

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

2nd meeting (Klaipeda, LT)
10–11 June 2013

MEETING REPORT 10–11/06/2013

* * *

1. Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.1 Previous meetings

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

1.2 Second meeting in Klaipeda

The second meeting took place in Klaipeda, Lithuania, on June 10-11, 2013. The aim was to move from words to actions, i.e. from theoretical discussions to addressing practical issues, such as structure, funding options and overall coordination. Also the possibility of a small-scale pilot tour in order to try out a touring network model in practice was to be introduced and elaborated further.

Moderator:

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

Participants:

Triinu Aron, manager, STÛ, Tallinn (EE)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Maija Pavlova, director, Gertrude Street Theatre, Riga (LV)

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

Annika Sillander, manager, Regional Dance Center of Ostrobothnia, Vasa (FI)

Hanne Svejstrup, producer, Dansehallerne, Copenhagen (DK)

Olga Zitluhina (director, Time to Dance festival, LV) was forced to cancel her participation due to her coinciding festival.

Katarina Lindholm from Dance Info Finland coordinated the meeting.

2. Outline and attendance

The purpose of the second meeting was to move from theoretical conversations into dealing with practical issues and provide answers to some concrete questions. Are there issues around Nordic and Baltic identities and cultures that the touring network should incorporate, deal with or take into consideration? What scale and type of work would the network tour? How would the network

organize itself when it comes to fundraising, communication and overall coordination? How could the different responsibilities be shared in practice?

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

- Picking up from where we left off in Helsinki
- Purpose of the touring network: the question of why?
- Audiences: Whom are we presenting to?
- Funding issues: where will the money come from?
- Structure and coordination: how will the network operate and how will the responsibilities be distributed?

Furthermore, the possibility of putting up a small-scale pilot tour in the fall 2014 was discussed in detail, as there would be a small sum in the project budget to encourage it. Additionally, the Touring Think Tank would have a sharing session in the program of the keōjaKlaipeda Encounter on the following Saturday. As the session would be an opportunity to open up the work of the Think Tank as well as to get some input from the dance field, this was to be discussed at the end of the meeting.

Everyone who attended the first meeting had been invited to continue. Furthermore, it was decided in the first meeting that all venues and festivals in the Nordic-Baltic region interested in the Think Tank and a possible touring network were to be mapped out and invited to the next meeting. Based on recommendations from the keōja partners in their respective countries, about 30 organizations were individually contacted with an invitation expressing the need for strong motivation and commitment to the project.

Six organizations from the first meeting and seven new organizations attended the meeting in Klaipeda.

3. Content of the discussions

3.1 Introduction

The meeting was started by a brief introduction of the Think Tank activities as well as the overall keōja 2012–2015 project. The main objectives of the Touring Think Tank were repeated as follows:

- The Think Tank is for the participants to come together and work about the main issue – the lack of a touring network that would operate on a Nordic-Baltic scale.
- The Think Tank is confronted with the question of whether such a network is possible to build and, if so, how to do it.
- The Think Tank aims at coming up with a model or a structure for such a network.

After that, the possibility of organizing a small-scale pilot tour within the scope of the Touring Think Tank in 2014 was presented. The purpose of doing so would first and foremost be to show that the envisioned network model or structure would work in practice. Making the pilot tour happen would be up to the Think Tank members. Dance Info Finland's role was clarified to be coordinating the Think Tank in 2012-2014 and producing an evaluative report at the end of the project. Any steps towards a real operating touring network as well as coordinating the pilot tour will depend entirely on the Think Tank members.

Also a brief presentation round took place. All Nordic and Baltic countries, except for Iceland, were represented at the table. This is more of a geographical spread than in the first meeting, where only one Baltic and no Danish representatives were attending.

3.2 Scope, scale and audience

The purpose of forming a touring network became a fundamental question during the meeting and was put under scrutiny. The question of “why do we need a touring network” was answered with the possibility of getting more funding for touring activities, to present more dance, to give artists more opportunities to perform and to develop the audience. Giving artists more (work) opportunities and support was the most important thing for some, while for others it was catering for a particular audience – or attracting a completely new one. Everyone agreed on the fact that having a touring network would help in sharing costs and knowledge. Several saw a value in sharing knowledge particularly about touring plans, in cooperation and in sharing of expenses in presenting work as well as meeting regularly and seeing work together. Some felt that the network would give the professional field an opportunity to learn more about each other’s countries and dance fields.

Relating to this also the need of **a vision for the touring network** was brought up. What would make the Nordic-Baltic touring network special or different from existing ones? Suggestions and thoughts that came up were the possibility to attract interesting artists/companies from outside the area as well as doing something different from your profile and what you usually present. Also touring site-specific work or work particularly for young audiences came up. Site-specific work was, however, deemed to be too costly overall.

The issue of the **geographical/national scope** of the touring activities was discussed in more detail. The question was raised whether the network should only consider Nordic-Baltic work, or whether it could instead, or additionally, tour interesting international work in the area. It might be easier to attract European and non-European companies as one touring network than on individual basis and by sharing the costs. It was also considered whether it would also be interesting for Nordic and Baltic artists to see new things (which would hopefully contribute to the artistic development in the region). On the other hand, many felt that it would be more realistic to start with Nordic and Baltic work and then perhaps at a later stage also present international work as a parallel activity according to possibilities and resources. There was agreement on the fact that nationality per se would not be of intrinsic interest to audiences. However, it was pointed out that funding organizations would have an interest in where the work has been produced and who has produced it. This means that the geographical scope is likely to have an impact on fundraising.

Scale was an important topic throughout the meeting, since the organizations around the table ranged from having access to venues with 50 to 450 seats. Furthermore, the organizations are in different positions when it comes to receiving and programming, as some present in their own venues and others need to collaborate with an array of venues in their regions, i.e. negotiate and program with different kinds of audiences in mind. It was pointed out that it is more difficult to sell a piece forward to a third party than to receive one from a network that you know and trust.

Audiences were another major topic throughout the meeting. As some organizations operate in capitals and others in regions, the notion of different audiences (urban vs. rural) often came up. While there are some work that go well everywhere, most work require a certain kind of audience. Especially the regional organizations suspected that work that is too serious or conceptual or discuss with colleagues rather than with the audience, might not work, whereas pieces that communicate easily with the audience and contain humor and immediacy would. The work brought to regions would need to be engaging and easily accessible.

It was also questioned whether it is about pleasing your audience or attracting a new one. Most audiences have different motivations to go and see dance – a big part of contemporary dance audiences tend to be interested in a broad range of contemporary art and are not dedicated to dance only. The importance of having **“a hook”** in order to get an audience interested and get them to come back was brought up several times. This was linked together with the need of having a vision and something that would make the network special. Having “a hook” would be of use in marketing

and it was mentioned on several occasions that branding the network somehow would be beneficial, especially when bringing in stand alone productions.

3.3 Structure and coordination

When speaking of how to organize the network, many as an important precondition for a touring network saw **the importance of trust among the partners** and that takes time to build up. The feeling of not knowing enough about each other's venues and festivals was shared across the room.

Not only the matter of having different audiences but also different personal taste came up several times. Many participants doubted that they would find productions that they all would like without reservations. It was therefore suggested on several occasions that instead of touring the same work, the network would select an array of 3-5 different pieces and let everyone pick from that **pool of work** what would suit them best. It was acknowledged that this would require a set of criteria to be followed when adding pieces to the pool of work. The Aerowaves network was brought up several times as a structural example.

The fact that the organizations involved are different in terms of size, resources and audience base led to the suggestion of having **multiple scales/circles within the network**. These different scales could then be made suitable for different type and scale of work to meet the different needs among the network partners. With this kind of structure partners could share many kinds of work according to their interests and possibilities.

In the end, four **different models** for a touring network structure were proposed:

- Selecting **one production** and touring it across the network
- An **import-export**-based model of Nordic-Baltic work across the network
- Touring new and unseen **international** (i.e. not Nordic-Baltic) work across the network
- Touring work with a **particular audience** in mind (e.g. young audiences).

Particularly the import-export-model (i.e. receiving productions as well as presenting own productions) got support, although many were open for several or all of the suggested models. There are also many Think Tank members who only import/present and don't produce anything of their own, although a network might have an effect on that in the future due to artistic and audience development. It was concluded, that a **hybrid model** is most likely, and furthermore that audiences should be an important factor when thinking of the possible models.

The **overall coordination** was also discussed, as there would be a couple of different ways to go about it. One option would be that one partner takes a coordinating role (main organizer), or alternatively that the coordinating post is circulated between partners. Another option would be that the partners form a legal entity together. In the end, it was considered unnecessary (and possibly difficult due to national differences) to create a legal entity. Instead, having a **project leader** and operating with a separate project budget was seen as a way that has worked in the past. The organization, which takes on the role as a project leader, does need to have some liquidity as well as an auditor. Time resources are, on the other hand, not necessarily needed, if an outside person is hired to do the job.

As an exercise at the end of the meeting, the network structure was visualized as strands of activities answering the question of what a touring network would be doing. This would become useful when building up a budget.

3.4 The pilot tour

A few hours were spent **watching and discussing trailers and video bits** of work in order to spark up a dialogue around work as well as see if any of them could be considered for the pilot tour. The participants themselves suggested the trailers.

As for the **pilot tour** in particular, the scale should be between 70-200 seats and the piece(s) should be suitable for both urban and rural audiences. It was not seen as a precondition that one piece would tour everywhere in the context of the pilot tour, in fact, choosing one piece that would tour all countries was deemed to be too costly and difficult in terms of both finding something that everybody would want to present and scheduling issues.



Also the question of whether the pilot tour should present work that already tours or instead give the chance for something else to tour, was posed, as was the possibility to have some additional activities to go with the tour, such as workshops and educational work.

Even if the option of a double-bill evening was brought forth, **selecting one production** for the pilot tour got most support, although all participants should not be made to commit to it. It was considered to be better to tour something from the Nordic-Baltic area rather than from outside it, as it would help in fundraising and contribute to developing the area itself. While a handful of pieces were discussed as potential candidates, one production in particular got a wider support. This piece did not interest everyone and has already toured in some places, but was still considered to meet the needs of different kinds of audiences and to be in many ways a good door opener.

It was felt that one performance would not work on its own, but that it would need to be contextualized somehow in order to attract audience, especially in the regions. It was suggested that the tour/touring network could be “branded” to help out with the marketing. **A brand** could also communicate credibility and authority as well as raise general interest.

The pilot tour was in general seen as **the best way to test the possible touring network model** and find out if and why a touring network is necessary. Trying it out in practice was seen by many as the only way of getting answers to all the different questions and issues.

3.5 Funding issues: short-term and longer-term

When speaking of funding, the **different economic situations** and resources in the different countries will undoubtedly have an impact and there will be balancing issues between the Nordic and Baltic countries. Furthermore, while some organizations have their own budget for buying in performances, others need to fundraise. It was agreed that having a certain amount of money for presenting could not be a criteria for being part of the network.

Funding issues were discussed during the meeting both in the context of the envisioned network as a whole and in the particular case of the possible pilot tour. An overview of the **different funding options** turned out as follows:

- **National/partner funding** (individual fundraising, ministries, etc)
- **Nordic funding** (Nordic Culture Fund, Nordic Culture Point, Nordic Council of Ministers)
- **EU funding** (Creative Europe).

Each of them was considered to have benefits as well as shortcomings. In any case, partner/national funding must be considered obligatory due to the required self-financing part of the budget. The suggestion was that it might be good to fundraise for the pilot tour and the short-term plans first, and in the mean time prepare for longer-term funding applications. While it was decidedly too early for a EU application, this was seen as a possible long-term aim. **Nordic funding** would be best suited for fundraising for the pilot tour as well as the start-up of the network. It was also decided that fundraising would be the next measure to be taken toward the formation of a network.

4. Outcome

In summary, many of the challenges encountered during the meeting revolved around the fact that the organizations involved are quite different in terms of scale, structure, audiences and resources. Consequently it was suggested that the **structure of the network** would be built in a way that allows for different types and sizes of work to tour. It was also suggested that all venues and festivals involved would produce a fact sheet (with number of seats, size of stage, etc.) to serve as a small database for possibly forming scales/sub-networks within the touring network.

There was a general sense around the table that the **aim of the network** would at this point be to come together on the basis of trust in order to move on to an import-export model at due time. The network would be devoted to touring Nordic-Baltic work to begin with, meeting and communicating regularly and seeing each other's work.

Putting up a pilot tour was seen as the best way to test the proposed model for a Nordic-Baltic touring network. It was decided that the Think Tank would apply for Nordic funding for the pilot tour, which would take place in the fall 2014. It was furthermore suggested that all network partners would participate with a small sum in order to pay that person. However, those partners who cannot afford it should not be excluded from the network or the pilot tour because of it.

It was decided that a **fundraiser** who could write the applications and coordinate the application process would need to be hired in early autumn. The fundraiser should be someone with a good track record of successful Nordic funding applications. Possible candidates were briefly discussed.

No decisions were made regarding a **possible main organizer** or coordinating role, although it might be possible to find a fundraiser who might take on the coordinating role should the applications be successful. It was decided that the organization that would host or employ the fundraiser would not have to commit to being the overall project leader in the future.

It was also discussed whether the network should stay open or if it should be closed from new participants at this stage. While transparency and openness was considered important, it was nevertheless decided that for the sake of continuity, keeping previously made decisions and moving forward, the Think Tank/network-in-the-making would from now on be **closed from new participants**. This was considered to be a critical birth condition of the network as bringing new people up to speed at every meeting would be counterproductive. At a later stage the network can, of course, decide to expand.

It was concluded that there is a **strong need for commitment** at this point, not necessarily to present/receive pieces, but to stay in the network and contribute to its development. It was furthermore agreed to be extremely important that there would be continuity between this meeting and the third meeting.

5. Follow-up

The next step toward a touring network would be to put up a pilot tour and finding money for it as well as preparing funding applications for starting up the network itself. For this a fundraiser as well as an organization where he/she could do the work would need to be found as soon as possible.

The time and place for the next (third) meeting was discussed. Many options were mentioned, but it was agreed that the meeting should take place somewhere easily accessible and include possibilities of seeing performances together. It was also decided that the best time for the meeting would be either just before the application deadlines (i.e. September-October) or right after the decisions are made (December). The dates and the place would be decided shortly, in order to make sure that as many as possible will be able to attend.

In the mean time, the organizations that participated in the first meeting in Helsinki would be contacted and their wish to continue and commit would be investigated. Additionally, each participating organization would make a fact sheet of their activities based on a model that would be put forth by Think Tank member Ib Jensen.

5.1. Sharing session in keōjaKlaipeda

The Touring Think Tank held a sharing session on Saturday 15 June as a part of the keōjaKlaipeda program. Four of the Think Tank members participated in the discussion.

The dance artists present brought up the question of flexibility in scale and/or different levels within the touring network, which was one of the main issues in the second Think Tank meeting. The idea of having a flexible structure in which different kind of work would have the opportunity to tour received support.

Audiences were also a topic of discussion and it was in general seen as important that the right kind of work is presented to the right kind of audience. There was agreement on the fact that presenters/venues should make the programming choices.

* * *

Further information:

Katarina Lindholm

katarina.lindholm@danceinfo.fi

+358 9 6150 0936



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

This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.