

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

Kick-off in keõjaTallinn (Tallinn, EE)  
19-20 September 2012

### **SUMMARY REPORT 19-20/09/2012**

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## **1. Introduction**

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

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

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

These keõja Think Tanks work towards finding concrete action plans in order to develop the infrastructure of the dance field in the Nordic and Baltic countries.

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

### **1.1. Think Tank kick-off in keõjaTallinn**

The kick-off meeting for the keõja Think Tank was organised September 19-20, 2012 in Tallinn, Estonia, and was partially included in the programme of the keõjaTallinn Encounter (the first of three Encounters organized within the keõja 2012-2015 project).

#### **Participants:**

**Marie-Christine Duréault**, France

Independent governance facilitator in sustainability, co-construction and collective intelligence

**Riitta Heinämaa**, Estonia/Finland

Director of the Finnish Institute in Estonia

**Sari Palmgren**, Finland  
Freelance choreographer and dancer

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

**Ragnar Siil**, Estonia  
Undersecretary of Fine Arts, Estonian Ministry of Culture

**Julie Teyssou**, France  
Tour manager, David Rolland Chorégraphies

Additionally, **Andrew Jones**, Drama and Dance Adviser for the British Council in UK, was due to participate, but was unfortunately forced to cancel his trip last minute due to illness.

The kick-off meeting was organised and hosted by **Katarina Lindholm** and **Pirjetta Mulari** from Dance Info Finland.

## 2. Outline and agenda

The purpose of the kick-off meeting was to form the group as well as to build a basis for the Think Tank and its working process for the following years. The aim was to discuss and define the overall theme and pose the key questions.

The schedule was the following:

### Wednesday 19/09

- Working session, 10:00-17:00

### Thursday 20/09

- Public session, 12:00-13:30
- Wrap-up, 15:00-16:00

The agenda and work process was loosely planned in beforehand by Marie-Christine Duréault with the help of Julie Teyssou and Katarina Lindholm via Skype meetings.

## 3. Working session

The working session was held at the office of the Estonian Union of Dance Artists at 10–17 on Wednesday 19th.

The work process and discussion method was organised as a round-table, which meant that the participants addressed each topic or question in turns. The turn to speak went around in a circle.

The topics addressed during the day were the following:

- Individual motives and intentions behind participating in the Think Tank as well as individual perspectives and viewpoints to the theme of sustainability and dance
- Defining sustainability in the context of dance: what it is and what it isn't
- Different visions of sustainability in dance – what could it be?
- Extracting five key issues or themes that are most central for a vision of sustainability for the dance field
- Planning the public session with the audience on the following day

The different backgrounds and areas of expertise of the Think Tank participants covered dance art and cultural policy as well as governmental environments on both a local, a national and an EU level. Hence, their individual perspectives and viewpoints on sustainability and dance varied from calling for long-term thinking in funding strategies and longer lives for dance productions to larger reflections on quality, intrinsic values and the need of perseverance.

During the first part of the day, the group aimed at both defining sustainability in the context of dance as well as envisioning different sustainable strategies, practices or improvements to current conditions or phenomena.

Thoughts about the relationship between dance and the community or society as a whole as well as between dance and its different stakeholders – especially funding bodies – spurred a lot of discussion. The field should be seen as an "ecosystem" with different surrounding structures and conditions and this should be acknowledged also by the field itself. The need for increased awareness and self-awareness was discussed, as well as the need for transparency and honesty, yet avoiding institutionalisation and structural inflexibility.

The relationship or balance between tradition and change in the context of dance was another topical question. The nature of dance as an art form was seen as strongly associated with change, innovation and a continuous search for the new. Tradition was perceived as both possibly oppressive and restrictive as well as a source for innovation and creativity. Thus, it was concluded that long-term planning, that might otherwise create rigid and restrictive structures, should incorporate flexibility and encourage innovation.

Another central issue discussed was the strong self-governance and, consequently, the lack of joint governance within the dance field. This was seen as a risk of staying as a too closed and self-preserving system, which easily means staying "off the table" in a broader context, e.g. in funding decisions. Opening up the field was in many ways felt to be necessary, also in order to create higher awareness and more profound understanding of the whole "ecosystem". For this, it was concluded that a plan or strategy is needed.

Finally, a fundamental issue that spanned over the whole discussion was the need of better and more strategic communication both inside and outside the dance field. It was seen as crucial when it comes to communicating results, the spillover effects and intrinsic values of dance as an art form. More importance should be put on the artistic processes as well as how the society overall is taken into account. Who should the dance field communicate to and how? It was concluded that the dance field should find a joint communication strategy.

In the afternoon, the aim was to draw conclusions from the discussions by formulating five principal themes for a vision of a sustainable future of the dance field. As key issues or themes, the following (among others) were mentioned: the need of communicating and having a communication plan, opening up the dance field and inviting people from outside in, getting out of self-governance, the need of long-term planning, increasing understanding and awareness of the whole (eco)system with its rules and consequences, the need of constructive discussion and also disagreement in order to develop and increase self-understanding.

Drawing from this, the five principal themes were articulated as:

- Describing, understanding and managing the ecosystem
- Long-term planning with the readiness for change
- Out of self-governance and invite more people in
- Communication and plan
- Value, process and work-in-progress

Finally, the public session of the following day was shortly outlined.

## 4. Public session and wrap-up

### 4.1. Public session

The public session was held on Thursday 20th at 12–13.30 in Telliskivi Creative District, the main venue of keõjaTallinn. The audience consisted of approximately 50 registered keõjaTallinn participants, i.e. dance artists and professionals.

Of the participants, **Riitta Heinämaa**, **Sari Palmgren**, **Julie Teyssou** and **Marie-Christine Duréault** were present, as well as **Pirjetta Mulari** and **Katarina Lindholm** from Dance Info Finland.

The public session consisted of two parts. The first half an hour was used for introducing the topic and presenting the work done on the previous day. The rest of the session, approximately 1 ½ hours, was then used for group discussions.

The public session started with a few welcoming words and a brief introduction of the Think Tank and its participants. The work of the previous day was then presented by introducing the five principal themes for a vision of a sustainable future for the dance field, followed by some questions and answers. These were the following:

- Describing, understanding, managing the ecosystem (presented by RH)
- Long-term planning with the readiness for change (presented by SP)
- Out of self-governance and invite more people in (presented by PM)
- Communication and plan (presented by JT)
- Value, process and work-in-progress (presented by MD)

After the short presentations the audience was asked to write down one of the five themes that they found the most interesting or important or personally relevant. Then, five groups were formed around each theme. The audience members were asked to join the theme group that they had written down earlier. The group discussions were facilitated by the Think Tank participants, each facilitating the theme they had presented earlier.

The content and working method of each group varied slightly. Despite the different themes, many interrelated issues were raised in all groups; the relationship with and attitude towards the audience, community and society; issues concerning identity and how to communicate it; artistic independence as opposed to structural support/restrictions; the need for different kinds of communication.

At the end of the group discussions, the audience members in each group were asked to write down on a post-it one or several of the following things (depending on the group):

- A problem, issue or challenge they personally, their organisation or their field faces
- A solution to or suggestion of improvement for that issue
- Some personal act towards solving an issue or working for improvement that they are going to do (until the next keõja Encounter)

They were also encouraged to leave their email address on the same post-it, should they wish to be contacted in the future in matters regarding the keõja Think Tank on sustainability. A majority of 36 audience members wished to be contacted in the future.

#### 4.2. Wrap-up

A brief wrap-up session was held on Thursday 20th at 15-16 in Telliskivi Creative District. Present were **Riitta Heinämaa**, **Sari Palmgren**, **Julie Teyssou** and **Marie-Christine Duréault**, as well as **Pirjetta Mulari** and **Katarina Lindholm**.

After some general reflections about the public session earlier that day, each of the participants spoke shortly about their thoughts and impressions of the kick-off as well as about the whole experience. General ideas regarding the following steps and meetings were also briefly discussed.

### 5. Outcomes

The aim of the two-day kick-off had been to discuss and define the overall theme as well as pose the key questions, and these aims were by and large reached. However, it was agreed that the five principal themes for a vision of a sustainable future for the dance field still might need some sharpening or further elaboration.

The working session showed that the topic of sustainability in the context of the dance field can be viewed from many angles, but that it also consists of many interrelated issues. More efficient communication both within the dance field as well as outwards was seen as an important and initial step towards a more sustainable future. Involving the dance field itself in the building of a sustainable future was also seen as important.

The public session showed a clear interest in the topic among dance artists and professionals. Questions and issues around the many different aspects of sustainability were perceived as highly relevant. There was a lot of discussion about the need for increased communication with audiences in terms of audience development, accessibility, attracting new audiences, within the different groups. Also the discussion on how to get out of self-governance was perceived as a question of how to make dance more communicative and accessible rather than a question on how to open up dance organisations to professionals outside the dance field.

The public session also brought up expectations directed at the keõja network in general. Worries about the lack of a EU lobby group for dance as well as a expectations of getting concrete tools and guidelines from the Think Tank emerged in the group discussions. Expectations were also put on keõja to bring problems to the front and confront them, to create strategies and to lobby.

## 6. Continuation plans

It was discussed if and in which way the Think Tank participants and/or organisers should communicate with the interested audience members from the public session (who left their contact details). The Think Tank participants considered the possibility of keeping contact with the audience members who left their email addresses and ask them whether they have fulfilled their promise/concrete action and how. This could take place before the next meeting during spring 2013.

It was also discussed how the Think Tank participants and/or organisers could communicate with the dance field about matters regarding the Think Tank and its progress throughout 2012–2014. Using social media, a blog or a newsletter was considered.

The time and the place for next keđja Think Tank meeting was left open, but it was agreed that it should take place in spring 2013.

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### Further information:

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