

Abstract of the conference

Creating Conditions

June 5th – 6th 2009

Krudthuset, Copenhagen

Arranged by the organization Independent Performing Artists

The Danish organization *Uafhængige Scenekunstnere* (US) – Independent Performing Artists – organized the conference “Creating Conditions” in Copenhagen, June 4th – 5th, 2009.

Approximately 70 professionals working within the performance art field participated: international and Danish artists, cultural entrepreneurs, performing arts managers, representatives of institutions as well as politicians.

Independent Performing Artists (US) is a Danish organisation for professional independent and freelancing artists. US functions as a cultural and political body working to improve production and working conditions for artists – mainly from performance, dance, theatre and cross-over disciplines. We have existed since 2005, have over 90 members, and receive new member applications each month. US also represents the Danish independent circuits in a Nordic network-collaboration between the organisations for professional independent performing art in all five Nordic countries.

The conference Creating Conditions was kindly funded by the Committee for Performing Art.

The aim of “Creating Conditions” was twofold:

- To receive inspiration from European colleagues about how to create and organize production houses and open venues.
- To create an open discussion platform on possible frameworks for open venues in Denmark.

US finds it of great importance that all recent events focussing on production structures from a Danish perspective should so to say speak together. This is why this summary also takes into account 3 other seminars recently held in Denmark that addressed some of the same issues.

- The seminar “Interaction Echange in a GloCal World”, arranged by Berliner Luft, Camp X, and The Danish National School of Theatre - Continuing Education. Copenhagen 17 – 18 April 2009.
- A talk by Lieven Thyron (manager of the Belgian dance company “Les Ballets C de la B”) and discussion about production structures, arranged by Chapter 15, June 10th 2009, Copenhagen.
- “Belgieerne kommer” -- an inspirational seminar with 3 Belgian companies arranged by the “ILT Festival”, Saturday June 13th 2009, in Århus.

Since US was informed that the Belgian models would be represented and discussed on the last mentioned seminar, we invited speakers from other European houses: Gessnerallee (Zurich), Brut (Vienna), The Basement (England), and internationally working artists (please visit US’ website - www.scenekunstnere.dk - to see the full conference program).

Recognitions, recommendations, and warnings

Based on our own and several other conference participants' notes, this abstract presents some of the recurrent and most significant recognitions, recommendations, and warnings that came up during the 2 days of discussions, exchange and input:

Overall, it is crucial to an open venue dedicated to modern performing art in Denmark:

- To acknowledge and act upon the need of the small Danish performing art's environment to have ongoing **communication**, international **exchange** and **transparency**.
- To create **alliances**: Professionals within the field should communicate honestly, sharing knowledge and experience.
- To search for new possible relationships between **venue-artist / venue-audience / artist-audience**. Not only should we rethink how to reach audiences, but through hands-on methods we should acquire more useful "audience-knowledge": what are audiences interested in seeing on stage, what do they expect of the performing arts?
- To work intensively to create co-productions both nationally and internationally.

Recommendations concerning the organisational structure of a venue:

- Management of an open venue
 - o Rotating leadership was discussed intensively and generally favoured.
 - o *Professional* management should be implemented, this means having educated/experienced administrators, PR-officials instead of "wanna-be-artists" doing the jobs of others. This professional management is complemented – obviously – by an artistic management.
 - o A recommended model: The artistic director employs different curators. These curators receive a certain amount of money that they can use in just the way they want (according to their specific artistic ambitions). The curators should both be Danish and foreign experts.
- Other staff involved
 - o Highly recommended was the demand for artistically oriented technicians whose expertise is dedicated to the arts.
 - o Desirable was a permanent fundraiser team working full time at the venue raising money for residencies, exchange, co-productions, performances, and the venue in general.
 - o The idea of "mentorship" was discussed and was and generally favoured. The venue should create a mentorship arrangement with both fixed and rotating mentors for up-and-coming artists.

Recommendations regarding a venues' profile:

- o The venue shouldn't just "copy and paste" structures and profiles of other existing successful venues around the world. Efforts are needed to establish an independent profile that is in touch with the venues' specific ambition, surroundings, and community.
- o It is important that the venues' profile is based on a strong manifesto of some kind. Thus, the venue is transparent and reliable with regard to both the audiences' and artists' expectations and demands.
- o The venues' profile should be dynamic: it is the management's responsibility to keep the profile vibrant and interesting at all times, attracting artists' and audiences' attention.

- “International programming” should be high on the priority list for a Danish open venue.
- The venue should be a bold entrepreneur with regard to marketing. Rigid structures telling “how things are done in this country” should be expanded and/or bended. To really make this happen the contemporary performance environment should create alliances and take joint action. A recommendation that was discussed and generally favoured: creating an alternative and flexible programme (monthly – seasonal) for what’s on in the country.

Recommendations concerning audience relationships:

- Overall, a venue should be “inclusive” not exclusive. Both artists and audiences of all kinds should feel welcome and relate to the venue’s profile. This should have a positive effect the other way around: the experimental part of the venue is acknowledged (as failure is as much part of the deal as success). The audience should learn that risk-taking performance might not work – that artists can fall short too.
- The venue could: educate the audience through expecting something from them; giving the audience the possibility to meet the artists and to give feed-back; always have an open mind for the audiences’ experiences in order to relate better to them and their surroundings.

Recommendations concerning the relations between a venue, community and innovative platforms:

- A venue should work hard to create international exchange, residency programs, festivals, workshops and community based work. .
- Co-production is the key word!
- The venue should take their potentialities with regard to community work seriously. This could actually turn out to be the venue’s primus motor. The debate tended towards the idea of creating a social space that is strongly tied to its surrounding local community. It should be a place where people not only come to experience art or to learn about it, but also just to have a good time – socially. Combining among other activities: talks, workshops, events, parties and small performances. On these occasions significant informal meetings and networking can take place both amongst artists themselves and between artists and audiences.

Deborah Vlaeymans and Christine Fentz

US would like to thank the conference participants who sent in their notes and observations. This abstract was made possible through their valuable contributions. Thanks are especially due to Emmanuel Limal, Seimi Nørregaard, Lea Gudmundsen and João Lobo.