has allowed lots of people to not only learn about how the institution they are visiting works, but also to reflect on their own work. By making comparisons, people can think about their own organisation and way of working. They think about the concept of normality in their institution. What is normal for them is probably not so usual in another context.

Developing their ability to communicate in English

Before the whole process, the preparation phase is important. We ask them to send us information in English about their centre and their activities. They are already developing their ability to communicate in English about their working environment.

Strategic programme for the ENCC network

In terms of our network, this project attracted some important funding and opened up the network to working directly with cultural centres, not just with national networks. This programme allowed us to bridge that gap. These very positive effects reinforced our decision to continue the programme, even if we no longer have any direct project funding.

Personal and professional experience combined

On a more personal level, people say they have had a great experience and been involved in something that has been organised for them, which is rather unusual for people who spend a large part of their time organising on behalf of others. They establish both professional and personal contacts."

Advice to inspire you

Make participants aware of their responsibility

"We learnt from the experience. In the beginning we had a few people dropping out after the preparation seminar. I think they hadn't been given enough information before embarking on the process. I also think participants didn't really accept the responsibility they had for the project because they were expecting everything to be done for them. So now we've adapted the programme and let them take more responsibility for the programme and decide what they want to do with the options offered to them. We have also reinforced the communication between each party before the exchange.

Talk before the exchange commences

In terms of the organisations hosting the exchanges, we offer training on being a good host and how to prepare. This is mostly advice such as finding a mentor for the person or preparing a suitable work space! The most important thing is that they communicate a great deal before the exchange so they have a better grasp of what the visitor will need and can tailor the exchange to suit these needs."

Learning alongside your peers



*In this section we learn about exchange schemes between professionals performing the same job. **Ulla Mäkinen** presents the Barcelona International Dance Exchange platform – set up by and for dancers – and **Maarten Bresseleers** tells us about the experience of a network of human resource managers working in cultural organisations in Belgium. In both cases, the initiators of these schemes act as facilitators and seek to develop new ways of learning that are not based on the hierarchical relationship of teacher to student, but come from being supported by peers.*

A platform for exchanges between dancers to train and meet in a different way

Ulla Mäkinen,
Co-director

BIDE, Barcelona International Dance Exchange,
Barcelona, Spain

Background to this initiative

*Programme
devised by
dancers for
dancers*

“Sebastian Garcia Ferro, Daniel Werner and I came up with this idea in 2007. Being dancers and choreographers ourselves, we know there is so much knowledge available to be shared. And we love doing it. There are not very many places for exchange between dancers. If you go to a festival, it's usually to perform your own work or to work with a master. Actually Daniel and Sebastian came up with this idea and suggested it to me because they knew I like this kind of work, this collective way of being together and establishing something out of these meetings.

*Different
way of
meeting one
another*

Besides, as a dancer myself, I'm used to going to auditions where you present yourself to somebody selecting you. In my experience, it's not the best way of meeting other artists. I was thinking about what would be the best way for us to meet each other. In my opinion, it would definitely be through our work.

*What about
learning from
one another?*

Our intention was to build a platform of laboratories, with a non-hierarchical way of coming together, without a master-student relationship. We noticed that artists and dancers attend a lot of workshops to learn with different choreographers and we thought: “Why don't they just come together and learn from one other?”

Account of an innovative practice

Barcelona
International
Dance
Exchange,
BIDE

“We ran our first event in Barcelona in 2009 and called it *Barcelona International Dance Exchange*, BIDE. Since then, we have had an annual five-day event in the spring, with around 50 people coming from 20 countries (professional dancers, choreographers, a couple of musicians and dance students as well).

*An idea that
has been
emulated*

From there, we have developed the BIDE concept and run satellite events, for example in October 2012 in Outokumpu, Finland, and in November 2012 in Seville, Spain. We are also planning a BIDE event in Argentina in 2013.

*Network of
partners to
introduce
participants*

We are also expanding the number of partners we are working with, collaborating with universities, institutions and theatres in six different countries to encourage local artists to join us.

Like a danced IETM meeting!

It is like a mini-IETM meeting, but it's based on sharing the practice together! Participants immerse themselves in the practice and see what happens. Maybe they get excited by an idea and take it home or perhaps they're inspired by a person they want to collaborate with.

Suggestions for a laboratory

Before the event, the participants suggest an idea for a laboratory. For example, a Finnish choreographer has proposed to work with dancers and musicians to try out new ideas for her next piece. The event is organised as follows: on the first day, we have a meeting together, get to know one another, discuss what the meeting is about and dance together to break the ice. On the second day we start with the laboratories. We have three to five different proposals every day so that the artists can choose a laboratory related to their work or preoccupations. Each laboratory lasts six hours. The artist who proposes the laboratory is its facilitator. We select the laboratories for the first day beforehand and they are run by people familiar with the form. On the followings days, we continue with laboratories proposed by other people.

Public event at the end of the week

Each evening, we get together and the people involved in each laboratory stage a small performance, show an exercise or say a few words about what has happened in the laboratory in which they took part. On the final evening, we hold a public event in a theatre. We bring all the work from the laboratories and turn them into a performance.

Inquisitive participants with open minds

We try to have a very wide range of people taking part, such as young artists but people from the older generation as well. There are some students, mostly final year students, who are almost out in the field. We have a lot of young artists who want to come because it's a great way of building a network. We also have artists who have been working in the field for longer. What they have in common is their curiosity and open-mindedness. This is what connects people. They are curious to discover what the others are working on and open-minded enough to immerse themselves in someone else's idea for a day.

Keep costs down by staying in someone's house

There is a fee for the event: € 170 for the five days. Half of the participants come with a bursary from one of our partners: what we're looking for is people being able to come without having to pay for it themselves. For accommodation, we have a deal with local dancers: they put up a BIDE participant and charge € 20 a night. This is a way of having affordable accommodation and involving more people from the local scene in the event, forging links. Food is up to each participant except for the first dinner which is included in the fee so that we all eat together. As an organisation, we are supported by the Cultural Institute of Barcelona and the Catalan Arts Council."

Effects and transformations

Network of friendship, an antidote to competitiveness

“I think what makes it really worth while for the artists is the feedback and emotions we get from the participants. Collaborations and friendships have started at BIDE events. I think there can never be too much friendship because we’re all raised in this competitive arts scene, elbowing our way through it. In contrast, we believe that if we collaborate we can be stronger. To see this happening here makes me really happy!

Long-term inspiration

In terms of the effects it has on participants, they often tell me that there is something from this event that stays with them. Many of them want to organise a satellite event in their home town. For instance, next year we’re planning an event in Italy because one of the people who took part previously is organising it there. For the most established artists, they say it’s a chance to get out of their usual work circles. Sometimes they can feel pretty stuck in the work they do. This event reminds them of what else is going on and they meet new people. Everyone needs a breath of fresh air!

Learning to work in a different way

Participants often say they had their doubts when they arrived, that they didn’t really understand how it can work. And after the event, they say that sharing is the most natural thing. They’re surprised by the possibility of working not towards a piece or a performance, but for the sake of developing and deepening their art. They’re working for the sake of their own curiosity and education. I think people can really share their passion.

Experience can be transferred to their own creative process

These exchanges put the focus on the process of the work itself, on the path to it, and I am sure this way of working also gives the participants tools to work on their pieces when they’re back home.

Tools for continuing the scheme

We are trying to offer other opportunities for artists. We now also have one-week residencies open to participants who met each other at a BIDE event and who want to develop work together.”

Advice to inspire you

Be specific when recruiting

“I think the success of our events has to do with curiosity and inspiration. To retain this spirit, we try to be very accurate in the application process. We emphasise that people must come to our events with an open mind and we point out our wish to have artists who are interested in working collaboratively. Some of them aren’t. Sharing is different from teaching. Throughout the event there are plenty of opportunities for everyone’s skills to be appreciated, but this is harder if one person has a need to be in the spotlight and doesn’t make room for the others.

Set the tone from the first laboratories

One way of creating this atmosphere is in the selection of facilitators for the first day’s laboratories. We invite artists who have prior experience in facilitating. The laboratories on the first day offer an example of how to facilitate

so that artists who are not so used to working in this way can be given a good idea of what this work is about. This includes discussions about the differences between facilitating and teaching. Being strict about what happens on the first and even the second day sets the tone for the event and it's easy to try out riskier things in the latter stages of the event.

Agree to let go of some of the prerogatives of being the organiser

I would also stress that the organisers need to 'let go' a bit towards the end so that there can be space for alternative proposals. It means being curious as an organiser, curious about going towards the unknown."

A learning network	Maarten Bresseleers, <i>Coordinator</i>
to develop	
competencies	

Sociaal Fonds voor de Podiumkunsten, Brussels, Belgium

Background to this initiative

Institution set up at the instigation of social partners

"We are officially the Social Fund for the Performing Arts of the Flemish community in Belgium, an institution established in 2001 by social partners in the professional performing arts sector. We work in employment and training/education. Initially we focused a great deal on certain 'risk groups', such as the unemployed, disabled people and immigrants. After that, we developed several activities.

Public service mission commissioned by the Ministry of Labour

Through an agreement with the social partners, we receive additional subsidies from the Ministry of Labour because within our sector we deal with certain issues in the employment market that are an important part of the Ministry's policy. There are three different themes. One concerns issues around education and forging a better link between education and the requirements of the job market. Another is to stimulate human resource management in the sector. Lastly there is 'diversity', the equal participation in our sector of every group in the job market sector, like a sort of mirror. This can include people with disabilities, people over 50 etc. Thirty other sectors have this kind of agreement with the Ministry of Labour. We have regular meetings with consultants from other sectors to share our experiences in each area and see what kind of activities can be transferred.

Lack of training in human resource management in the sector

Greater attention needs to be focused on human resource management in the sector. Our observations suggest that most people who end up in charge of human resources have not had any training in this particular area. Most organisations do not even have someone dedicated to it. As the Sociaal Fonds, we organise all kinds of training, some of which is on

human resources, and noticed that there was a lot of interest in these courses. That's how we started, with basic courses on HR management and using it in your organisation.

How do you learn to put it into practice?

Then we noticed that people had lots of questions and needed to discuss it further. They said, "OK, the theory is all very interesting, but how do you actually put it into practice?"

Account of an innovative practice

Meetings to share HR experiences

"We thought it would be useful to set up meetings twice a year where every one can talk about HR. They can share their experiences, things that are working, things that are not working. This was in 2010; we set up these meetings in three cities to minimise the distance people have to travel.

Development of a scheme with the professionals concerned

We sent out a message to the whole sector, targeting business managers and human resource managers where these existed. We had a kick-off meeting in the three cities to explain our intentions. We asked them three questions: "Is this of interest to you?", "What kind of themes would you like to discuss?" and "How should we continue?" We also set up a LinkedIn group to give us online coverage as well. This online platform is not really working, but the face-to-face meetings are.

A learning network

This is how we developed the learning network, allowing professionals with HR responsibilities to learn from one another. We also planned the possibility of bringing in an expert if the group needed some external advice.

Clear organisation of each meeting

There are 15 to 20 people in each of the three groups. They work in venues, art centres, companies, festivals or any kind of organisation in the sector. Each meeting is hosted in the workplace of one of the members. At the Sociaal Fonds, we undertake the moderation and compile the report. It's not very formal, the moderation is light-handed and we just make sure that everyone in the group has a say.

Agenda determined with the group

We have a clear agenda for each meeting, such as extra-legal benefits, people working from home or annual appraisals with employees. On each topic, we ask two organisations to present how they deal with it, and then we embark on a discussion. The themes are chosen by the group, but it can be that we just make suggestions. For example, we're thinking of having a meeting on the issue of diversity. It's not at the top of people's priorities, but we're trying to include it on the agenda!"

Effects and transformations

Possibility of tackling this kind of topic in a meeting between professionals

"People attending the meetings are very pleased that we took this initiative because it gives them a platform where they can share their issues. In the various existing platforms, work organisation is not a topic that usually gets discussed. People talk more about subsidies, projects and business issues.

Participants heavily involved

We see a lot of energy in these groups and a strong will to share with others. It really is working. I'm often surprised by the level of sharing that goes on – it's very encouraging. My observation is that the topics discussed in these meetings are still very practical topics, such as administrative issues and the mobility of artists. I assume that from this foundation they will evolve to more strategic topics, such as recruitment and skills management.

A network of resources

What we're realising today is that there's not actually a particularly great requirement for additional expertise. The need is more around practice, how to deal with things on a daily basis. People know each other and they contact each other directly between meetings. They easily identify the people they can call to get answers to their questions.

Lessons for the whole sector to learn

For the sector in general, this initiative has had an impact because other projects are coming out of it. We realised that we lack the kind of job descriptions and skills profiles that practically only exist in big organisations. These are important because they form the basis for recruitment and for annual appraisals with your team. We're putting together a project on this issue.

Transformation in training practices

Another effect for the Sociaal Fonds is that it had an impact on the content of the training we offer. We now look for trainers who can move from theory to practice. For example on the topic of annual appraisals we include practical matters such as how you go about planning them and how to conduct them. In this particular area, we have a great demand for tools that will help professionals in their day-to-day role.”

Advice to inspire you

Check that there is a willingness to share

“It's very important that everyone in the group wants to share but, as I said, this was not a problem in our group.

Guarantee that discussions will be confidential

I think confidentiality is essential. It's very important that people are sure that anything they say in the group will stay in the group and will not be made public.

We reinforce this at the start of every meeting, reminding all participants that everything that is said in that meeting will remain confidential. This is very important.

Anonymous reports

We produce a report because not everyone in the group can attend every meeting. However in our report we don't mention the names of the people or the organisation, and we always send the report to the people who attended the meeting first before sending it out to the members of the group, just to make sure they agree with what has been written.”

Circulating opinions and ideas in teams



*This section reveals practices at the heart of organisations. Their initiators seek to promote spaces for talking and place motivation and team involvement at the heart of what they do. **Judith Knight** invites us to her weekly lunch with the Artsadmin team, **Yvona Kreuzmannová** takes us teambuilding in Bohemia and **Sibylle Arlet** allows us to learn about teams running projects in the community in the Centre region of France. In all cases, these practices are based on established protocols for meetings that forge a network of cooperation and a circulation of ideas within the organisation.*

Having lunch together once a week to keep abreast of everything going on

Judith Knight,
Director

Artsadmin, London,
United Kingdom

Background to this initiative

*A singular
organisation*

“Artsadmin is a producing and presenting organisation for contemporary artists working in theatre, dance, live art, visual arts and mixed media. Our vision is to be an arts lab for the 21st century for the creation of performance, site-specific and interdisciplinary work, where the innovative, experimental and unusual are nurtured. We are based in Toynbee Studios in London.

Artsadmin has grown quite big now and we do a multitude of things. We have a team of 25 people. Our building has five rehearsal spaces, as well as a theatre, twenty offices for arts organisations and a café. Our activities include production and touring for artists, advisory services, organisation of events, rent of the spaces, editing of information on opportunities for artists, educational projects, a bursary scheme etc.

*Risk of a
fragmented
organisation*

We work on very different projects. For example, the work could range from a school project in a local area to a tour to China, and everybody is focusing on their own tasks. Because we have the building with rehearsal spaces, there are people managing this activity, with many people coming in and out. It would be very easy to end up with a group of people coming to work on their project and not really engaging with everything that is going on in the whole organisation.

*British
habit of a
sandwich in
front of the
computer*

The lunch break is something that the French or the Germans are much more likely to have than the British. We often have a sandwich in front of our computer and work through the lunch break, which is not terribly good.

*What about
having lunch
together once
a week?*

Once I went to the theatre in Groningen and saw a team having lunch together and having a conversation. And because of this situation at Artsadmin, I thought we should have a weekly lunch together.”

Account of an innovative practice

*Tuesday
lunch*

“Every Tuesday we organise a lunch with the whole team. We supply the food. It’s for one hour. Everybody comes unless there is a very good reason for not being there. A different person chairs the meeting every week, so everybody has a chance to chair it.

Report on what each department is doing

We have an agenda of subjects that we cover every week: it includes the building, the projects, fundraising, the café, the advisory service. All the different departments report to the others about what they are doing.

Future activities and understanding interactions

We also talk about what shows, performances or galleries we have attended and will attend or about important meetings coming up. For example I might have a meeting with a festival director coming up, and someone working on a project might say that he is trying to contact him for a specific question. Then we might decide to go together or I include the project on the agenda for the meeting. This is essential. We do a sort of round of 'who has been where' and another round of 'who is going where'.

Adaptable framework

Sometimes we do something different. For example, when we did the residence with the company Grand Magasin, we invited them to come and give a presentation about their work to the staff because they were going to be with us for the next four weeks. But most of the time we stick to our similar agenda."

Effects and transformations

Crucial initiative for this organisation

"It does help in informing people. It might not be very innovative, but it's terribly important for us to have taken this initiative. We carry on so many very different projects and activities. We work in different fields, in different geographical areas, with different timelines. Somebody might come back from a long tour, while others are rushing to open their project in an area of London.

Feeling less isolated

My job is to bring everybody together a bit more, and I know it's very easy to NOT be together, to feel it is a group of separate art producers or advisers working under one roof, concentrating on their own project. This initiative has really helped people relate to other people's jobs and stave off a possible feeling of isolation.

Better appreciation of how everyone is feeling

This time together every week helps people to be more aware about why some are busy, why some are looking stressed, whether things are going well or what they feel about the artistic progression of the project. People find it very valuable.

Opportunity for new colleagues

Besides this lunch, we do of course have regular meetings with the producers and with the advisory service, the building people etc, but this lunch is the one chance for everybody to hear about everything through Artsadmin. It's especially important for younger or newer people to have this broader view of the organisation and to have the opportunity to chair one of those meetings.

Possibility of talking about what the work means to them

What I also see as a very interesting effect is that sometimes we just talk about artistic work. It's essential to have those conversations, reminding ourselves about why we are doing those jobs, how we feel about our jobs. We can get all so ground down with budgets, contracts, things to do, that it's sometimes essential to have the opportunity to discuss the artwork itself – that is the reason we're doing this work after all.

Sharing our identity

Sharing the lunch is also sharing the identity of the place you are working in and this identity issue is all the more important for us since we rely a lot on fundraising. To convince partners and sponsors, we have to explain very clearly who we are. We have worked on it, but it's quite hard to say it in a very concise way, even for me! These meetings help to make everybody aware of that complication and of the importance of the message.

Sharing, increasingly important in these tough times

We're certainly not the first people to say that sharing is necessary, but in the financial gloom at the moment, people realise they can't carry on like they did. I think there are more and more conversations going on about sharing resources - skills, material things, information."

Advice to inspire you

Have a meal together to share more than words

"I think the food is important, especially for British people who tend not to take any lunch break! Having a meal together has a different feeling than another boring matter-of-fact meeting. It's rather about sharing, and indeed, the food. It does make a difference.

Offer food

Another condition I would stress is that offering the food is important. On the one hand it's a small benefit – not having to buy lunch one day a week – but on the other, it's much more than that. It's also about giving. The whole thing is about giving and sharing."

**Team-building out of
the office to create
space for new ideas**

Yvona Kreuzmannová,
President,

Tanec Praha, Ponec
Theatre, Prague,
Czech Republic

Background to this initiative

Promotion of contemporary dance after the fall of the Wall

"Tanec Praha, meaning "Dance Prague", is a small NGO founded in 1991, just after the new law facilitating the creation of NGOs – the Association Act – was approved in our country. We wanted to bring the best possible contemporary dance artists to Prague because there was a big gap from forty years' isolation from the contemporary scene, not just in dance but

in art in general. During the nineties, we began a second main activity which is the Czech Dance Platform, and then we looked for our own venue to serve the local dance community more effectively. The Ponec Theatre opened in 2001.

These are our three main activities. Through international networks like Trans Dance Europe, we also developed residency and exchange activities, and six years ago we began to do community work with a project entitled Dance for Children, Dance for Schools.

Project-based team organisation with a shared foundation

We developed these activities one after the other over the years and formed a team where everyone has clear responsibilities and competency for his own activity, which means there are the director and co-director of the festival Tanec (dance) Praha, the director of the Ponec Theatre and the director of the Czech Dance Platform. And I run the whole organisation. We have a shared PR, technical and marketing team. We try to help each other whenever an event is coming up. The team is very small.

Team with a changing structure

Because of our financial situation, some of the directors are not employed for the whole year. We don't have the money to pay a full-time salary. Some external production managers are employed for each event. We also hire coordinators for international projects, such as the M4m project we are running, a project on mobility funded by the EU and attracting different partners in Europe.

How can real team spirit be created in these conditions?

My concern was how to create a real team when we have different contracts and schedules."

Account of an innovative practice

Team seminar for real exchange

"To make it work in these conditions, we have to operate with team work. There is a lot of space for brainstorming, we have a team meeting every week to share and coordinate the various activities. To help reinforce the team, I decided to do a kind of teambuilding exercise outside Prague, in the countryside, to discuss in depth what the basic problems are, what's working, what's not working, what kind of coordination we need to do better. For me, teamwork is much more important than decisions that could be taken by me.

Away from day-to-day office life to talk more about the day-to-day!

We do this outside Prague because in Prague everyone's too busy with other things and can't really concentrate on what we want to do. Initially we started with this teambuilding in the first weekend in January, after all the New Year celebrations. We went to the mountains. We started on the Friday afternoon with a very long discussion about the work, the system of coordination, who's responsible for what and how we could develop the

activities better. Then we finished it off by going bowling or skiing together! It's also teambuilding from being together in another part of the country and enjoying sport as well. Everyone loved it. We try to do this in both summer and winter now. We also moved to southern Bohemia in the forest, lighting fires and discussing very informally until three in the morning! "What are relationships like if someone hates someone else?"; "Why does this work better than that?" It's excellent because it gives very clear points of view inside the team.

Involve everyone in strategy meetings

If we need to rethink the organisation's strategy, which has been the case in the past two years because of financial issues, we do some strategic planning together at Ponec Theatre, with the whole team, including technicians. It usually lasts one long afternoon and the following day.

Healthy differences

Sometimes it's not easy to include the whole team in these strategic discussions, but I like taking the risk! People have different views and personal opinions. There are different generations involved: I'm the oldest and there are also very young people there. The age range is from 20 to 50 and it's not that easy getting them all to work together."

Effects and transformations

Motivated team

"I think these spaces are really helpful both for the organisation and for the people themselves. The main effect of those "in-building meetings" is to motivate people. They really feel involved and that their active approach is needed.

Innovative ability for the organisation

They develop things differently than people from my generation. I give them space to think about things again, to introduce new ideas and new activities, and it happens! For example, when the person who was working on the children's studio project joined the team and attended the teambuilding, she really began to set her own strategy for the project, how to work with schools, how to work with other NGOs in the same field, how to have the whole district work with us etc.

Looking longer term

The strategic discussions are also very useful for everyone because some of them never think that far ahead. It makes them look at the organisation in another timeframe.

Professional development of young people

I feel these moments are a very natural way of exchanging experiences and also mentoring these young people, without calling us mentors or particularly emphasising it. When I accept some things and reject others, I'm really explaining the reasons and sharing them with the team. I'm a leader of the organisation, but at the same time I really try as hard as possible to create a space for new ideas. Over the years, I've understood that as much as I'm taking a risk giving increasing responsibility to these people, they're

learning by doing and by making decisions. At the same time, I'm always there if, for example, they need someone to consult before making a decision. I'm a sort of a consultant.

Possibility of transforming a leadership role in line with convictions

In 2009, I went to work as the Artistic Director for the European Capital of Culture and learned a lot through this process. When I was taken off this project for political reasons, even though I'd won the title for the town of Pilsen for 2015, I started to understand that the corruption and clientelism in our country go much deeper than I expected. Now I'm back at Tanec Praha, but I don't want to get back to my position of leading activities. I want to get back to helping with advocating and contributing to changing the political situation and the spirit, the feeling of the community around the arts. Civil society isn't strong enough, the government doesn't want it. I feel that it's my role to help develop NGOs and civil society in my country."

Advice to inspire you

Create space

"I think that if you create space like this for new ideas, then the people in the organisation will fill it. But it's not easy.

Learn to make space

It took me time to learn how to create space like this. I'm never sure if it's enough. There are some boundaries of course. There still has to be continuity in the basic vision for the different activities. But at the same time it really is possible to give space to so many new things, and especially artistic planning. I included three young people and one middle aged one on the artistic board some years ago, and they're stronger for it. They have lots of ideas, they have experience. For me, it's about compromise. There are many proposals and options on what to do artistically, but these new people have different points of view from me and it's very interesting how we can find decisions together.

Exchange information on practices, a resource in times of crisis

In 2008, we faced a major crisis because of the political situation – the city cut its support to the Tanec Praha Festival by 90% – and I then had to rebuild the team. It took us three years but it happens that this new – and younger – team is absolutely fantastic. Crisis situations are sometimes the best environments for innovative ideas and introducing new energy. Some might think that in a very tough financial and political climate caring about internal matters might not be a priority, but I know it has helped me in life whenever I have been involved in the work practices of other organisations. In fact, my starting point was when I was invited on a kind of fellowship to the United States in 1992 to observe several art organisations. For me it was the best way to understand that you can do things differently. I know that in Europe in the 1990s there were opportunities for young managers to get these kinds of fellowships, workshops and experiences, to find mentors, inspiration and examples of good practices. These opportunities are now scarcer, which is a real pity, especially for our part of Europe which is still a long way from the reality of the West."

Tripartite activity in the field to improve the quality of work

Sibylle Arlet,
*Associate Production Di-
rector - Secretary General,*

Culture O Centre,
Orléans, France

Background to this initiative

*Excentrique
festival, a
local project
inviting crea-
tion with the
community*

“Every year the Excentrique festival takes place in ten or so different places, from villages to areas in our biggest cities, including natural sites and historical monuments. It takes place in France’s Centre region, which is the size of Belgium. The festival’s aim is to work with specific partners in each location, adapting to their way of working on each occasion. These partners can be associations, local authorities in small rural communities, a historical monument or even local residents. The components of the Festival can change every year or come under partnerships that run for periods of between 1 and 4 years. The Festival is multi-disciplinary (performances, film, music, circus, culinary design etc). It brings together projects that have been taking shape in the region before the festival – often involving local people – as well as performances of more classic productions in venues that are not specifically designed for staging shows.

*Festival
organised
by a region-
al cultural
body with
very diverse
partners*

Since 2009, the organisation of the Festival has been integrated into the regional cultural organisation called Culture O Centre. This organisation runs professional networks and provides a range of stage equipment to regional organisations at very affordable prices. We currently have 16 permanent staff in the team, with fixed-term staff contracted to help run the festival. The partners we work with are organised to differing degrees. Working with them, you have to have very different levels of competence. Sometimes you’re just needed to provide some support but on other occasions you have to carry the whole project.

*Redefining
boundaries
between
production
and cultural
mediation in
the field*

The specific nature of the projects created with communities posed the issue of the boundary between production and cultural mediation. For example, exploring an area to find venues, residents or collectives that would be keen to take part in a project run by an artist can come under both production and mediation. When the festival started, we often saw friction between the people responsible for these two aspects. This was something we needed to sort out. We also noticed that excessive demands were made on the technical staff wherever we went, with the result that it was hard to meet these demands.

*Young team
when the
festival was
set up*

When we set up the festival in 2006, our team was initially small (six people) and consisted mainly of young professionals for whom the festival was their first real professional experience. From the outset we needed to boost

everyone's professional competencies in order to cope with increasingly ambitious projects.

How can you work on participative projects in the field without neglecting your other work?

Participative projects take up a great deal of time. We had to be sure that these projects didn't take up all our work time dedicated to public relations. We're working in different places every time. By definition, when we go somewhere new, no one knows us. So there's quite a bit of work to do to get our bearings, forge links, distribute information, create a file etc... which is also done in the office. It's really important for this part of the work to be given its due importance so that it can be achieved."

Account of an innovative practice

Tripartite activities in the field to retain specialist job competencies

"To deal with these various issues, we decided to set up an organisation with tripartite activities in the field, involving a production administrator, a PR officer and a stage manager.

Having a representative of each profession for each activity provides development opportunities for everyone and enables them to become established within their particular role. We could have introduced someone to oversee a number of tasks, but we wanted to keep a degree of specialist competence in each area. We thought it would be hard to reconcile this ambition and find people who could cover several tasks.

Tailor-made work organisation for each project segment

If there is something specific about how we organise our work, it's that on each occasion we wonder how best to organise ourselves. This depends on the area, the partners and the specific issues posed by a particular project. If we have a partner working with us who has excellent production and technical skills, then this partner becomes associate producer of the event and we perform all the cultural activities and mediation. We often draft partnership agreements to put down on paper who is doing what. Formalising this after discussing it together is important.

Same team from start to finish with a high level of delegation

We prefer to support a project from start to finish. For a part of the festival taking place in Blois for example, it's the same production-technical-cultural mediation team working on the project from start to finish. These tripartite teams have a lot of delegated responsibilities, from representing the festival to partners, all the way to managing budgets. They are in the field a lot, often together. These visits take time, given the distances in the area for example between Orléans and Le Poinçonnet (153 kilometres)."

Effects and transformations

Possibility of working in depth on different subjects

"From an organisational perspective, it seems to me that our choice of a tripartite organisation bringing together different job competences enables us to be precise about the competences and to explore all aspects in more detail, for example adapting contracts to the specific features of each situation or taking time to meet the people doing PR.

Confronting viewpoints from different places

Enhancing the status of each 'job viewpoint' creates more debate within the team than if just one person were running it all wearing a number of hats. For example in a Chateauneuf-sur-Loire project, the production administrator and PR officer had a discussion and decided to involve local schools at different levels in our project to create a fairground. A meeting with the artist resulted in the following suggestions: the creation of drawings of various animals, including these in the draft sketches for the merry-go-round and considering them in the final choices for the model, and then including the drawings in an exhibition alongside the merry-go-round.

This discussion was very healthy and increased the level of negotiation between the different roles. It's a way of experiencing what internal debate like this can produce because we then know that we will be more robust and more united in making it happen in the field.

Working out the best solutions

This need to share within the tripartite group and examine the impact of a decision from different viewpoints definitely takes more time, but seems to us to produce the best solutions on each occasion. If people within the tripartite group don't manage to agree, then this is dealt with at a project meeting attended by the technical, PR and production managers.

Solidarity between jobs in the field

Creating these tripartite groupings in the field also generates solidarity and awareness that you are not alone when you're trying to work on a daily basis to make a project happen at more than 100km from the office. When work on a project becomes more intense, being organised like this also provides better coverage in the field.

Change in the supervisory role

The managers in each centre delegate heavily to their teams and have to accept that this is how it is. It changes their role to one of supporting their teams. For example, it's mainly the teams in the field who are in contact with the artists and me to a lesser extent, even though I'm the production director. You have to accept that you must let go. The organisation pushes for greater autonomy and exchange. The role of team managers changes in that they're involved more as guarantors, working in a listening role, giving advice and ultimately arbitrating when required.

Project allocation redefined every year

Every year the projects are allocated to the team in line with the programme. There is no specialisation by artistic discipline or geographical area. This seems to give us a better team dynamic. There's no set prerogative for budgets, for example. This redefinition every year encourages exchanges within the team.

New ways of doing things - uncomfortable and stimulating at the same time

More generally, our project and our organisation create new working situations for the team every time. This can be uncomfortable for some and demands a lot of energy, but it can also be very stimulating. There's no routine.

Key involvement of the team

Assigning people to the project and to the organisation is essential. It allows more fluidity in the way activities are set up."

Advice to inspire you

Share the process of reflection

“I think the process of reflection which led us to develop this organisation is very important. It was shared with the team and had a bearing on the artistic project and how work was organised. This means that our organisation can function with strong shared and territorial dimensions today. The value in which I hold the process seems to echo our artistic project in which the issues of constructing a project step by step with the artists and local people are central. It’s a source of the organisation’s adaptability. The more it comes out of a process, the easier it is to adapt it.

Make choices together on how to organise work

It seems to me in fact that several work organisation methods could operate within our artistic project. For example do you choose an organisation by project? Or by job (direction/ communications/administration/technical)? What seems essential to me is that organisation is continually being discussed with the people concerned and that choices are being debated. This exchange results in all the working relationships being settled between people and the tools required for collective work. We shared a lot for example on how to evolve over time, on the phasing of the project, who is assigned to a project at a given time etc. For each person there’s the assurance of really understanding your place and your role in making the project happen.

Establish a specific meeting protocol

This way of organising work which changes methods depending on the project needs constant adjustment between people in the team. They have to want this level of exchange and to be supported in this change by formalising how exchanges are organised. We have set up different meetings in a very specific way. For example we have project meetings attended by different people during the different phases of the project. They systematically bring together the tripartite production-mediation-technical roles involved in the project, as well as the managers responsible for these areas of work. The other people in the team, like the communications officer or production associate, join them as the project goes along.

Reflect with the team to improve wellbeing at work

So that we can adapt to each situation, it’s important for us to reflect a lot on the work: who does what, what the required competences are, when to discuss things together, work patterns when the workload increases... We wanted to work on these aspects in particular because it seemed essential for team members to have maximum visibility of the shape of their role in order to feel good about their work. In our sector, we often see people’s frustration and malaise linked to organisations where these issues are not adequately addressed. People who think something is expected of them and then notice that this is not the case or people who work hard on projects and get minimal feedback from their organisation. I was struck by these observations. In the Culture O Centre I wanted the reasons why things are happening in a particular way to be made known and expressed clearly to the teams. This doesn’t necessarily mean there is systematic buy-in, but at least everyone’s clear about it.”

Transforming your organi- sation in a changing world

A photograph showing a group of people sitting on the floor in a room with large windows. They appear to be engaged in a discussion or activity. The image is overlaid with a yellow tint and the large text 'Transforming your organisation in a changing world'.

*In this section, we learn about initiatives that set out to radically transform the organisations in which they have been created. The initiators of these practices have democratic values and are keen for wider society to participate in their organisations. They want to reinvent the methods by which cultural projects are most often conceived and implemented. Decisions about programming, audience relations and the conditions of implementation are carefully re-examined. This changes considerably the relationships between artists, the audience and professional teams. **Luc Dewaele** discusses Vooruit's experience of sharing programming responsibility, **Devinda De Silva** unveils the TEAM project developed in communities in Wales and **Grzegorz Reske** talks to us about the transformation of the cultural centre in Lublin to associate artists more closely with life there.*

Reinventing the method of programming in an arts centre to share this responsibility more

Luc Dewaele,
Head of Artistic Management and Marketing

Vooruit Arts Centre,
Ghent, Belgium

Background to this initiative

Process of evaluation and projection every four years

“We need to devise a structural plan every four years in order to get structural subsidies, and we use this long-term planning exercise for ourselves and for our organisation as well, not just to get the money. We have discussions with the artistic team and the rest of the team as well, and with people from outside. We discuss what we have been doing well as an arts centre and what could be done better.

Discovering competences within the team

Another point is that when we started a project called “green Vooruit” – aiming to enhance the possibility of working in a green way at every level – we discovered that we had a lot of people with potential and skills that were not really in their job description. They develop these skills more outside of the job than in Vooruit. We thought it was important that they be given the possibility of developing them within what we do. It could be an incentive to people to work here or to keep working here.

Organisation in existence for thirty years

It is also because the organisation has been around for about thirty years and some people have been working here for almost as long. Even though we are a big team, (85 full-time equivalent staff), you realise there are not so many opportunities for growth within an arts organisation. We tried to look at other organisations to see how they deal with this issue and how they try to empower people.

Artistic projects more open to society

On another hand, for a few years now we have been expanding our programme to projects that are linked more to the city and to society in general. We’ve been meeting more and more artists who are concerned with this. We had the idea of developing things that are mostly not purely artistic.

Organisation in the digital age

A final important point is that we have been investing a lot in digital communication and digitising our organisation. We know we have to be more and more interactive. Twenty years ago, you invited an artist and you came up with a poster to communicate it. Now you need to organise a conversation with the artist and the audience before the performance. You need another approach; you need to involve the communications staff a lot earlier. It’s not the same ‘chain of command’ that we used to have.

What place does an arts centre have in society?

We think arts centres like ours will definitely be very different in a few years from now. Cultural centres in Belgium emerged in the 1980s as a kind of movement against the art institutions of the day. Now the context has changed, we also feel a need to change. We had a lot of discussions in the team about the things we want to see happening in society, which are of course mainly creative and artistic, but not just that. At the same time we were wondering whether we would maybe be taking on too much responsibility ourselves, whether we should stick to being strictly an 'arts centre' or develop another definition for it."

Account of an innovative practice

Greater shared responsibility

"Instead of developing an artistic plan, we tried to develop a broader one, a plan for the people working here to expand their stake in what is going on. This led to a plan called 'Think / Act / Play / Share'. We want to reorganise ourselves as an organisation, to have a more shared programme, to have more people involved in it. The programme is more about everyone's shared responsibility: the business vision, artistic vision and communication. It also involves people outside the organisation; more than a very straightforward curatorial programme, we tried to produce a cooperative move.

Merger of programming and communications teams into an "editorial" like in a newspaper

We have merged our curatorial team and our communications team into an 'editorial' team like you find in newspapers. We have also invited people in from other teams. It's often difficult because they have busy schedules, but we ask them to come and join us. There's a meeting every month with the full editorial team. We've also switched offices around to put everybody in editorial teams together.

A more coherent and sustainable vision of being together

The main idea is to make sure that things are shared and discussed from the very beginning. People are more involved in the topics and programmes being tabled. We notice that when colleagues are involved earlier on, you have a more sustained vision of where you're going with your programme. It's not a cascade system where there's a programme from the top that is poured down and executed by the organisation.

Free up half a day and dedicate it to exchanges and reflection

Another initiative is to set aside half a day per week where people are expected to do nothing operational, but just get inspired, share things, talk to colleagues, watch documentaries together, invite artists for discussions. This takes place on Friday mornings. If you want to develop a project about sustainability, about society, about politics, you get input from everyone much more quickly."

Effects and transformations

Greater responsive-ness

“This project changed our way of working a great deal. Take the example of our ‘we strike back’ project. In the very specific political context of Belgium, the new government proposed new measures and trade unions organised a national strike to reject them. The following Friday morning, there was a lot of debate in Vooruit’s team about how the media was handling the situation and the lack of subtlety around it. We thought there should be an alternative vision to this black and white picture. One week later and we had a programme! Everybody was involved. It was an invitation to the audience to come to Vooruit and debate, have longer discussions, understand the subtler points, get more people involved, and discuss the role of trade unions and the media.

Better quality programme

We used to have five programmers in music, theatre, dance etc. One person decided what was going to happen in one particular field. Now there are still curatorial responsibilities, but we try to find broader ground for everything we do. I used to be a curator myself and I know that you often have to have your idea fully developed before you take it to the communications team or the rest of the team. It doesn’t work like that anymore. It can take time to come up with a fully developed idea, to convince people that it’s a good one, but it’s also a way of checking whether your idea holds up to critiques from your colleagues. It should result in better quality.”

Advice to inspire you

Take your time

“This takes time! You can’t force change like this in just three months. It depends as well on how large your company is. You also need a long-term vision. You need a plan that people feel they have contributed to, like this ‘Think / Act / Play / Share’.

Accept change is hard, mistakes will be made, it will be tough

You also need to be very open about whether things are going well or badly, maybe not just for this kind of change but for every change. You need to tell people that some things can and will go wrong. You don’t need to feel bad about not getting it 100% right because you’ll never get it 100% right. It’s all the more important because we seem to be working in a sector where that’s never enough! Because you work with demanding artists or because you always want to offer more to your audience or because you’re asked to justify how you’re spending public money.

Regularly evaluate change

We have a continuous evaluation process between a few people on major change. We’re giving ourselves a year to run with this ‘editorial meeting’ organisation to see whether we’ll keep it and we’re giving ourselves three years to see if this is where we want to go as an arts organisation.

Be prepared to work on slowing down the organisation

This move is not just a shift in organisation, but also a way of living that we're trying to incorporate. We can't say to the world "slow down!" and not think about it as an organisation as well. For example, we used to have a lot of burn-outs in the team and that made us really think.

Analyse workloads cleverly

One of the problems causing this is a very heavy workload, which is rather common in the cultural sector! You should decrease the workload a little, just to give yourself space to think and work on a project like this. We can't expand the team so we're looking more towards cutting out routine work, but there isn't one answer for the whole organisation. You have to look at it person by person. And sometimes it helps to have fewer events – we hold between 400 to 500 events a year at Vooruit, which is a lot.

Transform the style of oversight

Another point is to give people more freedom in their jobs but also clear guidelines so that they are aware that what they do is part of a bigger picture. The different team managers need to develop more of a coaching style than a managing one. This is also an important change for the organisation."

**Building special relationships
with members of communities
and a set of meetings
to develop different projects**

Devinda De Silva,
Head of Collaboration

National Theatre Wales,
Cardiff, Wales,
United Kingdom

Background to this initiative

A National Theatre without a theatre

"We were created in 2008 as the National Theatre Wales, but our project is not to have any building. We want to keep flexible to better serve our key values. We aim at being innovative, engaged and international. We produce theatre work inviting international artists to work here in Wales. The first year we had 12 shows in 12 different locations in Wales. From the very beginning, our project was to work in a specific way with the community of Wales. Today NTW has a staff of 15 full-time and three part-time employees and an office located in Cardiff.

A project rooted in the community

As an organisation, our level of engagement is high. It is essential in our project. We go all over Wales to work with our productions and we work with very different communities. We perform in night clubs, on top of mountains, in theatres, in villages... We have also created the Assembly programme, a series of bespoke, democratically-elected creative arts projects which take place across Wales. We make the effort to encompass many people in our work.

Audience relations, the prerogative of a single team?

Usually in the UK, you have an education or a community department in cultural organisations and these are the only people who deal with the audience, the community, within the organisation. A lot of their work is generally not connected to the rest of the organisation and it is usually over a fixed period of time with few long-term benefits. We were wondering if we could work this out in another way.”

Account of an innovative practice

Team project

Special relationships with the community, TEAM members

“We set up a group of people who are keen to enter into a relationship with us. They range in age from 16 to 80+, with the majority being young (18-25). They can be students, have jobs or be unemployed. We encourage all kinds of people to join. They are a network of people across Wales who we collaborate with and support, who are NTW’s representatives in their community. We call them TEAM members, because we share the vision that they are an integral part of our work. We do not want to make differentiations between them and our core team or the artistic team. These are all part of collaborations we make.

Creating opportunities for them

We have about 200 TEAM members. We build a close relationship with them, offering them opportunities to develop. There are many different opportunities, they can be involved in very different ways. We support them in setting up their own creative projects and provide training for their personal development. We also have work placement opportunities, for example in the production team for a certain amount of time. For each show, we set up a shadow programme. People from the community come and shadow different members of the team, to learn skills and discover work in this field. It could be compared to an internship programme, but a lot of the people who access our scheme have not really worked in theatre before.

Removing barriers to accessing jobs in culture and local potential identified

To get an internship, you usually need to have certain skills or confidence and knowledge. You need to be able to go to an interview and explain what you have done. The people we’re working with at TEAM would not get those opportunities without a bit of support.

We try to build up local leaders. They often start their own projects and we support them in making their own creative events in their area. We mentor them. They really can contact anyone in the organisation, not just the artists, but also John, the Artistic Director, or me working with them or the Head of Finance etc.”

Meetings to develop different projects

Monthly meeting to share ideas

“Concerning our internal organisation, we have what we call an ‘ideas meeting’ every month. Every staff member attends and gives feedback on everything he or she has seen. We have a ‘go & see’ policy, so we encourage staff to go and see as much work as they can, whether in theatre, art,

music or books. In this monthly meeting, we report on everything we've seen, and if someone did something really interesting, we should follow it up and invite them for a meeting. It's a very open organisation. We also try and invite people from outside NTW to attend these meetings. This has often included TEAM members.

Weekly team meeting

We have a team meeting every week known as the 'Tuesday meeting'. Everybody says what he or she has been up to or what he or she will be up to in the coming weeks.

360° project meetings

We also have a '360° meeting' on each project: before we start working on a production, we all sit down and share what we expect from this show. And when the show is over, we come back and see what we did right, what we felt we did wrong, how it went. It's a way of helping us learn together from our own experience.

Specific and distinct management for each meeting

Different people in the organisation lead those different meetings. John, the Artistic Director, leads the ideas meeting and Lucy, our Executive Producer, leads the 360° meetings. We have one-on-one meetings with our managers and obviously the different 'departments' have specific meetings, like the communications staff meets to discuss a specific show for example. But then they might invite me to see what we can do with the TEAM members on this specific show.

Ideas wall

We share a wall where we put ideas or requests for help from our colleagues for input on a project etc. For example someone will ask to have a specific meeting on the project he's running to get feedback and evaluate it; another will ask for a contribution for a summer camp project for emerging artists he is responsible for.

Need for exchange

Of course, sometimes you think it's a lot of work attending these meetings and at the same time being in different parts of Wales to meet people. Actually I find it really useful to know what's going on, because we're all following our project. I am all over Wales following TEAM, and it's very important that the others know what I'm doing!"

Effects and transformations

TEAM project is at the heart of the organisation

"I think the TEAM project fundamentally changes the way every one here at NTW works. People involved in TEAM have taken a lead role in the development of NTW and now work with us across all aspects of the organisation. We have decided to make TEAM a core value in the organisation, which basically means it's part of everyone's role.

Initial reticence from the professionals

To start with when we shared our vision for the TEAM project and that it would become a core value of the project, that everybody would have to contribute, that we would change job descriptions, there was an initial fear perhaps. Staff members felt busy enough already. But I sat down with each of them saying, "Look, I'm not imposing anything. Let's see together how you could contribute".

Inclusion in each job description

Our TEAM responsibilities are now included in our job descriptions. For example, our production manager will not only deal with productions here, but will also work with the community on work placements, give talks or run guided tours around the set.

A resource to get to know the local area

What people have now realised is that TEAM can be very useful. For example, the production manager often finds resources and useful information from TEAM members when it comes to finding a specific location, identifying the right person for an artist's project, all the local knowledge we really need. In September, Constanza Macras is doing a project in the north of Wales. We meet TEAM Members there to help us, for instance to find a choir she wants to work with. TEAM Members are the first people we call when we need local information. As we progress, and as we draw more on TEAM, this feeling of "I haven't the time for this" is going away. The contribution TEAM members are making is much greater than the time spent looking after them.

A resource catering for the need for jobs

Another effect of the programme on our organisation is that a lot of TEAM members have gained employment within NTW and also outside. We're always very keen to give them support in their professional development. For example we've just advertised for a TEAM assistant. The job has been given to a TEAM member who has worked with us for over two years and developed her skills. Actually four to five members of staff originally came to us through the TEAM programme!

A resource for discovering new talent

Through TEAM we're getting talent that wouldn't have come to us any other way, people who would not have the confidence or the experience to apply for a job or propose a project. For example, we met a group of young Somali poets who didn't even see themselves as poets or artists or practitioners in any way. Working with them through TEAM, and then through the Assembly, we got them performing and then we won a Gulbenkian Award with an idea that came from these guys! It will be one of our productions for 2013.

Crucial impact on diversity

The TEAM programme has actually had a huge impact on the diversity of the people we're working with, not just the staff but generally speaking the people we collaborate with. The fact of working intensely with the community creates an open and welcoming atmosphere. For Wales, we have a very diverse staff in terms of ethnicity and background. We're based in

Wales but we want to have an international reputation. Diversity within the staff and in our different collaborations is really important to us.

*Young
Welsh
people are
stakeholders*

The TEAM programme has an impact on the way we are seen as an organisation: welcoming, easy going and supportive. Often people say to us they wouldn't think a national organisation would be that way. We see some young people from Wales progressing, and I like the fact that they can get involved and influence the way we work."

Advice to inspire you

*Move from
engagement
to collabora-
tion*

"From a more political point of view, it helps us move forward with the way we work with the community. With the artists and the creative staff, people use the word collaboration, but when it comes to community work, people use the word engagement. We want to get away from this wording and call it collaboration whenever we have a relationship with someone on a project. My job title is now Head of Collaboration. The word 'engagement' has been over-used in Britain because of all the incentives in cultural policy to 'engage with the community'. To me it implies a power relationship, a help relationship, it sounds patronising. We have to move forward with the way we work with the community, and if we go on using this term 'engagement' that's been around for ages, then no one will understand that what we do is different.

*Breaking
down barriers
between
the team,
audiences
and artists*

The model we're trying to build with TEAM breaks down some barriers that traditionally exist between staff members, audiences and artists. While traditional engagement with the community is often about audience development, TEAM brings a different perspective: it genuinely gives them a chance to influence the way the organisation is run. We will implement the TEAM panel so that they can advise and direct what they want through TEAM. We give TEAM members the possibility of having a greater say in the organisation."

A close relationship between the artists and the team in a theatre transforming day-to-day work

Grzegorz Reske,
*Head of Theatre
Department*

Cultural Centre,
Lublin, Poland

Background to this initiative

*Building
undergoing
complete
transformation*

"We are a cultural centre that has undergone a lengthy process of rebuilding, step by step. The building has changed a lot in recent years, and this process has played a key role in our reflections on our link with artists. The

rebuilding is currently underway and in 2013 we will have a new centre with rehearsal venues, studios, a black box and guest rooms.

Fifty people now work at the centre, including people dedicated to the visual arts part of our activities.

Difficulties for artists in Lublin

We're concerned about the situation artists in our city face. Many need to have other jobs to survive. We were wondering whether we could do something to provide them with a better structure for their work, a structure that allows them to not need other jobs to survive. If we could provide them with the space and tools for a longer time, they could maybe use this opportunity not only to do their own laboratory work but also to run commercial workshops and build up their income.

Regular relationships with particular artists

For a long time the cultural centre housed two groups. They were touring a lot so they were not in the building much. Then some other artists or groups forged a relationship with the centre because they had come back to establish themselves in Lublin or because they needed rehearsal spaces. We then had four groups working regularly in our centre.

Context of the candidacy for the European Capital of Culture

All this was taking place at a time when Lublin was preparing its application for the European Capital of Culture. We didn't win but during this period there were major developments in culture in our city which meant we developed our funding in relation to the new building as well.

A team that has been around for a long time

We felt our team needed a better understanding of the work of artists today, such as what it means to rehearse, how a piece of work develops in the given time they have, why particular costs are necessary. Most of the team has been working here for a long time. And our story as an organisation dates from the communist time when the House of Culture was dedicated to the amateur movement. Even if our organisation changed in 1991 to become the Cultural Centre in Lublin and now has a different orientation, there are still traces of that history in a part of the team.

What if we created a regular local artistic programme?

We started thinking that if we had four different groups in our centre, there would be a good chance that one of them would be in the city at any given moment, which meant that we could think a few months ahead in terms of the repertoire. That's how it started. We called this the Central Theatre programme."

Account of an innovative practice

Collaborating artistically with six companies

"*Central Theatre (Teatr Centralny)* is a hosting programme for artistic groups. Six independent artistic groups working in theatre and dance are hosted by our cultural centre. It means that they have rehearsal spaces for their work, that they have some money to produce and support the production work, that they can perform at least ten times a year in Lublin and that

some of their members are fully employed by our centre (in some cases, the Artistic Director, in another actors, in another the Production Manager etc).

Theatre offerings every week

This framework enables us to offer audiences at least three performances a week and they know that every week they can see a performance as part of the *Central Theatre* programme.

During a second phase, we started thinking about the groups coordinating their own artistic plans to develop a yearly plan for Lublin, so that they don't all open at the same time for example. This programme has allowed us to structure our audience development and in my opinion that is a key point."

Effects and transformations

Evolution in the relationship with audiences

"With the new building, we want to go from being a production house and a venue for presentations to something that could be a real 'house for the arts', a place to spend time in, to go to regularly and discover artists and their work. Instead of running events and attracting audiences for each particular event, we'd like to build an audience that stays with the organisation, an audience that wants to explore what we offer.

Developing the structure of a high-quality technical team

This *Central Theatre* initiative also allows us to keep our technical team in good shape because they're occupied throughout the year. This means that they can make a living out of their job while we have good skills when ever we need them. We're still working on spreading their workload more evenly throughout the year.

Financial lever

By pooling the needs of these groups, we could cut costs, such as printing and communication costs. Besides, when we give money to the artists for a production, we ask them to raise at least half of it from other partners. We help them do this. We made it a rule so that funding comes from at least two sources.

Making the local artistic community professional

When the new building is finished, we'll be able to show work in progress, which is also very important for the development of the artistic community here in Lublin.

Possibility of performing regularly in front of a large audience

All the artists in this programme come from really independent movements. Even though previously they had to fight for audiences, at the very beginning of our relationship, they might have thought that our framework would restrict their freedom. Now they understand that this is really a way of presenting their work to a good audience.

Less administrative work

They also see that a huge part of the administrative and communications burden has been lifted from them. And they're reassured that they still have control of the artistic element and the way their work is presented.

Space for exchange on creative work

When the building is finished, we should also be able to have a really creative space, not just for working on productions, but also for discussing and being inspired. I can already see artists having a creative influence on one another, stimulating each other's work. In recent years, groups from Lublin have won numerous national theatre awards in Poland.

Development in how the team sees contemporary work

For our own team, having artists in house is really essential. I notice that all the 'non-artistic' people now show much more interest in the productions created in-house. They want to see the performance, they appreciate very contemporary pieces more and they don't hesitate to ask the performers questions. This is to be put in context with the fact that we are still a traditional Catholic country! This change concerns not just the people who work with us, but also their friends and families when they're coming to see performances with them.

Constructing a new identity for our centre

I think that working with artists in this way has helped us a lot with transforming the organisation. This rebuilding is also about shaping a new identity for our project, making it more orientated towards the artistic side of things. Right now we're discussing giving the future building a new name, making this new orientation clearer for everyone."

Advice to inspire you

Clearly explain programme choices

"We try to give the whole team a clear message about why a particular performance is being presented, sharing the artistic programme with the whole team. In our future organisation, for example, the Head of Accounts will attend all artistic meetings. We try to develop mutual understanding of the different jobs within the team, such as between the accountancy department and the artists."

Enriching your team by making it more diverse



*This topic is illustrated by an account from **Maarten Bresseleers**, the coordinator of Fonds voor de Podiumkunsten, whose learning network we have already encountered (page 20). Is diversity in teams a matter of policy for cultural organisations? Should the values they defend in their artistic projects lead them to reflect society in its entirety within their teams? Maarten Bresseleers describes the job opportunities database he set up in Flanders to help employers in the sector expand their recruitment. Alongside this political vision, we can also see the question of diversity within teams in the sector from another perspective, one in which diversity is considered a breeding ground for talent. This is the area explored by **Devinda De Silva** from the National Theatre Wales in his conversation about the TEAM project (page 38).*

A database of job opportunities to expand recruitment

Maarten Bresseleers,
Coordinator

Sociaal Fonds voor de
Podiumkunsten,
Brussels, Belgium

Background to this initiative

Under-representation of certain groups in society

“The Ministry of Labour realised that immigrants or people of foreign origin are generally under-represented in the job market in Flanders and that this needed to be changed. In Flanders, we have a large community from Morocco, Turkey, Eastern Europe and Africa. It’s a priority for the Ministry of Labour that these groups enter the job market. The Ministry of Labour tried to set up several initiatives to counter this tendency. It’s a philosophical point, not a nationality issue. They use the term ‘ethnic-cultural minority’.

Diversity, a priority for the former Ministry of Culture

In our sector, it was also a priority for the former Ministry of Culture to have people from these groups on the boards of cultural organisations to create opportunities. It’s not only in terms of our human resources, but in what’s shown on stage as well, and about having these groups in your audiences. The sector is now more aware of this issue.

Attention focused on three different groups in the population

At the Fonds, we work on the issue of diversity in teams working in the sector in Flanders. We work on different populations: people of foreign origin, people with disabilities and people over 50. In the Flemish job market, only four out of ten people over 50 are still working, which is too few. We try to stimulate these groups into considering a career in our sector.

Does our sector fully reflect the job market?

I think the key question is: “Does our sector reflect the job market?” It could be a relevant question at different levels – the country, the city or the region. All the more so because usually cultural organisations are based in places where there is a great deal of diversity in the population.”

Account of an innovative practice

Database of job opportunities

“We’re trying to change things across the whole sector. We’ve constructed our own database of job vacancies in the sector because we want to know more about the job market in our sector (what kind of job vacancies, how many, what positions are difficult to fill etc). Every week, we send out a newsletter containing some of the job vacancies to 6,000 people.

Recruitment, a gateway into the sector

At the level of each organisation, people often wonder whether they can do anything. As an employer, when recruiting I think it’s really important to check that there are no obstacles that could discriminate. For example, people from these groups are usually not aware that there are job vacancies in the sector because they’re advertised on very specific websites.”

Effects and transformations

Still not enough initiatives in the sector

“Today in Flanders, there are only a few organisations that are really working on this issue, even if you have incentives to build what they call a ‘diversity plan’. We’re not there yet!”

Advice to inspire you

Identify specific modes of communication to target particular sections of the public

“To every employer advertising a job vacancy in our newsletter, we also propose issuing it through a more general channel and to specific organisations in order to reach immigrants, people with disabilities and people over 50.

Write job adverts that avoid jargon and are accessible to everyone

We focus a lot on recruitment because that is the gateway. We work on advertisements and job descriptions, checking that the job description is understandable for everyone and that there are not too many specific words.

Formulate reasonable requirements for each vacancy

More generally, we raise employers’ attention to the issue of whether we’re expecting too much. Are we setting the bar too high? Is it higher than is actually needed? There are a lot of candidates for every job vacancy because we’re very attractive in general as a sector. Employers do not need to try to reach these specific groups because they have plenty of candidates. We’re noticing a tendency for people to be overqualified when they enter the sector. Actually, diversity is harder work!”

Joining forces to act together



*In this final section, we present three initiatives in which cultural operators have joined forces. The pooling of financial resources or professional competences is the catalyst that allowed these practices to be developed. **Sarah de Heusch and Alain Garlan** present the guarantee fund created by SMart, while **Isabelle Mérand** relates Gesticulateurs' experience of job sharing in the Pays de Redon and **Monika Klengel** tells us about the venture in the independent Austrian company, Theater Im Bahnhof, which has had a policy of basic salaries for 12 years. These accounts frequently express a concern with fundamental security needs in the workplace, but also the desire to work differently. Joining forces makes us stronger. Here are three illustrations of it.*

A guarantee fund to protect its members

**Sarah de Heusch and
Alain Garlan,**
*International Development
Officers*

SMart, Brussels, Belgium

The source of this initiative

*Providing
artists with
administra-
tive services*

“In Belgium in 1998, a producer and a computer engineer set up a new business to provide administrative services to artists. They gradually found themselves increasingly in demand. Quite quickly they noticed that the sector in which their clients work as musicians, street theatre actors, circus artists etc does not allow them to afford the actual cost of administration services. Realising there was a need for these services, they had the idea of developing as fully automated a system as possible to make it less expensive for the artists. They therefore set up SMart – the Société Mutuelle d'Artistes (artists' mutual society).

Today, SMart has 45000 members in Belgium who are artists and creative professionals (technicians, intermediary professions, visual artists etc) and who use the mutual company's services provided by its 150 employees (130 full-time equivalents). SMart takes over the administration of their business, such as formalisation by contract, social security declarations for their work and client invoicing. The creative professionals are sure that their work is being properly declared, that they're up to date with social security contributions, that their invoices are being sent out and that all the paperwork is being done for them. SMart bears the employer's risk for each contract. The cost of the service is 6.5% of each contract/invoice drawn up for a client.

*How to
combat the
precariousness of
artistic life?*

The creation of SMart is closely linked to the fact that the life of an artist in Belgium is a precarious one. They have insecure professional conditions and joining forces is a response to these conditions. Mutualising makes them stronger. This is in keeping with mutualist history which has a strong tradition in the area of health and banking, but not in the cultural sector. Today the realisation that an artist's life is precarious and that tools are needed to legalise work is widespread in Europe and SMart is now expanding into France, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Poland, the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Spain and Italy.”

Account of an innovative practice

*Establish-
ment of a
guarantee
fund*

“Beyond this shared administration and management tool, what has developed is the mutualisation of risks. On the invoices produced for each client, a sum is deducted (2%) which is dedicated to a guarantee fund. For each contract/invoice drawn up, 6.5 % goes to SMart: 4.5% to cover the cost of the service itself and 2% for the guarantee fund.

Guarantee of being paid quickly

This fund manages the risks in a shared way across all its members. From the moment SMart chooses to manage a project, the professionals are sure of being paid quickly thanks to this guarantee fund, which finances outstanding payments. For example, if a bar hiring a group for the evening doesn't pay the performance fee, the artists will be paid by this guarantee fund. It is then up to SMart to recover the money.

Development of services adapted to a population with variable income

With the money from this fund, we decided to develop new services. A leasing service was set up to allow artists to buy equipment they need such as musical instruments or a computer when their variable income makes it hard to access credit. We have also set up insurance, not just for their professional activities but for their private lives as well. This insurance is valid for one year from the first contract made with SMart and is renewable as contracts go on. These various benefits contribute to us giving artists greater security in their profession."

Effects and transformations

Guarantees offering re-assurance

"For members, knowing they will be paid for their performance within seven days is a key benefit. They also have the reassurance that everything they do is above board and that mistakes aren't being made in their paperwork. It's even more important when they're working in a number of different areas and their situation is more complicated. They benefit from easy access to all the documents and forms they need. Everything is centralised in one place.

A more professional route

We're also finding that when young artists leave art school, they've learnt their craft, their skill, their artistic technique etc, but they're not prepared for professional life. To some extent using SMart tools allows them to become more professional, to be able to set their own budget, to understand the importance of paying people in the team, to understand what expenses they can ask their clients to pick up.

A network

Members communicate a lot through forums to exchange experiences and promote their activities. This method of communication works very well.

Representatives who listen

We have representatives who really know the sector: in recent years, there have been several changes in Belgium in relation to artists' legal circumstances. We support our members in their dealings with public services. In some cases, we've even supported them with petitions in court, with the aim of setting a precedent. The visibility we have allows us to have discussions with the authorities, the Ministry of Employment, the National Employment Office, trade unions etc. We perform a lobbying role around these issues."

Advice to inspire you

Reach a critical size

To be able to mutualise the risk, you have to have quite considerable funds and 'broad shoulders'. SMart's critical size allows it to have this. The inexpensive cost of services, achieved thanks to extensive computerisation, allows a sum to be added which is put into a mutualised fund – the guarantee fund – while still being affordable for a great many people.

Participate in decision-making

For a mutualist system to develop effectively, you also have to have democratic governance. In other words the mutual company is managed by its members and they take part in general meetings and leadership selection.

Make the approach part of the social and solidarity-based economy

It also seems fundamental that profits from the business are re-injected into the system, making this type of approach part of the framework of a social and solidarity-based economy. It seems to us that the mutualist operation at the heart of the social economy is a model that has not been used very much in the cultural sector, with little really being shared, organised or formalised, whereas we often talk about artists' collectives and work collectives. The profession has basically remained very fragmented, very individual. SMart is not the only example of a mutualist operation. It seems to us that the social and solidarity-based economy can help us find solutions that are completely in tune with our ethics."

An organisation created by a group of people in order to become employers together

Isabelle Mérand,
Coordinator

Groupement d'Employeurs les Gesticulteurs,
Redon, France

Background to this initiative

Culture at the heart of local development: les Articulteurs

"In the Pays de Redon et Vilaine in Brittany, associations, artists, elected officials and local communities combined with experts have come together around a community initiative programme entitled EQUAL, placing culture at the heart of local development. They are known as the Articulteurs.

Project supported by the European EQUAL programme

By taking a cooperative approach, the Articulteurs want to show that culture creates social cohesion, encourages individuals to flourish through the emotions it conveys, assures their wellbeing, and contributes to economic development by creating jobs and wealth. These were the objectives of the EQUAL programme which ran for four years from 2004 to late 2008, and was organised around three activities: structuring a cooperative approach to a common project, undertaking experimental activities, and transferring and communicating methods, competences and tools that can be used in other organisations and other areas.

Reflection on local cultural employment

Within this context, the Articulteurs have been reflecting for a while on the question of employment in the cultural sector. Most of the organisations (particularly companies) actually need to employ people but rarely have the financial means or sufficient need to recruit full time. Several companies therefore resort to employing people on short-term contracts counting on unemployment benefit available to complement their low or sporadic wages. *[There is a system in France of compensating for specific unemployment among artists and technicians in the performing arts and audiovisual sector].*

What if jobs were shared?

For the Articulteurs, job sharing became the obvious solution to creating permanent jobs in the cultural sector.”

Account of an innovative practice

Establishing a consortium of employers, the Gesticulteurs

“A study was conducted which identified a network of partners and needs in touring and administration. The companies involved decided to set up a consortium of employers, a legal body which allows human resources to be mutualised. The *Gesticulteurs*, a consortium of employers in the performing arts and culture, was therefore established in early 2008. The consortium of employers is a legal body allowing employers to join forces to employ one or more employees together. The exclusive aim of a consortium of employers is to create permanent jobs in sectors such as culture where employment is precarious and where the need is primarily for part-time or ad hoc jobs.

Providing a workforce through an agreement

The principle is to make employees available through the employers’ consortium to member organisations. An availability agreement is signed between the employers’ consortium and the organisations that would like to share a job. They agree on the job profile, the split of working hours and the tasks with the employers’ consortium according to the needs of each. The member organisations are then invoiced by the consortium for the hours worked by the employee in their particular organisation.

Creation of shared jobs

At the start of the *Gesticulteurs* project, three organisations – two companies and a production office – embarked on creating a job in administration. There was a high demand in distribution at the time but creating a shared job in distribution seemed to raise other issues. It appeared that the companies’ expectations were very different and that there were issues of competition and rivalry between the companies. We created an opportunity for each company to think about and specify its expectations and then discuss them together, allowing the group to plan how they could function together around a shared job in touring and the distribution of productions. At the end of this process, we recruited someone for a production / distribution job in 2011.

Network of special exchanges

Today the group has eight members, of whom six are companies working in different artistic areas (theatre, dance, music), all based in the Pays de Redon. The two other organisations are ADDAV 56, a departmental body developing

the performing arts, and a production office. Some of these organisations share all their jobs, others have retained some 'directly', for example in distribution, after joint consultation. The consortium brings together a whole host of artistic directors, production managers, distribution managers, administrators and technicians who operate like a close exchange network.

Strong commitment from consortium members

Unlike a service provider, what makes the employers' consortium stand out is that it also mutualises the risk to some extent. The statutes say *Members of the consortium are jointly responsible for debts with regard to employees and creditor organisations for compulsory contributions.* This means that when one of the members is in difficulty, all consortium members cooperate to help the organisation resolve its difficulties as well as possible. This requires great commitment on the part of the organisations involved.

Values in action

What you can't do alone is made possible by many, provided that each organisation undertakes to use its own resources with a view to perpetuating the mutualised job. Mutualisation, listening and solidarity are our fundamental values and these have to be shared by every member."

Effects and transformations

Stable full-time employment for employees

"As far as the employees are concerned, the employers' consortium allows them access to a stable, full-time job within a secure working environment. Coordination by us cushions the difficulty of having to work for several employers and provides a space for talking about difficulties and finding solutions.

Structuring makes things more professional

This structured setting makes things more professional, reinforced by working on a number of projects which offer food for thought. The working community created by the consortium is of huge benefit to employees, but this type of job is demanding and requires hard work.

Artistic directors become more professional

For employers, the outcome is access to a competent employee with a stable job, the possibility of being supported in this new role of employer and benefits from the methodologies and tools available within the consortium. Reflections around the creation of jobs and regular discussions within the consortium allow artistic directors to become more professional at designing and running their projects.

Evolution in people's jobs as they work on projects

Overall, after five years, it seems to me that people are much more professional now. The employers' consortium has allowed everyone to find their professional place, be it in administration or in the artistic domain. What I have noticed in this time is that the work undertaken by companies has evolved a lot. In terms of institutional recognition, for example, artistic directors have been able to defend their project to institutions more effectively by explaining how they are structured. It's great that artists are able to devote themselves to their artistic work by being able to rely on an effective administrative and legal framework!"

Advice to inspire you

Subscribe to the spirit of mutualisation

“The important thing is to adhere to the philosophy of mutualisation, to understand the mindset, the advantages and disadvantages fully. It’s not a system that suits everyone. That’s why we insist on the values of sharing, listening and solidarity.

Clearly explain obligations

People often approach these projects thinking that it’s going to save them money. That’s not the case at all because you have to take into account the costs projects like this incur. We insist very strongly on shared responsibility with regard to debts during the induction protocol to be sure that the future member fully understands his obligations.

Structure how work is organised

We have worked very precisely on how we organise and plan work, the relationships between the employing companies, annual meetings etc. These aspects are not always taken into account within the companies – sometimes employees are left to fend for themselves. Furthermore our consortium has administration, software and mutualised offices whose costs are reflected in the hourly rate invoiced to members.

Create a role to coordinate the work

In our scheme we have a coordination role that looks after staff management. If an employee works for eight different members, he can find himself with eight requests within a quarter of an hour and this can quickly become hard to manage. It’s my job at Gesticulteurs to coordinate all these requests. This provides a kind of screen between the demands of employing companies and the employees’ day-to-day work. This coordinating role allows us to look ahead and anticipate each person’s tasks, identifying and defusing potential conflicts by managing requirements. For example, when different closing dates for accounts have to be managed in administration or in distribution when new works are produced. Doing this ensures everything runs smoothly! This coordination role is also meaningful in the relationship with members, that is to say the employing companies. I get a call if a problem around work or a relationship arises with one of the employees in the consortium. It’s not easy for a member to take on the position of employer and understand the obligations employees in the consortium have. For example I have to explain why an employee can’t always respond to a question within an hour of it being asked.

Organise regular meetings

To operate smoothly, we also set up different meetings. There’s a monthly meeting for the companies’ artistic directors, the touring manager and me in my coordination role. This appeared necessary to us given the specific nature of touring. Even if the Distribution Manager expends similar amounts of energy on different projects, one particular show can sell better than another. It’s a source of tension which in our opinion needs more shared work on a regular basis.

Take time to set up a consortium

Lastly, I think it’s important to emphasise the time needed to set up this kind of organisation and make internal changes. Discussions are essential for creating a tool like this and discussions take time. One of the issues around employers’ consortiums is the funding of this lengthy conception phase.”

**A fixed salary within
a company to offer
greater security**

Monika Klengel,
*Actress and
General Manager*

TIB, Theater Im Bahnhof,
Graz, Austria

Background to this initiative

*Permanent
company
of 'theatre
makers'*

"We are a theatre group in Graz, Austria, producing five to six productions a year with a fixed ensemble. We do not cast for every performance. We're a group of 15 to 20 people, a collective that has been working together for quite a long time, first as students and amateurs and then from 2000 as professionals. We have an Artistic Director and I am the General Manager looking at the development of our work, but there's not a huge differentiation in our roles (actor, author, director, stage designer...). We call ourselves 'theatre makers'. The core of our work has always consisted in exploring and working on everyday life and people. We've concentrated our work on political issues and the development of society, always trying to link a contemporary artistic approach with our desire to produce interesting work for everybody. We want to be very close to our audience.

*Tired of
having to do
another job
alongside
theatre*

Before 2000, we were working in theatre but had jobs on the side as well. We also had a small venue to work in. It came to a point where we said that something had to change, that taking the step towards professional theatre work was necessary.

*Development
of individual
ventures*

At that time, there were several changes to employment laws in Austria, concerning the status of freelancers and the development of self-employment for example. In this very neo-liberal shift in the law, we developed an awareness of what it means to be an artist in legal terms. Before that, we did it for fun, but we hadn't really given these aspects any thought. We consulted some specialists about our legal situation to give us a better idea of what we could do.

*Changes in
private lives*

It was also a period when our personal situations changed a lot and we were starting to have families. We felt we couldn't go on with earning a few thousand schillings one month and then nothing the next. One option was to become a taxi driver! We thought it was not healthy for our theatre if we were always occupied with these kinds of existential questions. It was also a period when we became quite well known in Austria, so our financial situation really improved.

*What if we
set a fixed
salary?*

Instead of investing in a bigger venue, we thought about paying everybody the same and instead of paying project-based fees, employing the whole ensemble all year round. This is how it all began."

Account of an innovative practice

Fixed wage every month

“Based on our system, everyone gets 14 monthly salary payments a year. The monthly amount is not that high, but the biggest burden is taken away. The system has improved over the years because to start with there wasn't much money to spread round. From 2006, it was about € 1000 per person per month after deductions.

Development of financial resources

This could happen because our general income increased, first through better public funding with support we received from the state and the city, but also because we tried to finance this large amount of money through other channels. We took initiatives to work with enterprises to produce theatre for companies. We also developed improvised theatre for which we're quite well-known in Austria. It turned out that this branch of our work could bring in additional funds. We also boosted our co-production work and touring in Europe.

There's a strong relationship between our organisational model and the development of our organisation's general income.

Everyone is involved and is responsible for development

Every artist in the ensemble is a member of the association, so everyone is responsible for it. We know we depend on each other to be able to live like this. We own our own company which reinforces the solidarity among us.”

Effects and transformations

We could give up taxi driving!

“It has changed our lives in many respects. We've developed improvisation theatre in a way that we probably wouldn't have done if we had chosen another system. We like improvisation theatre very much, but we sometimes do it for companies, situations and events which we might not have chosen ourselves. On the other hand we don't have to drive taxis anymore! Improvisation theatre is a necessity now, but we love it! The members still have other professional activities to earn their living, but they do it on a project basis and in fields related to their artistic work. Some work in education, others write scripts for films etc.

Valued security to concentrate on artistic work

What we get from Theater im Bahnhof is a basic income. It's like a safety net. Each person's link with the group and with the work is very strong. You could liken our group to a family in a way. For some of us, it might appear a burden sometimes. It's not a system that's easy to leave! On the other hand, I'm convinced that this payment model has had a very positive impact on our artistic work because our minds are freer. I see a number of actors and directors in Austria involved in so many projects at the same time, with huge uncertainty about their future. In contrast to that, we know that at least we can cover our fundamental needs every month, so that we can concentrate more on rehearsals and the artistic work itself. That's the biggest advantage of this system.

The evolution in arts funding in Austria and also the effects of legal changes with developments in self-employment often lead to a sense of isolation among artists. The number of people on stage in a production is reducing. Lots of actors and dancers have to work on solo programmes. This system of individuality through self-employment leads to loneliness. Everyone is fighting for his or her own universe – not always deliberately, but often because the political system demands it.

Possibility of defining production contexts to match artistic content

From a more organisational point of view, our system has strongly influenced the way in which we plan productions. For each project, we ask ourselves what's required. Maybe one project can be developed quickly and another needs a year of research. It's essential for the work to define appropriate conditions for it. Our way of working really gives us the possibility of rethinking and questioning modes of production, breaking with routine all the time, asking ourselves how to find the right circumstances to work freely. I think our organisational model is very helpful in this sense. And for me, questioning the production system is essential.

Development of a repertoire

This allows us to have more productions available for touring at the same time, developing a repertoire. It helps us develop the touring activity which we need to be able to afford our system.”

Advice to inspire you

Fully understand and accept the system

“I think it demands considerable interpersonal skills from members of the group. Even if every member is getting the same amount of money every month, it doesn't necessarily mean we have the same amount of work to do. People have developed various profiles of activities – more some years, less in others – but nevertheless we decided not to change the system of equal pay to keep our sense of solidarity. Staff costs represent 80% of our budget which is a lot. It's a deliberate decision! But it has consequences, such as our stage designs are usually very simple. We really invest our money in the artists. You have to be very clear about that.

Keep the same group

Another condition is we do not change our cast: continuity is really crucial for our work. I think we're the only group in Austria that works this way. It has to do with the friendship that exists between us. Our relationship is more than a work relationship.

Sign a contract on the level of involvement

Of course, we also have rules of engagement which are necessary. Every artist has to work on at least two or three projects a year, contribute to the development of new projects and do improvisation theatre. This is the contract we share.”

Conclusion

Finding your own way to take action

Issues around work organisation exist throughout the performing arts scene in Europe, regardless of the geographical context or type of organisation (company, venue, festival etc). Working together is the very essence of the performing arts.

Despite this, we knew it would be difficult to collect contributions highlighting innovative practices around work organisation. We followed up leads and conducted the survey through intermediaries, searching for clues to identify the initiatives that would be presented in this document. Why is that? Here are some hypotheses which are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

Innovators are not aware they are innovating

In many cases, the people who agreed to talk to us wondered whether what they were doing really was “innovative”. Acknowledging that something is innovative comes much more easily from peers and counterparts than from the people behind these approaches. In a way, innovation is relative. What seems innovative in one place is not necessarily innovative somewhere else. It can only be said to be innovative and inspiring when another person looks at an organisation. These accounts revealed that several ideas initially came from observing colleagues within the sector (Judith Knight) or outside it (Luc Dewaele).

That is why it is hard to identify innovative practices which could be useful to many more people. Beyond the accounts presented here or the contributions we received, there are certainly many more initiatives that would merit being highlighted so that others can adopt them or be inspired by them. Just as the

IETM has opened a window by publishing this document it now seems particularly relevant to encourage spaces for exchange, training and sharing, as some of the interviewees suggest we do (Lise Sogaard Sorensen, Luis Miguel Prada, Ulla Mäkinen).

It is hard to share practices

Work organisation practices depend on a whole range of elements, as these accounts have shown us: the country's social and political context, its cultural policy, the history of the organisation itself, its territory, its missions and its leaders' choices. To share experience, you have to be able to put these different influences into words and articulate how the choices were made. This demands a sustained and reflective approach and an appropriate framework, as shown in the establishment of a learning network (Maarten Bresseleers). The accounts in this document also prove how much these questions go right to the heart of the organisations in which these projects are found. In a way we are delving into the heart of the experiences, endeavours and attempts to respond to the complexity of work situations encountered on a daily basis. It is always hard to expose your weaknesses in a professional domain where issues around representation and recognition can be key.

Artistic projects occasionally mask issues concerning how work in the sector is organised

Professionals in the sector often demonstrate high levels of motivation and commitment. Occasionally, thanks to these powerful driving forces, they are able to make up for work organisation issues by working much harder, being more flexible in their working patterns and accepting tougher working conditions.

The cultural sector is still very attractive for employees and young workers, either because of the projects being run or the values being championed. People consider it lucky to be able to work in this sector.

Under such circumstances, it is sometimes hard in organisations to identify work organisation issues, work out together what to do about them and look for solutions. It is often extreme situations – such as illness, crisis or even burnout – that reveal just how tough the day-to-day work can be.

Generally speaking, teams put a great deal into their artistic project – the “why” they are working – often relegating the question of project implementation - the “how” - into the shade. The issues around the organisation of the work lie in this shady area.

By examining these different constraints, we get a better handle on the difficulty of collecting accounts of these issues within the large professional network that is IETM. This publication is a contribution to professionals in the network who are considering issues around the organisation of work in an isolated way, by allowing them to recognise and find others interested in this movement towards innovation and transformation in the service of artistic projects.

Innovation is possible in difficult times

In the current context of the economic and financial crisis across Europe, we believe the existence of spaces of reflection on work organisation to be particularly important. Yet it is not always an easy idea to defend. In such an environment, with artistic projects under severe threat, there can be a strong temptation to consider ‘internal’ questions such as the organisation of work as secondary and that it would be better to focus on the artistic projects themselves. Another proposition has emerged during the interviews to counter this vision opposing the artistic project and work organisation (Isabelle Mérand, Yvona Kreuzmannová, Monika Klengel, Alain Garlan and Sarah de Heusch). It is precisely in periods of crisis that notions of sharing, inventiveness and experimentation are most vital. They help us uphold the idea that organising work and sharing it within teams leads to permanent and adapted solutions being implemented in an environment in crisis.

Supporting experimental approaches

This is why what an innovator does is so crucial. He or she is able to analyse the prevailing work context and conclude the reasons and objectives for what is happening. Today there is a movement involving committed people who are interested in work organisation issues, who want to disclose what they do and share their questions. What are their motivations? On what is their activity based?

to find out more

about the experiences of the people interviewed

Lise Sogaard Sorensen, *Danish Agency for Culture*,
www.kulturstyrelsen.dk/english

Luis Miguel Prada, *ENCC*, www.encc.eu

Ulla Mäkinen, *BIDE*, www.bide.be

Maarten Bresseleers, *Sociaal Fonds voor de Podiumkunsten*,
www.podiumkunsten.be

Judith Knight, *Arstadmin*, www.artsadmin.co.uk

Yvona Kreuzmannová, *Tanec Praha*, www.tanecpraha.cz

Sibylle Arlet, *Culture O Centre*, www.cultureocentre.fr

Luc Dewaele, *Vooruit*, www.vooruit.be

Devinda De Silva, *National Theatre Wales*, www.nationaltheatrewales.org

Grzegorz Reske, *Cultural Centre Lublin*, www.ck.lublin.pl

Sarah de Heusch and Alain Garlan, *SMart*, www.smartbe.be

Isabelle Mérand, *Les Gesticulateurs*, www.gesticulateurs.org

Monika Klengel, *Theater Im Bahnhof*, www.theater-im-bahnhof.com

quotations in the publication

Norbert Alter, *L'innovation ordinaire*, PUF, Paris, 2000

Florence Giust-Desprairies, *Les racines subjectives de l'innovation*, article in
the Education Permanente journal on innovation, February 1998

As noted by the French psycho-sociologist, Florence Giust-Desprairies, in her work on innovation, "*Dissatisfaction and malaise are not enough to explain the commitment found in innovative practices. On the contrary, plenty of examples show social actors adopting fallback positions and finding refuge in complaining or making external claims. This brings forward the question of conditions that are triggers and that lead the innovator to want to do things differently [...].*"

She champions the idea that alongside motivations rooted in the social actors' immediate environment, innovation allows its initiator to rediscover "*his or her own way of taking action*". In each of the accounts presented here, we see analyses of the environment, but also the desires, aspirations and convictions of the people who initiated the practices described. The approach taken by innovators is one of giving meaning back to their work, for themselves and for the teams for which they are responsible.

This work on meaning can take very different forms, but is always positioned as an experience: in methods of everyday collaboration (Sibylle Arlet), in the implementation of artistic projects that include work organisation as an essential given (Grzegorz Reske) or in how the artistic project relates to the outside world (Devinda De Silva).

With this publication, we aim to support experimental approaches in how work is organised to allow inventiveness in everyday life and with teams, as well as in how artistic projects are supported, experienced and implemented.

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IETM international network for contemporary performing arts



Un espace pour penser sa relation au travail,
analyser, questionner, perfectionner, transmettre

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