

Path dependency in theatre funding: Venues and their Impact on Dance Productions in Estonia

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ABSTRACT

Estonian contemporary dance emerged in the early 1990s outside established theatre institutions. Since then, it has existed in a project-based format, which means that though dance artists can receive funding for preparing projects, there is no financial support for facilities needed for everyday practice outside or between the projects. The type of venues available for practicing contemporary dance has an impact on choreographic practice presented for the public, even if that dimension often remains invisible.

Funding policy, like other policies, is greatly affected by the historical legacy of a particular policy (that is, path dependent), and the same can be claimed about choreographic practice. Therefore, in order to understand why a certain policy or practice prevails and is resistant to change even if it becomes problematic, it is necessary to look at the beginning of the path. In the present article, the history of theatre and dance funding in Estonia is taken as an example to discuss how that history affects the present in terms of choices by dance practitioners. Though Estonia is taken as an example, the situation is far from unique and therefore can serve as a case for analyzing similar situations in other countries.

KEYWORDS

Contemporary dance, path dependency, theatre and dance funding

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INTRODUCTION

Dance, in all its forms, requires space for its execution. To formulate complex ideas and/or use more than one body, dance requires more space than a body occupies when turning around with arms outstretched. Even though it is possible to conceive of dances that use narrow space, and convey complicated concepts, the range of movements and movement patterns remains limited in conditions of restricted space. Dance makers may in their mind imagine complicated movement patterns executed by multiple bodies (elaborate, polyphonic dance texts), but transporting that imagination into reality and making it visible to other people usually requires compromises. In many cases these compromises are made due to space restrictions, and if these are constricted for an extended period, choreographers' works tend to become constrained as well. The situation can be compared with that of painters compelled to draw or paint without the use of a canvas or paper and with limited access to other surfaces – the loss to humankind would be immense. Thus, even if space for moving is not the only thing that affects dance making and choreographic practice, it often has a strong impact on choices that choreographers make.

THE PRESENT CONTEMPORARY DANCE SCENE: GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS

Independent dance in Estonia has evolved alongside the reclaiming of the Republic. Currently, there are five dance companies (besides the two ballet ones) presenting productions on a more or less regular basis: Fine 5 (since 1992, led by Tiina Ollesk and Rene Nõmmik), Zuga (since 1998, led by Tiina Mölder, Helen Reitsnik, and Jarmo Karing), Tallinna Tantsuteater (since

2009, headed by Heili Lindepuu and Dmitri Harchenko), Goltsman Ballet (since 2012 led by Maria Goltsman), and Nii Physical Theatre (since 2012 led by Renate Keerd). Five companies in twenty-five years, and only two from the 1990s. The list of independent dance artists is longer but few give regular performances, and most of them are young (under 30) with some exceptions like Mart Kangro, who entered the field in 1997. Most of those who began their careers in the late 1990s and early 2000s have disappeared from the scene, and even those who dominated the contemporary dance scene in the 2000s have become less productive. Considering that the average annual number of dance studies graduates from two Estonian universities (Tallinn University and Tartu University Viljandi Cultural Academy) has been fifteen for the past twenty-five years, a question arises: what is the matter? Even though a great many graduates are occupied in the ethnic dance field and others dedicate themselves fully to pedagogical work, there is still far too great a loss of talent that cannot be written off as individuals who have followed the wrong vocation, in particular in the light that universities have three-to-four-day admission exams to select suitable candidates for the field.

Another issue in the field is that dance, based on the movement sequences of well-trained bodies (that has in Estonian dance writing been called an “elaborate, polyphonic dance text”), is slowly becoming extinct, and the number of artists who express their ideas predominantly corporeally is diminishing. Priit Raud, director of Kanuti Guild production house and promoter of contemporary dance since 1991, has claimed: “one of the greatest issues in Estonian performing arts is that people are not fully trained. Everything may be well conceived conceptually, but the production has not been fully developed over the rehearsal period. [...] The production is sloppy and you can see that. That is in particular visible in dance.”¹ That regret, made in 2015, can be understood in the light that for the past fifteen years, the phrase “contemporary dance” equals the so-called conceptual or pedestrian-style dance in which a well worked out dance text tended to be considered “too balletic” and preference was given to presenting ideas via the use of a verbal text, video, pedestrian movement, and everyday activities. The trend in the mid-2000s among the majority of Estonian dance artists was to “liberate themselves from movement”² and emphasize that “movement-based dance”³ is outdated. Though there are multiple reasons for the predominance of pedestrian-style dance on Estonian stages in the 2000s and the early 2010s, the contributing factor to the situation was the shortage of training spaces and larger per-

1 Raudsepp 2015.

2 See Einasto 2014.

3 It is difficult to know when or by whom the phrase was first used, but it was part of the vocabulary in 2006 when the Estonian Art Museum (KUMU) in collaboration with STÜ (Independent Dance Association) advertised a series of “contemporary movement-based performances”, see <http://www.fine5.ee/uudised-toimunud/uus-kaas-aegse-tantsu-etenduste-sari-tantsukunst-kumus/>

forming venues, making it difficult to work out polyphonic dance texts, and keeping dancing bodies in top physical form.

VENUES AND THEIR IMPACT ON DANCE MAKING

When discussing the present Estonian policy about contemporary dance, production houses are brought into the discussion as institutions solving the issues. Production houses are a decade old phenomenon in Estonian theatre and the first visible examples emerged in connection with the evolution of contemporary dance. Three major ones in Tallinn are Kanuti Guild (since 2002), STL (Sõltumatu Tantsu Lava = Independent Dance Stage since 2014), and Vaba Lava (since 2014) – all receive funding from the state to cover utilities and rent, and provide salaries to one or two administrative and technical staff members, but for productions they have to find other sources,⁴ usually Kulka, the cultural fund. Since neither Kanuti Guild nor Vaba Lava are exclusively dedicated to presenting dance productions and STL claims to be the only dance house, the latter will be used as an example about the issues a dance production has to face.

STL receives state funding out of which 60% goes to rent. The venue the organization rents is relatively small (154 m² in total, including 60–70 removable seats) which makes it unsuitable for presenting elaborate dance texts. However, renting a larger venue is above the means of the organization. Kanuti Guild has three working spaces with the main stage of about 100 m² plus space for 132 seats, a small stage of 60 m² with 30–50 seats, and a cellar hall (with a pillar in the middle of the room) of 48 m² with 30 seats. Only Vaba Lava can boast a large space of 630 m² and 500 seats plus having a rehearsal studio of 128 m².⁵

The venue where a dance piece is to be presented strongly influences the kind of piece the choreographer decides to make. A piece for the proscenium stage differs from that for the black box, and the size of the box or the closeness of the audience affects strongly what kind of performance choreographers can offer for viewing: in order to see certain patterns the audience has to be more distant from the stage than a small venue enables. The venues available to contemporary dance, including those mentioned, do not offer much space between dancers and spectators, which means that visual effects requiring greater distance are out of the question. The venues above conceptualize contemporary dance not as a polyphonic dance text, but rather as an intimate venture that does not make great demands for the spectators' visual or kinesthetic processing of the presentation.

The venue size affects the size of movement and number of dancers used for dance production. Aare Rander, dance teacher and choreographer who

4 Raudsepp 2015.

5 There is another available venue for presenting dance works – the Auditorium of the Estonian Art Museum (KUMU) with a stage of 120m² and 245 seats, but Kumu does not produce works itself.

has worked in Estonia and Finland, has pointed out that if dancers are practicing in small studios they do not learn to expand their body movements or imagine space-requiring movement patterns.⁶ There is little group choreography in Estonian contemporary dance: out of approximately two hundred new productions presented in 2006–2016 only about a quarter used four or more dancers,⁷ and often the works with more than six dancers included dance students.⁸ Of the works using less than four dancers, most have been either solos or duets.

Another aspect of the same issue is that the bigger the number of people engaged in a production, the greater the budget. As Kulka supports creative activities but not the “exploitation” (repetition) of performances outside the initial two or three, repeat performances should be covered by ticket sales. However, as the venue is small (and that means also a small number of possible spectators), it is impossible to sell many tickets even if the production is popular – therefore a smaller number of performers is preferred.⁹ An interesting example in this context is the STL production from 2013, *Rock’n Roll ja lehesadu* (Rock’n Roll and Flying Leaves), choreographed by Kaja Lindal and Hendrik Lebon, which has successfully been shown all over the world. It is usually played in schools or other non-theatre venues, but it is impossible to show it in Estonia without additional funding, which is difficult to obtain because there are three people involved. As it is a participatory performance, it can have a maximum of forty spectators, which means that ticket sales do not cover the presentation costs of the production.¹⁰

Still another issue is that the rehearsal period for making a dance piece is relatively short: STL can offer only a three week rehearsal period prior to a premier, though the residency program, supported by Kulka, can last a month.¹¹ The same is generally true about other houses – the usual preparation time is a month. However, making an elaborate dance text with more than two or three performers often requires more time than that: in addition to finding available dancers for the project, performer schedules for shared rehearsing and practicing times together have to match up, and more time is needed for a single rehearsal to warm up and “tune” the bodies to each oth-

6 Rander 2008.

7 This is a rough estimate based on statistics collected by Eesti Teatriagentuur (Estonian Theatre Agency) and presented in the annual *Teatrielu* (Theatre Life) publication, but we are missing data for about two years, and not all dance productions are presented by the existing companies or production houses. But the trend is there.

8 To be more specific, a number of new productions with 1–3 performers out of the total: 2006: 13 out of 20; 2007: 12 out of 15; 2008: 9 out of 14; 2009: 11 out of 17; 2011: 10 out of 17; 2013: half of 22; 2014: 17 out of 24; 2015: 16 out of 26; 2016: half of 22. The productions cover those presented by Kanuti Guild, STÜ, Fine5, ETA, and Tallinna Tantsuteater.

9 Aron 2017.

10 Aron 2017.

11 Aron 2017.

er, not to speak of creating the movement vocabulary itself. Pedestrian-style performances require less time than those above. Since funding is only received for producing the production (a three to four week rehearsal period with a limited number of performances) but not for its additional “exploitation”, productions are short-lived even if they are successful.

HISTORY MATTERS:

PATH DEPENDENCE IN POLICY MAKING AND CREATIVE PRACTICE

Before plunging into history, it is worthwhile to think about how and why history matters. Evolution in nature and culture seems to follow a cyclical pattern: periods of rapid and radical changes are followed by longer periods of slow, incremental variations within the paths that the radical changes opened up. In the evolution of culture, the same patterns can be traced: explosive processes¹² are followed by those of quiet progression.

During an explosive process (for example, a birth of a nation state like the Republic of Estonia in 1918), there exists a time and space where a great deal of opportunities are available (there were multiple options for the creation of the new state, from the type of state and the methods of how to make that particular type of state) for progress, but out of many the one that is chosen makes other options impossible (it is not possible to build a parliamentary and autocratic state at the same time). Looking from the present to the past it often seems that the choice made was the only logical or rational one, whereas looking from the past to the present it is possible to see that the choice was often arbitrary and determined by chance. Once a particular path is chosen, investments (time, energy, finances, legal framework created) are made into that particular path. The greater the investment and the bigger the values embedding them, the more difficult it is to change or leave the path, at least by peaceful means. In social sciences this difficulty is summarized as “path dependence”¹³, in particular when analyzing technological advancement and policy making. The birth and rebirth of the Republic of Estonia in 1918 and 1991 respectively were explosive processes in terms of the creation of the state: transitions from one form of political and economic formation to another, requiring new legislation and welfare policies different from the then existing ones. Theatre policy (the way theatres were seen to function in society, which in turn decided what kind of funding was designed for them) was formed during the first explosion process in the 1920s. Though the rebirth of the Republic enabled the creation of a totally new policy, the chosen path was of restitution, meaning re-adopting pre-Soviet policies, later to be modified, but not significantly changed. Since the continuity of the nation state was paramount, the adoption of a radically new policy was hampered.

Current policy makers have to act in an environment created by former pol-

¹² See Lotman 2013, 64–70.

¹³ The literature of “path dependence” is too large to present here. For this article the consulted articles were by Weir and Skocpol 1986, Pierson 1997, Thelen 1999.

icies that have created the structures formed by the historical development of a policy or practice: most policies are embedded in a legal framework and surrounded by other policies that affect the present resources and plans.¹⁴ The longer the history, and the greater the values attached to a particular policy or practice, the more difficult it is to change it even when change is imminent. Financial and time resources required to implement a totally new policy discourage great and rapid changes.¹⁵ The Estonian case is a good example: at present there is some dissatisfaction with the present funding scheme, but it is not sufficiently big to implement a totally new scheme requiring major changes in the legislation. Historical theatres that benefit from the present system are deemed culturally too valuable. On the other hand, expanding the present funding scheme is not financially possible for the state, making the funding scheme locked-in¹⁶ and resistant to any change.

In order to discuss the present funding of theatre, the presentation of the history of theatre funding is required: an understanding of how a policy was introduced may help to dismantle it.¹⁷ It is not only institutions and policies that tend to be path dependent. Small incremental change and explosive processes characterize the whole development of culture and various cultural practices. Implicit cultural norms and traditions shape an idea and practice of cultural phenomena: each culture, for example, has its own notion of who can publicly dance, where and when and with whom, and it is very difficult to change that understanding. That would require a major, often long-term shift (war, major political and economic change) in the cultural landscape that would make the old ideas and practices inappropriate. Human thinking is path dependent insofar as it is based on habitual mental circuits; even creative imagination and practice, including that of dance making, tends to be path dependent because it is shaped by cultural norms, expectations and requirements, as well as by the educational system – a certain paradigm¹⁸. Therefore, the understanding of what is folk, show, or contemporary dance or ballet tends to become stagnant too, based on practices and highlighted performances that are supported by production houses, the critical apparatus (the press), funding agencies, and other media, affecting indirectly the choreographers' imaginations and dance-creating process.

BACKGROUND: THE THEATRE INSTITUTION IN ESTONIA

Estonian theatre institutions were modeled after that of the German city theatre, combining drama, music, and dance. Thus, the word “theatre” includes drama and musical theatre (opera, ballet, other forms of professional dance or pantomime presented in a place adjusted for the needs of presenting a

14 Pierson 1997, 44.

15 Weir and Skocpol 1986, 121.

16 The concept of “lock-in” as used by Pierson 1997, 45.

17 Thelen 1999, 396–399.

18 See Kuhn 2003 [1962].

performance).¹⁹

To understand the present situation concerning venues, it is important to take a look at how theatre in Estonia evolved. It emerged in the early twentieth century out of amateur acting groups that formed a part of national consciousness-raising activities under associations dedicated to artistic and educational activities (singing in choirs, playing various musical instruments, establishing Estonian-language schools, and press). In 1906 two of these groups – Vanemuine in Tartu, and Estonia in Tallinn acquired professional status, followed by Endla in Pärnu (1911), Drama Studio in Tallinn (1924, under the name Estonian Drama Theatre since 1937), Ugala in Viljandi (1926), and a theatre in Rakvere (1940).²⁰ All these theatre companies were repertory theatres that acquired or constructed their own buildings in which they have since been housed. This practice has provided the society (and cultural bureaucracy) with the notion that a theatre equals a house specially constructed for theatrical activities with its own permanent repertory company. One theatre building equals one theatre company under one management.

Estonian professional dance also emerged in the early twentieth century: as a concert dance practice outside theatres, and as dance companies in the existing theatres to produce more complicated and demanding dance scenes in musical productions (operettas, Singspiele, and, later, operas). Estonia Theatre founded its permanent dance company in 1926 (now the National Ballet) and Vanemuine in 1935 (now the Vanemuine Ballet Company).²¹

In 1925 Kulka (the National Endowment for the Arts) was founded, giving every spring and autumn grants to artists, but also to theatres. As the young Republic of Estonia considered theatre institutions an important part of its national image and culture, theatres also received funding via the state budget.²²

That was the system that the Soviets took over, keeping theatres in bigger cities (Tallinn, Pärnu, Viljandi, Tartu, Rakvere), and establishing some new ones (the Russian Theatre in 1948, the Puppet Theatre in 1952, and the Youth Theatre – now Tallinn City Theatre – in 1966). Kulka was disbanded because in the Soviet Union the state took care of all the arts that supported “progressive ideas”. Other kinds of theatre and dance were considered “bourgeois relics” that had no place in Soviet society. Amateur theatre and dance activities could be practiced in regional community centres funded by the state or in some cases by economically successful collective farms²³. The Estonian Philharmonic Society (funded by the state) was an umbrella organ-

19 Pappel 2003, 11–12.

20 Karjahärm and Sirk 2001, 211.

21 Tormis 1967, 14–74.

22 Karjahärm and Sirk 2001, 205.

23 Collective farms (kolkhozes) were often “states within the state” since they had their own welfare system, and if economically successful they functioned like private enterprises.

ization that coordinated music and dance concerts, and from the late 1960s, supported show dance groups who performed in cabaret programs in bigger Tallinn hotels (Astoria, Tallinn, Viru, Olümpia). Independent and private theatre and dance companies were unthinkable until the late 1980s when Gorbachev's perestroika opened the door for private entrepreneurship. That unlocked the path and enabled the foundation of two new, initially project-based groups: VAT Theatre in 1987, and Ruto Killakund in 1990, which became Von Krahl Theatre²⁴ in 1992.²⁵ Into this "wave" we can place the foundation of the first privately funded dance company – the Nordic Star (1991–1994).

THE EMERGENCE OF INDEPENDENT DANCE IN THE 1990S

The Nordic Star, founded in 1991, was a 10-member dance company funded by the Nordic Star film company and headed by the Estonia Theatre ballerina Saima Kranig, whose personal contacts in the Tallinn Choreographic School (now Ballet School) and the Estonia Theatre enabled the company to use the school and theatre venues for rehearsals and everyday class when the studios were free.²⁶ Besides those two venues, Linnahall ballet studio was sometimes used through a private non-monetary agreement.²⁷ And even though Nordic Star had to rent theatre buildings for their performances outside the Estonia Theatre (where the company did not pay rent, as Mai Murdmaa, the then artistic director of the ballet company, was supportive of the new group), it was relatively modest and affordable.²⁸ Until the 1992 currency reform (from Soviet roubles to Estonian local currency with a fixed rate to the Deutschmark), the company members received a regular salary, and their work conditions resembled those of a typical Soviet ballet company. The company disbanded in 1994 because the film company was unable to sustain the expected level of revenue. However, five dancers (Rene Nõmmik, Tiina Ollesk, Oleg Ostanin, Anu Ruusmaa, Katrin Laur) from the Nordic Star formed, in 1992, their own group – the Fine 5 Dance Theatre, who supported themselves by teaching classes and performing at various closed-audience parties. For regular training they accepted the service-based offer from the Teachers' House management: they would produce programs for children's Christmas parties and perform at festive occasions in the House in return for the free use of the Teachers' House venues (in the Old Town). As interest in non-balletic and non-ethnic dance grew, and Fine 5 wanted to do larger scale productions, they decided to establish their own school in 1994, which required larger venues. On learning that the former Volta Factory buildings (close to the Old Town) were empty, the company moved there despite the far from beneficial conditions (concrete floor, weak heating system). They had

24 Von Krahl hired a permanent company in 1998.

25 Ruus 2006.

26 Kranig 2017.

27 Ollesk 2017.

28 Kranig 2017, Ollesk 2017.

to do their own renovations, but there was no rental fee, with only utilities to be paid for.²⁹ This enabled the company to develop and expand in terms of movement explorations and group choreography: between 1995 and 1997, in addition to company works for five dancers, they also produced works for a student body engaging 8–12 people, thereby offering the nascent choreographic talent of Anu Ruusmaa and Tiina Ollesk the opportunity to undertake more complicated spatial and movement forms than working with a smaller number of people would enable. That kind of “luxury” is for most Estonian choreographers a forgotten dream now.

Two years later, the Tallinn municipality declared a contest for non-profit organizations for a venue on Lai Street (Old Town), which Fine 5 won, and for the next 13 years (1999–2012) the company and their school had their permanent home there.³⁰ After the Tallinn municipality decided to sell the building and Fine 5 had to move out, the school was forced to discontinue its activities, though the Fine 5 leaders Rene Nõmmik and Tiina Ollesk, as Tallinn University faculty members, have been able to use the University studios for preparing the company's productions, but this solution is far from satisfactory.

While Fine 5 was able to find its own venues thanks to their school, Box RM Dance Company (Merle Saarva, Raido Mägi, Laire Purik, Irene Hütsi, Erika Katlasepp, Erki Melts) from Viljandi (1995–2000) was able to carry on its activities without renting any space. As students of the Viljandi Culture College, they could use the facilities of the college when these were available (in the 1990s one could access the college as well as Tallinn University dance studios 24/7, but now both institutions are locked up for the night), and as they took classes in the Fine 5 Dance School, its venues were sometimes used for practice. But they mainly used other available spaces, like abandoned or little used buildings – places without owners to which access was unregulated, and when the doors were open, one could just go in and use them. Box RM did a great deal of site-specific work, and one of the reasons for this was that such venues could be used and nobody bothered them.³¹

The situation about renting a theatre space for performances was also easier in the 1990s: the rent theatres asked was usually a utilities-based fee. Now, the situation has changed: theatres (and other cultural institutions) are required by the state to earn a third of their revenue (by ticket sales, sponsorship, municipal support, renting out their venues) which means that all relations connected with venues or services are built on a monetary basis. Thus, if a dance company wanted to have a permanent home venue now, the minimal sum needed would be 70,000 euros per year, which is a mission impossible without state support.³²

29 Ollesk 2017.

30 Ollesk 2017, Lindepuu 2012.

31 Saarva 2000.

32 Ollesk 2017.

THE EMERGENCE OF DANCE PROMOTING AGENCIES AND PRODUCTION HOUSES

The first independent dance promotion agency – Tantsuinfo Keskus Eestis (TIKE – Centre of Dance Information in Estonia, 1991–97) started out as an information centre dedicated to collecting and spreading information about and primarily promoting contemporary dance. In 1997, it was reorganized into a purely managerial institution called Teine Tants. In 2002, the agency received the Kanuti Guild Building in the Old Town, in need of renovation, but usable for presenting dance. Before obtaining Kanuti Guild, Teine Tants used the Von Krahl Theatre building, also in the Old Town, thanks to the fact that Priit Raud, the executive director of TIKE and Teine Tants, was also managing director of the Von Krahl Theatre in 1998–2004. However, even though Kanuti Guild was, in the early 2000s, often referred to in many documents as a “dance company” or “dance house”, it has never been exclusively dedicated to dance, not to speak of “movement-based dance”; rather, it has always promoted the notion of dance as a form of performance art, and has promoted contemporary music and art in addition to experimental theatre as well. Furthermore, Kanuti Guild has never housed any dance company for their regular activities, though Zuga, because many of its works were produced by Teine Tants, almost enjoyed that status.

As Priit Raud, director of Kanuti Guild, was more interested in producing experimental dance forms, including that in the pedestrian style (a suitable export article to the production house’s partner festivals abroad), another organization dedicated to promoting contemporary dance – Sõltumatu Tantsu Ühendus (STÜ – Association of Independent Dance, headed by Triinu Aron) – was founded in 2005, which produces works as STL. According to its mission statement, STÜ “supports creative and performative activities of freelance dance artists and companies [...] for which purpose it produces new productions, offers residences [...], organizes dance workshops and master classes.”³³ However, until 2014, when STÜ moved to the same building where Vaba Lava works, it had no venue of its own and therefore had to look for places where to work, and that forced the organization to find its own venue, although unfortunately the one it can afford to rent is rather small.

Besides these dance promotion agencies there are places offering residencies for choreographers, mostly outside Tallinn, like Mooste Visiting Studio MoKS in South East Estonia, MASSIA near Pärnu, and Pardimäe Lokaal in Lääne-Virumaa, where the resident artist has to take care of his/her residency and living costs, but the venue is free for use during the residency program. Koidu Cultural House in Viljandi has also now Kulka-funded residencies: four one-month or eight two-week residencies a year with a stipend for living and venue costs covered. Thus, the situation has improved in terms of where to present dance pieces as well as where to work for a short period, but it is still difficult in terms of keeping oneself in good physical shape via

33 STÜ 2017.

everyday training, or with regard to places where dance productions need a more extensive work process.

THE PATH OF FUNDING THEATRE INSTITUTIONS

When Estonia reclaimed its independence in 1991, it tried to continue – as far as possible – where it had stopped in 1939. Those theatre companies (with their buildings) that had survived until 1991 were considered a national heritage and have been funded from the state budget. Later (in 2001) some private theatres (including VAT and Von Krahl) were added to the list of theatres receiving state funding.³⁴

Kulka was re-established in 1994 to support the arts, folklore, body culture, and sports via funding projects that promote and popularize the arts and sports, creative artists, unions, and societies.³⁵ However, Kulka supports activities and individual artists: it may cover the production costs (scenery, lighting design, fees to artists), but it does not give money for renting venues because of the persisting idea that a theatre company already has its own venue³⁶ – an idea that is true for the so-called historical theatres, but does not apply to most of the new groups and companies, including those of dance. The fact that dance requires regular training, which can only be done in a larger space than someone's living room, has also not penetrated this institutional set-up and is another indication of the path dependent dance mindset which deems that dance takes place only in Vanemuine and Estonia Theatre with their rehearsal studios, workshops, and equipment for producing pieces.

Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, the ownership issues of real estate were being resolved (those who had been owners of some property and their heirs in 1939 could reclaim their property), with the result that by the mid-2000s, the places that had been accessible to Box RM, for example, had disappeared.

In 2001 the National Audit Office report pointed out that funding theatre institutions lacked a coherent and transparent system. The issue was not whether the so-called historical theatres should be funded, but rather that the basis for allocating funds was vague, and there was no criterium for how to include new companies into the list of state-funded institutions. Since 2012, the state-financed theatres have a three-tier budget: a secure support from the national budget, the support allocated by the Ministry of Culture, and self-earned funds. The state-supported theatres are listed, and the list is based on the long-term perspective plan of theatres, repertory plans, their importance for the national culture, and their regional importance.³⁷ However, the Ministry of Culture is in difficulty since the state-funded theatres and the Es-

34 Kulturiministerium 2002.

35 Eesti Kultuurkapitali seadus 1994.

36 Private information from Anu Ruusmaa, a long-time member of the Kulka board for the Performing Arts Fund.

37 Sibrits 2012.

tonia Theatre (which has its own legal act) consume 95% of the funding and 75% of the audience. Private theatres, including Von Krahl and VAT, as well as production houses like Kanuti Guild and STL have to be satisfied with the remaining 5% of the funding, even though their audience is about 25% – that is approximately 300,000 annual theatre visits.³⁸

Although the Ministry of Culture is not against supporting creative artists, the funds are limited, and it prefers allocating funds to production houses instead of dance companies, even in the form of three-to-five-year stipends that would be allocated on the basis of their former activities. The danger, from the Ministry's point of view as presented by Hillar Sein, theatre chancellor of the Ministry of Culture, is that people receiving long-term stipends start taking them for granted and expect the state to continue them.³⁹ It is clear though that having already a path dependent theatre funding in place, the Ministry is reluctant to introduce some new commitment of the state that it may find burdensome in the future and may also become a locked-in policy for the future.

As a consequence, the whole field of contemporary dance is project-based. The majority of dance artists are freelancers and support themselves either by participating in show programs or teaching dance in schools or kindergartens. Many produce one or two dance pieces after graduation and then discontinue. Thus, the field is very volatile and constantly changing. Financial support for dance projects or workshops can be applied for from Kulka, directly from the Ministry of Culture, once a year from the Eesti Rahvuskultuuri Fond (ERF – Estonian National Culture Fund), and from smaller regional cultural endowments and sponsoring organizations. Those who have remained true to the field (like Mart Kangro, Henri Hütt, Kadri Noormets, Siim Tõniste, Külli Roosna and Kenneth Flak) are active in many residency and international programs; several do their work mostly abroad (like Krõõt Juurak).

A project-based working style in production houses means that the house chooses companies or artists for residencies and that situation ruffles some feathers: "Art is like meat on market stalls for the producer who walks by and picks what s/he likes," says Tiina Ollesk.⁴⁰ Besides, Kanuti Guild and STL, by favouring performance art and pedestrian-style dance, have created their own path dependence of what they consider presentable, and it does not suit every artist. Thus, in recent years, more and more dance works are produced outside the existing production houses. Choreographers find new venues where to practice and perform and either produce their works on their own or find a producer outside the existing frameworks.

Looking back to the 1990s and even the early 2000s, it is now clear the period was loaded with opportunities (the most recent state-funded theatre – NO99 was founded in 2005), but because it lacked a strong leader with a

38 Peep 2017.

39 Hillar Sein in Virro 2014.

40 Ollesk 2017.

comprehensive understanding of contemporary dance, the period dissolved into the current unhappy situation.⁴¹

FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

The present theatre funding scheme is locked-in and not likely to change unless some explosive process emerges. Even then, it is essential to remember that any policy, once implemented, will create its own path and, however unsuitable later, is likely to be resistant to changes. Therefore, it is necessary to form flexible strategies and practices, and look for ways to find state support enabling the existence of multiple paths and less likely to get locked-in the way the present theatre funding is.

Solutions have to be found also within the existing framework. One of them is returning to the *quid pro quo* model of the 1990s wherever possible, and, according to some practitioners, there are already cases when this is practiced on a small scale. There are plenty of houses (for example schools, kindergartens) and venues in Estonia where dance could be practiced in a way that would not disturb the main users of the buildings, and in many cases the companies or their members could offer some service for the venue owner. This would be easier to practice if the institutions with venues were not pressurized to earn part of their revenue and think only in terms of financial profit when renting out space.

Another idea, proposed by Lennart Peep,⁴² is to exchange part of the resident theatre company and its directors for a year or two (for example, (Tallinn) Drama Theatre actors and directors are in exchange with actors and directors of the Viljandi Ugala). It would break the usual routine and the creative team would start to see theatre from a different angle. Estonia Theatre had its Pööningutants (Attic Dance) program in 2012 in which independent contemporary dance choreographers made dance works for the ballet company; unfortunately, it was discontinued after three productions. Both ballet theatres have hosted contemporary dance performances and given opportunities to some non-ballet style choreographers between the late 1990s and early 2010s, but this practice too has been suspended.

Dance practitioners have always been resourceful in handling difficult conditions and that may be one of the reasons their needs are often ignored – they have managed. At the moment ETA (Estonian Dance Agency) is raising funds via Hooandja (an Estonian version of Kickstarter) to renovate and open TantsuRUUM (Dance SPACE) in Tallinn – a 250 m² multifunctional dance venue that can be used both for performances and as two training studios

41 Hillar Sein mentioned in a meeting in June 2017 that in the mid-1990s there was a chance to establish a contemporary dance theatre, but there was no leader to push the idea forward.

42 Peep 2017.

separable by a partition wall.⁴³

New digital technologies focusing on dance as an image rather than as a performance bound by a particular time and space may also provide ways around the shortage of performance venues. Image-based dance requires the use of animation, special effects, and/or motion capture; it allows for more comprehensive thinking about the spaces in which dance movement occurs. In this digital reality, live performance is no longer the default condition of dance, but rather a specific occasion with a specific purpose instead of a standard purpose.⁴⁴ However, this could not replace physical kinesthetic art, though it has great potential for expanding the field.

The existence of a suitable space is a crucial factor for dance practice and, as can be seen from the example of Estonian contemporary dance, one of the aspects affecting dance aesthetics. This is something both dance practitioners and analysts should consider. It is imperative to notice the extent to which the choices artists make are directed or even predetermined. Understanding the situation via the historical roots of the issue provides opportunities for a solution: whether it is the example from history, agreements based on *manus manam lavat*, new training and performance venues, like residency centres, TantsuRUUM and other novel places, or new perspectives by taking advantage of digital technology. Dance art reflects and shapes the face of its time. It is dependent on the impact of social values and trends as well as on political events and attitudes.

43 <http://www.hooandja.ee/projekt/uus-tantsuruum-eesti-tantsuagentuuris> (15 Nov 2017)

44 Toepfer and Einasto 2017

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