

Report on International Conference Network of Residencies in South-East Europe #NORSE

Organized by: Nomad Dance Academy Slovenia and Centre for Urban Culture Kino Šiška
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by Ana Letunić

During 7th - 10th April 2019, Nomad Dance Academy Slovenia and Centre for Urban Culture Kino Šiška with the support of the City of Ljubljana and numerous local and international partners hosted a gathering of decision makers, cultural workers and dance professionals from fourteen cities in South-East Europe, who addressed creation of a network of residencies as a model of institutionalized and decentralized centre for contemporary dance.

In the space of Kino Šiška as an example of a very good cooperation between public and civil sectors, the participants were firstly warmly welcomed by Mateja Demšič (Municipality of Ljubljana), Simon Kardum (Kino Šiška) and Dragana Alfirević (Nomad Dance Academy) with the clear intent to “improve the network of residencies in the region” and wishes for a “fierce debate with strong outcomes”.

After Skopje in 2012, Sofia in 2015 and Belgrade in 2017, this has been the fourth gathering within the Nomad Dance Advocates initiative that has been established as “a permanent program for advocating a more stable position of contemporary dance field in the region”.

Getting inspired

During the session on examples of good practices of art residencies, moderated by Stephan A Shtereff (Sofia), we heard about the different types of residences currently active in the local and the European context.

Miha Colnar (Ljubljana) presented the Švicarija Creative Centre, which operates as a part of the International Centre of Graphic Arts (MGLC). The currently biggest artist-in-residence centre in Ljubljana has been opened in 2017 on the initiative by the City. It hosts different models of residencies such as ones based on invitation (related to the programme of the institution), exchange programmes, open calls for artists and critics that give international visibility to art scene in Ljubljana, collaboration with other NGOs or institutions in Ljubljana, as well as self-funded residencies.

Jasmina Rihar (Ljubljana) presented the International Cities of Refuge Network (ICORN), that “offers shelter to writers and artists at risk, advancing the freedom of expression”. Ljubljana joined

the network in 2011 and hosted six authors from Morocco, Ethiopia, Iraq and Iran since then. During the residency, each author is provided with social and health security, apartment, small grant and a city coordinator. Eighteen countries and two hundred artists are members of this network to which other cities from the region (such as Zagreb and Rijeka) are considered as candidates for joining, as well.

Clymene Christoforou (Newcastle upon Tyne) spoke on behalf of organizations D6: Culture in Transit and Res Artis, the largest network that promotes the role of residential art programmes. When conceptualizing residential programmes for D6, she places a great value on “connecting the artist-in-residence to the place and to the local community” due to the belief in the social value of the arts. Primarily, D6 organizes research residencies that then grow into production residencies if there are the right conditions. While talking about Res Artis, a global network with over 650 organizations and over 70 countries, she reflected on the meaning of the residency as “giving sufficient time, space and resources” in the process of mutual responsibility, experimentation, exchange and dialogue while also “being a catalysts for global mobility”.

From Pia Krämer (Montemor-o-Novo) we learned about the Espaço do Tempo, a residency centre in an old convent that “hosts up to 70 residencies a year and where 11,000 meals a year are served”. The invitation-based residencies are intended for artists working in the performing arts (“new theatre”, dance and sound design) and usually last two to six weeks. In her reflection on the meaning of the residency, she emphasized the importance of the work with the local community, “giving freedom to artists” and creating the best environment “not only for working but living as well”.

Mapping the Coordinates

In order to better understand the resources that already exist in the field, the following session, moderated by Dragana Alfirević (Ljubljana), was structured as a presentation of invited cities and the state of their art residential programs, needs and visions of regional cooperation.

Steriani Tsintziloni (Athens), dance curator representing Duncan Centre and Athens Festival, reflected on the problem of centralization by stating “Athens hosts 90% of the whole Greek activity in contemporary dance” while the smaller regional centers are mainly private. The Duncan Dance Research Center opened in early 2009 (built by Isadora Duncan in 1903) with two studios that host artists for an average of a week or two, which then leads to the overall of about eighty artists-in-residency per year. As a research center, it provides the “space and time to experiment and communicate” and functions as a link to the final production but “does not aim towards a production itself”. The centre operates by funding of the Municipality (one third of the funds) while the rest is provided from educational activities and “a lot of community work”.

Marijana Cvetković (Belgrade) presented the Station Service for Contemporary Dance that exists as a “strong community” for almost fifteen years despite a significant lack of dialogue support from the Belgrade cultural administration. Stanica is therefore “small and unstable as a structure”,

sometimes closing the office while waiting for the grants but permanently developing programs. Concerning the residential programmes, Stanica supports artists through exchange and collaborative agreements with the partners abroad. The residency program StationOne started in 2015 (with an European project as a background) was shortly followed by an exchange programme with Akademie Schloss Solitude from Stuttgart. Cvetković suggests residency program in Belgrade has several functions such as being a host to different international artists to produce and research, “giving an opportunity to the local community to be an audience for a different art” and having a sort of “an external eye” to the developments on the Belgrade scene. All of this and more makes a residency programme “a tool to revive certain spaces and communities”.

Petya Stoykova (Burgas) represented the Youth Cultural Centre in Burgas that operates in the conditions where “90% of contemporary art in Bulgaria happens in the capital”. In the Youth Cultural Centre, the residency system is connected to the two festivals the centre hosts (Age of Aquarius and the Water festival) since “the residency is a opportunity to present something at the festival”. The audiences in Burgas still need to be sensitized for the field of contemporary dance but, since Burgas has ten schools for dance, it is a perfect place to work with young people.

Cosmin Manolescu (Bucharest), representative of the Gabriela Tudor Foundation, firstly reflected on the conflicting situation with the National Centre for Dance in Romania (CNDB), since there are great challenges in maintaining the continuity of the centres’ activities due to the lack of proper spatial resources. Concerning the residential programmes, “ArtistNe(s)t” was a residence program initiated by Gabriela Tudor in 2005 with four public cultural institutions that hosted over sixty artists in the period of ten years. Also, residential programme was developed within the European mobility, artistic research and co-productions project E-Motional (2011-2015). Recently, the Foundation developed a new three weeks residency programme in Lisbon (Portugal) that is co-funded by the Administration of the National Cultural Fund. When reflecting on meaning of residences, Manolescu concluded that the “element of mobility can work for the element of stability”.

Brigitta Kovács (Budapest) presented the Workshop Foundation and the context within which it operates. In Budapest, 80-85% of dance collectives are independent, without a permanent venue and with the lack of operational funding. Since the contemporary dance scene is becoming more and more project based, “residencies gain even more importance than before”. The Workshop Foundation also programmes 10 days to 8-week long residencies that host international artists coming from international networks such as Life Long Burning, Global Practice Sharing and Movement Research (NY). Since Workshop Foundation operates four studios (one in Trafo, three in Jurányi House), the goal for the future is to dedicate one studio only for hosting residencies.

Mateja Demšič (Ljubljana), Head of Department of Culture of Ljubljana, was the first representative of a city cultural administration to speak at the conference. After a short overview about the state of culture in the city of Ljubljana (with 280,000 inhabitants and eleven cultural institutions founded by the City), Demšič discussed the situation in the performing arts in the context of the topic of residences. As the city founded three theatres but the institution for contemporary dance only existed for a few months in 2011, the residential programmes are mostly attached to the theatre programmes. Other than that, the public residency programmes are the ones within the Švicarija Creative Centre/International Centre of Graphic Arts (MGLC) and the ICORN network, both already discussed within the first session. Concerning the future, currently there are four heritage buildings to be renovated by the City and the plan is to include at least one or two residencies in its facilities.

Since contemporary dance is poorly represented in the residency system as well as the national policy, this would be one of the solutions for the problem. Also, on a broader level, since Europe is turning right also by supporting mostly traditional art forms, Demšič concludes that it is relevant to support contemporary art since it “leads the way”.

Pia Brezavšček (Ljubljana), the President of Contemporary Dance Association Slovenia (CDAS), warned about the lack of analysis on the needs of the scene and the fact the residences need to be redefined as models of “different temporalities”. While reflecting on the case of the centre for contemporary dance, which was shut down in 2012 due to austerity measures, she highlighted the importance of having a public institution for dance since it is “the only way the field can get certain stability”. In proposing the model of a such centre, Brezavšček suggests it could be a network institution with having only offices as a base through which it would be possible to coordinate other spaces in the country intended for contemporary dance.

Mojca Kasjak (Maribor) represented Plesna izba Maribor that has a residential programme as a part of their festival Platforma. Although more oriented towards visual arts, another residential programme in Maribor is Guestroom Maribor, which is an international artist-residency programme established in 2011 by Pekarna Magdalenske mreže (PMM)- central organization for non-institutional cultural production in Maribor. Kasjak hopes to develop a system of residences in the near future but infrastructure is a challenge.

Nikola Stojadinović (Zagreb) represented the City office for Culture of Zagreb and gave a short overview of the case of Zagreb Dance Centre. The Centre became a part of Zagreb Youth Theatre in 2016 after being governed by an NGO Croatian Institute for Movement and Dance, since the cultural administrators “weren’t satisfied with how the space was managed”. Concerning residencies in Zagreb, Stojadinović encouraged the cultural workers to “pitch” the residencies to the cultural administrators since “there is space for residencies in the city”, especially those with “some social benefits for the community”.

Iva Nerina Sibila (Zagreb) presented the Zagreb dance scene “as very strong and diverse”, from her point of view as a dance artist and writer. Since the scene consists of many small collectives and NGOs that produce work in precarious conditions, there is “a lot of work in different models of communality and collectivity”. In her opinion, Zagreb Dance Centre could be a potential residency space but there is “no real dialogue” with them. Pogon Zagreb Centre for Independent Culture hosts different residencies but “it is problematic to work there now because the conditions are terrible”, but its old industrial space should go under reconstruction soon. In term of potential residency programmes, it is also valuable to consider self-organized contemporary dance festivals such as Platforma and Improspekcije.

Ivan Šarar (Rijeka), Head of Department for Culture in City of Rijeka, discussed the influence of the European Capital of Culture Rijeka2020 project on the city residency programme established by the City of Rijeka in 2012 since, in the current preparation of the title year, there are “too many people coming and going so everybody wants this residency”. In order to empower the independent and the contemporary dance scene, the City pays all running costs for the space of Filodrammatica that is now used by the independent scene. He also mentioned the matter of scale of the scene since it is “quite small but very atomised” so the City is “trying to empower it through infrastructure”.

Željka Jakovljević (Novi Sad) presented a contemporary performance and dance platform and festival Pokretnica that was initiated in 2013 as a dance educational research project. Pokretnica hosted artists-in-residence in 2017 and 2018 and recently started to collaborate with Svilara cultural station that was opened within the program Novi Sad 2021 – European capital of culture.

Violeta Djerković (Novi Sad) spoke on behalf of Svilara cultural station that, as a result of a “ten years long grassroots longterm process”, started operating last October with the mission of “reinterpretation of cultural heritage and increasing participation of citizens”. As other cultural stations within Novi Sad 2021, Svilara will also have residency programmes and community programmes.

Ana Medigović (Podgorica), Head of Department for Culture in City of Podgorica, informed us that the city runs six cultural institutions with the budget of one million euros (with the total city budget of 65 million euros) while the contemporary arts scene is almost non-existing. The most urgent matter is the development of a cultural development strategy that will address this issue, as well. However, Podgorica hosts several festivals that promote cultural exchange and mobility, and one of them is recognized as a generator of the independent scene. Therefore, there is a plan to sign a three-parties contract between the Ministry of Culture, the City administration and FIAT festival in order to empower the contemporary performing arts.

From Skopje we heard Antonio Pavlovski, representative from the Department for Culture, Violeta Kachakova from Lokomotiva- Centre for New Initiatives in Arts and Culture and Iskra Shukarova from Jadro – Association of the independent art and culture scene in Macedonia.

Pavlovski informed us that next year there will be new public calls for projects by the City, adding to the current one that supports more than 200 projects every year. Also, a bilateral agreement Skopje- Ljubljana is being prepared as a potential base for some collaborations like the current one between Kino Šiška and Kino Kultura.

Kachakova discussed how Lokomotiva, now working in the central venue of Kino Kultura, is trying to conceptualize residencies as development of new productions and projects since Lokomotiva’s projects are most often developed within regional collaboration. Kino Kultura is currently working on development of new models leading towards co-governing and co-programming cultural space.

Shukarova shortly presented Jadro, a national platform that brings together organizations, as well as individuals active in the independent cultural sector. Its space functions as an open platform and there is a consideration to develop artist-in-residence programmes.

From Stephan A Shtereff and the cultural administrator Doncho Hristev we learned about the current situation in Sofia. The Department of Culture is planning the infrastructural project Toplocentrala that is to transform an old heating plant into a space for contemporary arts. The current dilemma among the cultural administrators is on whether it will function as a public institution or a public-private partnership. Since there is a lack of public residency programmes in Sofia, Toplocentrala would ideally host it.

Abigail Gibson (Timisoara) presented Unfold Motion, the only contemporary dance company in Timisoara. The company is involved in a lot of cross-cultural exchange, one them being artistic residencies. Due to the mission of the company to participate in the cultural-artistic development of the community and Timisoara being chosen as a European Capital of Culture in 2021, there is a lot

of potential in relation to “the projects developing the field of contemporary dance” in the coming years.

Shaping the Narrative

During the workshop Shape the Narrative, moderated by Marijana Cvetković (Belgrade), the participants tried to imagine optimal residency programmes, as a starting point for concrete proposals to be presented to different city administrations. The five groups, divided by three or two cities, were firstly mapping the existing resources in the cities, then the current policy frames, upcoming investment projects and potential alliances as a support in the creation of residency programmes.

From the Bucharest- Athens- Timisoara group, we heard about the concept of a town as a residency, i.e. the residency programme reaching far beyond a studio. The group also imagined the ideal residency as an institution separated from the city because that way “it would be more agile”. The residency centre could be placed in new venues such as the regenerated industrial heritage and, for a start, require only “an office with a few employees”.

Rijeka- Ljubljana- Burgas group started by mapping the resources that are already there but are not really well used, as well as the existing financial means “that are not well distributed”. Using CCN Montpellier and Bora Bora residency programmes as examples of good practices, they proposed a creation of a regional platform where “everybody would contribute to the resources of the overall project”.

Sofia- Budapest- Maribor- Skopje group suggested that “artists should decide about the goal of the residency” but from the point of view of city administration, it is important to have the structure that would mediate between the needs of the artists and funding, “articulate the project and defend it in front of a City council”. They also reflected on the potentialities of festivals turning into residency programmes.

Skopje- Novi Sad group discussed infrastructure that could be involved in developing residency programmes. In Novi Sad, ECoC 2021 supports such infrastructure while Skopje has houses of culture that could be used for the programmes. Concerning the policy frames, it is noted the strategy for culture developed in Novi Sad “opens space for international artists to come but not so much for local artists to go elsewhere”, while in Skopje, the municipality is developing “new institutions that could be used for a residency program”. What was also stressed as important is to “develop sustainable conditions for residencies and then discuss the programme level”.

Zagreb- Belgrade- Podgorica group concluded that in all three cities, there is a lot of potential for creation of residency spaces, but the challenge is the constantly changing political structures. On the other hand, from a wider focus there already exists a lot of resources such as “the know-how, alliances between each other and other cities, access to

EU funds or other funding schemes, cultural exchanges as well as the socialist heritage that could change purpose". Finally, the goal is to "act together in each local scene", being sensitive to different contexts, and start with bilateral or smaller scale collaboration in order to have a bigger influence from other cities.

In conclusion, the moderator summarized that the "residency programmes are actually instruments to support development of local dance communities and should be presented as such to the city administrations". Of course, the political conditions are unstable but we learned from this session that "there is a lot of resources, mostly in people", so it is important to do something concrete in the coming months.

Creating the Network

During the workshop Create the Network, moderated by Tjaša Pureber (Ljubljana) we dealt with the relationship between cities, residencies and NGO's, as well as the support (other than just financial) the cities can give to residency programs. The possibilities of doing collective programming and exchange of artists were discussed, as well.

The first group discussed on how can the civil sector do the programming when the public sector provides the spatial resource and how can the NDA network "be a backbone to such projects". The other concern was how to secure transparency, i.e. a real dialogue between the needs of the city and the artists.

The second group stressed that the changing of the perception of the city administration to the usage of public space is important, whether the initiative comes from the city administration mapping the spaces or artists mapping them first in order to propose a different usage to the city. Another way the artists could be supported by the city are long-term open calls or other support mechanism such as redistributing funds from e.g. one day of parking space and directing them towards the arts.

The third group stressed the need of creating a responsible dialogue between cities and the NGO sector on the use of public spaces. For example, before proposals of building a new residence space, it would be more reasonable to map spaces that are closed for public holidays or are empty in long periods of time, which could then be allocated to residencies.

The fourth group proposed having a pilot residency programme for city officials where they could meet with artists who present the possible results for the city in terms of economic and symbolic capital, as well as advocate to create a special funding lines for residencies on the local level.

During the collective discussion, we heard a proposition on the instrument called city tax (existing in e.g. Berlin), paid by services like tourism and directed towards the cultural fund that could be implemented during the current development of tourism strategies in the cities. Another idea concerning the advocacy processes with the cities was to create alliances with the "middle positions in certain administrations since they are not changing".

In thinking about the network as a framework for realization of the residencies, we realized that the artists are also bringing back knowledge to their environment so this “international flow of ideas” is a crucial advocacy argument

Inspirational talks

During the first inspirational talk, Rok Vevar (Ljubljana) told us about the historical examples of residences since the “20th century of history of dance is connected to mobility”, due to a high number of dissidents migrating to other cultural contexts as a consequence of social, political and economic crises. Some of the examples are Monte Verita during WWI (with e.g. Isadora Duncan, dadaists, Max Weber, Mary Wigman, Rudolf Laban...), Ted Shawn’s farmhouse Jacob's Pillow and the prominent Black Mountain College in the US, artists-in-residences at university campuses such as the Dartington College in the UK etc. Finally, Vevar suggested that the development of contemporary dance is connected with the crashes of real-estate markets, i.e. “periods of transitions when city opens up with new spaces” (e.g., the fall of the Berlin wall).

In the second inspirational talk Dejan Srhoj (Ljubljana) discussed the Nomad Dance Academy as an example of good practice. The network works on professionalization of contemporary dance in the Balkans for already fourteen years during which it initiated a few festivals in the region that are now running independently. The three principles by which the network operates by are the principle of invitation, principle of balance (between countries, genders etc) and the principle of open space. Finally, the network is defying the logic of exclusion that is currently strengthening in European countries by making alliances with the cities instead, so the making a network of residencies in the region is the next logical step.

Looking ahead

In the last session, we talked about some very concrete plans since it became clear there is a political will by the city administrations and a sense of ownership in the network. Seven working groups were formed about these propositions: Ljubljana (Kino Šiška), Sofia (Toplocentrala), Skopje (Kino Kultura), Novi Sad (Svilara), Podgorica, Rijeka and a group that would work on the proposal for the functioning on the network (in the periods of one and three years).

The Sofia group was represented by an artist and curator Stephan A Shtereff and the cultural administrator Doncho Hristev. Since the project of Toplocentrala centre is not yet a fact, they focused on “the intermediate step of creating a residency through an existing festival”. The residency should last at least for a week and the artist should share its results with the local scene, the citizens and the cultural administration. It would also be modelled on three principles of the NDA network (of invitation, of balance and of open space).

Podgorica group, represented by Rok Vevar (Ljubljana), discussed concrete plans ready to be implemented in the near future. The infrastructure for a residency programme secured by the City is a one or two apartments house, funds for its renovation and a large space now run by Association of Architects that could be equipped as a studio. The residency programme would be intended for the Montenegrin artistic diaspora, international performing artists (in a group no more than three) and the local community of artists which would in total make around six residencies per year. The main players for realization of this residency programme will be the FIAT festival and Association of Architects Podgorica.

Rijeka group (Kora Girin, Ivana Kalc and Edvin Liverić) proposed combining the already existing resources in the Croatian cultural centre Sušak (HKD), Kamov residency programme run by Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Rijeka and an NGO Prostor Plus. Kamov residency programme, existing since 2011 when run first by cultural department of Rijeka and then the museum, will provide a resource of two spacious apartments and a smaller studio (more suitable for a discursive program). Prostor Plus will provide a studio that can be used for rehearsals/presentation as well as a presentation frame for the artists at the NGO's festival. Croatian cultural centre Sušak (HKD) can provide four studios for the duration of three weeks and a stage for the presentation of the work. Since it is a public institution, HKD will be the key partner to enter the negotiations with the City about this residency programme. Concerning the current budget, it would be realistic to have one residency per year in duration of two to three weeks, for maximum six people at the time. In the long-term, the representatives of Rijeka would like to "convince the deciding bodies to create a residence centre opened for the whole year, in order to have something that is generating the scene".

Representatives from Novi Sad, Violeta Djerković and Željka Jakovljević, presented a proposal to make a yearly residency programme for local, national and regional performing artists, which would make three residences per year. Concerning the resources, there are spaces for rehearsal and presentations in Svilara cultural station but there is a lack of technical equipment. There is also a space for accommodation, but it is rented by Novi Sad 2021 for all the residences in the ECoC project. Therefore, this residency programme would need to "count on support of the new network in terms of 10 or 20% of the residencies budget" so there is a clear need for a common fund on the level of budgeting. Based on "detailed and precise criteria including work with the community", the artists would be selected by one invitation and two open calls where the jury would consist of the network members who "would have to track the mobility of artists from the network". In 2021, the year of the title, all the artists would present their work in the frame of a festival or a conference of the network. Another important topic concerning this residency programme is the collaboration between Novi Sad and Belgrade through different possible models such as an open call for artists from Belgrade or artistic collaboration with a Belgrade artist. Ideally, the duration of the residency would be three months or any other longer period of time possible in the current conditions.

Skopje group, represented by Violeta Kachakova (Skopje) worked on the development of a residency programme that should start after 2021 and "support the local context while advancing the regional collaboration". Kino Kultura will stop functioning as a project space in 2021 and "an institution in which a real residential programme can happen" will be developed until then. This model of a "mixed institution" is currently developed in a dialogue of the NGOs with the local

authorities and will, hopefully, be supported by structural grants. In this new institution, there would be three types of residencies: production-based, research-based and residency with a working space other than rehearsal space (e.g., an office). Also, the proposal is to have a co-curated programme on the level of the region, based on the needs of the artists.

Ljubljana group, represented by Tjaša Pureber (Ljubljana), reflected on a former municipality building in front of Kino Šiška that will most likely be renovated into a residency space (among other functions) by 2024/25. The regional network would at the earlier stage serve at an advocacy level to provide the resources and become a programmer in the later stage. That way, this regional community of residences would become an “international hub for many different practices that exist in the global dancing community”. This would be made possible by three-way programming, meaning one-third of the residency programme will be local and curated by the dancing community in Slovenia, one-third would be a part of the regional programming that would be co-curated in the network and the other artists would be selected through an open call for international artists. The building would not be just a residential space but a horizontally run space for many different NGOs with Kino Šiška as a possible administrator. Currently, there is a good will in the local cultural administration but “nevertheless a strong advocacy process is needed in order for this to come true”.

The group that worked on the aims of the whole network proposed a few stages of structuring the network of residences, presented by Iskra Shukarova (Skopje) and Cosmin Manolescu (Bucharest). Starting the process with a “collective rethinking and reimagining the term residency and how it can be implemented”, a “body of experts” would be formed to “offer knowledge to the developing bodies”. In the next stage, network would need to be represented on European level discussion, especially since “residency and Southeast Europe is a current priority for EU”. That way, the overall budget of the network could be combined of the individual cities budgets and the EU funds, which would enable to employ a team to work just on the residency system.

Making a new beginning

After an overview of the discussed topics by Ana Letunić (Zagreb), we closed the conference with final thoughts on how to proceed further. Proposals by the cities of Ljubljana, Novi Sad, Sofia, Skopje, Podgorica and Rijeka are ready to be implemented starting from now while proposals from Belgrade, Budapest, Timisoara, Zagreb and other presented cities need a further advocacy process to develop.

As a backbone to this network of residencies, Nomad Dance Academy offers its 14-years experience, methods, know-hows, contacts and commitment. Further dialogue of participating organizations with the individual city administrations is crucial, especially in this political moment when the countries in Europe are becoming more nationally oriented making it logical to create alliances through the cities instead.

With all this in mind, the participants of the conference are encouraged to propose and work on new models of collaboration and forms of organization in the coming months.

Figure 1. Cities joining the network of residencies at different stages.