

EDN Atelier 17 (8 & 9 September 2021), 'Creation of Dance Work'

Report by Marta Keil

The 17th EDN Atelier took place online on the 8th and 9th of September 2021 and was hosted by Tanssin talo, a dance house in Helsinki which in February 2022 will open a new venue with two spaces: the 700-seat Erkkö Hall and the 220-seat Pannu Hall. This backdrop shaped the thematic scope of the conversations held during the Creation of Dance Work atelier, an event which aimed to tackle the subject of working conditions in the dance field, to redefine the position and role of larger scale artistic production, to reflect on the responsibilities of production houses, and to map initiatives and platforms that try to rethink transnational touring and cooperation under the shadow of climate change.

The gathering took place at a moment of reopening for most dance venues and festivals in Europe: a kind of critical point, at which the ideas shaped during lockdown are confronted by a growing pressure to 'get back to normal', meaning to produce, to perform, and to present work as frequently as possible for the widest possible range of audiences. At the same time, the dance field's 'normal' is one that only ever worked for a few, with most artists and arts workers experiencing precarious working conditions and limited access to production resources. The Covid-19 outbreak thus seemed to highlight many existing inequalities in the field related to geopolitical context (with resources and infrastructure for production and touring varying from country to country, and between Europe and other continents), the scale of companies (the pandemic seemed to have a larger effect on medium size companies than on established ones with secure funding sources), mobility restrictions, and working conditions (generally, employees seem to have been less affected than freelancers). Another key factor in thinking about dance creation and touring is the climate crisis and the ecological impact of artistic mobility.

As many speakers pointed out, the pandemic opened up a kind of uncanny time gap – one which severely impacted the situation of many professionals involved in dance at the same time as it gave them space to reflect on working models. Tanssin talo proposed rethinking the role and position of large-scale productions and their international touring conditions as a perspective for wider reflection on the pandemic's impact and the consequences for dance development.

The main questions raised during the atelier were the following: what is the role of large-scale productions in the overall development of the dance field, especially when it comes to the visibility of artists and to reaching audiences? How to produce large-scale dance performances with transnational casts when mobility is restricted for reasons related to public health and, often, politics? What is the global perspective on

the international touring of dance performances and what are the initiatives taking place at the local level? How do global perspectives vary depending on standpoint? What is the responsibility of tour managers, producers, programmers towards local and transnational artistic communities? How can international touring be shaped in a way that is environmentally sustainable and that, at the same time, answers the genuine needs of artists and audiences for international exchange and collaboration?

This last question seems especially important in the current sociopolitical context, which sees nationalist tendencies and a fear of newcomers on the rise in many countries. If the ecological crisis requires a complex redefinition of international touring, then folding entirely into local community is not a solution. In the face of rising nationalist and xenophobic tendencies, exposure to different perspectives and contexts is needed more than ever. The lack of mobility of some and the forced mobility of others engraves this fear of newcomers deep in society and reinforces the desire to retreat into our private shelters. The main and recurring question is thus how to secure and support transnational cooperation in the dance field in an ecologically sustainable manner.

The atelier in Helsinki consisted of four panel discussions, followed by presentations from artists Milla Koistinen, Veli Lehtovaara, Johanna Nuutinen, Elina Pirinen, and WAUHAUS, all of whom are taking part in SPARKS, a new artistic development project that support artists in their creative trajectory, from research to residency to production.

Redefinition of large-scale dance production from the artistic perspective

Session with contributions from Robyn Orlin, dancer and choreographer from South Africa, based in Germany, Shobana Jeyasingh, choreographer based in the UK, and Frédéric Gravel, choreographer and dancer based in Canada, moderated by Bush Hartshorn, artist, curator and coach based in the UK.

This conversation tackled the concept of large-scale dance performance from the perspective of artistic choices (related to the performance's dramaturgy, the set, ways of building a relationship with audiences, choice of collaborators, etc.), as well as the role of such projects in boosting artists' visibility and supporting their careers.

Both Robyn Orlin and Frédéric Gravel highlighted that access to presentation opportunities in Europe is key for dance artists in South Africa or Canada, even though there are significant differences in financial and structural support in both countries. Whereas for South African choreographers it is often the only way to be able to work in the dance field (as there is no consistent support from local government), for

Canadian choreographers it is a matter of visibility and meeting audiences, as there are subsidies for producing work but no opportunities for local touring.

Robyn Orlin underlined that some artists based in South Africa use their fees from international touring as a sort of seed funding that enables them to continue their work locally. Therefore touring opportunities are vital not only for their own artistic careers, but also to develop the local scene. She also pointed out the privileged situation of European dancers and performers, who have access to financial support and infrastructure. While this point is right in many ways, it seems important to add that the perspective is different in Berlin (where Robyn Orlin is currently based) than it is in, for instance, some of the Eastern European countries, where dance is chronically underfunded.

Another important consequence of being dependent on international touring is how it affects aesthetic choices related to scenography. As Frédéric Gravel mentioned, there is “a Montreal scenography style for dance”, which is simply “lots of lights and no set”. He explained that artists often choose to work principally with lighting, as they will usually have access to this in hosting venues, but shy away from set design, as it is too expensive to transport. In answer to this point, Robyn Orlin said this doesn’t mean that scenography is dead, but that it needs to transform itself and adapt to the climate challenge. She asked: “Where to store the set and props and costumes after you’re done with touring? What happens with them?”

However, the choice of a minimalist set brings an interesting challenge to large-scale productions by posing the question of what other aesthetic tools and choices could be helpful in creating intimacy with audiences. Alongside the obvious advantages of greater visibility and reach among diverse audiences, working with larger scale venues can also bring an opportunity to research tools for building strong, intimate connections with the public. As Gravel put it: “I like to question what tools we need to make the show visible, expandable, reaching out to the last rows.”

If, according to Gravel, the accessibility of props and technical equipment is usually better in larger venues, the time capacity is not: large-scale venues are constantly in use for presentation, and so there are usually very limited possibilities to rehearse there. This points to another important aspect in the relationship between smaller and larger scale venues: the hierarchy between them. Larger scale venues are often perceived as more prestigious, granting an artist more visibility and reputation. As Bush Hartshorn asked: “When you were beginning your work as artists a few decades ago, did the scale play a role in your artistic aspirations?” The problem of hierarchy was also brought up by Shobana Jeyasingh, who joined the conversation a bit later. She highlighted that in the UK dance field the hierarchy is simple and quite rigid, running from fringe venues at the bottom up through small, middle and large scale venues. This

hierarchy is reflected in the venues' history and location, their infrastructure (such as technical equipment), their ticket prices, and the different types of audiences visiting them.

According to Jeyasingh, the politics of site-specific or site-based work are very interesting in this context: such work "feels like a holiday from the problems relating to different scale venues". It also opens up the possibility of playing with large-scale structures while disrupting norms and dismantling dominant hierarchies. Responding to Bush Hartshorn's question as to whether she ever aspired to working at scale as a young artist, Jeyasingh highlighted another interesting tension: not between the scales of the venues, but related to the politics of audience seating, especially in relation to hierarchies between central seats and those on the peripheries (why should places at the wings be considered less important?). This grading of the audience space brings an interesting question as to how artists could dismantle it – for example by offering a view that is equally accessible from each seat. In that sense, work in larger scale venues could bring fascinating political challenges.

Transnational artistic collaboration in the context of climate change and the consequences of Covid-19

Session with contributions from Jala Adolphus, independent producer and editor working between Asia and Australia, Tang Fu-Kuen, dramaturg, curator, producer and artistic director of Taipei Arts Festival in Taiwan, and Mirna Zagar, executive director of The Dance Centre in Vancouver, moderated by Katarina Lindholm, manager of international affairs at Dance Info Finland.

This discussion aimed to reflect on global exchange from the perspective of sustainability. Katarina Lindholm aptly stated that the political, social and economic dimensions of working conditions in the dance field are interconnected and vary in relation to context. As she asked: "When talking about climate challenges and sustainability from other perspectives than Europe, are we talking about the same thing?"

Tang Fu-Kuen explained that while in Asia the pandemic has literally paralysed the region, it has also amplified a lot of disruptions related to the governing problems of many Asian countries. The local political context has become a significant factor, which, according to Tang, will have an impact on physical touring and make it even more difficult than before. To a certain extent, an answer to this crisis of physical mobility lies in the development of digital solutions, which will enable hybrid forms of performance, created with transnational teams and combining both physical and digital presence for the artists. A good example might be the last production that Tang Fu-Kuen worked on as a dramaturg: the performance *Postcolonial Sprits* by Choy Ka

Fai, presented in summer 2021 at Tanzhaus NRW in Dusseldorf and Tanz im August in Berlin. For that occasion, Tang coined the term 'phygital', which describes a performance that takes place physically on stage (or in any other venue) and that offers audiences the physical experience of being together in one space while simultaneously including the virtual presence of the artists who could not travel. In the case of *Postcolonial Spirits*, Choy Ka Fai could not bring dancers from Indonesia, Singapore or Taiwan to Germany and decided to combine a physical set with digital presence for the performers. This kind of work requires complicated and expensive technical support, however: for the German premiere of *Postcolonial Spirits*, 18 people were working in an Indonesian studio at night, streaming their artistic work directly to the Berlin stage. As Tang Fu-Kuen pointed out: "Our technical knowhow is still quite behind: when one wire doesn't work, the entire set doesn't work. The amount of work is immense, the risk of collapse is high." In his opinion, what is needed is technical crews and festivals who are ready to support artists in this challenge.

Jala Adolphus, an independent producer working between Indonesia, Europe and Australia, pointed out that the process of building international cooperation and touring in the dance field in Indonesia is quite a personal and organic one, as there are no agencies in Indonesia. For that reason, Asian Network for Dance (AND+) was established in 2015. It has no funding, no member fees, no central office. Its goal is to generate dialogue and interconnection, and to raise awareness of ethical practices for international touring. For instance, it aims to answer such questions as how can co-productions take place in such a large and diverse region? What kind of new collaboration models are needed? How can residencies be rethought in order to support in-depth research and creation processes? Adolphus underlined that there was still a lot of space for programmers and organisations to engage in dialogue with Indonesian artists and ask about their needs. She also highlighted that sustainable artistic mobility looks different depending on context: for instance, green mobility is complicated to achieve in Asia, which lacks sufficient rail connections.

Mirna Zagar, who works between Croatia and Canada, agreed that the definition of 'sustainable' differs from country to country, depending on the political context one is situated in. She also felt that right now the dance field keeps bringing new questions to the table, but might not be ready with answers. Zagar explained that the idea that green mobility is a matter of switching from airplanes to trains doesn't fit in Canada: firstly, because of the size of the country; secondly, because the trains are expensive in terms of both time and money, which very few are privileged to have. As an example of an interesting shift taking place among institutions during the pandemic, Mirna Zagar pointed to the National Arts Centre in Ottawa, which, when international touring and presentations were not possible, reached out to local artists to share its resources, including its venue spaces and digital tools. These digital channels were used not only to stream shows, but also to connect with different communities, including schools and

older people in care homes. As a result, many local artists found themselves, for the first time, reaching large audiences across the country. Zagar reflected also on the long-term consequences of the pandemic: new models are popping up and being tested everywhere, but what are the artistic consequences of a greater focus on local contexts? Are we risking regional isolation?

Tang Fu-Kuen responded to this by developing further the tension between the international and the local, explaining how during the pandemic he decided to look for the international within the local. In the first instance, he decided to look for international artists living in Taiwan, then to look at the expats, migrant workers, and global communities that live among us, asking them to map the local landscape from their perspective. As he said: “we need to reach out to people beyond our imaginary – which not always has to be far away from our localisation. Actually, it may allow us to reach much further than we have ever been. And sometimes it is enough to look around yourself.”

Current initiatives and projects in the performing arts field in Europe that aim at proposing new understandings of transnational collaboration

Session with contributions from Birgit Berndt, artistic director for dance, Norrlandsoperan, Sweden, Eduardo Bonito, curator, artist and producer, project manager of Big Pulse Dance Alliance, working between Brazil and Germany, Elena Polivtseva, Head of Policy and Research, IETM, Belgium, and Ari Tenhula, managing director of Zodiak in Finland, and moderated by Marie Proffit, curator and cultural manager based between France and Sweden.

This conversation aimed to look at potential future strategies for inclusive and sustainable touring for large-scale productions, and at how international exchange and sustainability can come together. Panellists shared case studies and best practices based on projects they were involved in. As Marie Proffit proposed, sustainability was approached not only from the ecological perspective, but also in relation to working conditions and the status of artists and their audiences.

Several projects were presented that currently operate in the European field and are working to redefine transnational collaboration and touring in the performing arts:

1. Big Pulse Dance Alliance

Big Pulse Dance Alliance is a network of 12 European dance festivals/institutions, supported by Creative Europe. The project has two main commissioning strands:

- 'Scaling Up', which supports artists producing works mainly for small and medium size venues to transition to large-scale productions.
- 'Open Air', which supports artists to develop portable, ecologically aware projects for outdoor performance.

The main goal of the project is to bring diversity to the big stages, with special attention paid to countries where funding for large-scale productions is scarce.

Big Pulse:

- Proposes actions that support artists, including large-scale co-productions (as part of the process of 'upscaling artists') and co-production for outdoor performances.
- Offers mentoring and networking for younger choreographers who usually work at smaller scale.
- Forms a large network of dance festivals.
- Mentors its co-produced artists in strategic or artistic choices, offering them support along the way.

The aim is to make sure that supported projects can tour to venues beyond the network of co-producers. Artists are therefore invited to meet on a regular basis with the artistic directors of festivals or houses that are part of the network and that will host their productions.

An important factor, underlined by project manager Eduardo Bonito, is that the artistic directors of the partnering venues are very well connected among themselves, and adopt a horizontal governing practice which enables them to actually listen to the artists.

2. Re-Think project and Norrlandsoperan in Umeå, Sweden

Birgit Berndt presented the strategy to develop a new model of co-production and touring at Norrlandsoperan, a performing arts venue in Umeå, Sweden, and detailed her experiences in developing a newly launched, artist-led think tank called Re-Think, which aims to foster accessibility, sustainability and mobility for contemporary dance. The project culminated in September 2021 with the Re-Think Festival in Umeå.

As Norrlandsoperan does not have its own dance company, their major focus is on co-producing and collaborating with dance artists and inviting them to think together about how a co-creation process can take place in a more sustainable way, and how knowledge can be shared between makers (artists) and culture professionals (presenters, curators, producers, etc.). It was on this basis that Norrlandsoperan initiated Re-Think, which started during the pandemic and is supported by the

Swedish Institute. One of its aims was to invite artists to co-think and co-shape the programming process of the institution. The think tank itself included five Sweden-based choreographers and five international ones.

The major question and starting point for Re-Think was: what can Norrlandsoperan, as an institution, provide to the dance community in terms of knowledge sharing, capacity building, and developing new strategies, and how can that resonate in the meeting with audiences?

The shared reflection with artists led to an understanding of sustainability that rested on:

- Longer creation processes.
- Involving audiences earlier on, not only at the moment of presentation.
- Being more involved in local contexts.
- Taking care of archiving works and thinking of, for instance, living archives (as an answer to the question: 'how can we store performance?').

The outcomes of the Re-Think project, proposed by the invited artists, have been based on three strands:

- Forming a think tank (creating a resource for one another, as sustainability was understood as also being about sharing knowledge and expertise that already exists in the field).
- Creating a festival to share artistic work, mainly in the process phase, to get peer to peer feedback, and to share capacity building (including through debates and workshops).
- Establishing an online platform (a hub for exchange and a 'store' for the living archive).

An important question recurring throughout the process of working with artists is how can the work and its process be more accessible for audiences? One of the ideas that came up was that of a 'rehearsal radio' that would create soundscapes of rehearsals. Another question that often arose was how could the discussions, conversations and research taking place during rehearsal be amplified and reach members of the public.

3. Perform Europe

Perform Europe is an EU-funded project that aims to rethink cross border performing arts presentation in a more inclusive, sustainable and balanced way among the 40 countries of the Creative Europe programme, plus the UK.

Among the projects presented at the EDN atelier, Perform Europe is probably the one with the largest geographical scope, as it maps out and reflects on the ways we tour performing arts, both physically and digitally, in 41 countries. Within the project, the notion of sustainability is understood across four levels: the human, the social, the economic, and the ecological.

The project will last 18 months and consists of:

1. **A research phase** (mapping existing cross-border collaborations and touring schemes, digital tools and trends). The main takeaways from the research phase have been that there are big financial and infrastructural discrepancies between countries; that there is lack of common understanding of artistic value at a European level (for instance, what presenters value artistically and consider worth touring); that inequalities can exist between the regions of one country, with physical or economic barriers preventing mobility; and that there is a lack of sustainable support for innovation. As Polivtseva highlighted: “while money is never the main reason for artists to tour, the lack of money is usually the reason why they don’t do it”. Another important finding is related to human well-being while touring (lack of work-life balance).
2. **A digital platform** (launched in summer 2021) to share knowledge and to find partners for touring, networking, and the presentation of performances, which aims to help artists and producers to meet outside of existing networks and bubbles.
3. **A support scheme** designed on the basis of the research which offers fees for presenters and producers to form partnerships and tour works across borders.

The support scheme consists of two calls:

- First step: the selection of performers and presenters who will be invited into a matchmaking process. For this step Perform Europe received more than 1300 applications, among which 500 were selected for the second step.
- Second step: selection of the sustainable and inclusive cross-border touring plans presented by applicants. Each partnership should include at least one producer and three presenters from three different European countries. The partnership proposals were required to tackle at least some of the main Perform Europe principles: practice solidarity, look toward fair collaboration models, embrace digital tools to make distribution more sustainable and inclusive, work with local audiences.

The selected projects for distribution partnerships will be implemented from October 2021 to June 2022. They will receive a fee ranging from 10,000 to 100,000 euro to cover all costs related to both physical and digital touring.

A note about the jury: it was created in order to bring balance in terms of background, years of experience, gender, geographic context, and artistic disciplines.

4. **Proposal of policy recommendations** for Creative Europe (based on learnings taken from the support scheme) on how sustainable and inclusive touring should be supported on a policy level.

To a large extent, this is a process of ongoing learning through research, translating observations into actions, seeing how things work, and getting feedback from everyone involved in order to come up with concrete policy recommendations both at EU and local (regional) levels.

Elena Polivtseva said there had been an incredible level of interest in Perform Europe right from the start of the project – a clear sign that a space is needed to rethink cross-border touring in the European performing arts field.

4. Nordic Culture Dance Net

Nordic Culture Dance Net is a new, small-scale network for collaboration and exchange in contemporary dance at Nordic level that has been initiated by Zodiak, a centre and production house for new dance in Helsinki that works mostly with freelance dancers and choreographers. Nordic Culture Dance Net enables artists from Finland, Norway and Sweden to build resources to expand the lifespan of dance work. The network counts 7 partners, 4 venues (2 in Sweden, 1 in Norway and 1 in Finland), 3 big dance companies (2 in Sweden and 1 in Norway), 3 festivals, and a group of choreographers whose work will be produced. The first phase of the network will last for two and a half years.

Nordic Culture Dance Net is shaped by the current situation in Finland, where the dance community is quite underfunded. Ari Tenhula explained that production costs are high and the lifespan of produced performances is short (with only a few works finding their way to wider dissemination). From approximately 1000 dance professionals in the local field, around 20 get individual development grants, and roughly 10 choreographers receive annual funding for their work. So there is a lot of pressure on Zodiak to build a more sustainable environment for artistic creation and touring in Scandinavia and in Europe.

NCDN is supported by Nordic Culture Point (with initial seed funding received in 2020). Its main aim is to develop artists' thinking and to extend the lifecycle of performances in Nordic countries. From the perspective of Finland, entering larger networks is key to supporting further development and the dissemination of dance productions.

Its main activities include: mentoring, residencies (enabling artists to build and share knowledge at professional gatherings), and co-productions (as a tool to develop larger scale dance productions in the Nordic region and, as a consequence, further touring in the area).

According to Ari Tenhula, the lack of touring is particularly evident in Finland, partly for geographical reasons (a sea between Finland and other Nordic countries), partly for economic reasons. The aim of NCDN is to show that there is a strong need for structural support for cross-border touring within Nordic countries. From a long-term perspective, transnational touring could supplement national touring. At the moment Nordic funds support only one-off mobility activities.

Observations shared following the presentation of the four initiatives detailed above:

- There are already some synergies between them (either existing partnerships or similar areas of interest and research).
- The question of marginalisation and accessibility is essential, as not all regions, art disciplines and artists are equal when it comes to accessing touring and distribution.

Eva Broberg asked whether, even in such an early phase of implementation for most of the presented projects, there might already be some interesting takeaways when it comes to identifying challenges or future needs.

For Birgit Berndt it was all about time: if you really want artists to be more involved in co-creation and co-thinking then you need much more time – and much more funding, as this is a more expensive working process.

For Eduardo Bonito the takeaway was the lack of opportunities to spend time on in-person meetings, which affects how connections are forged and how trust is established.

For Ari Tenhula it was the fact that transnational funding is not a priority in some countries, so it is a challenge to convince local authorities and decision makers to take part in larger transnational projects such as Big Pulse Dance Alliance.

For Elena Polivtseva it would be a need to extend the timeline and human resources of the Perform Europe project, as the demand and need within the field turned out to be so strong. She also noticed a tension between a desire to experiment and make changes at large scale and, at the same time, a need to set limits in order to make the project feasible and clearly articulate to whom it is addressed.

Perspectives from programmers, producers and tour managers on touring dance productions

A conversation between Virve Sutinen, artistic director of Tanz im August festival in Berlin, Alesandra Seutin, performer, choreographer and teacher, based between Zimbabwe and Belgium, Emmanuelle de Varax, head of producing and touring, Théâtre National De Chaillot, Paris, Sabrina Chen Li, deputy general manager and programme director, Shanghai International Dance Center, Shanghai, and Linda de Boer, manager planning and touring, Nederlands Dans Theater, The Hague, moderated by Bia Oliveira, head of producing and touring, Sadler's Wells, London.

This session unpacked perspectives on international touring after 18 months of the pandemic, with a special focus on looking at initiatives and methods that have been already been tried out and that might prove useful for others. The underlying question remained: how can international touring, especially with large-scale productions, be ecologically sustainable?

At the start of the discussion, Bia Oliveira recalled questions proposed by Mikael Aaltonen, programme manager at Tanssin talo and the host of the atelier:

- What kind of productions will tour in the future?
- Should we focus for example on smaller scale projects (no set, basic lighting)? Should we focus on outdoor work (which has been one of the very few ways to present work during the pandemic)?
- Is the number of people travelling a big issue for funders and presenters in the future?
- How does this reflect on your productions?
- Is the way forward for artists to create concepts that can be reworked in different contexts by local artists and performers (a practice which has already been happening for quite some time – for example in the work of Jérôme Bel)?
- Will the multinational model of co-production endure, and will it further develop as the main means for developing new works on a larger scale?
- Is there a real danger (due to the pandemic, the climate crisis, and the looming threat of financial cuts) of a dramatic decrease in international mobility and collaboration?

In answer to these questions, Emmanuelle de Varax shared the main lessons learned from the pandemic:

- A lot of preparation work, prior to the touring itself, can take place online. Reducing travel and costs at that early stage can make a significant difference.

- For one new production at Le Chaillot it was decided to reduce the number of sets from two to one (originally separate sets were planned for Europe and Asia, so the tour could take place simultaneously and the team could move more easily from one place to another). Instead, the theatre decided to plan more sustainable touring (in one region, but for a longer period) and to have only one set.
- When working with companies whose performances will be presented at their venue in Paris, Le Chaillot can leverage their network to help plan a regional tour together with other French or European venues, so companies can visit more venues in the region.

An important challenge in planning regional touring is that if one venue drops out, a significant gap opens up in the schedule (and perhaps the budget), and this sometimes happens when the performers are already on tour, have already committed their time, and need to be remunerated. Another challenge is that some festivals and venues demand exclusivity in presenting a company or performance.

Linda de Boer, manager of planning and touring at Nederlands Dans Theater, also pointed out that one of the main lessons from the pandemic is that bringing collaborators physically together can often happen at a later stage in the artistic process without harming its quality. When it comes to touring, as with Le Chaillot, they prefer to have one set, rather than two, and to tour in a more sustainable way: staying longer in one region and visiting more places in one geographical area. At the same time, while NDT does not see itself doing less international touring in the immediate future, they are rethinking means of transport (using trains where possible). Something that remains complicated in relation to travel though is that NDT receives public subsidy for international travel: this always has to be negotiated with the presenters (to check, for instance, if taking the train is affordable, or how carbon emissions can be offset afterwards).

Another takeaway from the pandemic experience is that NDT wants to continue livestreaming works a few times a season in order to connect with both their regular audiences and new international ones, and to see to what extent this approach can be complimentary to physical international touring. It doesn't bring in additional income, as preparing a livestream requires a lot of investment, but it's a way to let audiences know what the theatre has been doing (as they produce many more projects than are actively on tour).

When it comes to Shanghai International Dance Center, the situation is much more complicated, as hosting any international dance groups has not been possible since 2020. The main obstacles at the moment are:

- Group short-term stay are not available.
- If an individual gets a visa, he/she/they need to quarantine in a designated hotel for 21 days.
- The artist and venue then need to start a one-month long procedure to allow the production to take place on stage.

The Center therefore started to work on its first in-house production, and will most likely shift from being a receiving house to a production house. SIDC used to host 250 performances each year, among which a third were international. Now local artists have to make up the numbers – which, as Sabrina Chen Li highlighted, is obviously a great opportunity for them. The decision to reorient towards becoming a production house had its roots not only in the pandemic, but also in the realisation that there is only one national contemporary dance company in China (the rest are focused on traditional dance). As there are so many young emerging artists, and such a widespread need in the field for space to work and present, SIDC decided to host the second China Contemporary Dance Biennale online (as that was the only option to connect with international presenters).

In relation to the touring of large-scale productions, Alesandra Seutin underlined that for many artists visibility is key to being able to work and continue their practice. The same goes for touring. As she put it: “For instance, the idea that I might stop touring outside the continent of Africa means I might not have an opportunity to continue to work, as the touring network between African countries is almost non-existent. If the artists want more visibility, they need to travel outside the continent. In that sense, green mobility is rather unrealistic in this context. For some artists, travelling out of the continent means they can sustain practices taking place locally while back.”

At the same time Alesandra agreed that to a certain extent training online or rehearsing online can become an enriching experience, and during the pandemic she has chosen to work with some of her collaborators (e.g. a composer) remotely during the preparation phase. At the same time she explained that being in same space is still the richest and most desirable experience for performers.

Virve Sutinen pointed out that shifting attention to big companies risks narrowing the view to the top of an iceberg – and to the most privileged. She highlighted that the dance sector is not well funded and mainly consists of freelancers operating in precarious, unstable conditions. At the same time, in her opinion the current moment of reopening is revealing the inequalities in the field. ‘Getting back to normal’ (for example by returning to touring as we used to know it) is only possible for those who are strong enough: namely repertoire theatres and big companies. Venues are reopening, but the

audience is hesitant; it is not obvious yet that they will be back. According to Virve Sutinen it is high time to translate shared thinking from the pandemic into concrete actions. As she said: “What is needed now are not new policies or high moral speeches, but very simple rules on how to act. For instance: what if, as an answer to climate change, we try to adapt to mobility by train instead of plane, which often means much more time spent on travel? Who pays for that? Does it mean the fees need to increase? How do we offset if it is decided the artists will fly? In Germany using public funds for this purpose is not possible. How can we address this problem as a sector together?”

In reaction to this, Bia Olivera observed that there is something deeply unfair in calling for artists to stop using flights while touring: “It feels like punishment, but of the wrong people. All those huge companies who cause most of the problems when it comes to climate change, they still keep going, while requiring less mobility from smaller ones in a way that could harm their work.”

Eduardo Bonito pointed out that the countries that are far away from Europe emit much less CO₂. These countries are the ones most badly affected by climate change, yet they are not the ones causing it. He recalled discussions that took place in the frame of the Big Pulse project: “I have been participating in many fora tackling the issue and the biggest recurring question is who will pay the bill for it? Who pays for the additional days spent in transition? For an accommodation on the way, if needed? Who pays for carbon footprint compensation? Do you know about any lobbying initiatives in our sector for raising that question with the EU or ministries of culture?” The current risk is that if the costs of green mobility are placed on the shoulders of companies, they will have to decrease their productions, and, as a consequence, the artists’ income. Is it really a solution for individual artists to pay for green mobility?

In response to that observation, Eva Broberg added that the format of the atelier is a tool for EDN to continue working on the aforementioned issues, and pointed to On the Move, an organisation that specialises in monitoring mobility in the culture sector and can be a vital source of information. Furthermore, Broberg highlighted that it is crucial to see the differences between contexts. For example, travelling through Asia by train is complicated, but the same is true for Croatia and Serbia. It is important to bear in mind that Europe is far from homogenous when it comes to art infrastructure or social, political and economic conditions.

At the same time, maybe a solution for sustainable touring lies in the redefinition of what festivals and presenters can offer. For instance, instead of inviting a company to a city for one night, a festival could increase the number of presentations, offer artists a

residency to stay longer, or reach out to other festivals or venues in the region who could receive them too. Maybe, as Eva Broberg suggested, we could start with simple rules: if you travel for 600km, you need to have two shows in two other venues. At the same time, paying attention to a given context is key: even if such a framework works in one location, it might not in another.

Final note

On the one hand, online discussion has its obvious limitations (it does not offer informal networking time after panel discussions, and zoom fatigue is a factor, especially after more than 1.5 years of the pandemic). On the other, it made it possible to bring in participants from different continents, no travelling was required, and it had the potential to reach a much larger audience. An interesting question is whether this form of EDN atelier can be continued and, even more importantly, how might this conversation influence the operational model of EDN as a network? How to secure visibility for those whose physical mobility is (temporarily) restricted? How to keep the discussion and reflection going despite the unavoidable pressure to 'get back to normal', or, rather, to fulfil funders' expectations? In addressing these questions, there seems to be a great potential for EDN to actively advocate for and support sustainable conditions for dance creation and touring.