

THE FIKA PROJECT

**NARRA
TIVES**

BY

CULTURAL

CHANGE

MAKERS

The Fika Project.

Narratives by Cultural Change Makers

©Nätverkstan Kultur and Sven Rånlund

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Interviews by Sven Rånlund

**Edited by Karin Dalborg
& Mikael Löfgren**

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Editors' foreword

This book is part of *The Fika Project* which is supported by the EU Erasmus+ education and training programme and Region Västra Götaland in Sweden. Its aim is to design a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) concept for cultural leadership development capable of meeting the demands of our complex and changing times. The project was initiated by Nätverkstan Kultur and its partners Trans Europe Halles, ENCATC and Olivearte. As the starting point for the work, the project group undertook an analysis of the needs of the cultural sector and a survey of existing cultural leadership training. Together with *Perspectives on Cultural Leadership*, which is being published alongside it, this book forms the analytical and empirical basis of the CPD programme for cultural leaders in an international context that is *The Fika Project's* ultimate objective.

As part of the project we commissioned arts journalist Sven Rånlund to interview ten experienced cultural change makers from various parts of the world. They are active in different countries, in different types of organisations and with different art forms and types of culture. We present here their stories about life and work, education and training, professional experiences, success and setbacks, dilemmas and solutions. As the reader will see, the stories are very different, partly due to external factors but also because of the individual qualities and beliefs of the interviewees. Despite the differences, however, they have much in common both in terms of the challenges they face and their ways of dealing with them. We hope that, rather than presenting role models to emulate, these stories will serve as inspiring examples for the readers to test against their own experience.

The project group would like to extend its thanks to all the cultural leaders interviewed for being so accommodating and to author Sven Rånlund for his perceptive input, and we wish you an enjoyable read.

Bohus-Björkö, spring 2016
Karin Dalborg and Mikael Löfgren

Author's foreword

Ten people in leadership positions in arts and cultural organisations in various parts of the world were interviewed for this book. The interviews took place via Skype and were long, often wide-ranging, conversations about professional life and life in general. We slowly reviewed the years, bringing specific memories of work, encounters and experiences to the surface. As the interrogator, I tried to identify the moments in the course of people's lives that showed the first hint of a future leadership career.

For interviewees, the sessions evolved into an occasion for in-depth reflection on their professional lives. In order to translate *their* stories into *these* stories, the interviews have been written in the first person, not just to bring the reader closer to the interviewees but also to ensure that their own voices are heard more clearly. It is one thing to talk about the successes of one's organisation in a strictly professional capacity, but it is something else entirely to find words to describe crises, hard-won experiences and unexpected leaps. I hope that the reader will be able to sense the interviewees' own presence in the words that follow.

So what is it that connects these international cultural leaders? Although there are many differences between them, they do have one thing in common: they understand the conditions under which art is created and artists operate. The ability to lead and develop your own organisation, irrespective of its size, depends on an understanding of artistic creativity. Several leaders talk about how they exploit their creativity in their day-to-day work, as if their leadership role provided scope for a type of art all of its own.

Sven Rånlund

Ong Keng Sen, Singapore International Festival of Arts and Theatre Works, Singapore.



“We are all in some way involved in a kind of ‘world creating process’...”

I run an independent theatre company in Singapore called Theatre Works, which is my base. I’m also Director of Singapore International Festival of Arts (SIFA), commissioned by the Arts Council. I have also founded Arts Network Asia, a collaborative group of artists and cultural workers from Asia. As I operate at many levels, I focus on quite a few different cultural areas.

For me, art is about an encounter with the ‘self’. It’s easy to think that making art is about other people and their conflicts, tragedies or issues. When I first began making art in school and all the way up to university, it was always about some fantasy of someone far away. That is the starting premise of most art – you imagine something outside of you and write stories about this other world. But around the time that I started Theatre Works, I realised that I wanted to search for the ‘self’, because this is, in a way, our blind spot. Our bodies are built in such a way that we always look at people and places from inside. So, for me, the idea of the ‘self’ is connected to how, in the theatre and the arts in general, we can turn the mirror on ourselves so that we are no longer in that blind spot.

After studying law in Singapore I went to the US to do post-graduate work in performance studies. I was already a professional director, but I felt that I needed to engage in a wider socio-political field. I decided not to go for a typical course aimed at perfecting one’s craft but looked instead for a more extensive interface with global politics.

In 1988, I was invited to run and reform Theatre Works in whatever way I thought best. After 27 years I am still in post, but the company has evolved and has been radically transformed. For me, the key to running a small or medium-sized organisation is not to be afraid of evolving. In fact, transformation is really the only way forward for this kind of cultural enterprise.

Theatre Works began as a repertory theatre with a subscription base. Today, we are a platform for various creative interventions. We have no fixed repertoire; we don't even produce a season anymore. We can go a whole year without making any theatre. Instead, we offer residencies, talks and dialogues. That is where the need is, rather than yet another play. So the evolution of Theatre Works with me at the helm has really been about sensing what is needed and being ready to change. It's true to say that evolving has been our only option to ensure continued relevance.

I can identify some distinct stages in the changes that Theatre Works has undergone. The first stage involved delving into cultural histories and ethnicities to reclaim our roots from what was at the time a globalised, western perspective. What we see nowadays, of course, is a much more diverse globalisation that incorporates different histories. During that stage we reached out to our own roots as English-Chinese speaking individuals, in the realisation that there were alternative, repressed histories. The second stage was to move away from being centred on our own ethnicity and to begin a journey to search for affinities. This was about searching for a shared space that was not based on roots. Doing this was an important reclamation of mental space, because this space had been lost.

In fact, we were globalised people long before we realised it. Vikings and Arabs, for instance, were travelling all over the world long before we began to think about colonialism, which is the starting point for a lot of post-colonial or post-post-colonial conversations today. So reclaiming the mental space that was lost through modernisation, as Theatre Works has done, has been a sort of process of renovation. It's like renovating an old building



and uncovering lots of different layers. As Asian performance artists and researchers, we often begin by searching for our roots, but for me it is much more important to search for affinities. In non-Western countries, the search for roots was, for a long time, a search for identity, which has obscured a lot of other attitudes and philosophies that have now been lost.

Through our search for affinities we have become aware of a deeper, unifying element across different cultures and identities. We are all in some way involved in a kind of ‘world-creating process’. We are creating worlds that we can believe in and function in, and also contribute to. Personally, this is the basis of a lot of my current philosophies – a desire to create worlds that are ethical as well as integrated.

What prompted me to reflect upon art in this way was my arrival in New York. Suddenly, I discovered that composers like Philip Glass and Meredith Monk, who were clearly not Indonesians or Tibetans, were writing music that had strong affinities with the gamelan and Buddhist meditation. So how then do we begin to develop an understanding beyond our roots? One key belief is that roots do not limit creative individuals and art in itself. It is in fact possible to write gamelan music that demonstrates a

strong affinity with the art form without being Indonesian. You don't need that essential belonging to take on another voice. It was an important moment for me when things started to break down: when it was no longer East versus West, South versus North. It's not just about roots, identity or affinity. When you don't have to belong anywhere, you can rewrite the structure of the whole world.

The question of passports is still a crucial one. But things change when we question the role of the passport as an essential form of identity and begin to suggest that it is merely a bit like your credit card. For me, the moments of finding these affinities are important breakthroughs into spaces that can allow for conversations wider than just "Where do you come from?" and the stereotypes that follow from that.

I truly believe there is a need today to reflect on the world before borders were introduced. I'm interested in going back to what was global even before colonialism, when people moved through borderless spaces.

"For me, the key to running a small or medium-sized organisation is not to be afraid of evolving."

In Singapore, we have something called the Media Development Authority. This has official powers of censorship and regulation that enable society to exist in harmony. The Authority's activity is based on the actions of the British who began introducing legislation for the control of public assembly when they arrived in Singapore in 1819. But if you look at what existed before the British came and started exercising control over the indigenous population, you will find that people had various methods of negotiating, debating and engaging in dialogue. I think that if we are to deconstruct the systems of hegemony and power that we have today, we need to go back to before the systems were put in place.

For those of us working in the cultural sphere, these issues seem to be very much linked to the fact that the people and political parties in power will never want to give up their authority. Their power has a legal basis, since the legislation was enacted in accordance with the law at the time of independence. What I can do as an artist is to think about putting other things on the table: alternative philosophies, alternative viewpoints about how the world might be constructed. As the director of a small or a medium-sized enterprise, I should not limit myself to thinking about what is possible. Instead, I need to focus on what is impossible within the existing framework. If I don't, we are sure to remain a small or medium-sized organisation.

It is important to ask yourself how you can move forward. What are the alternatives to disillusion and resistance? There is always the option for an organisation to submit to becoming bigger and better in line with a specific formula for success. But for me, the crucial thing is actually to be on the border – to cultivate border thinking. Border thinking comes from South American political resistance. I interpret it to mean that it is about finding a way to manoeuvre yourself through these hegemonies and trying to remain true to your needs.

When you start to engage with the impossible, you are starting in a way to work towards the dream of an alternative. So how do we feed these dreams for change? For me, it is about finding previously vague spaces with some kind of potentiality. When trying to grow a dream you have to look for more informal realities, things that many people may dismiss as being unclear and not factual. This lack of definition can allow dreams to be realised. It is crucial to inspire others to think about different kinds of vagueness, almost to breathe life and energy into what is impossible – not to clutch at straws but to define ways of thinking that will provide not only solace but also belief and forward momentum.

Theatre Works started as a collective, but it hasn't operated as such during my time there. I strongly believe that collectives require like-minded people. That is where a lot of organisations

fall down, unfortunately. There are lots of examples, for instance in the UK, where the vision of the collective had eroded but the structure remained, and then the whole venture collapsed; or where the organisation was led by one visionary and then turned into something else.

I think it important to hold on to what the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze called 'lines of flight'. Who is able to chart these lines of flight? At Theatre Works I was the person who charted the pathways. But it wouldn't have been possible without someone to make it actually happen. It can be anybody: an executive, a director, an accountant, a deputy – somebody who manifests these lines of flight. There has to be a give and take between ideas and execution. You can work alone, of course, but you need at least one other person who can challenge inspiration by putting it into action; this leads to dynamism.

It is not easy to find partners to co-create a vision with. At Theatre Works, I work with a managing director, who is also alongside me at SIFA when we put together the festival. We met when I was 12 years old, so we have a shared history. But how do you find someone you click with? I saw a production by the legendary theatre director Peter Brook recently and it's the same for him – he needs to find people he clicks with or he won't be able to continue to propagate his ideas.

Part of finding people with the same beliefs and philosophies includes understanding that these people will not necessarily always work with you. Not because you are still active in that enterprise, but because they might have to move on to some other uncharted territory where they can start to make a difference. It is important to see this as extending the gene pool, so to speak, so that initiative can flow into other spaces. I imagine that I have been a factor in persuading many different individuals over the years to take up careers in other countries where they can make a difference, combined of course with their own search for personal happiness, desire for different spaces, etc. As a mentor, I may have been an important but very small part of their lives.

I see it very positively as people leaving for new homes else-

where rather than just staying with one organisation. If you are a good organisation they shouldn't stay, because it will be clear that the enterprise is safely established on its own course and that they should move on. By 'safe', in the context of Theatre Works, I mean that it is already experimental, and has people who believe in experimentalism, evolution and transformation as a paradigm. Our space is safe because it is already super-evolutionary and super-transformative.

"As director I need to focus on what is impossible within the existing framework."

In 2013 I was appointed Director of SIFA, Singapore International Arts Festival. For many years the festival was simply called Singapore Arts Festival. More important than the inclusion of the word 'International' was the fact that it had previously been curated and managed by the Arts Council – in other words, by bureaucrats. The nerve centre of the festival had been inside government and with, as I see it, a lot of self-censorship. So becoming SIFA was also a political move, because with 'international' in the name we would have to move beyond local jealousies and petty conflicts and take on board a wider, international perspective.

The Arts Council gave me the job – and they must be regretting it now. The whole situation is currently coming to a head, with a big discussion underway about how the Arts Council uses funding as a means of censorship. My appointment as Festival Director reflected their need to expand their vision and to be seen as open and objective. This came after some pressure from the cultural sector to keep the festival going but as an independent entity separate from the state. The idea was to encourage multiplicity rather than continue with the monolithic approach. The intervention from the sector carried such weight that the Arts Council probably thought it wise to acknowledge it and to

commission the festival from an independent agency on the arm's length principle. They must have understood the importance of co-operating, so I have no doubt that it was a political move to have me as Festival Director.

I started by attempting to recalibrate the festival. I wanted it to engage with the audience qualitatively rather than quantitatively. Bringing qualitative engagement to the table meant not only introducing quality work but also asking ourselves about the nature of public engagement: Is it public engagement when 400,000 people watch fireworks?

The arts are at the heart of our discussions. SIFA is not a festival per se, nor a cultural festival, but an arts festival. We therefore have to allow for the inclusion of extreme individual trajectories and not just consider works in which artists are objectified to create knowledge or enhance diversity.

The position of a major, national festival such as SIFA is linked to the political landscape. Just because the funding comes from the party does not mean that the Arts Council should automatically follow the party line. The Arts Council should have its own way of thinking about social harmony and not just say that it can't fund any project that is detrimental to social harmony. We can agree that social harmony is something we have to deal with in Singapore, but that doesn't mean the authorities have to apply the standards of the political party in power when it considers the issue. They have to make judgements about what they want to fund, but such judgements should not necessarily be aligned with government thinking.

The Arts Council should not immediately adopt the government's position. You often encounter the statement, "We can't fund something that is critical of the Ministry of Health, because that department and the Ministry of Arts are all part of the same government." This for me is a very problematic way of thinking. There is less risk-taking, because a lot of institutions don't dare to deviate from the government line, as they may claim that the work the institutions plan to present would affect social harmony.

I think there is a lot of self-censorship going on in cultural in-

stitutions in Singapore at the moment. An example: A theatre decides it can't put on a play by Luigi Pirandello because it is surrealistic and there is no audience for it, so they are self-censoring. Censorship works at both a financial and an artistic level, though, since the play could also be seen as promoting alternative lifestyles in the form of gay marriage, which will be problematic for the government.

The four-year post that I have been appointed to is therefore quite an interesting one. It's my view that I have been given the role in my capacity as an independent artist. My immediate idea is to develop an ecosystem for the arts. SIFA plays a vital role in this ecosystem. While in this post I should not simply follow the government or Arts Council line. The fact that they invited an independent artist to take on this role is therefore justifies my standpoint: if they are not happy with it, they shouldn't have appointed an independent artist who first and foremost has a duty to society. Strategy, in short, is very important at the moment.

In SIFA's first year, we didn't have to apply for a permit for any of the shows in the festival. But this year we did have to apply, and that meant censorship. We now need a permit for every show, every talk and every film. As soon as this became apparent, I started to challenge it on every possible occasion. If I had been told at the beginning that I was going to have to run a festival with censorship, I would have said no.

The festival has to submit scripts and videos to the authorities. They look at them and suggest amendments. For example, we had programmed a theatre production from Hungary. The response went like this: "The nudity on stage is okay, but the blowjob is problematic. Could you ask the character who interrupts the blowjob to enter a bit earlier so that it doesn't actually happen? Permits will then be approved with edits." This means that if we don't follow their suggestions, we won't get permits to put the play on stage; it will basically be illegal. The reason things became very difficult for the festival was that we only got the permits two days before the date of the performance. It was very stressful having to sell tickets not knowing if there would actually be a show.

I have a feeling that SIFA is going to become more aligned in the future. Perhaps that is the festival's destiny, but I think that what we have done is to try to give it a different perspective. The festival is big enough to have an influence on audiences' ideas on things such as quality of life, enlightened democracies and the public role of the arts. A small, private company cannot talk about the public role of the arts and be taken seriously. That is why I think I present a danger to them.

This is what border thinking is all about. You enter a space that opens up – but that particular space is about to close, so you have to move on to another empty space. I think that if you keep fighting and confronting people on the same spot, you will have less chance of achieving a transformation. Being a border thinker means you have to know when to leave a space and find new spaces.

There are moments in time – magical Camelot moments – when you may be fortunate enough to be part of some milieu where you can influence or change ways of thinking. But these spaces very often get quickly absorbed into the mainstream and you have to keep moving to other spaces. This is why artists can be seen as flies in the ointment, because we are nomadic and constantly looking out for new spaces. My feeling about my four years in a Camelot idyll is that it then dies and you have to find new spaces.

So far, I've learned a lot from leading SIFA. I've suddenly realised that in the wider, socially-engineered Singapore, the independent arts are really just a playpen for noisy children so that the adults can get on with their work. I can see no opportunity for an independent artist to play an international role. You can get political commitment from your audiences and your communities that you feel in tune with, but it will be almost impossible to reach out to other communities.

In this context, there is a lot at stake for a lot of players. There is also much fear of being mentally and spiritually corrupted. But having grown up like this, I can also see Singapore's advantages.

I like to live in a place that is clean, not strewn with rubbish. That is why Singapore works. The spiritual and emotional aspects of the place are not important because the physical aspects work. Everyone is happy with that and no-one cares about the censorship of free expression. That's why many people say that Singapore is the future of the world and more and more cities are becoming like Singapore. People actually believe that Singapore is a perfect model. But at what cost?

Although I am the director of a company and of a national festival, I don't think of what I do as being a leader; it's just me being true to myself. Leadership is something that happens along the way, and people might want to join you, but I believe in role models and mentors, not in leaders or followers.

I think this comes from my status as an artist. I'm not a cultural manager in the way I think about censorship. My perspective comes from the work that I make as an artist. In a way it's very intrinsic to me. I don't see it as artistic leadership. It is, for want of a better phrase, leadership by a particular artist.

**Nina Wester,
Hålogaland Theatre,
Tromsø,
Norway.**



"I am a natural leader, it's as simple as that..."

I was 20 when I saw my first piece of theatre. I grew up in a small island community in Norway with parents who were tremendously socially engaged but not particularly interested in the arts. My artistic life and my leadership have probably both been influenced by my working class background, for better or for worse.

I am a natural leader, it's as simple as that. I have always been encouraged to make my voice heard and have never felt restricted by the fact I was a girl. That probably has something to do with my parents making it very clear to me that it was important to take part in the social debate and that everyone has a duty and a responsibility to be active in society. My father was a politician at the local level and my mother was also involved in politics, so there was a lot of discussion at home about social issues. I got involved in left-wing politics at an early age.

Even as a child I did a lot of writing, anything from poetry to scripts and news items. At one time I wanted to be a journalist, but then I realised that journalism had to respond to reality and I preferred to create reality through my writing. While studying film I came into contact with the theatre, and when I was 25 I started a theatre group, although I didn't really have a deep relationship with theatre. I was interested in art, but theatre wasn't a big part of my life.

I was in my thirties when I got a place at the Stockholm Academy of Dramatic Arts. That was quite a late age to realise that theatre was to be my focus in life. The move to Sweden was a little bit of a culture shock. The media debate was quite different from in Norway, and there was a lot of discussion about class,

feminism, LGBT issues and ethnicity. I am really grateful for the years I spent in Sweden. In addition to acquiring another language, I also started writing plays in Swedish, which has become my artistic language. So I now write plays in Swedish and translate them into Norwegian – it’s a bit odd.

It was amazing to come into contact with Swedish socially-engaged theatre, children’s theatre and documentary theatre; it opened up a new perspective on the world. After I had finished my theatre course I had lots of jobs in Sweden and chose to stay for a few years. But then I started to miss my roots. I did a project in Tromsø and decided to live here for a year. During that year, I was encouraged to apply for an artistic director post, and that was a job I really wanted to do. Even when I was a student at the Academy of Dramatic Arts I used to say, “I’m going to be an artistic director before I’m 40”. And that’s what happened – I was 38 when I was appointed Artistic Director at Hålogaland Theatre in Tromsø.

When I started in the post four years ago – the position I am about to leave – I knew exactly what I wanted to achieve. I believe theatre should be socially useful. The problem is that it is often conservative and self-absorbed. It has a strong internal mythology, a self-image of what theatre actually ‘is’. I wanted to see what I could change: to see if I could build bridges, make theatre more outward-looking and more relevant. Take Utøya for example: the massacre was in 2011, but Norwegian theatre is only just starting to react. I wonder why we are so incredibly slow. Theatre should be more strongly linked in to the social debate and contemporary realities.

In these dangerous times, I also think audience development is vital for arts institutions. The arts are under threat, so we must be in the vanguard demonstrating that we embrace many aspects of society. We need to show that we have a function that goes beyond our own little universe.

My aim was to put in place a repertoire where I could have artistic responsibility for absolutely everything. My mantra was to



be honest to myself and to my task. I have tried to explore some of the bigger issues in life and give the audience opportunities for deep involvement. It has been important to take a holistic view and create long-ranging links between performances and across time.

One thing I introduced was a sort of ‘backdrop’ for each production, to give broader meaning to the plays we perform. This could include various side events, such as discussions, small festivals or some sort of publication. The idea emerged gradually alongside my realisation that theatre often lacks an intellectual framework. People are not stupid, they need to be able to properly engage with a subject. Shouldn’t theatre be our main source of social analysis?

Unfortunately there was a lot of internal opposition to this way of working. I am not suggesting that it was anything to do with the staff; it was just that people have very different views of their professional roles. In my view, all posts in artistic organisations – including those in the marketing and communications departments – work with art. But when we’re trying to get the message out about our artistic activity, we fall short. You can’t just describe the repertoire as ‘something where everyone will be able to recognise themselves’. That doesn’t give theatre enough

credit for its intelligence. We have huge intellectual capacity, but we seem to keep it hidden so as not to frighten away the public.

Artists are guilty of contributing to this too. Those of us who work in the arts tend to be preoccupied with our own interests. Few of us are interested in communication, and fewer still have a strategy for reaching out. It means that marketing departments are very powerful. This is not unique to our theatre; the clash between artists and marketing departments has been a familiar feature in every theatre I have ever worked in.

My way of changing this pattern has been to try to get all members of the theatre staff to feel as if they have the words 'the art' stamped across their foreheads. But it hasn't worked very well. People have reacted with opposition and fear. There has also been quite a positive response to what I've done. It's perhaps been a bit excessive, which shows how little has been happening in the theatre world.

When I started as Artistic Director it felt great to be able to work with this regional touring theatre. I want theatre to be for people, irrespective of where they live and what their background is. It doesn't mean that the theatre you create therefore has to be less good, it just means that theatre has a greater role in society. So when we take Hålogaland Theatre out to an island outside Hammerfest, which we do three times a year, it feels like Christmas and Norway's National Day at the same time! Even if we put on a performance about torture in 1970s Chile, it sells out. That's when theatre feels incredibly meaningful. You're helping to educate people in a community. That's probably what my work is – a public education project.

I was probably too ambitious when I took on the job. But many of my ideas have had an impact and things have gone really well, so it's not all gloom and doom. Audiences have grown steadily. Our research shows the visitors now associate Hålogaland Theatre with the word 'topical'. However, while audiences and people in Tromsø have been appreciative of this approach, internally it's been a battle.

If I had chosen to remain in the post of Artistic Director I would have focussed on developing the internal dynamics of the organisation. The theatre is still young and is located in the far north of Norway; it has a lot to prove to itself. It also has a negative self-image, a belief that North Norwegian culture isn't acceptable as it is.

In a business like this, a leader needs to know how to use the organisation to push through the development they want to see. That's where I was lacking in knowledge. There's been a split between me and parts of the organisation, and I have tried to take the others along with me. But I was only appointed for four years and haven't had time to spend looking into things and waiting.

I can see now that I should have been more patient. I should also have listened more and listened better. People probably see me as tough. At the same time, I needed more enthusiasm from the organisation.

It worries me when there is too much fear in an arts organisation. For me, the artistic realm is somewhere where I can be completely unafraid. But there is a widespread fear in cultural institutions that audiences will get smaller and subsidies shrink. That's quite a natural fear to have. But we should not allow ourselves to be ruled by it. When a similar feeling hit me a couple of years ago, I realised that I could not remain in post as director. What happened was that I suddenly started to take a short-term view of our activity, even though I knew that things went up and down. Politicians talked about a decline in audiences at Hålogaland Theatre and there were headlines in the papers. This surprised me, because those of us who work in the arts must after all be allowed to take a longer-term view of what we do. Perhaps it was about the theatre's anxiety that it was inadequate, its fear of showing who it was. After all, the task of the theatre is to communicate fairly complex matters, and audiences usually accept that. But problems will arise if the theatre does not have much self-confidence.

We recently put on a major production in which we put to-

gether two Ibsen plays, *Little Eyolf* and *The Lady from the Sea*, something that had never been done before. Many people were sceptical at the outset and thought it would be too difficult a concept for audiences. But it turned out to be the theatre's greatest triumph. Something new – some 'third thing' – was created, which is exactly the sort of thing theatre is capable of. But there was a deeply-embedded fear of failure.

"It worries me when there is too much fear in an arts organisation. For me, the artistic realm is somewhere where I can be completely unafraid."

Many of Hålogaland Theatre's organisational problems then have been about self-image. Several employees have described it as being as if the theatre was 'leaking', somehow taking in water. It's an interesting image, which shows how people see the foundations the theatre is built on. When new ideas are brought in or new people come along demanding things, there's a sense of encroachment, as if the theatre were a fortress. Something else in danger is the theatre's mythology. Rather than seeing the new as something interesting, people are afraid of change. But I'm optimistic. The theatre is still young and in five years' time there will probably be less of a feeling that it is 'leaking'.

I have consistently had strong support from the board during my four years in post. They have given me clear direction and I have been aware of the confidence they have in me. When I arrived in post I was extremely clear about what I wanted to work on, so they knew who they were appointing. A board can also act as a temperature gauge and provide a manager with useful perspective, as it is easy to feel yourself hemmed in by the day-to-day work. It is also important to learn how easy it is to lose your overview and only see what is in front of your nose.

This is my first leadership role at this level. I have not had any

formal leadership training. One important realisation for me has been that, in addition to artistic vision and great inner strength, you also need experience of leadership to be able to understand how some things work. Admittedly I couldn't have done things very differently, I just had to learn about the organisation the hard way. But next time, if there is one, I will probably behave a bit differently. I'll be more patient and not just plough on in the way I have.

In my case, it might have been easier if there had been a different organisational structure, where the Artistic Director wasn't at the top of the hierarchy but reported to the Managing Director – because in reality administration has priority over artistic development; we just pretend it's otherwise. I have had authority to make decisions, but it hasn't worked in real terms.

There can also be problems when an artist is given a leadership role in a major institution. Both I and my predecessor arrived in the post as artists without leadership training. The person about to arrive, on the other hand, is a woman in her 60s with significant leadership experience. The problem is that the theatre is looking for an artistic leader who will develop and change it while at the same time it is hoping for continuity. It needs to decide which of these tasks it is to be. In my opinion, the primary job of the artistic director is to develop the programme of work, not manage it.

If I am to take on a similar job again, I will want to have several people on my side – a few colleagues in different places in the organisation who want the same thing as I do. Here, instead, it's been: accelerate, brake, accelerate, brake, forward, back. It's been a long road for the organisation to travel, and I've been the one in the driving seat. I had wanted to work with the whole organisation, but, as I've noted above, that wasn't really very successful.

I'm now beginning to draw some conclusions. I think I will find my insights useful in another organisation, but first I need to take a break and work out which direction I want to go in. I am also going to be having a baby, so all of a sudden there are other important things in life. Is my future in the theatre, or will

I go into another field? I am still very committed to the arts, not just the theatre, but I need to think about my next steps.

I have made a few discoveries in terms of my own motivation. During my leadership we have successfully undertaken a lot of projects, reached new audiences and had good feedback from many quarters. However, I am wondering whether I get enough out of it. That raises the issue of responsibility, as there aren't very many female artistic directors. If I stop, that will mean one less person working to develop theatre.

Another learning point is the importance of listening to oneself as a leader. It's important to work out the reasons why we want to achieve a particular thing and make sure we have a firm grip on our vision. Because there will constantly be people trying to nudge your vision in different directions. I have noticed how easy it is to fall into line with other people.

Working in a small place has granted me a particular freedom, I think. For example, I've been able to have a monthly meeting with leading figures in the town, including the director of the art museum, the bank manager, a festival director and the university vice-chancellor. They have become friends and I have been able to talk to them and get project ideas off the ground in a way that would be impossible in a larger place. Imagine a theatre director in Oslo meeting the bank manager every month – it just wouldn't happen. The excellent local networks are one reason for wanting to stay here in Tromsø; I will find them useful in the future. I want to continue to develop the cultural diversity of northern Norway in some way.

If I get a leadership role again, in another organisation, I will probably be a different leader – not as humble as I have been; friendly, but clearer and more assertive, perhaps tougher. Because I know what I want. I would try to take a longer-term view of things and not rush. And I would not take on everything – so much is projected onto the person in the leadership role.

I think that having a private life ought to make any future leadership role easier. I have been living alone for these past few

years and it has been nothing but work, work, work. I've got a lot done, but have not had much else in my life by way of respite. I probably need to ensure my private life is more clearly defined, whatever professional sphere I'm working in. Because I remain passionate about my work. It's great, but it feels as if I have only used one arm and that the other is slightly paralysed. From now on I want to use both arms.

“There can be problems when an artist is given a leadership role in a major institution. Both I and my predecessor arrived in the post as artists without leadership training.”

I think I have paid a high price in personal terms. On the other hand I have learned some key lessons. I am enormously strong willed – I am virtually unstoppable once I get going and see how much needs to change. For me, leadership is not simply a stage in a career – there is so much I want to achieve that I can only achieve as a leader! Because of this I have been wondering if theatre is right for me. I perhaps ought to work for a festival instead, or somewhere where I can develop several different strands of a programme.

The ‘cultural leadership’ issue is an interesting one, and it brings two things to mind: firstly – of course – it is about being the leader of an organisation working in the cultural sphere; secondly, it raises the question of what sort of culture you take with you as a leader into your organisation. By that I mean that a leader is the bearer of a particular type of culture. For my part, I feel that I have the right qualities for leadership. It's about upbringing, values and experiences. Do I feel a responsibility? Yes, absolutely. At the same time, I sometimes think, “Why must I always lead? Can't I just go with the flow?” There is also some element of duty in it all, as pretentious as that may sound. So if you have

the right qualities you should probably use them, although make sure that you get something positive out of it for yourself.

When I look around me at people in leadership positions who I admire, they have this combination of personal qualities, leadership experience and, of course, knowledge of their subject. But there are also other dimensions to their leadership: they know they have a special inbuilt talent and they also have a sense of responsibility. This is just what I have had instilled in me since I was small – that everyone has a responsibility to society no matter who they are.

My father is no longer alive but was able to see me achieve my leadership role before he died. For him it felt quite natural: it's the type of person I am. He didn't see it as a status thing that his daughter had become a leader, it was more that he saw it as confirmation of my inherent qualities. He was right.

**Anu Kivilo,
Arvo Pärt Centre,
Laulasmaa,
Estonia.**



“It’s the art or the artist that should get the credit, not the art manager ...”

I’ve been involved in cultural management in Estonia for over 20 years. The foundations of my professional life were laid in my work for the Open Estonia Foundation, a non-governmental, not-for-profit organisation established in 1990 with the support of the philanthropist and multimillionaire George Soros. I started there in 1994, supporting a variety of initiatives to create an open society and a greater level of democracy. At that time, the Foundation (which is still in existence) worked across a number of different fields, including education and medicine. We also started internet centres, translated Western philosophers into the Estonian language, and so on. The Foundation had introduced a new Arts & Culture Programme, which was my main responsibility from 1994–2000.

The years at the Foundation gave me a grounding in how to engage with the arts. Before that, I had studied English language and literature, worked in small travel and tourism businesses and done some translation work. I had just graduated and was quite young, very much involved in a lot of different art fields. As a result, I had a good overall picture of arts and culture in Estonia. However, there were moments when I asked myself if it wasn’t a problem that I didn’t have my own arts specialism. But I discovered that my strength was my horizontal knowledge; in a way, I knew something about everything. I later found this to be characteristic of my personality. I think it is sometimes helpful to ask yourself: What are my strengths? How can I benefit from them? Taking a positive view, rather than thinking about who you are not.

The beginning of the '90's was a very dynamic time in Estonia. We became free in 1991 and everything changed. But in 2000, George Soros said that Estonia was 'open enough' and no longer needed major support, so the Foundation was reorganised. Many of us working there left, but we thought about how we could use our knowledge and maintain Estonia's involvement in some of the cultural programmes so that we would still be part of the international networks.

At that time, there was no cultural management education in Estonia, not in any contemporary or modern form, although there had been opportunities to send arts managers abroad to study. Then the idea of Estonia taking part in the UNESCO Chairs programme came up, and I was asked by the Music Academy if I could put the necessary organisation in place. So I got a new job as head of the Cultural Management Masters Programme at the Music Academy, and I stayed there for 6 years. During that period, I took a Master's degree in that department, which was probably quite unusual. My role was mostly one of administrator or negotiator, issuing invitations to numerous international professors and working to develop a first class programme. Later I also delivered lectures on Project Management and Fundraising.

The way I worked at the Academy was quite different from the normal workings of the university. It is important to 'think outside the box', and it is something I need to be able to do when working in an organisation. When I look back, I can see that I've often done my work in a slightly different way. For instance, when I start a project I don't always know exactly where I'm heading. There may be a degree of intuition involved. You have a framework, of course, but you might not have the answers immediately. I think that's what makes this kind of work fascinating. People say that if you accept a position and feel 100% certain you can do the work, then it will probably quickly become boring. Perhaps it is enough just to be 80% confident that you can manage the work, and then you just have to take a leap with the 20%. You're not acting responsibly if you take a post knowing



that you don't know anything about the business – I'm not a pilot so I'm never going to fly an aeroplane. You shouldn't take too great a risk, but being in a position where you do not know everything means that you have to find solutions, and that can be inspiring.

I enjoyed my job at the Music Academy, i.e. the work with international networks and the analytical research aspects of the programmes. But I was also keen to work in the 'real world', not just at a theoretical level at the university. Even though arts management training can be very practical, there's still quite an element of theory.

During this period, Tallinn was preparing for its role as European Capital of Culture in 2011. In 2006 I joined the City of Tallinn as Head of the Culture and Heritage Department. That was quite a high-ranking position for a civil servant, and it put me in charge of my biggest team, with about 40 people in the Department and many others spread around the cultural institutions. This enabled me to develop a very broad knowledge of what was happening in Tallinn. We also started lots of interesting projects. On the down side, this work very much had to fit into existing structures. Many systems were already in place, being part of municipal bureaucracy. That didn't leave me with

much creative space, even though there were numerous decisions to be made on a daily basis.

I often had to take decisions about things I didn't know very much about. Of course we had specialists around, but I was the one who had to make the decisions. As a high-level civil servant, I wasn't employed on a political basis. But at that time the local authority was very much influenced by the leading political party, and this remains the case. There came a point when I decided that there was too much political interference for my liking and felt that I had to leave.

“When I start a project I don't always know exactly where I'm heading.”

For a short while I worked as Administrative Manager for our biggest film festival, the Black Night Film Festival. Then out of the blue I got a phone call from the Pärt family. They told me about their plans to set up the Arvo Pärt Centre and asked if I wanted to be involved. That's an offer you can't refuse – you wouldn't get a second opportunity to work with Arvo and Nora Pärt!

Initially I worked as their assistant, but in 2012 I was appointed Managing Director. The aim is for the centre to act as the repository for Arvo Pärt's legacy. He and his wife Nora moved back to Estonia from Berlin a couple of years ago and brought back all his material. They could of course have donated it to a national archive, but Arvo is very keen to see this centre develop.

A lot of our work is about systemizing Arvo Pärt's legacy. That includes digitisation, commenting and building up a database to create links between all the material. In addition, Arvo spends time explaining his work, and there are therefore three musicologists employed to deal with the music. Usually these kinds of archives are established when the creator is not with us anymore, but since Arvo is very much involved we can all ask him for any necessary clarifications, so it's not an ordinary

archive-building process. When in Estonia he is at the centre practically every day. It is located in Laulasmaa outside Tallinn. For the time being we work from a private house nearby, awaiting the opening of the new centre in 2018.

We can't currently accommodate groups of students or researchers at the archive since the material has not yet been systemized and we don't have the physical room ready. From 2018, the centre will be an open house for the public, with a library, an archive, an auditorium for concerts, films and seminars and a classroom for educational programmes. This will be funded by the Estonian government, since an Arvo Pärt Centre is very much in the national interest. Situated in the countryside, only 35 kilometres from Tallinn, it will be accessible for the public but also for international visitors and networks. The journey to the centre will in itself enrich the experience and bring visitors closer to the nature and Arvo's music. Also, I think it's important that centres such as this are not always in New York or London.

When it comes to my professional role, there are two keywords that summarise the tools I primarily work with: networking and communication. I've worked with these all my life, in fact. I'm not a very individualistic person. I don't want to decide everything and make other people follow me. I'm more someone who likes to gather people around me and put a working group together. At the Open Estonia Foundation I always tried to have discussion about what we wanted to do and achieve. For me, networking and team working are crucial. I will always ask a specialist if I don't know the answer to a question; that's the way I like to work. I've always tried to ensure that the members of my teams have a range of qualities, so that will include some people who are cleverer than me. For example, I'm not good at marketing, so I will look for someone who knows about marketing to join my team. I don't think I worry particularly if someone else is smarter than me; I'm not concerned about prestige.

In a situation where you don't know something and you make a mistake, you are ultimately responsible for your own

poor decisions. If you make use of and acknowledge other people's expertise, your idea or project will be all the better for it. I don't think my stature is diminished if I have cleverer people working for me. Two key concepts in cultural leadership are delegation and the giving of responsibility. If you can motivate other people, they will be willing to do things for you.

“When it comes to my professional role, there are two keywords that summarise the tools I primarily work with: networking and communication.”

I don't know if arts organisations are very different from factories; I've never worked in a factory. But I think that wherever there are humans and rules, there has to be human leadership. The issue of prestige and who takes the credit is also related to your motives. In some fields there may be creative practitioners and artists who want to keep all the credit for themselves. I'm a human being too, and I'm always pleased when someone tells me that I do a good job. But I think I have always been more interested in getting something done, improving something or completing a project than in showing off about my own personal accomplishments. This is something a cultural leader should always bear in mind: it's the art or the artist that should get the credit, not the art manager. We are the facilitators; our work as managers is not about creating works of art. But of course, personal motivations vary. I wouldn't be terribly happy if I was completely forgotten either.

There is much discussion about whether leadership is something that can be learned and studied. I think it is possible to learn many abstract things, for example knowledge of structures and legal and financial issues. But when it comes to leadership, you are either a leader or you are not. I think it is to do with having some kind of charisma: do you have it or don't you? I don't really think

you can study it. I don't know whether or not I'm a leader myself. But I am a doer, and I think you learn from the process.

Many people, especially young people, think that leadership means that you have a lot of freedom. But it's more important to be aware that you have a responsibility. You need to know that you are responsible for both things and people. So I think that as a leader you should never look down on people from above; you should be their equal and treat them as human beings.

I have a memory of my father from my childhood; in the '70's he was a manager in the agricultural sector, and every evening he would drive around the fields to see how the farmers were getting on with their work. He always talked to them just as he would have talked to a government minister. I believe that knowing how to communicate with gardeners or members of cleaning staff is as important for a leader as knowing how to communicate with, say, your artistic director. You motivate people by talking to them. I remember one project from the Music Academy, a summer course with an orchestra of young musicians of 12 nationalities. When the project ended, I went to thank the administrator at the Academy who had taken a break from his summer holiday to be there to assist the ensemble. For me this was quite a normal thing to do, but he said: "Anu, you are the first person to say that to me". How can you study these things from a book?

Every person counts. That doesn't mean I'm not strict. There have been many occasions when I have had to tell an employee that we didn't need them anymore. There could be a variety of reasons for this – perhaps the person hadn't done a good job or there was a lack of funding. These moments have been the most difficult of my career. You have to work out how to smooth things over; perhaps have a chat outside the workplace, or take the person for a beer. I have always tried to deal with it so that at the very least we are still able to communicate after a little while. At some point you have to draw a distinction between yourself as a person and your position. I might be criticised in my professional capacity, but I hope I won't be criticised as an individual.

I was often faced with this kind of dilemma when I was working in local government, especially after the start of the economic downturn in 2008. When you're given the task of reducing the budget by 20%, you begin to wonder what kind of crisis management the organisation has in place. It's not easy to be the bringer of bad news to a group of 15 cultural managers for theatres, orchestras, libraries etc. All of them are of course hostile to me, since I'm the messenger. In such a situation, it's important to show that we are one team and must find a way through together. And to be honest, I think that at the time we did find some very good solutions. For instance, when someone had space and someone else had people, we shared resources. Because of the financial pressure, I think some of the organisations started to communicate with each other in a much better way than they had before when everything was easy and they were all in their own comfort zones. Now they were obliged to start working together.

Sometimes these crises are not negative at all. This can be true at a personal level too. I at least have experience of good things coming out of stressful situations – for instance, when I left my post at the local authority. No one told me to leave, I was just very tired of the work. And after that, so many doors opened it was amazing! Sometimes you have to have the courage to make those kinds of leaps.

After I left my post as a civil servant I was appointed to a lot of committees, which was very interesting work. I don't think the Pärt family would have contacted me if I had still been employed at the City of Tallinn. So having to deal with stressful situations can sometimes help you get to the next level; that at least has been the case for me.

I left my local government post because of political interference in cultural life. For example, there could be interference in the appointment of a director of a cultural institution. Being part of the committee I was involved in the decision, even though I might have been in a minority. Even if you are against a decision, you are part of it. So you have to decide how far you are willing to compromise in such situations. You also have to decide where

you want to position yourself; are you part of the cultural community or do you belong to the civil service? I've always felt myself to be part of the arts community, even though I'm not an artist myself. Sometimes it's important to ask yourself: Where do I belong? Who is my tribe? If you have a leadership role in a local authority you can easily fall foul of a political or administrative agenda. There was a point at which I just felt there were too many lines that I didn't want to cross, and that I had achieved more by preventing daft things from happening than from doing enjoyable things. Preventing daft decisions might be one motivating factor, but after a while I thought: Why do this with the one life I have?

I wanted to do something where I felt happy about my work, and so I had to step away. I wouldn't suggest everyone do the same. But after my many years in this management business, I trusted my inner instincts and knew that I could leave and things would be okay. I don't see myself as a brave person, but I know when something is going in the wrong direction and a change is needed. I know I will land on both feet.

Curiosity is definitely one of my strongest motivations. Different roles of course require different types of curiosity. At the local authority there was a structure. At the film festival, the challenge was how to manage a situation where you need a lot of resources and professional people for just one month, and then you need them again next year at the same time. The dynamic of this sort of organisation is absolutely crazy, and you can sometimes be working almost 24 hours a day. That may be one reason why I only stayed with the festival for a short time; the job went well, but perhaps the situation was too fast-moving for me. The Arvo Pärt Centre is much more stable in that respect, even though we have our more active periods now and then.

I love Arvo Pärt's music, but what I am passionate about is his personality. In the last 5 years or so, I've felt that what I am missing in society as a whole is the situation we had in the '80's and '90's when there were discussions between artists and intellectu-

als; their words had a deeper meaning and people were really listening. In recent years I've somehow lost that feeling. This doesn't mean we don't have clever artists now, but I personally wanted to work with a person who is a bit out of the ordinary. And Arvo is just that sort of person. It's apparent when he enters a room and suddenly the room is full. Arvo is sometimes seen as some kind of monk, but he's not a monk at all. He's warm, funny and clever. He gives a lot to other people just in the way he communicates. And his music is very deep and meaningful.

In the last three years at the centre I've often asked myself whether this really is a place of work or whether it is something more than that. I'm not saying that we don't have problems or that it's always easy to work with these kinds of people. We deal with very intimate materials – personal archives that must be treated with confidentiality. You have to show respect and be honest about things. At the moment we are a very family-like organisation. Our workplace is a small private house. It's like family life, but of course we don't forget for one moment that we are not part of Arvo Pärt's family. So for me, it's a completely different type of organisation to places I worked earlier in my career. And since we work very closely with one another, some tasks have to be dealt with differently, for instance if I need to discuss a problem with an employee. It's difficult to hide problems here. Sometimes you get worked up about an issue, but then you look in the mirror and say: "Come on, let's find a solution!" Everyone here is really passionate and kind, and keen to do a good job. It's a different type of organisation.

My job as Managing Director – working together with the Pärt family who are the majority of the board members – is to work out where we want to go and set targets for what we want to achieve. I don't instruct the musicologists as they are the experts in their field, but I might spend time helping them to think through what they are planning to do. We are currently spending a lot of time in meetings about the architecture and design of the new centre. I try to take a coordinating role, checking to see if there are any problems or whether we need external support. I

also deal with all matters relating to funding from the ministry, private sponsorships or other projects – it involves a lot of work on spreadsheets. I don't handle the accounts, but I'm responsible for the budget. I work a great deal with the Pärt family on strategic issues. The board is not the kind of board that meets once a year to sign papers; we have contact almost on a daily basis, especially with Nora Pärt and one of the sons. So my role is more about coordination and building up the foundation of the future.

The centre is 80% funded by the state with added donations from the Pärt family. My role also includes raising funds from the private sector, and in this context it's always useful to have a living member of the Pärt family alongside me. The centre is a private foundation, not a state foundation, which is as the Estonian state wants it. At a day-to-day level, I'm in regular communication with Nora Pärt, who was instrumental in starting the archive. She has been a big part of Arvo's life. You might almost say that she made it possible for Arvo to be a composer, having acted as his manager and carried out many of the official duties.

The subject of cultural leadership is a difficult one, and I think my perspective is quite different to that of other people. In the first place, are we talking about arts and culture or about leadership? For me, all kinds of leadership are just human leadership. The question is always: Why do you do what you do? For me, it's about having a lot of interesting people around me that has enabled me to do new things and grow as an individual. I have had many experiences that have helped me to ask myself different questions as a human being. So I definitely feel good and at ease among people in the arts world. I would probably have felt like a stranger in other areas of life, say something to do with making machines – it's just not my path in life.

I wouldn't be so idealistic as to say that artists are on a higher level than other types of people, but in many ways my work has been a kind of a mission; if someone feels that I can help them, or if someone thinks that I can do a good job, why not take that role? It's possible that some of the things I've done have helped

Estonia or improved the world of culture, and that would make me happy. I don't think about these things on a daily basis, of course, but at special moments it's interesting to get an understanding of what motivates you.

In the case of long-term projects that span several years, it feels good to know that I have probably brought some energy to the work. I don't feel too cynical about problems encountered along the way – for instance the occasions when I've resigned a post – because projects sometimes need different personalities over their lifespan. It might be that I was important for the organisation at a particular time and that other people have later progressed the work at another level. From time to time you need different kinds of people, and different leaders. I don't find that problematic.

Looking back, I haven't made a career in any single organisation, I've always moved on to new organisations. In that sense I've always worked horizontally. In the past, people used to stay with one organisation for many years, perhaps for their whole working life. I haven't stayed any more than 5-6 years in any workplace or job.

I would give a few words of advice to my young self: Be curious, and give rein to your emotions! Don't be afraid of the new. Be responsible; think through why you do certain things. Taking responsibility as a leader also means you sometimes have to do daft, boring, elementary tasks. That's just part of the game, and it's not something to be afraid of. But also – be honest with yourself. You can't copy another person's life, no matter how many management books you have on the shelf.

**Göran Dahlberg
Glänta,
Gothenburg,
Sweden.**



“Being Editor-in-Chief was a necessary evil ...”

The reason I started Glänta in 1993 was to get something out to the public. It wasn't that I felt we were lacking a particular type of cultural magazine and wanted to fill the gap. It was about the context and the energy around us, with lots of interesting people who wanted to express themselves but didn't know how to reach out. We were a group of friends who spent a lot of time thinking about how all of this might translate into interesting material. That was the sort of urge that gave rise to Glänta.

At the time of the first issue I was still a journalism student. Prior to that I had studied psychology, history of ideas and linguistics, but I also had a degree in engineering. So I had a broad background in social sciences, natural sciences and humanities and I'd got to know interesting people in all these fields.

It was perhaps the history of ideas that was most important to start with. We wanted to create a magazine that could be a blend of different subjects and ideas but also have a clear focus on particular issues or concepts. The aim was to combine a freedom of sorts with a degree of rigidity.

Leadership for me was accidental. It was my idea to start the magazine, and I asked people if they wanted to be involved, but I wasn't proposing a long-term project. We had no money, no public support, no cash even to fund the first issue. The fact that no one got paid wasn't really a problem, our main concern was financing the printing. So we asked the printers for credit, and then we had a big launch party when the first issue came out. That was our initial financing model. It was a risk, but we got

the money and were able to pay the printers. We used the same trick for the following issue.

So there was no long term plan for Glänta when we started. In fact, we didn't even offer subscriptions when we sold our first issue. In the first place, how were we to keep going for so long? And secondly, if we offered a subscription, who would trust us to keep on producing issues for a whole year? On the other hand, it wasn't an arts project, we had no conceptual thoughts of that sort. What we had was this incredible energy and lots of interesting people who were eager to write and talk about their own and other people's writing.

When we did the first issue, I think I knew every person involved. I had a background in various different academic areas and our ambition was equally broad: we wanted Glänta's contents to come from all directions! Initially we had writers not only with a humanities background but also from medicine and the natural sciences. This changed after a while, but the aim is still to have something from all fields in every issue.

I was 25 years old when I started Glänta. I had written a couple of articles and reviews, but I knew nothing about how to run a magazine. I remember once when I wrote a short article in Göteborgs-Posten about the newly opened Tidskriftsverkstan, an organisation that supported the production of independent magazines. I hadn't yet decided to start Glänta, I was just curious and thought I had a good idea for a piece. Tidskriftsverkstan shared offices with the magazine Ord & Bild, whose Editor Johan Öberg was in the office when I came for the interview. I could see him sitting there, next to a fax machine, when a text in Russian came in. Johan translated the fax straight into PageMaker. Incredible – someone faxes a text and he translates it directly into the layout program! That's even faster than we do things today. Of course he had to save his PageMaker document, probably on a separate SyQuest disc, and take it or send it to the printers. But what I remember thinking at the time is that this was light years from what I could see myself doing. Everything was way above me. I couldn't speak Russian,



nor even use PageMaker. I felt like a little boy. I may have thought it was cool, but I do remember that I felt much more discouraged than excited.

Even though it was my idea to start Glänta and I was the one who invited people to get involved, the reason I did it was to get to work with the people I really liked to hang out with. It was something we could do together, that kind of thing – like starting a band. It was definitely not about deciding everything and running it by myself.

However, when I look back, I was actually involved in all aspects of the first issue: I did the layout, I contacted the writers, I sold the magazine. But I did it with my friends. I was studying to be a journalist and I remember that I succeeded in having the magazine featured in some parts of the course. This was before everyone had their own computer, so one advantage of being a journalism student was that I had access to good equipment and software. The way we worked it was that I often sneaked the other staff members in at the weekends.

It took some time to develop my role as Editor-in-Chief. The first major step forward was when we got funding to work on Glänta, and that took some time. All the work in the first four or five years was unpaid, but after that I was paid for one day a

week. This was an important development, and we became a little bit more professional.

In the early years, any money we made that didn't go towards printing went on – pizza! We met on Sundays, ate pizza, read, and talked about manuscripts, either at Tidskriftsverkstan or at somebody's house.

I remember the fourth issue, which was on the theme of psychoanalysis. During our discussions, we suddenly realised that one person was missing from our little group. "Where did he go?" Then I spotted him in another room, working on a text that criticised everything we had just been talking about in our meeting. There was obviously some tension in the group! But it was productive. And the article was published, of course. When something like that happens – one person thinks psychoanalysis is rubbish and writes a piece about it – it's important to try to keep the group together. I guess that's been my role, to keep us moving forward.

But after a certain point it becomes difficult to keep a small team together. Glänta has gradually become more professionalised, but we've continued to stick together as a group and we keep in touch. Not in the same way as at the beginning, but there is some continuity. After 20 years, there are still people around from the early days involved in editorial boards or with other functions.

Even though my role has been to keep the magazine together and drive it forward, the most fun part has been working with people I enjoy spending time with. At the same time I've always wanted to write myself. Being the Editor-in-Chief but also wanting to be a writer has been a source of conflict for me, writing having been my initial motivation.

When I started Glänta, I didn't actually know what an Editor-in-Chief did. What I loved was reading and writing. And then I started this project which meant that I became the Editor, because that's the person who runs a magazine. So the work I had to put into this – we're not talking about money in the first years – had to be as Glänta's Editor-in-Chief. And the people I was leading were the writers, who were doing what I wanted to be doing.

I've been ambivalent about leadership from the start. Being Glänta's Editor-in-Chief was a necessary evil to enable the magazine to move forward and get to a point where I could be involved too. Throughout this time, the roles have almost been reversed: the people who write become my superiors, because they supply the content, and I am their employee, trying to get the best out of the texts. This conflict has been ongoing and has never been addressed. I've always thought that soon, very soon, Glänta might be able to operate in such a way that I don't have to be its full-time Editor. I've been thinking that for 20 years, and it hasn't happened yet. So, in a sense, I've always been the Reluctant Editor. Then again, the work has also been an enormous pleasure, especially the compositional aspects of putting an issue together.

Glänta's administration has taken a number of significant leaps forward over the years. The first was when the magazine received public support. It wasn't much, only SEK 20,000 (EUR 2,000), which didn't even cover printing costs, but still. In 1997 there was enough money to pay me a small salary as Editor-in-Chief. In 1999 we started the publishing company. And at the same time we organised the first Filosofibaren (Philosophy Bar) – that was a clear turning point.

“The people who write become my superiors, because they supply the content, and I am their employee, trying to get the best out of their texts.”

Filosofibaren came about in the same way as the magazine, i.e., we had no secured funding and no structure. It all began with 6 tables and 30 chairs. We booked Atalante, a venue in Gothenburg, with the idea of sitting down every second week to talk about philosophy and drink beer. That was all. What we thought was: there are 10 of us, perhaps another 20 will show up – that will be fine. But lots of people came right from the start. I was re-

ally surprised, we had no idea that our idea would appeal to so many people.

Eighteen months later, we started running *Filosofibaren* at Södra Teatern theatre in Stockholm. It was even more hyped up there. People queued for an hour before we opened. It was amazing, but we were completely taken by surprise. We didn't know how to handle it, or manage it, because the concept – just like the magazine – was based on us as a group of people who liked to talk, write and read. For *Filosofibaren* too it was very important that we took part in the discussions. We wanted it to develop out of an organic community based on our common interests; a small group where everyone is welcome, but where the important thing is that there is an ongoing discussion. So the invitation was to a debate that had already started; it wasn't a Q & A session, or an event where we were just the organisers. The whole idea was that we would always be present and take an active part in the proceedings.

For a couple of years we tried to alternate *Filosofibaren* so that it ran every other week in Gothenburg and every other week in Stockholm. But even though the sessions were packed, we didn't make much money because we had set ticket prices low so that anyone could afford them, including students and unemployed people. So although the events were popular, we didn't make money. The proceeds only just covered the train tickets and pizzas for the people who travelled between Gothenburg and Stockholm to moderate the talks. After a while we couldn't go on. We sat in our meetings allocating jobs: "Who can go to Stockholm to talk about such and such a philosopher?" And people just looked down at the table... so it became impossible. We had got to a point where we needed to rethink and become more professional, but instead we closed down. We had reached an inflection point.

The conflict between idealism and professionalism has been there all the time. We've talked about it and wondered if we could have done anything in a different way. Promoters called us from lots of different places and asked us to run *Filosofibaren* at

their venue. But it wasn't possible, we couldn't be there on that basis. Somehow it wasn't what we wanted; we wanted to move on, keep the energy going. In the end we've had to become more professional, but we haven't exploited Glänta.

I've been thinking retrospectively about what Glänta does and what we might have done differently. For many years we've written about postcolonial theory in the magazine, but for some reason we haven't translated or published postcolonial theoretical thinkers. Why not? It would have been a smart move. We chose to go off in other directions instead.

When we chose to close down *Filosofibaren*, we also moved away from the socially-based model and put our publishing company on a more professional basis. We still had the parties and some readings, talks and other events, but we no longer regularly acted as a Glänta collective. We didn't really see this as a sacrifice, we simply realised we'd come to the end of the road. It had all got too much.

A lot has changed between the time when Glänta was just a magazine and the point at which we moved into publishing books, but much is still the same. The first books we published were written by authors from our inner circle, and the editorial process was pretty much as for the magazine: eat pizza, read texts and make decisions. For the past 5–7 years we've been running pretty much a professional operation in that we have a working editorial team. We have approximately two full-time posts split between 3 or 4 people. That has been the situation for some years now. We have tried different organisational formats, for instance an unpaid editorial group, but it's now the paid employees who decide what to publish.

So throughout my years as Editor-in-Chief – whether paid or unpaid – my motivation has always been to work with people I like working with. I've never had an aim to work full-time with Glänta, I've always had other jobs, and that has made it possible to employ other people. So it's been important both that everyone involved works together but also does other things.

For me it has also been crucial that everyone who works for Glänta is also actively involved in the magazine in some way or another, perhaps by writing, presenting visual projects, or translating. In a small organisation, I don't like the idea of a situation where some people work on the artistic side and others only on administration. I suppose it's the same aim we had in the early days of the magazine, i.e. that every issue should include everything. It's difficult to live up to, of course, but having every employee contribute to the magazine is meaningful – it feels important.

Our organisation has nevertheless been professionalised. I'm not the bookkeeper anymore, I don't go and deliver copies to mailboxes and bookstores by bike as I did at the start; I don't even put the issues in envelopes for subscribers, and I don't do the layout. In fact, I wouldn't be able to use the InDesign editing program anymore, I've forgotten too much. So we don't all do everything, but there are some elements left of the collective approach.

For that reason, it's important that we still have both the magazine and the publishing company. It would be difficult to retain this system if we only published books. We've also continued with the parties. It's helpful for our activities to be based around the regular appearances of a magazine.

This is also where our international work comes in, the various partnerships we have with, say, the South African magazine Chimurenga and the Eurozine network in Vienna. These connections are very appropriate for a magazine run as a collective, even after some professionalization and job sharing.

Still, there is something odd about this professional role. I'm the Editor-in-Chief and I invite other people to contribute – the thing I'd love to have more time to do myself. But these days I get paid: not full time, and not very much, and that's important since we pay people really poorly. But I'd be ashamed if I had a full-time, well-paid job and offered writers such lousy payments. I'm still ashamed now, but a little less so. My professional role being a sort of 'Involuntary Editor-in-Chief' perhaps makes it a little less shaming. Perhaps, I sometimes tell myself, I would rather have been the person doing the writing.

At the same time I realise that I am perhaps glorifying the status of the writer. I have actually been published myself quite a lot, including two books. And I know that the writing process can be hard work, almost painful. So these are by no mean definitive standpoints. If I had wanted to write more, I could have done so. I'm in two minds about it: I have to write, even though it's hard. But I need to have a bit of both worlds, otherwise I can't handle it.

I haven't really got any professional editorial background apart from my role with Glänta. I've never worked for any other publishing company or magazine. It would have been an interesting and useful experience to work for a large publishing company, but without that, it's difficult to compare my leadership to that of others.

One thing that I think is unique about Glänta is that we work a lot with the texts. It's important for us to hold on to that. At the same time, it's becoming more and more difficult to earn a living from working with texts; it really doesn't pay. But it's at the heart of what we do – we work with all sorts of different types of material to make it as good as it can possibly be in the context of the whole, and this remains our goal.

My work as critical reader is varied, and I can sometimes have several different roles at the same time. One example is a book we published a while ago. I had read part of the book earlier, and I remember that in my then role as critical reader I had been quite negative. When I later saw the same passage, now integrated into a sizeable manuscript of several hundred pages that we were about to publish, I wasn't critical about it in the same way. I remembered how I had felt about it earlier, but as Editor-in-Chief I thought it was best if the passage was reworded to forestall any criticism. In my first reading I had thought that this section needed to be tightened up, because it was too loosely written. That was an interesting discovery, I hadn't thought very much about that before.

It's not that I was kinder or less critical, I just had different

“In a small organisation, I don’t like the idea of a situation where some people work on the artistic side and others only on administration.”

views. What fascinated me was the discovery that there was a tension between these two readings. If I’d been totally absorbed in my role as Editor, I wouldn’t have had access to that other way of reading, and the end result would have been the poorer. It wouldn’t have affected my mental health or my personal financial situation, and it could have been better in a whole number of ways – but it would have had a negative effect on the final version of the text.

As an Editor, I think I’m pretty tough. I’m not satisfied with “Oh, leave it as it is, never mind.” That’s something I rarely say. I imagine some writers think I should say it more often, and the same has also been implied by one of my former colleagues. Besides, we work with poems in the same way as we do with essays and articles: we question, and challenge, and turn them over and over in our minds. Some writers find this a bit unusual, but most of them are happy in the long run.

Over the years, I’ve developed a number of methods for dealing with conflict. For instance, you can’t begin a discussion with a writer at the level of detail. Even if there are thousands of details to remark upon, I think it’s better to start at the other end. It’s all about trying to judge the text on its own premises so that your approach tallies with the author’s intentions. For an Editor, this is rather like placing yourself in the other person’s shoes.

But leadership, with all its terminology – such as relational leadership – feels very foreign to me. One aspect of leadership is having to deal with unpleasant disagreements when things fall apart – having to take some flak. That can be really horrible. I wouldn’t say I have a method for dealing with that. One thing is that it’s easier to fend things off with experience. Another thing

is that it's not the end of the world if something that isn't quite as perfect as it should be slips through into one of our issues. In that sense, I've changed. I used to think, I don't care if the text has gone backwards and forwards ten times; if it doesn't hold up it won't be published. However, when I think about it there have been some tricky situations in the last few issues, so perhaps I haven't been that much more willing to compromise after all.

But I think I've become better at dealing with conflict. The question is whether you learn from your mistakes. As Editor-in-Chief, I'm the one who decides if something is to be published or not. At the same time, the person who wrote the text is my superior, in the sense that in the absence of that person my job would be totally meaningless: Zero, zilch, nothing. Whereas that person could take their material and publish it elsewhere.

It's odd to discuss management in the world of cultural magazines, a world where there is an unbelievably small amount of money. People get paid SEK 999 (EUR 100) for something they've worked on for two months! There is very little money available and this leaves its mark on leadership. What does it mean to be a leader in what is virtually a not-for-profit sector? It's a strange environment, for many reasons. Since starting Glänta I've never worked full time – first out of necessity, then from choice – and this is partly because I also want to have a presence on this other side too. However, it's the people who write contributions for SEK 999 or poems in books that sell 250 copies who are the authors; they're the ones who get the prizes.

All this undoubtedly affects my view on leadership, or 'cultural leadership'. When some money does find its way into this mystical, semi-idealistic world it's usually to develop the management side of leadership. If you also want to work on the other side of things, then you have to do so on a voluntary basis. When I write something for Glänta, which I never do during work hours or in the office – not one single line – this conflict is very apparent. It doesn't add up financially, not even if you have your own office or run your own magazine. And I think this is the ten-

sion you have to work with. You have to take it into account, both in your leadership but also in relation to others who are employed.

There is a wonderful sentence in Jacques Rancière's book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*. It's about having to "choose between creating an unequal society with equal people or an equal society with unequal people". It's an impossible dilemma, of course, but interesting. For me, 'the ignorant schoolmaster' is an important figure who represents the idea of maintaining ignorance as a right and as a working tool. Or, in this context, being 'the un-manager-like manager', working with and against that contradiction.

**Olha Reiter,
Wiz-Art International
Short Film Festival,
Lviv,
Ukraine.**



“The stories of my generation have not yet been told, and I have gradually realised how I can do something about that...”

My aim is to develop the film industry both in my region and nationally. I want more people to get involved in the film industry, I want more films to be made and more stories to be told, and I want our films to get more international recognition. In fact, I'm interested in the whole filmmaking process, from the initial idea to the point when it reaches its audience. I also like curating screenings and building structures. My various interests are both broad and narrow. But that hasn't always been the case.

I began organising things quite early on in life. In the late '90s, when I was still at school, I got involved in school radio. I enjoyed working in that medium, even though people didn't really believe in what we were doing. In 2001, at not yet 18, I was involved in a social movement campaigning against the president and government of the time. This was normal; we have always had to fight against things such as corruption or the poor educational system. At university, in 2004, I was involved in a sort of political organisation, this time a national movement. I was one of perhaps 30 members of a network all around Ukraine planning for a revolution. Still very young, I was part of the

creative team organising flash mobs, slogans and more. I had no involvement with film, yet there I was, filming all our actions. Someone gave me a camera and told me to document everything, and that was probably a key moment for me; it was the first time I had held a film camera in my hands.

The revolution ended unsuccessfully. People were disappointed because nothing had changed. I went to the US for a couple of months and when I returned I rejoined the organisation, managing lobbying campaigns, monitoring and other political activity. However, I got tired of this and went back to university, where I started a film club and organised weekly film screenings and discussions. This became a way of introducing some interest into my life, because I was extremely bored by my course in Slavic languages and literature and needed to do something else.

“My role has often been to start things up.”

In 2008, someone I met asked me to run a Visual Arts programme as part of a theatre festival. That’s how it all started for me. I had had some experience working in organisations and I was more motivated by the proposition of working in this field than by Slavic languages (which I nearly got a PhD in). After my involvement in the festival, things simply continued on a more professional footing. Our festival now has a good reputation and is quite well known, being the first short film festival ever to take place in Ukraine.

My role has often been to start things up. For the past three years, for example, our work at Wiz-Art has not been just about the festival. Since everything you do in Ukraine is somehow connected with politics, we initiated a partnership with the municipality on an urban development project called Klaster.in.ua involving the renovation of a historic building in Lviv. The project



has been a great success and the building has now been given a new lease of life as a cultural centre. I have also found someone to replace me as leader. Many aspects of cultural life in Ukraine are in need of a new start with fresh energy, and another of our projects is Lviv Film Centre, an old cinema that has been converted to accommodate a wider range of activities. So there are a lot of different projects in my life.

My most recent project is the Lviv Film Commission, which is based at Lviv Film Centre. I'm now aiming to focus entirely on this and my priorities are to start producing regional film and fundraising for new productions. Once the business is established, I will be happy to leave and let someone else take over. Finding someone to run the business won't be difficult, since it is very common in Ukraine for the older generations in particular to look for state employment where they can stay in post forever. I want the opposite: I want to start up new ventures then pass them over into safe hands and move on to new projects and new opportunities.

The situation in Ukraine is an important motivator for my work in this field. I feel a huge responsibility for my city and my region and I know that people have a desire for change. I don't know

why I feel responsible. Perhaps because I have good self-esteem and know that I can do it. Of course, I also have my darker moments. But we live in a situation, especially in independent film, where there are only a few NGOs in Ukraine still active. It will all stop if we don't keep going. We have an opportunity just now to lobby for funding for the Film Commission and for film production in our region, because we have really good connections with the municipality. So my personal feeling of responsibility is linked to the struggle for my country, which I have been involved in for much of my life. There have been people before me who have tried to make things happen. Some have left; others are dead or have been killed. But I'm still alive, so I can keep up the fight.

Lviv is a great city to live in, the best in Ukraine! A lot of people move here from other parts of the country. I wouldn't say it is comparable to Berlin, since our region is very religious and conservative, but there are quite a few groups of people that are politically and culturally active. I think we are on the verge of big changes, and we should see the results in 20 or 30 years' time.

After my year organising the audiovisual programme for the theatre festival in Lviv, I decided to start a separate short film festival. I hadn't visited other film festivals, it was just something that I hit upon. I was 22 at the time. We wanted to do it legally, not download and screen pirated films. We wanted to invite guests so our audiences could see that there are actually people who make films. That may sound simplistic and funny, but when we started our goal wasn't to develop the local film industry – it was to enable people to come in contact with real film workers and discover that they are just like them. We wanted to be guided by the films and the people behind them.

The festival is viewer-oriented so that we are always thinking about the audience. We have a saying that every single screening matters, so a lot of work goes into curating and linking the works together. The festival consists of national and international competitions, a non-competitive programme, educational components and masterclasses. The festival is always in the here and

now but also has an eye on the global perspective, as is clear from our main themes. Last year the theme was ‘The Reason for the Future’, and the year before it was ‘Stronger than Weapons’.

“So my personal feeling of responsibility is linked to the struggle for my country ...”

We have a constant struggle for funding. Our budget is small, but we nonetheless usually manage to invite up to ten international directors and about 30–40 directors from Ukraine. The target group for the festival is people under 40. Sometimes we have older audiences, but not often. Lviv has lots of gastronomic festivals: a chocolate festival, a dumpling festival and a coffee festival, which is probably the biggest in Europe (Lviv is known as the capital of coffee in Ukraine). These food-related festivals bring money into the city, which is something business understands. A film festival, on the other hand, especially for short films – that’s something for youngsters. It might be different if we screened feature films. I’d like to organise a feature film festival sometime in the future; we certainly need it in this part of the country.

For me it has always been important to set a target and visualise the ultimate goal. The Film Commission is a logical step for me and I can see myself continuing to promote film production in our region. My role is to explain the benefits of this not only to the municipality but also to the cultural sector, businesses and residents. They need to know that film production will bring more money into the city; we just need to create the right working conditions for filmmakers. We also need to build an industry and train people who can support the filmmaking process. It is expensive to bring a complete film crew here, that’s why everything is linked: film education, the film festival and film production. The Film Commission is helping us to shape

this field, which is now really starting to grow – it’s like a new-born child.

I got my current job as a result of my work on our earlier project of renovating the historic building – Klaster.in.ua. I had really tired of the project and I couldn’t see myself running it in the future. It is a social and community-based project for children, and not the sort of thing I am interested in working with. But thanks to that project – which was a success story – the municipality began to trust us. I was able to start a conversation and talk to them about the importance of having a film industry in Lviv. I explained what I was really interested in and told them about what Wiz-Art had been doing for many years. This was an important moment for me, because prior to that I couldn’t see myself doing anything in film except organising screenings. That’s enjoyable, but stepping into film production is something else. My story and the stories of my generation have unfortunately not yet been told, and I have gradually realised how I can do something about that.

This summer I visited SOFA, the School of Film Agents in Poland, which was a very inspiring and encouraging experience. It showed that anything is possible, even in Ukraine with all its current difficulties. These days, the government is more open and they no longer think you are insane when you offer them something new.

Working properly in film production has been my dream for many years, but it wasn’t until recently that I was able to see it as a realistic possibility. After talking to a lot of people I was able to identify some opportunities. Nevertheless, I might change my mind, and maybe it won’t last. In a couple of years from now, I might think the film business sucks. It’s not that I am suddenly seeing my current life through rose-tinted glasses; it’s just that I can see how simple it could be in a country other than Ukraine, where there is ongoing support and you can focus on the creative aspects.

Money is the most difficult thing. Our budget for the Film Commission this year is ridiculously low: 7,000 Euros. Also, we

have no salaries, because Wiz-Art can't afford to have workers. So money is an issue, but it is also a problem when people say the project is impossible. Hearing that from people in the municipality and the cultural and business sectors is very discouraging. Of course there are difficulties with the Film Commission, including tax problems and bank system problems. But at least I know what to do. The knowledge I have was not handed down to me; I have read and researched a lot by myself. At SOFA I met people in the industry that it would have taken me years to develop a connection with. I had an hour and a half to talk to them about my idea of developing a film commission for Lviv and I got really good feedback and advice. Few people can imagine the situation in Ukraine; the system is totally different to other European countries. I have also learnt a lot by asking questions. I'm not afraid that people will think I don't know very much. It's not because I'm fearless – it's about freedom. We are desperate to express ourselves.

Major social change won't happen overnight, but I think we will get results over time. As it is now, people in Ukraine are thinking only about the present, but what we need to do is invest in the future; that's the most important thing of all. If we don't invest in the future we will be disappointed when we look back. As a city and as a country, we need to invest money, people, resources – everything. We should be thinking not only about how to pay salaries but also about how to grow smart people.

I tell everyone I meet that watching films is a job! For most people film is entertainment, which of course it can be. But when you come to our festival you pay to watch films that make you work. I mean, your mind has to work. You're not being entertained and you don't eat popcorn. I am really grateful that we have audiences like this.

There are now five of us at Wiz-Art. I am the CEO and the only one who has been here since the start in 2008. The majority started by volunteering. We are not employed, we are freelancers. We are sometimes paid a fee out of the ticket revenue for the

film screenings after deductions for taxes, translation of subtitles, editing of teasers and other expenses.

I'm probably the person that keeps Wiz-Art together, but I am keen for that to change. Our team is now quite strong. I could be away for a month and the activities would carry on as normal. For the future, I would like the organisation not only to continue as it is but also to evolve and introduce new projects. Perhaps it is time for a change.

I am really keen to focus on the Film Commission. The problem is that I don't get paid, since we have so little money. It will be great to have the Film Commission in the future, but I'm still interested in doing lots of other things. I really like curating programs for the short film festival. I also enjoy getting practically involved in film production. However, it's not my ideal working scenario. We are in a situation where we are getting ourselves up to speed and trying to learn as much as possible. Of course, the Film Commission could just support other organisations and individuals and do nothing else, but we want to learn from the sector. Recently, we co-produced and co-funded a film production with Lviv Film School, shooting in the mountains for eight days. I need as much experience as possible. One day I will have to choose. Producing is probably my best option. But for now it's important that I know how everything works. I am not planning to run the Film Commission from behind a desk. I might do it for a year, but then I would find someone to replace me.

"Am I a leader? Perhaps."

The Film Commission is really only one part of my overall plan. We need funding but we also need a bigger group of people with different functions. I see the Film Commission and Wiz-Art as an engine. My role is to seek out more participants, more people to come and work in our region. It is good that the Commission is part of the municipality, because it is official recognition of the

need for a film industry. With a strategic goal, this creative industry can bring benefits to the city. If we can find an investor – someone from outside Lviv – we can build a structure for film. But first we need to create good conditions for investment in the city generally – good soil in which to plant the seeds. Lviv has a strong IT sector and is home to Ukraine’s biggest IT company. They could be important for the film industry too.

I think culture is the most important thing in society. Am I a leader? Perhaps. The film industry is a creative industry and part of the cultural sector. I call myself a film agent, but I could also call myself a cultural leader. My overall focus is film, anything and everything to do with film.

**Sigrid Niemer,
ufaFabrik,
Berlin,
Germany.**



“My generation felt that something was missing...”

I am one of the co-founders of ufaFabrik in Berlin, the multi-disciplinary culture and life project situated in what was West Berlin. In 1979 we took over a large area that once housed a film laboratory. We have been together for a long time, and in some ways we have been pioneers of self-governing art/work/life projects.

I grew up in a small town in post-war Germany and came to Berlin to study art and education. At that time, studying in Berlin meant that you were exposed to ideas from the student movement, which to a large extent involved reframing what had happened since the end of World War II. After the war there had been a period of rebuilding the country and infrastructure. But my generation felt that something was missing. For me, it was without doubt the big life questions. Because of the economic miracle in Germany, our ‘Wirtschaftswunder’, I felt that I could try anything and do anything I wanted; the world was my oyster. After finishing my studies, I knew I didn’t want to be part of any education system. I told myself that I wanted to have experienced life before I started teaching other people.

West Berlin at that time was all about lifestyle. What mattered were the things that gave meaning to your life. I wasn’t interested in having a normal professional career and a nuclear family. I moved into a collective and worked with my friends renovating flats. We had a concept of everyone being equal and making all decisions collectively, not only for small things but also for the bigger issues. As part of the group process, we had no personal income, just a joint income. I was very attracted by the

seriousness of the system, by the way people had to communicate and find solutions in different situations.

There was an ecology movement in Berlin at the time, which was important for me. Something else that was crucial to me was the idea of exploring yourself and your talents, especially together with other people. We started a music school without qualified teachers. The notion of exchange became popular: I could show others how to play the guitar, and they could show me how to make a coat, or something else. Out of that came the idea of renting two lofts in Berlin. We founded an association, Fabrik für Kultur, Sport und Handwerk, that became a meeting point for people who liked to discuss existential questions. We had a training room for martial arts, a café, rooms where groups could get together and a printing shop. There were experiments with energy sources such as early wind wheels and solar panels. Everyone enjoyed being in a situation where you had opportunities to encounter other people, and people learned from each other.

One of several initiatives that we organised in 1978 was the first environmental festival in Berlin called 'Umdenken – Umschwenken' ('Think differently – change your life'). Over a period of six weeks, various groups worked to introduce new, creative ideas into society. One issue that came up in discussion was of a new space for a serious experiment in living and working. This led to the summer 1979 squat at the ufaFabrik, which was the start of the project. Thirty six years later, I am still involved.

ufaFabrik is rooted in three concepts: arts and culture, ecology and sustainability and, lastly, community and social experiment. A holistic approach to society has been fundamental, i.e. a belief that we shouldn't divide life rigidly into different aspects such as work, family life, leisure time and so on. So ufaFabrik was never a project in itself but was grounded in a holistic view which connected most aspects of life. In addition to working together, we started as a co-housing community and I have lived here since the start. Today there are about 30–35 of us living at ufaFabrik and over 200 people work here on a daily basis.



ufaFabrik is unique in many ways. We have lots of different activities and have been together for a long time. It is quite a big area of about 18,500 square metres, with seven different buildings separated by green spaces. When we were squatting, there were about 100 of us who all knew each other. It was ideal for what we wanted. We talked a lot about how we were going to get a rental contract. We had one rule: we discussed everything internally, but spoke with one voice to the outside world. That meant we had lots of discussions about how to persuade the public and the municipality to give us a chance. One thing that came out of our discussions was that we didn't want anything for free; we were willing to pay rent. We said that we were open to anyone who was open to speaking to us. This was very important, and different from political groups at the time who were divided into left or right-wing organisations. In Berlin, our approach was quite new and refreshing. There were people who criticised us for it, saying that we talked to the "wrong" people. But we got a one-year rental contract only three months after we had started our squat. That contract was then renewed, and today we have a long-term lease. It was our policy of openness that enabled this to happen.

My role in the early years reflected our principle that everyone should be on the same level and all decisions should be made

by consensus. We took it very seriously, having lengthy discussions to find good solutions that everyone could agree to. For me, communication has always been a major theme in my life and I worked hard to bring people together. I had studied visual communication and I was working in a print shop at that time. I wrote, printed and distributed leaflets about the ufaFabrik. Communication was important to me, and the work suited my rather orderly mind very well.

As a collective, ufaFabrik was a fantastic opportunity for us to develop our own creative opportunities. I played several instruments, I explored tap dance, I was into circus. We were enthusiastic and had a lot of fun together. This energy, and the feedback we got from people involved in our programmes, empowered us to undertake the more demanding tasks. We practically had to start at the beginning with the former film laboratory. We renovated everything, fixed the heating system and invested in the building to make it usable. At the same time, we had to earn money. We had a system – ‘one pocket for the money’ – which meant that all income went into the pocket and everything we needed was paid for out of it. The system meant we could restore buildings and start up various activities. There was no private money during that period.

One important source of income was our cultural programmes for which audiences paid fees, and this money was immediately reinvested. We started a café, and then an organic bakery. Slowly we built up a range of different ventures that we could make money from. This could only be done by pooling all our resources. We had no capital to invest but we had our energy, our hands, our creative minds; that was our investment. A group of about 45 of us decided that we wanted to be part of this very rigorous community and share our incomes and everything else. This group formed the core of the whole project.

Looking back, it sounds as if it was an easy time, which it wasn't. But it was our only chance. We had the opportunity to create something so immense that we really wanted to hold on to our original structure. However, in the early '80's our financial

arrangements attracted the attention of the Tax Office. From their point of view, we were running a business and should pay taxes. That was the point at which we finally realised that we were creating a new business model. We were covering all our expenses ourselves and didn't ask for public support. We were optimistic that when the municipality realised what we were doing and that we didn't have any personal income, they would be open to finding a creative solution to our tax rating. Instead, they thought we were pulling the wool over their eyes. Discovering that the authorities could not come up with a solution that worked for both them and us was a hard lesson to learn. Our only hope for a long-term solution was changing the whole structure. As a replacement for our 'one pocket for the money' system we created a sort of umbrella organisation that dealt with official contracts, and underneath that there were a range of companies: the cultural centre, the neighbourhood centre, the free school, the guest house and so on. This is still the way we work today.

I wouldn't say that our first collective financial model was immature; it was simply unusual, since there were no precursors. It also felt like a natural step to divide the activities into areas and define the work more clearly. In the beginning, the idea was that everyone should do and know everything. That was great fun, but not very practical. When our activities expanded and there was more and more work to do, it wasn't possible to be involved in every aspect. Instead, we took responsibility for different parts. Rather than having a complete overview, we had to trust our colleagues. Personally, I believe that new organisations should reflect the attitude or the philosophy of the people involved. For us, our founding idea – to know everything about everything – is still sometimes in evidence. We are still interested in everything and we ask each other questions, even though roles nowadays are more separate.

The fact that we live together at ufaFabrik makes a huge difference. This is my home. If something goes wrong, it affects my life. For instance, if the café failed and wasn't able to pay the rent, my flat would be at risk as we are part of the same financial sys-

tem. There is more to ufaFabrik than just a place of work. The people who are living here are interested in what is going on; we are all linked together in the same situation.

“That was the point at which we realised that we were creating a new business model.”

Over the last 35 years, my position on, and also my attitude to, leadership has changed a lot. After the early collective days, which I have very fond memories of, we arrived at a situation where we had to separate out our responsibilities. For me, that was a really good moment as I needed to see that bit of progress.

Today, much of our everyday life at ufaFabrik is run by separate organisations. But when it comes to making critical decisions, we sit together and discuss the issues until we find an adequate solution. There is still a need for consensus at a very high level; for instance, in matters concerning leases or people’s personal situation. But even within an organisation ruled by consensus there can be differences. Some people put forward proposals and others will be followers. The important thing is to get a ‘yes’ from everybody. At a global level, we know that we are weak when we are not strong together. The same goes for us. So a ‘yes’ from everybody means that we will all agree to live with the consequences. This principle has kept us out of harm, and I would say that over the years it has mostly been a successful one. When we really get down to discussing the consequences of a decision, all arguments are on the table. This can be both boring and time-consuming. Sometimes people from the outside can’t understand why it takes so long to get a decision from ufaFabrik, but in the end it is a sensible way to proceed.

My official role is as a member of the board of the cultural centre. I am also the Head of Communications for ufaFabrik. I am in a special position since I work for both one of the individ-

ual companies and for the umbrella organisation. In my role, I always consider what is best for ufaFabrik as a whole. Sometimes I feel that I am caught between two stools. On the other hand, it is important that some people see the bigger picture and try to remain true to the vision.

Personally, I had a period in the late '90's when I felt quite lost. After years of learning and experimenting, there was a time when ufaFabrik was getting bigger and bigger but we were weak on overall management. I knew I was pretty good at bringing different aspects of the project together, but I wasn't happy with how I was able to communicate this. In 2000, I began training to become a mediator and coach, which was a big change in my personal life. It gave me more options in terms of leadership and educating people. I now teach mediation and coaching and also instruct young people who work with us.

This process was a very logical one for me, since I am someone who likes to reflect. Over the years, I've attended lectures and workshops to develop my own skills, which have then fed back into my work at ufaFabrik. In lifelong learning, I have found a concept that fits well with my existing beliefs, and it also helps me in my day-to-day work.

My mediation work has taught me something very important about conflict, which is that it always has two sides: one is facts – the other is emotions. If you don't deal with both sides, you won't resolve the conflict successfully. I try to incorporate this insight into my work here; for instance, through being more aware of difficult situations but also respecting people's freedom of choice. Every change must come from inside. This approach has been a great help to me in my role here at ufaFabrik.

Perhaps I should say something about how we have survived as an organisation for so long. The extent to which we are open to individuals may be unique. We have never had written rules stipulating that everybody must do this or that. Okay, everybody has to pay rent. But if someone is in difficulty, there is always an option to find a different solution. We look at every person's par-

ticular needs or issues, and then we try to address them. So in this respect too, ufaFabrik is nothing less than a project for living and working.

A better word to describe ufaFabrik as an organisation might be 'organism'. It is constantly changing and on the move. Structurally, we have a model that includes the umbrella organisation and several smaller organisations. But there is no traditional hierarchy, or perhaps just a very flat hierarchy. We all share a common idea. Some people may be more experienced than others or play certain roles, but even this is not fixed. An important concept in this regard is respect.

The generation that started ufaFabrik 36 years ago is getting older. Some of us are already retired. I have begun to think about how it will be for me in 5-10 years' time when I slowly start to bring my active involvement to a close. We have started a kind of generation shift, which I am finding very exciting. I'm quite optimistic that our shared wisdom and experience will live on. We are trying to ensure that the businesses will be taken care of, but also that there will be enough freedom for people to develop their own ideas or projects. This balance is very important for our next ten years. Of course, this is a very individual process; I have to find my own way and my own tools to deal with this.

We have all the structures we need for the outside world; we have associations, companies and directors. If we need to go to court, we have the right set-up. But we have another structure internally. I can't tell other people what they have to do. It works on two levels: one is a formal structure – the other is an informal approach. If you live as close together as we do here at ufaFabrik, you need autonomy but also a feeling of affinity, a sense that you belong to something. Every person has to find a good balance between these needs, which are all very individual. They can also change during your lifetime. I think we need to remain very open and tolerant about this, and also communicate what we find in the moment.

Gender in leadership has been an ongoing issue in my life. In my youth I was quite strong and demanding. We fought a lot at

the beginning. Of course, much has changed when it comes to men and women in leading positions in society, but I still perceive a wide gap. However, at ufaFabrik we have found some sort of balance.

“Over the past 35 years, my position on, and also my attitude to, leadership has changed a lot.”

At a personal level, I got to a certain point in my life when I felt I had a kind of natural authority. When I talk about my experiences and what I’ve learned, people believe in me. I feel very much at home within the ufaFabrik structure. A lot of people work here and most of them know and respect me. I feel that it is important for me to be here.

On the other hand, there have been periods in my life when I didn’t realise that I was important to certain people. It took me a while to understand that. When I was younger, I was always busy and my involvement in social groups was exciting. Then came a period where I started to reflect more. My child was born. I put less energy into group experiences. I also took a new direction in life when I trained in mediation and was then able to teach. This is something I feel very comfortable with today.

Now I’m thinking of taking a step back and letting other people take over, which will be exciting. I am starting to assess what I have done so far, and I need to work out what is worth holding onto. What part have I played in this project for living? What might be interesting to other people and how can I share my experiences? These are the questions that drive me at the moment. I have given myself time to answer them – some 5–8 years – to ensure a smooth transition.

If I were to mention one thing that has prevented me from having any regrets, it would be – me. Every 5 years or so, I’ve had a big personal crisis. At some point I usually come to the conclu-

sion that I should leave. That's followed by a period of reflection and recovery, until I end up deciding that it is worth staying. This has been a very important process for me. I know I'm not tied to ufaFabrik. No one will decide for me, it is my choice to stay or leave. And since I haven't left, I know it's a key part of my life. This has helped me through all these periods of crisis, and there have been some difficult times. There is a saying that "every crisis presents an opportunity", and in my case it is true: I've been helped by my crises.

I think of myself as a lucky person, not being totally bound by financial considerations. I don't have to work to make big profits, for a boss or for anyone else. My work is about developing people and what we do is very positive.

ufaFabrik is unique in Germany. When we started this diverse, multi-disciplinary, ecological and holistic venture, we were pioneers in this sector. That it was a success story is reflected in the fact that, nowadays, all the major opera houses and concert halls have educational strands to their work and reach out to young people in different ways. They work on their high level art approach as a way of renewing their businesses. The people who started ufaFabrik were, in my eyes, cultural leaders. We know that we have inspired a lot of similar activities in Germany and around the world.

The question of cultural leadership is an interesting one. If culture is defined as the art of living, then the expression has resonance within me. I define myself as a cultural manager working in the cultural field. At ufaFabrik, we enable people to develop their artistic careers, and at the same time audiences come to us to see inspiring shows but they can also develop their skills. Because of the way we work, I would define both myself and ufaFabrik as cultural leaders. But we don't tell people what they have to do. As an organisation, we can provide people with opportunities, but they have to take those opportunities for themselves.

When I first read in a magazine that it was possible to study cultural management, I thought: "Wow, there were no courses

when I started!” For me, it has been a case of learning by doing. I have done everything on the job, which gives me a kind of authority. When I ask someone to put up posters for an event, I realise it’s a boring task but it has to be done. I have done it myself. After all, knowing your job is essential.

Kenneth Olumuyiwa Tharp, The Place, London, England.



“There are definitely times when a decision needs to be made, even if it ends up being the wrong one ...”

If someone had said to me a month before I was interviewed for this position that I would be considering the job, let alone getting it, I would have laughed. It was the last thing I expected for me, to end up in this kind of job and sitting behind a desk. I remember in the first couple of months when I met people and they asked me what I do, I would start by answering, “Well, I used to be a dancer, but now I’m...”. I was still in a process of transition around my sense of identity, not quite ready to let go of the past, and not yet quite fully comfortable with the new thing I needed to be.

My job is Chief Executive of The Place, also known formally as the Contemporary Dance Trust, an organisation that has been running since 1969. When people ask me how long I’ve been here, there are two answers. I first came here in 1978 as an 18-year-old dance student, making a switch from classical ballet to contemporary dance. After graduating three years later, I became a full-time member of the resident company, London Contemporary Dance Theatre, and stayed here full time until 1994, when the company closed. After 16 years at The Place I left and had a freelance career as an artist. And then, in 2007, I came back in a new role as Chief Executive.

As a freelance artist I had what most people have, i.e. a portfolio career. I was performing, teaching, and choreographing; I ran a youth dance company, I was Dancer in Residence at Queens' College Cambridge and many other things. In August 2007 I was teaching on The Royal Ballet Summer School, and in September I was behind a desk at The Place. So that was a quick change. I had six months to come up with a 5-year business plan for the organisation.

So why on earth did they appoint someone like me to such a senior role? From my perspective, there was one crucial component. I had then just spent two years on a cultural fellowship program called The Clore Leadership Programme, specifically designed to help to grow and nurture cultural leaders. That helped me to make a very significant transition to a different kind of role. I don't think I would have had the courage to even apply for the position without having done that, nor would I have been taken seriously, since I had no previous track record at senior management level.

However, one valuable area of knowledge I also brought with me to The Place was that I had been on the Boards of a number of other arts organisations; for instance I had spent five years on the Board of Trustees of the Royal Opera House. Although that's not the same as managing an organisation day-to-day, it gave me an insight in the kind of rhythm and pattern of the work and the way in which decisions are made; also, the kind of issues and generic challenges that we have to face, no matter what art form we work in or the size of the organisation. In addition, for a few years I had been part-time Education Coordinator, in a very limited capacity, for the dance company with whom I was also dancing. But that was a small company and I was not leading it.

The first year as Chief Executive was a big shift for me, a huge learning curve. I recall one memory of feeling that I had jumped on board an express train that was moving at very high speed. It was a feeling of wind blowing through my hair, my eyes watering, hanging on tightly. I thought: "It will be okay, when the train pulls into a station and I get a moment to pause, take a



breath, and then carry on”. But after a couple of months, one day I realised that the train wasn’t going to stop. It was going to continue at that pace and I had to get used to carrying on and making decisions, still with the wind blowing through my hair and my eyes watering. That was the pace it was going to go at.

I knew it was a big challenge, but at the same time it was like ‘Ignorance is bliss’. If I knew everything the job entailed, I might have been more terrified than I was at the time. It was interesting for me, partly being in a new role but also going back to an organisation that I had some significant history with. My background helped, because not everything was new to me. On the other hand, what I wanted to achieve and my responsibilities were completely different from those I had when I was a dancer.

Looking back, I can only guess that the people who appointed me were thinking very carefully about what kind of leadership the organisation needed at that particular time. For example, an interesting structure had been in place for the previous 12 years, which was a flat hierarchy of four people with equal responsibility leading the organisation. There was no sense of failure at all, but I think the organisation had reached a stage where the different components could operate successfully but it was sometimes harder to arrive at collective decisions for The Place as a whole.

Therefore I think the decision from the Board at that time was to change the structure, and that was where I came in.

In the beginning I think I searched for a leadership that would empower others. I remember wanting to speak to everybody in the organisation at the same time, within the first two weeks of my arriving, but it became very clear that that wasn't going to be possible. The organisation is complex with different bits working with different timetables: the School starting early in the morning, the dance company coming in later, the technical teams having their own schedule, and so on. I realised it was difficult for everyone to come together, so I ended up writing a short letter to the organisation instead. In one part of the letter I remember talking about my belief that the most important ideas wouldn't necessarily come from the top of the organisation. I wanted to emphasise that I felt part of my role was to try to harness the creative skills and energy of the whole organisation. So before even starting, that was an example of the kind of thinking I wanted to bring to The Place.

I may be a forward-looking person wanting to see changes, but that is perhaps not how other people would necessarily perceive me. I think I'm also someone who reflects. My instinct is often to recognise that there is usually more than one argument in play. There have been moments of decision where my intuition has been tested. But now, philosophically, I would probably be inclined to say that there are definitely times when a decision needs to be made, even if it ends up being the wrong one. What I and my colleagues need to know is the difference between when it is okay to move more quickly – even if you end up making the wrong decision – or when the consequences of making a wrong decision might be too damaging. I think you have to have a very strong feel for which situation you are in.

Coming from an artistic background into my role as Chief Executive gave me some advantages. The fact that I had been an artist probably means that there are lots of conversations I take part in where I understand what's at play. Someone coming in with significantly more management experience would un-

doubtedly bring strengths to the table that I didn't have when I started, but they might not get some of the other bits that I do. So one of the reasons why I was interested in the job was that virtually all areas that I had spent my whole career being involved in were all happening under one roof: performance, training, education, working with young people, developing artists etc. From my freelance perspective, it seemed to be the perfect time in my career to give something back to an organisation that had changed my life.

Even though I definitely have a management position, it's not an ordinary office job. I just walk out of the door and there is a theatre one floor down. The organisation is full of artists, other professionals, young people. What's particularly unusual about The Place is that it is both a professional arts organisation and a Higher Education institution at the same time, so we have two major sources of funding. And the fact that we have a theatre, a resident company and a school all operating in one building, as one organisation, makes it unique.

It is my role to have an overview of everything, but because of the size of the organisation most of the detailed decisions are made at other levels. For instance, I like to know what the theatre is up to, but I don't programme the theatre. Usually I'm quite separate to the working groups that take these more specific decisions. However, we know that the next few years are going to demand that we change business model quite significantly to become even less reliant on public subsidy. We are therefore looking at whether or not the structures we have are right for the kind of decisions we will need to make. That is a very live issue at the moment.

As a contrast, outside The Place I attend a weekly breakfast meeting with other arts leaders; this morning we talked about a subject that might sound a bit fluffy: 'generosity'. We are all very mindful of the financial climate that we are living in and the challenges that it is bringing, but I think that one of the things that such conditions promote is a conversation about different ways of working. Even when there is no extra money on the ta-

ble, we may recognise that there are ways in which we can be of great benefit to each other through working together. We all have lots of knowledge, some of us have spaces or other things to share, and those things are up for questioning and exploring.

Up until a few years ago, The Place had been in a period of financial stability for quite some years. Previously there have been fundamental changes in structure that led to greater stability, such as our School – London Contemporary Dance School – being a founder member of the Conservatoire for Dance and Drama, a group of eight, affiliate specialist conservatoires in dance, drama and circus skills. Being part of that bigger collective structure has allowed us access to Higher Educational funding, and has for many years brought a level of stability and security for the whole organisation that we probably wouldn't otherwise have had. Nevertheless, over the last five years there has been a series of major cuts, and we expect more to come. We, and other arts organisations, are probably still in a period of transition, where the old models and ways of operating are changing. We know that we will all have to survive on significantly less public subsidy full stop. So how do we make up that gap? There are for sure a number of changes that we are looking to make over the coming years.

Speaking of receiving public funding, there is also our civic role to think about. How open are we as an organisation? We have a well-developed national and international dimension to our work, but how valued are we at a more local level by the people on our doorstep? These questions are very much in my head at the moment, but are also part of a wider dialogue that is shared by lots of people in similar ways, both within and beyond The Place.

During my time as Chief Executive, much of the journey for the organisation has been about joining the dots more effectively. For example, the organisation could be just a dance school, or it could be just a theatre or a company. But the fact that we have all these things under one roof, which has been evolving organically over 45 years, leads to constant discussions. What we can do better or differently because we have all these things under one roof? So the journey has been more and more about planning in

a connected way. Trying to share information, for instance; if one part of the organisation is planning a change, let's share that information sooner so other parts can be inspired to add to that, or influence the process. On a more macro level we are looking to understand themes. For instance 'talent development': What are we, as a whole, doing to develop talent? What do we, as a whole, do for audience development, or for children or for families? It can be helpful to think about broader themes that are relevant to every part of the organisation, and how we are collectively going to come closer to our aspirations.

A challenge that I share with many colleagues working at senior level in the arts is the danger of doing too much. We are probably not very good at saying no, or stopping things. But when you add more and more, there comes a tipping point: Either the quality of your work will suffer, or it will cease to be sustainable, and there is a danger that the people who deliver it will burn out. For example, we used to have less programming in our theatre during the summer period, a period when our School also has less activity. Yet we have introduced new programme elements, growing our children and family theatre and participatory programme for example, as well as bringing in our artist development initiatives and this year playing a significant role in the Edinburgh Fringe Festival where we presented three of our associate artist companies ... it's all too easy for us to try to do more and more. As public finances are shrinking, I think we've reached a point where we need to be brave enough to say that we're not going to, or do not need to, do certain things anymore. If quality is going to suffer we should say no, or focus on some other outputs. We try to have a joined-up discussion about those things, but I think that certainly in my role – or for anyone that has to look at the bigger picture – it is important to make sure that enough time and priority is given to the crucial questions and that we don't just get caught up in day-to-day management. I could spend seven days a week just doing things on my to-do-list, which are important, but with the risk of losing sight of the bigger issues. That wouldn't be helpful

for the organisation. I think that's a constant tension for everybody I know working in the arts.

The problem of saying yes too often is probably something that is very relevant in many arts organisations, since our main purpose is not commercial. Even though we of course need to balance the books, it's not about how much money we bring in. For our own sake, and for the sake of the work we are doing, at some point we may have to start to say no. I had a period about a year or so ago when I was trying to carve out one day a week when I didn't have any scheduled meetings in my diary. I couldn't really sustain that, but now I at least try to have clear blocks of time to manage all the things on my to-do-list. I also remind myself of the need to have actual thinking time; it's really important. I try not to feel guilty when I'm not necessarily sitting in front a computer in my office, because I know how important it is to use these thinking times to best effect.

Some people love to have an empty mailbox, but if I applied that to my to-do-list it would be difficult. I try not to actually lose sleep over feeling guilty, but it's very rare that I get everything on that list done. It's easy for me to go through a whole day when all I'm doing is adding new things. That's very common.

Other ways of keeping in touch with what's going on are the regular one-to-one meetings I have with senior colleagues. We also have monthly artistic planning meetings, and regular operational meetings, which are the moments where we can join the dots across the organisation for the big strategic things and the more practical things respectively. Sometimes for me, joining the dots is not about all the details. It could be that through chatting with colleagues I discover just enough to recognise that there is a connection between what someone else has told me and what another colleague is doing.

As I speak, I have in front of me a list of areas for strategic development for the whole of The Place. Right now, there are nine things on the list, for instance 'developing our international strategy'. That theme is relevant both for our School, our theatre, our artist development department and our resident dance company,

each with their different international relationships. What we want to achieve is to make sure that we develop these international relationships in a more joined-up way. It's not about taking autonomy away from anyone, but instead about looking at things in a wider context: Taking the organisation as a whole, what relationships is it most important to devote energy and focus to? Where do we feel there is a way of connecting across several areas or strands of work? We have evolved organically with this, but the way to use our resources and energies in the most effective way is now to be more joined up and focus on how we make these decisions.

From the point of view of staffing we feel we have more and more of a priority on developing a stronger local strategy. It is also about our civic role. Are we comfortable knowing that there are probably people who live 50 yards away from our building to whom we are invisible? How we relate to the different communities on our doorstep is crucial to us.

Other subjects on my strategic list: We don't have a comprehensive 'people strategy'. We do have an HR Plan and an Equality and Diversity Plan, but there is more room to think about what kind of employer we want to be, or what kind of employees we want to have. How do we want to treat them? How do we make sure we get the best out of everybody, or that we attract and retain the best talent? We have elements of this, but clearly there is a potential piece of work that looks at the whole package over a period of time, so we can be more strategic about where we want to be in the future.

When it comes to the leading positions in arts organisations, the demands and the needs are on many different levels. Of course there isn't any one person that will have all the skills that are needed. So what we have to do is to recognise what our skills areas are and just be confident that we've got enough of the right people in place, making sure we use that knowledge to best effect. Or, if we don't have that expertise, we need to decide how to bring it in. In terms of structures, when we were recruiting new members for the Board we worked very hard to reach a wide pool of people. We found that some of those who were not ap-

pointed had expertise that could be useful to us, perhaps by taking part in small working groups around particular themes. It could also be as simple as inviting them to have a working dinner with us and seeing how that goes, and perhaps coming to a follow-up in six months' time to monitor how it's progressing. That's the kind of thing I imagine. There are always times when you can benefit from having other people's viewpoint, even if they don't carry an ongoing responsibility for the organisation. A kind of broadened networking method.

“Are we comfortable knowing that there are probably people who live 50 yards away from our building to whom we are invisible?”

As a leader of quite a large organisation with lots of decisions to be made on many levels, part of my skill is perhaps making a judgment on when to intervene and when to let the details get sorted out elsewhere. I have one example that makes me laugh right now, even though it took up a lot of energy and perhaps caused heartache at the time. It has to do with office spaces. One department in our organisation was delivering work for young people in the evenings and weekends. But every session they had to drag boxes of stuff from one part of the building to the opposite. It just became an operational nightmare for them. We tried to find a way to relocate them, but there was no obvious solution. I thought I didn't need to get involved in the details, but some months down the line I realised I had to ultimately make a decision. In order to do that, I needed to get stuck into the details and have lots of conversations. We found a solution, but getting there was actually quite painful. In a way I was slightly dismayed at having to get so involved. When I shared that experience with a senior colleague in another organisation I got the answer: “If there is one thing that will give you nightmares, it is office spaces.

In comparison, a cut in one's salary may often be preferred to changing one's desk." So there is an ongoing challenge about knowing when I need to know the details and when I don't.

We have lots of different skills and expertise across the organisation. Myself, I have no problem accepting that there is knowledge I don't have. There is absolutely no issue about hierarchy when it comes to asking questions. I just try to find the best person for me to ask. However, I think we may need to get better at knowing when and who to ask for help. Sometimes all that is needed is another pair of eyes and ears that can be more objective about something and turn your thinking around. Sometimes it is that bit of reassurance that what you are thinking is not so stupid after all.

Communication inside a large organisation like ours has to be constantly reviewed. When I started I was determined not to get stuck behind the desk – perhaps not every day saying hello to every student and employee, but at least being visible. One of the things that I try to do for myself is to deliberately leave my desk instead of just sending a colleague an email. I know that whenever I go for one thing, I come back with five things. During that walk across the building I will probably bump into someone I wasn't expecting, so by the time I get to my destination for the one answer I went for, a number of new things will probably have filtered through. I know they wouldn't have happened by email, and in the end I'm usually really grateful for them.

We use different digital tools for communication. Some are for sharing things and others are effective for administration. We have an email-of-the-week-letter to help staff pull the content together. We try to keep it fairly short and punchy, otherwise people don't read it. In the letter I usually write about at least one element that is outward facing; it might be the launch of a report or perhaps a great example of something I've seen. I feel it is really important to have an outside view of the world, so we don't just exist in our bubble.

Every now and then it is valuable to have people coming in from outside. There are several people I would like to come and talk to the staff, mostly as a way of ensuring we're connected. In

E.M. Foster's novel *Howards End*, the two most important words are 'only connect'. I've been thinking about that for lots of reasons: How we connect to each other in the organisation; how we connect to the world and the people around us that we are here to serve. I've also been thinking about it in relation to empathy, because the role of arts and culture in a young person's education beyond the specific skills and attributes of any one art form is so important. What I've experienced from engaging in dance is how a young person, or a person of any age, becomes more deeply connected to their whole body and develops greater self-awareness and well-being, but also how dance connects you to other people and to the world around you. To have empathy with another person's thoughts and feelings is one thing, but through moving in space as a dancer with somebody else you have another special kind of holistic empathy that is both spatial and kinaesthetic, and beyond words. Connectivity in that way is very interesting.

"I don't advocate conflict but I do think it is normal, certainly in the arts sector, to be able to have robust arguments..."

As a subsidised organisation, there are cultural policies that The Place has to adhere to, such as equality and diversity. I think that one way of getting the message through to staff about the importance of something is by sharing facts. A few key facts on something can push the right buttons and make people curious to know more and reflect on how things can be improved. I also think more people are interested in general policies when they are understood at a human level. In other words, what is the impact of having this or that component of a policy? Having human stories or case studies can also be very potent. That can be valid at a political level as well. Sometimes politicians need to meet someone behind one of those stories to really understand at a level that touches their heart. I think it's about motivation, really. Policies can exist as a kind of

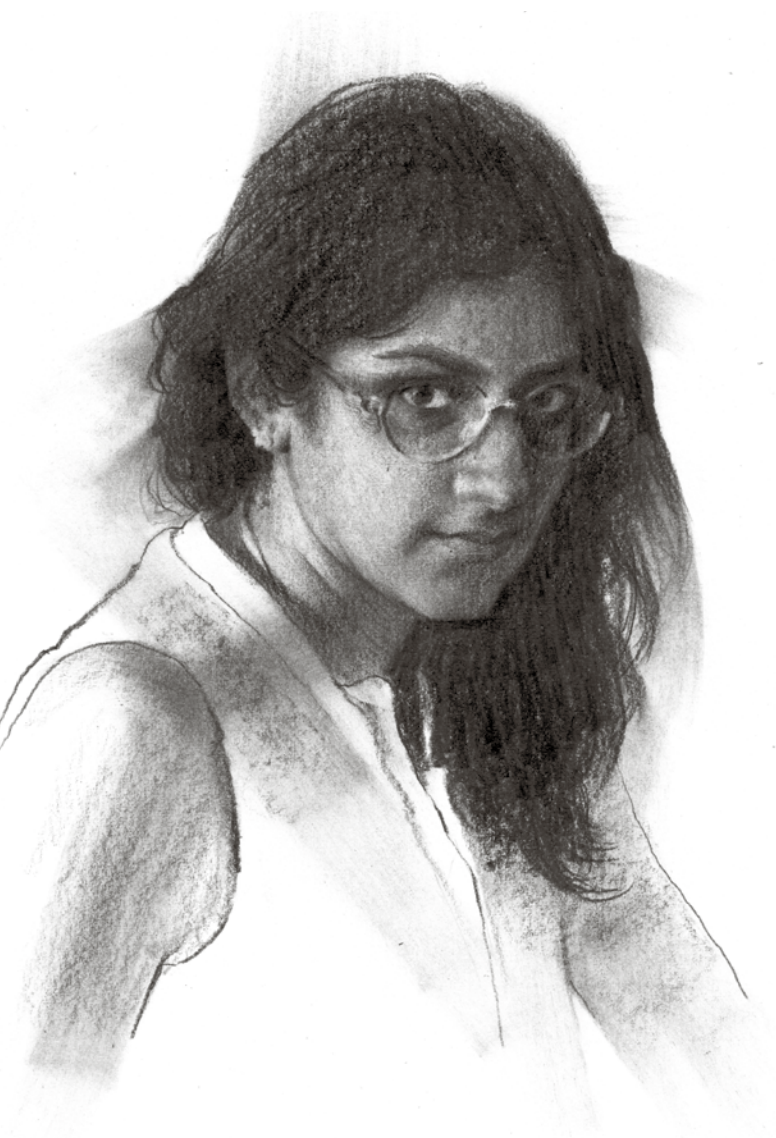
dry thing, a box that you have to tick. But when it really matters to you and you can see the benefits or disadvantages of it, then people are motivated. So that is a living perspective for me.

Dealing with conflict comes with my position, but what I've found is that sometimes my role is to try to be the arbitrator. People often have assumptions about what other people think, sometimes based on previous experience. But I have realised that it is not enough to assume what someone else thinks. Sometimes I've been able to challenge those assumptions, perhaps by creating an opening for the people involved to have one more conversation. In a conflict it can help to see the bigger picture. It's like in a family, where healthy and robust discussions are not problematic if the culture is right and the shared goals are understood. Even if we disagree on details, we won't lose sight of the end game.

One thing I have to do is to make sure that everybody is focused on the most important tasks, so when there are disagreements we can accept them as part of the process. Because by the time we have talked it through, we will have come up with something that is better. I don't advocate conflict but I do think it is normal, certainly in the arts sector, to be able to have those robust arguments, knowing that you can disagree without losing respect or trust for each other. Therefore, when anyone comes into the organisation, especially new employees or even young school students that come for a week, I usually encourage them to give very honest feedback. Coming from the outside, they see us with really fresh eyes. After all, we are the ones who can learn most.

In 2019 The Place will be 50 years old. A few years after I arrived in this post, we celebrated our 40th anniversary. That was a learning point for me, because I realised how far ahead you need to plan for these things. In the last few years we have done quite a good job of looking back over our shoulders recognising our journey and sharing that publicly. What I want us to do now is to look ahead and think about the next 50 years. What is really important for us to do as an organisation for dance? What exciting energy can we create by being really focused on what we want to do far into the future? These are questions to celebrate.

**Archana Prasad,
Jaaga,
Bangalore,
India.**



"The city, not my aching artistic heart, became my muse ..."

Right now I identify most with being an entrepreneur and a mother. I have a background as an artist and I've always practised art, so I'm definitely an entrepreneur in the cultural field. But when I think of entrepreneurship, it's not the usual, measurable definitions of success that come to mind but rather ways of working that differ from industrial methodology. Some people seek golden stars, but there's not a lot of gold where I work.

Before I started the Jaaga project, I worked in visual and performance arts, in particular with musicians. I worked with lights, design, animation and video projections. I've also been an arts administrator for a long time, except for a period between 2005 and 2008 when I was employed by Microsoft Research. They have research labs around the world, including one in Bangalore. In the labs you work on scientific research, not unlike in university labs, so it's nothing to do with marketing. I was employed there as a researcher in design when I left to start up Jaaga.

The step from Microsoft Research to Jaaga was interesting. It was extremely instructive to work there, surrounded by some of the smartest and most passionate people you can imagine involved in trying to find technical solutions to different public needs. I don't know why I took the job, but at the time it felt like the right decision.

The reason that I left the well-paid, enjoyable work I had at Microsoft was because I had been involved in some interesting research projects. I found there were two options if I wanted to get results. One was to continue at this large, well-financed organisation – it has great momentum, you can develop your skills

and you can reach millions of people. On the other hand, you have to work within the organisation's framework. So I realised that I could either continue for the next ten years – years that would be critical in my life – trying to influence the way the company thinks about certain issues, or I could be out in the field doing it on a much smaller scale. If I had stayed on at Microsoft, it would have taken quite some time to get the company to agree with the direction I wanted to go in, although I think I would have succeeded. Alternatively, I could be on the outside working with people that I could choose for myself, even though I would not have reached millions at the same time.

It would have been good for my career to stay at Microsoft, and perhaps move to another city or another country. But that wasn't what I wanted to do. One day, I just realised that I didn't want to spend my life at the company, even though it's great. I don't regret that decision for one second. I still have friends and mentors from that time, but I don't miss the job. The time I spent in the company was absolutely fantastic for me, when I look at the learning curve. I learned so much, everything from writing emails to recognising wider perspectives and understanding how to behave in a corporate culture. In fact, I'd recommend every artist spend a couple of years in a large company, it's a really great experience!

At Microsoft we had freedom to choose our own research projects. My interest was art in public spaces and how to connect art and design to different levels of society. That meant I could combine research with my own art in public areas, so ideas were flowing in both directions. I took on a role in the lab which involved coming up with ideas that computer scientists could translate into fantastic algorithms and other inventions. My natural impulse was, "Wow, what would happen if you could do this and use it for that?" For instance, would it be possible to develop a tool where people with simple mobile phones with no internet – this was before smartphones – could share their poems on a public blog? Was there a way to publish poems, that other could have access to, without the internet? And if so, how could it be used?



My interest in this came from a street art project I had been involved in. Every Sunday, on a really busy street in Bangalore, we tried to reclaim the public space for art and would invite people to engage. We selected a new art form for the activities every week; for instance, street dance, singing, music or writing. I discovered that a lot of people really enjoyed being creative in public spaces. Sometimes we had several thousands of people engaged in street art, sharing a beautiful bond between ourselves and the artists for a couple of hours. But I also realised that many of them wanted more; they wanted to keep in contact after that Sunday activity had ended. They just didn't know how, since the street art evolved spontaneously. So my question as a researcher was: if they could keep in contact with each other, would they do so?

At Microsoft we started from the equipment that a lot of people had at that time whether they were rich or poor, which was cheap mobile phones. We developed software that made it possible to publish poetry online, and we produced some interesting technical components. But the idea didn't come from above, and there was never any intention for it to develop into a commercial product. This was one of the fantastic aspects of my involvement in the research labs.

When I left Microsoft in 2008–2009 to start up Jaaga, I con-

ducted a little experiment in which I aimed to live for a year in Bangalore as cheaply as possible. My mother and I calculated that for 15,000 rupees (about 230 Euros) I could lead a frugal life that included housing, food, transport and a beer now and then. So when I left Microsoft I did two things: first, I put aside money for my experiment, so that I could survive for a year in Bangalore; then, I travelled around Europe for a couple of months as a way of bringing myself back to earth after my years in the corporate world. I had money for a computer and a really good camera, so I was almost travelling with a little studio and was able to focus on my visual art and some poetry guides that I had been working on. The plan was that after the time in Europe and this low budget year in Bangalore I would know what to do with my life.

During this period, my aim was to be totally self-supporting and to have absolute freedom to choose what I wanted to do. I had one more restriction: I would not accept money from any person or organisation. As an artist it's easy to say yes to freelance jobs, both because the work can be interesting and, of course, because money is usually needed. But I wanted to use this year to explore my own artistic potential without limits. By removing money from the equation, and also removing the actual temptation to earn money, I could freely choose whether I wanted to watch the sunset or help a client with a design project because the work appealed to me. So if I got involved in something it would be because I liked the idea or the person, not because I needed the money. If I preferred to knit stockings, I'd do that.

I wanted to experiment with my life and I discovered that I spent a lot of time with a group of people wondering about questions such as how a city and its inhabitants can interact more, or how artists can meet and cooperate. In Bangalore, there are monthly round table discussions at the Goethe Institute, with participants from both the arts and businesses. The aim was to find ways of influencing how the city was shaped and developed.

I was born in Bangalore, but at that time I felt I had lost contact with parts of my city. I studied art here and got a degree in art history. Then I studied design for four years in another town in India. When I came back to Bangalore I was swept up into the Microsoft universe amongst designers and programmers. The first thing I did as an artist during my experimental year was to hold an exhibition in Bangalore, as a way of reconnecting to the city. The aim wasn't to sell art but to begin a conversation with the artists in the city and rediscover the network that I had lost. What I did was to use the 'travelling exhibition' that I'd put on show during my time in Europe, which included lots of poetry, drawings and pictures. I had seventeen books of material, like private art books, that I used in small pop-up exhibitions in cities such as Naples and Berlin. I had made lots of contacts with artists in Europe this way and I wanted to do the same in Bangalore. I found a gallery, run by an old teacher of mine, and I was promised the use of it for a weekend just to start the conversation. However, I then discovered that the artists that I was hoping would come never showed up. I came up against a wall in the city, and I didn't know how to reach through it.

Then I got in touch with a round table group that was holding meetings about urban development at the Goethe Institute. I took part in a couple of their meetings and, since I was the most tech-savvy in the group, offered my help: "It's fantastic what you're doing here, so I volunteer to make a web page and a wiki and run it for free". With that I immediately gained a position in the group and was drawn into activities that could be described as 'events in the urban space'. One example was community walks where the participants would encounter some kind of art, or be invited for tea by a neighbour. We developed a dozen of these walks and marked them on digital maps which highlighted interesting people and places that the different communities wanted to let others know about. The name of the project was Bangalore City Project, and there is still a well-documented wiki online from that period.

I gained two important insights from my experimental year.

Firstly, I realised that I wasn't meant to be the introverted, soul-seeking studio artist that I had thought I would be, and secondly, I realised that I wanted to continue to work both in and for my beloved Bangalore. Therefore the city, not my aching artistic heart, became my muse. My focus was on trying to understand how I could work with artists from different milieus – talk to them and get them to share their experiences from the places where they worked. I realised that this was a direction that made me happy.

“I discovered that I spent a lot of time with a group of people wondering about questions such as how a city and its inhabitants can interact more ...”

During this period I got an interesting offer from the Goethe Institute to become the main editor and designer for the pilot of a new webzine called Art & The City. The task was to use Bangalore as a starting point and to describe Indian contemporary art through the perspective of the city. This offer happened to come in the 11th month of my year-long experiment, so it was perfect in many ways: I could do both research and documentation and reconnect with the city and the art world. Besides, I was really broke...

When the project ended, I was asked by some other people if I was interested in organising some kind of cooperative for artists. There were a lot of changes going on in Bangalore at that time: money was flowing into the expanding city, but what was available to visual artists was mostly traditional galleries and there were very few spaces for contemporary and performance arts. But, there were a lot of spaces available in town. I managed to arrange a deal for some twenty artists – some young, some well-established – to be part of an experimental space where, for a small investment, they were allowed to use the space freely for two weeks. Everyone was thus allowed to do absolutely what

they wanted – repaint the place, tear down walls, rent it, move in – while at the same time gaining a bigger audience and a brand new network. This was a very popular initiative with artists, and we had people on a waiting list. The problem was finding a landlord who was willing to let us rent a space, even though we could pay. We wrote a manifesto which clearly stated that the physical space would be needed for only 414 days, and after that we would close the group of experimental artists. Yet it took nine months to find a place. Landlords were simply terrified of having artists in their buildings. All this is also documented in the wiki – I’ve always put a lot of work into the documentation of the projects I’ve been involved in.

In India it’s very difficult to finance experimental art, or even to find suitable sites. There is no national structure for financing that kind of art. On the other hand, Bangalore has grown like crazy in the last ten years. It’s like a giant virus that eats up villages and makes the city larger. The transportation systems are awful, the roads are terrible and public transport is a joke. It takes hours to get from the south to the north parts of what was until recently a sleepy little town. And that has consequences, of course, for artists who want to reach out with their work.

During this period in 2009, the same months as we were working on the social art project in fact, I started Jaaga. I was so frustrated by all the problems with finding a space and dealing with landlords. What I was looking for was a space in the city centre that was close to public transport and not too expensive. My idea was to find a free site and build some kind of modular construction where artists could work and have exhibitions. We were some twenty artists, we didn’t have a lot of money or technical knowledge, but together we felt that we ought to be able to build something valuable, such as a construction in Lego.

At this point, there were a number of amazing coincidences. By chance, over a drink, I met an American called Freeman, and I told him about my ideas. It turned out that he had actually built the sort of Lego construction I had been thinking of, including at Burning Man in the US. He said: “Find an empty site in

Bangalore and then I'll come with my construction and we can play!" The very next night – this is true! – I happened to meet an architect who told me that he owned a piece of land, actually a place where people dump their rubbish, in the city centre. It was the very same spot that I'd looked at, a perfect place in the centre of Bangalore close to a bus stop. He said: "You can have this piece of land for your experiment for three months". I contacted Freeman again, and after a couple of months Jaaga was born. He financed everything and the warehouse construction was ready for opening.

Freeman and I founded Jaaga together. He was an American with a fortune made in the technical world searching for spiritual knowledge – I lived in India and came from the arts. He was interested in art – I was interested in technology. It was the interesting dynamic between us that produced our fruitful collaboration.

Jaaga – which means "space" – was born almost as if in a fairy tale, as a result of absolutely random meetings with both these men. Everything just fell into place: the name, the financing, the partnerships, the physical construction. Compared to earlier projects, I had no clear guidelines. It coincided with the universal discussion about Creative Commons that was taking place at the time, and Jaaga became almost a physical manifestation of the online movement that wanted to increase access to free art works and improve conditions for artists.

In the beginning I didn't have a clear role. Freeman and I did a lot of discussing and we documented everything: I would talk while he held the camera, and vice versa. It was all about what this space – Jaaga – could be. Our main idea was to bring the worlds of art and technology together under the same roof and see what happened. I worked for free. We had no clear vision, no formal mission, no social media strategy, no statement, no business plan. We had nothing of that sort; we just started and were curious about what it would look like – we'd never seen a building emerge in this way before. Eight metres high, a multi-storey in metal; it was huge, crazy. Like a circus with dancers and musicians, international and local artists; we had theatre and projec-

tions in the middle of the night. Everything was transparent, you could see through the whole building.

After three months, we were still there. It took us 18 months to move when the architect who owned the land – who visited us every day and loved the project – told us it was time to leave. At that point, Jaaga was such a mixture of people: a group of hi-tech people could be alongside performance artists making avant-garde work, a meditation group might be next door to someone transforming sexual massage into art – it was insane. For the second version of Jaaga we moved to a place four times larger. The module construction in metal was cheap and it didn't cost much more to build. On the other hand, we had to pay rent.

During these 18 months, Freeman and I had developed a process where every three months we looked deep into one another's eyes and asked ourselves "Do we continue?" Somewhere along the way we realised that we needed to structure the business. Since we paid rent, we had to ask the participants for a small investment, and we started a Jaaga fund to take care of the finances.

My working method has always been "learning-by-doing". I'm not the kind of person to go on courses in management – although, actually, when I started Jaaga I was offered a two-week course for artists to learn administration. That's the closest I've come to any structured knowledge of leadership. It was the first time I had heard about things such as business plans and visions and goals for organisations. Many things were new to me, for example different forms of organisation and legal terms, even though I had already looked up a lot of the facts online. It was valuable knowledge, but it was nearly a year after the course before I knew what to do with it.

For someone like me, there must be a practical reason to seek knowledge. It's like Alcoholics Anonymous – first you have to realise you have a drinking problem, and after that you can begin the process. I was exactly like that before I realised I needed to learn to be a leader: "Ah, so that's why you need a business plan!" Some people learn the hard way.

Our organisation is quite small. I'm sitting in our design department right now, a small office. We use all kinds of online tools for administration, for instance Google software. In another lovely part of the city we have a beautiful big building that we call Jaaga Startup, where filmmakers, designers, writers and other creative freelancers have their workspace. Startup is still an experiment; we will evaluate after a year to see if we've managed to create an environment for co-working that is creative, self sufficient and runs at a high level technically. I personally think that it's the best place for co-working in the country: it has heart and soul, good technology and above all an interesting mixture of 70 handpicked members who have chosen Startup as their workplace.

We have two other departments at Jaaga. DNA, which I run, involves a number of free projects and residents trying to solve urban issues in the physical space through art and design. And we also have the more adventurous Study, run by my partner Freeman. Study is a beautiful farm outside Bangalore where young people come to learn how to develop digital applications and also practise yoga and meditation.

Jaaga is what it is. It changes all the time, I would say every six months. I've never had a fixed idea. On the contrary, I want Jaaga to be what Jaaga needs to be right now. It's not an imperium. We have a few people employed here and there, a lot of members and volunteers and a huge network.

Jaaga isn't the open, public scene that it was in the beginning. Now we have closed doors, so if you want to be a member at Setup, for instance, you have to be elected. If you want to participate as an artist you can apply online, and when we identify a potential project in the city we put groups who want to work on art in public spaces together with the people who live in those communities. Jaaga is a different business than it was in the early days – it has more depth than width. We focus a great deal on trying to understand how to get a small group of people to become involved in a particular urban issue, for instance, or to create something collectively.

“For someone like me, there must be a practical reason to seek knowledge. It’s like Alcoholics Anonymous ...”

Right now I’m the mother of a two-year-old, and my perspective as a parent has in part changed what I think I can contribute to the art scene in Bangalore. And, to be honest, Jaaga reflects that change.

My advice to other entrepreneurs, or to myself when I was younger, is always to listen to your heart and take risks, no matter the consequences. If you plan too much you get nothing done, so just start and learn from the process. And also document what you do, that’s extremely important! During the first years of Jaaga’s existence, we made several hundred films, and every project is available online along with lots of information; documenting what we have done has always been one of my routines. Even now, we spend lots of time documenting meetings and sharing what we learn, so that others don’t have to make the same mistakes.

I don’t think I would have been in this position now without the help of other people who have been willing to share their knowledge. That’s the great change that has come in with the internet; global availability of information means people and organisations can learn in their own ways. It was far less straightforward only eight years ago.

I find the concept of cultural leadership quite odd. At a personal level, the biggest thing for me is that my own artistic journey hasn’t evolved. I see Jaaga as a piece of art and it makes me happy, because it changes all the time. It’s been like that from day one – Jaaga is a collective artistic and architectural work. In my head it still is, even though we now have bank accounts, cashiers and lawyers. It’s beautiful. But do I write poetry or make drawings? No. Any visual arts? No.

I regret nothing. It’s always been my conscious decision to put more time and work into the projects. Everything I do intel-

lectually is connected with Jaaga, and everything else is for my son and my family.

This has changed over the years. Five years ago, if I'd known that in 2015 I would not have produced any art for a long time, I would have said: "No way, I'm out of this project"! When I started I didn't know what it would be like. That's why I can say that thinking too much isn't good, because you might end up doing nothing. I lost something but I won something I could never have foreseen.

**Joy Mboya,
GoDown Arts Centre,
Nairobi,
Kenya.**



“We are really just beginning to develop a cultural infrastructure here ...”

The GoDown Arts Centre has nine Directors and I am the Executive Director. So I am here with my staff every day, thinking and planning on a day-to-day basis but also on a year-to-year basis. I can define myself as a cultural worker, but I am also interested in the development of the arts.

Before I got involved in management and administration I was an artist. For eight years I was part of a women’s band here in Nairobi, and after that I was an actor based at one of the playhouses. With my experience in music and theatre – I also have a background in architecture – I was interested in looking at the important issue of how to support the next generation of artists. I got involved in training artists, and this led to the GoDown Arts Centre, which has now been in existence for 12 years.

In 2001 I was one of a group of individuals and organisations thinking about a space for the arts in Nairobi. It was me that began to look at models of art spaces around the world, to get inspiration for the kind of space that would be suitable for us. My initial task was to visit various venues and come up with a model that could work in Kenya.

The reason I got involved in arts administration is because we are really only just beginning to develop a cultural infrastructure here. If you were an artist 10–15 years ago thinking about things like rehearsal spaces, networks and resources, then you would end up considering the kind of structures that could support something like the GoDown. For me, moving into management

and administration was partly because of this lack of structure; I wanted to fill the gap where I saw a need. That has now changed, since artists in Nairobi are now able to find art spaces and get on with their work. But it was not the case just a few years ago.

The name GoDown is derived from a peculiar East African word for ‘warehouse’. The word itself probably comes from India, from the early days of the development of East Africa when Indian immigrants introduced aspects of English into our own language. When we found this space in 2003 it was a car repair warehouse. So we decided to call it what it was: a godown.

The GoDown Arts Centre comprises around 7,000 square metres of space for performances, rehearsals, studios and offices. It’s one of the first multidisciplinary art spaces in Kenya and came about after a particular political turning point that followed Kenya’s struggle for a multi-party system. There was a complete shift in the political landscape in 2002. The atmosphere of political change meant that artists felt empowered to speak and express themselves freely. So going out and finding this particular arts space was in keeping with the spirit of the changing times too.

However, the journey to getting the place was a long and difficult one. We thought it would be easy, given all the artists with strong aspirations who wanted to get involved in their community. We searched the city for buildings, with a preference for areas where people were living and working. We looked at abandoned school buildings and shopping malls, places that were accessible to potential audiences. But after searching for almost two years, it was suggested that we take a look at a warehouse in one of the industrial areas. We went there, and our first reaction was, “Who would come to a warehouse in this kind of area?” It’s too far away, the neighbourhood is not safe at night, and everything is under one roof. Is this a good idea? But at that point we were desperate, so we said to each other, “Let’s make this work”.

We knew there would be problems, for instance with people and groups that were used to different noise levels. We continued



looking for places in other industrial areas, and one day I found a notice in a paper for a different warehouse. It was a fantastic but completely run-down space owned by a car company. I took our working group to the warehouse and we all felt it was too big; there was no way we would find enough artists who would want to go there. But we liked it and were given permission to rent just part of the space. Of course, after two years we didn't have enough room and needed all the other space that we had initially declined to take. That's how difficult it can be to plan.

Looking back, the first feedback from a lot of people was that the project was impossible: it was too large, too far away, too run-down. I remember one early performance by a group of visiting Indian musicians who were interested in making contact with the local Indian community. When we advertised the concert we got worried questions from that particular community: "Is it safe? Should we come in convoy? Do you have security?" That was the perception of the space and the location back then, which of course has changed. Now people realise that the city grows and that this art centre, which seemed a long way away in an industrial area, is no longer so distant. Art spaces can actually proliferate in all parts of the city.

“Art spaces can actually proliferate in all parts of the city.”

The challenge of converting this industrial warehouse into workable art spaces required us therefore to overcome not only practical matters but also perceptions: Could we convince both the artists and the audiences that the space was good enough? We had to prove in the first few years that the GoDown was viable and that we would be able to renovate it for the use of artists with various needs.

Those who moved in early on were very positive. A feeling developed that the space was usable for the arts and that it was a community for artists. Then, when we began to have performances and exhibitions, we put a lot of effort into some really good advertising. The posters and the publicity we put out were very attractive and probably changed public opinion about security and proximity.

Our team was really small at the beginning; there were three of us doing everything. On the other hand, we were in a strong financial situation due to support from The Ford Foundation who believed in the concept of multidisciplinary art spaces. They had carried out research in the region and realised that one of the things that was missing was spaces for artists. They were therefore interested in supporting the establishment of a venture that could be multidisciplinary but also could house many different arts organisations – a space that could create synergy effects between the disciplines and some kind of cohesion within the sector. They offered money for renovation and encouraged other organisations that were looking for spaces to think about locating themselves in this warehouse that we had now occupied. We also had a young architect who helped us redesign the space, which was important for our contacts with contractors and consultants.

Early on, we formulated a long-term vision for the GoDown Arts Centre. What did we want to look like in 10 years' time? A

big vision, of course, so we broke it down. In one year's time we wanted to have a refurbished space with artistic organisations in residence. Then we extended the perspective: what would we want to see in 2 years' and in 5 years' time? I think that that process – of just imagining what might be possible – was very important. Suddenly we had something to work towards.

One problem was making arts organisations feel positive about coming here, since the cultural sector in Kenya had never previously had money on a regular basis. Sometimes a funding partner would give support for one or two years, and then everything had to start all over again. Also, the artists did not feel confident that the space was going to survive in the long term. But when we hadn't given up after 3 or 4 years, confidence levels increased and artists began to ask for spaces and studios.

I personally never thought the project would be impossible. It certainly helped that we got a grant for two years and could renovate the building and start a number of programmes. In addition, having a partner with a long-term vision helped a great deal. In fact, they said, "If this thing succeeds, we will support you for 10–15 years" – and indeed they have now been supporting us for 13 years. Their trust was important for us and helped us to feel that we would be able to make the project work. We still work with a long-term perspective, and are now asking ourselves what the next 10 years will be like. It's important for us to have a sense of where we are going.

Other funding partners have come along after The Ford Foundation. Some of them are more project-based, which is fine as long as what they offer contributes to our longer-term plans. If we apply for support for a project-based activity, we always regard it as a building block for the broader vision. All in all, having a long-term vision and funding partners who share that outlook is not typical, so I think we have been very lucky.

When we formulated the physical vision of our multicultural art space we had nothing to base it on. There was no history, no references. The process actually started with some internet searching. We looked at African examples and were aware that

the most developed art sector on the continent was the South African one. But at that time, getting into South Africa was very difficult. The next closest option for us was the United Kingdom, as we have been a British colony and inherited part of their culture. So I looked up some art spaces and went to visit them in Scotland, Wales and England. It was exciting to see them and also to get advice. I particularly remember one person who asked me, “Why on earth do you want to be hampered by having a physical space?” Because having a space means that you have to worry about repairs, rents, future finances and so on. An alternative might be to think about activities instead of a physical footprint – concentrating on space only when you need the activity. We then had to consider all the good advice we had received, and decide what was important to us. We came to the conclusion that a physical footprint would be really significant for the cultural sector in Kenya. It would be a place you could point at and say: “That building is an art building where artists work”. A building like that would be a strong statement.

From our initial focus on achieving a physical space for artists, we have gradually become more aware of the fact that the art space is rooted in the Kenyan capital. It is a space that has many different dynamics and audiences, a space that wants to engage with the development of the city. So we have become more focussed as time has gone on.

There were at least two reasons why we chose to create a multidisciplinary art centre. One was that The Ford Foundation clearly indicated that they wanted to support the arts in East Africa, but that they couldn't finance 40 different organisations – but if there was a multidisciplinary art centre run by one organisation, it would enable them to fund both visual and performing artists. We therefore created a facility where artists can grow, and perhaps later move on to other spaces. The other reason was to do with the cultural sector in Kenya, which is still very young. We didn't anticipate any problems with a multidisciplinary space, we simply felt that visual artists, dancers, actors and musicians would enjoy working side by side. It just seemed logical

that the best solution would be a space that accommodated as many of us as possible as well as providing a home for organisations needing somewhere to do their administration. And on the whole it has worked very well.

The organisations based here are autonomous and not part of the GoDown. So, for example, the people running the music programme are also looking for their own partners and aiming to develop their own activities. Our role at the GoDown is to fill in the gaps and take responsibility for what is missing. That might involve increasing the number of live concerts or art exhibitions, even though there are organisations at the centre that promote these art forms too. This way we can help develop the arts; dance, music and visual art specifically. We are now having a discussion about whether we should stay with these art forms for the next 10 years, or if we should find something else to engage in.

“When we formulated the physical vision of our multicultural art space we had nothing to base it on. There was no history, no references.”

My role as Executive Director was clear at the outset: it was to provide space for artists to work, interact and present their art. It was our job to bring in audiences to the exhibitions and performances and make connections between audiences and artists. Then we made an interesting discovery: the idea that the only thing missing was the connecting factor was completely wrong. Once we began to programme the space, we found that the quality and the output of the artists didn't match up to what we felt was required. So we began to look at the whole question of what artists need. We picked three art forms and asked ourselves: “How do we participate in the advancement of these art forms so that the artists are able to present their best work?” In other words, we wanted to make sure that every public programme

always included an adequate proportion of high-standard artistic product.

Another area of development has been the change in the presentation space. We found having the audience sitting as if they were in a theatre a bit artificial. What was needed was to establish a deeper connection with the community and its engagement in the arts. So we began to move our activities to other places. We now stage performances both at the GoDown and also in the community and we try to build audiences where people live and work. So we have changed the way in which we approach artist development and audience development.

We felt that communities should identify and acknowledge all the creative activities in their community and not judge whether some of them are good or bad. The next step was to think about how to support that creativity and work out how to connect to the things that we present at the GoDown. One example is contemporary dance, an art form that is not naturally expanding in our local area. What we did was to move the rehearsals into the community. The contemporary dancers then invited traditional dancers and acrobats to join them. Together, they began to look at each other's work and talk about the different way they use movement, which led to a merging of contemporary dance with acrobatic and traditional dance. The dancers discovered this for themselves; all we did was support the initiative.

We now want to be more open and find out what is going on in the community, and also learn from the community. We no longer assume that there is a gap that we need to fill through our art work at the GoDown. Instead we want to see what is actually happening and engage where we can.

In many ways we have been lucky. We are able to try out different things so we can find out what works or if a particular direction is not right for the artists or the community. Hopefully we will be able to build a stronger relationship between the GoDown and the artists, and also between the artists and the community.

But it's a slow boil. We are engaging at a pace that works for

everybody, rather than stating, “In five years we should have a full programme for audiences where there is something going on every weekend”. That was our original vision, before we realised that it should perhaps be the vision for the next ten years. It’s been a process of discovery.

An ordinary working day for me includes lots of different types of meetings. At one level I’ll be dealing with issues related to running a centre with a variety of users. Sometimes there are user issues, at other times there are physical or practical issues. We also have people from the community making applications to the GoDown for support for their proposed programmes. Our administrative team discusses these requests and decides which ones we should follow up. Then there are meetings about our own larger-scale programmes that we run in conjunction with the city, for instance the annual city festival or city development projects that we are interested in progressing.

We have several ongoing artist support projects and a team that helps to streamline the work of the programmers. Then there is the issue of where we are going in the next year and the next ten years. We are currently working with a firm of architects to redesign the GoDown, and are having discussions about local and international fund-raising campaigns. So there are both large -scale and medium-scale activities on the go, and of course there is always the everyday business of running an office.

Maintaining an overview of all our activity is not too difficult as we have a small office with only eight employees. We all sit in the same open office space, so even if someone is on the phone we know who they are talking to and can take things forward as a team. We have certain key tasks as an office, so we try to follow up on them together and we communicate in a straightforward way. It will be interesting to see how the way we communicate changes as we grow. With staff spread around the building we might have to be more systematic. But for now, we share things in simple ways and use emails a lot for internal updates.

Becoming Executive Director was really not something I

could have foreseen 15 years ago. My journey in music and theatre actually went as far as studying to be an acting teacher. I started a small programme for young people who wanted to go into the theatre and performing and was interested at the time in working in that area.

It wasn't until we started to think about the bigger structures that it became clear to me that we needed people who would take on the role of worrying about the development of the sector. At that point I realised that that was something I could do, since not everyone is interested in things like policies and wider networking.

To be honest, I think my realisation came out of a feeling of responsibility. Having been given an opportunity to develop our cultural sector by a funding partner, there was a sense that we needed to pick it up and do the right thing. We wanted to improve the situation for the cultural sector in our city and it would be foolish not to play the part we needed to play. We shouldn't just complain and tell people what was lacking, we should actually be helping to resolve some of those issues. Then, of course, as someone involved in the cultural sector at an individual level, there was a deeper resonance: "This is what I do, this is who I am". So working in this sphere came naturally to me.

There are definitely creative aspects to my job, especially in the formative stages where you are continually having to find new ways to solve problems. It is important to understand what art and culture means to you, so that it's not just a definition that somebody has in their own territory, space and culture. Exploring, discovering, experimenting and trying to connect the arts with the community are all very creative activities. Even though I am not creating artistic product, moments of creativity are needed in my work in order to achieve the growth of the sector.

We usually say there is never a dull day here at the GoDown. There is always some unexpected person walking in and asking questions, or something unanticipated happens that requires your immediate input. In my role you need to be agile and ready

to navigate, absorb and respond. Those are aspects of the creative process as well, it's just that in this context they feature in management too.

As an individual I am perhaps not the typical yes-person. I really enjoy challenging any proposition that is put to me and asking questions, I won't just take it for granted. I would say that I am an analytical person, which might partly explain my interest in science, especially physics and biology. I find the logic and factual aspects of those things fascinating. For me, the process of seeking out the evidence to come to a conclusion is very exciting. Sometimes I look at the work we do in a similar way; I look for evidence and facts. I need to ask questions.

I do find cultural leadership rather a difficult concept. The two words do certainly have a meaning separately, but I never think of the notion of cultural leadership as having a specific relevance in this sector. The issue of leadership is interesting from where I am standing, being someone who is expected to take responsibility, lead and make decisions. Otherwise, cultural leadership is really rather an odd concept for me. But of course, it's something that can be discussed and eventually I may begin to understand what it means.

Róbert Blaško, Stanica and New Synagogue, Žilina, Slovakia.



"Our dream was to open our own cultural space ..."

The story of Stanica goes like this: Hanka, Marek and I were schoolmates. We were into the local arts scene here in Žilina. I experimented with 8mm film and photography and played classical guitar, but realised I was not cut out to be a musician.

Somewhere around the millennium we rented a few rooms in the centre of town. We named our space 'Atelier'. It was the first place in Žilina to have creative workshops for kids. Its biggest room was the size of a living room. Our dream was to open our own cultural space in Žilina, so we searched in lots of different places and found Stanica, this amazing railway station. Even though trains stopped at the station, people weren't allowed to go into the building because it was completely derelict.

We contacted the railway company to negotiate with them for it. But we were young and the railway people didn't have confidence in us, so we asked Marek's father to come with us to the meetings. They trusted him, and suddenly we were given a ten-year contract for the use of one room at the station. We started to renovate the building, even though we hadn't yet got permission to do so. But as we were certain of getting it we renovated the whole place. The railway company had no idea what we were doing, and frankly I don't think they cared. Negotiations continued for two years, resulting in a contract for thirty years; we could do what we wanted for a token fee if we renovated the building and invested at least 400,000 Euros in it. It was an enormous struggle and we had no public support so we got local companies, friends, families and other volunteers involved. The renovation took us five years and since then things have snowballed.

At the beginning, Marek and I led the organisation in tandem. There came a point when we had to decide who would be the official signatory, and I became the natural number two. I'm happy with that; I don't always have to be the official face. My children and family are now my priority so being number two feels more comfortable. We are still in tandem, but he sits at the front.

Even though Marek has a management background, the significant learning curve started when we became members of Trans Europe Halles and connected with a large network of other like-minded groups. Before that, we weren't sure that it would actually be possible to have a cultural centre in Slovakia in this unsettled, post-communist period. But when we learned about other cultural centres in Europe with similar stories to ours who had been fighting with municipalities for years to get older buildings turned into cultural institutions, we understood that it wasn't about money at all, it was about enthusiasm. You want to do something, you put a lot of energy into it, and somehow it works. We were a bit mad, and the people we met from other parts of Europe were mad in a similar way. So we relaxed, and at that point we knew that a project like that would be feasible in our little hometown in post-communist Slovakia.

Stanica's progress has been dependent on freedom. The whole organisation is based on trust and intuition. We have never wanted to control people or how they spend money. Most of the time we haven't even controlled our cash flow, which is daft, but on the whole things have worked out for us.

One of our basic rules at the outset was not to invest heavily in bureaucracy. We didn't want to expend too much energy making plans on Excel spreadsheets and that type of thing. But then, after 12 years, that principle had to go by the board when we started to renovate our new venue, New Synagogue, which is even bigger than Stanica. Suddenly, we had about five different accounts and couldn't manage them without Excel. We ended up with big debts, something like 50,000 Euros. We had a big



crisis and had to change our ways, so now we control the budget more carefully.

In the early days we would just say, “Let’s do it!” We were amateurs when it came to renovation, buildings and management. But we had passion and a clear vision with a goal that would take several years to achieve. I’m not sure why, but I like challenges and problems. I like it when people say something is not possible because it makes me say, “Let’s have a go!” It feels like a game. I’m not afraid to lose it all. In our organisation there is a lot at stake at lots of different levels. For instance, we have no financial reserves. Of course we are aware that having a reserve is a good thing. But we live on the edge, because we are used to it.

When we encounter problems, we just try to solve them. In that respect we have something of a punk attitude. We are in tune with the punk way of thinking and we like freedom – but we don’t like anarchy and we are not extremists. We try to be responsible in our dealings with others and employ common sense. The good thing with being an amateur is that you don’t start out focussing on the problems. If you did, you would end up seeing nothing but obstacles. We made a lot of terrible mistakes, but we also learned a great deal.

After Stanica had been renovated and the cultural centre had been established, I stepped away from the organisation for five years. This was in 2007. I was totally burned out and had lost motivation. We had achieved our big goal. But I didn't know what to do next. The problem was that our vision – to have our own place – was too small. We had of course some more general aims: to support emerging artists, to explore new contemporary arts languages and to help ordinary people create their own art. The problem was that everything was connected to Stanica. After a while I began to feel that things were repeating themselves. I told myself that as everything was now working it could work without me. The building and the facilities were in place and they were attracting visitors. I was a bit bored.

“We are in tune with the punk way of thinking and we like freedom – but we don't like anarchy ...”

When the organisation expanded into additional activities, we had to find more space for the multiple art forms that we wanted to support. After Stanica – our S1 – we came up with the idea of a new building – S2. That came about through the new job I was appointed to as head of the Mayor's office in Žilina, responsible for the town's non-profit sector and cultural activities. My new role was the total opposite of my previous one, which had been an amateur venture. But it was an appealing challenge. The new Mayor, who took over after an extreme right wing politician had been in post 16 years, was a former publisher who had strong connections with the arts. When the idea of S2 came up I didn't plan it around a particular venue, I helped to construct it. We used primitive technology: S2 is a cultural space made out of 3,000 beer crates, insulated with a mixture of straw, soil and water.

I returned to the Stanica organisation in 2011 at the start of the project for the third art space, the one we call the New Syna-

gogue. The synagogue in Žilina, which is one of the crown jewels of Slovakian architecture, became empty and the small Jewish Neolog community who owned it didn't know what to do with it. They wrote an article in the local newspaper asking for ideas. We contacted them and said, as we had before, "Let's have a go!" The renovation was doable because of everything we had learned as a result of our previous mistakes. We also had help from our fathers. My father, who is a builder, coordinated the renovation, and Marek's father had important experiences too. Marek and I were mostly dealing with support, financing, volunteers and getting hold of free construction materials.

Getting audiences to our events was difficult to start with. We called our families and I got my mother and sister and closest friends to come. The conditions at Stanica were terrible at first with no heating and no services, but things gradually got better. We have always worked intensively with the media and we try to ensure our activity is very visible, so that even those who don't attend can read articles and reviews of the events.

We have slowly built up trust with our audiences. What we offer our supporters in exchange for their trust is our visibility. If they give us money they know that we will only use it for projects. We have built up the bond between us over the years by constantly talking to people. They know us personally. We work in a transparent way and we are very much present, communicating and engaging at many levels. It has taken us over ten years, but the trust we have built up is very strong.

I think we have been quite persistent. When we started there was nothing: there was no heat and no electricity and the roofs were broken. We slowly made something of it. I do a lot of fundraising and I know that if ten companies refuse you the important thing is to get on and approach the 11th. We always try to find ways to move on and get what we need.

The fact that there have been several of us has been crucial. Hanka and Marek have also had burned-out periods, so we know what can happen. As a result we have chosen not to invest too

much in coordination for our organisation. We have no hierarchy. People can take a long holiday at any time. Those who work with us are responsible for their own projects. For some projects I might be the volunteer or help other staff members. For other projects I will be the leader; I make use of other people's talents and they give me the help I need. When there is a big concert at the New Synagogue I might sell tickets and Marek might work behind the bar. We don't have a traditional structure, it's more like a platform. People can do different things but there is still a working network.

The core value of the organisation is our belief in friendship. People like the atmosphere – I know this because I've researched it. Those who are involved are highly motivated and don't usually leave the organisation; once they have started with us, they stay. It is a bit like a family, and this is what holds the organisation together.

In the beginning we were workaholics. To be honest, we were obsessed. We had a rule that allowed us to take two days off a month, but we now have a more mature attitude towards the conditions in which we work. It was also helpful for me to get away from the organisation for a couple of years. Having now had the opportunity to view the organisation from the outside, I understand much more about how it works and I have successfully established a degree of distance.

An ordinary day for me is never ordinary. One day I might be gardening, the next I am writing applications, working in the bar or helping an artist construct something. Our duties include office work, premises-related work and artistic work, and there is always something new and interesting to do. But we do have our general areas of responsibility. I do most of the fundraising, project management, applications and reports. I hate these jobs, but I have children now so I can do my work during the day. I only took on these responsibilities so that I could be at home at night instead of working evenings on our events.

Two years ago, we almost went bankrupt. It was a terrible time for the organisation. We had to make people redundant be-

cause there were too many of us, and we were unable to pay people for six months. Since then I have been keeping my eye more on the finances; we do after all have about 30 projects on the go. Some people get paid out of ten different project budgets, others get paid out of the bar takings. Just putting this all together has been incredibly difficult and every year things are different because the projects are constantly changing. We have one person managing our finances, but we really need at least two.

“What we offer our supporters in exchange for their trust is our visibility.”

In terms of finance, we have about 50 sources of income, both large and small. This year we have sent about 30 separate applications to the Slovakian Arts Council for projects that we want to do. We might be successful with 20 of them. This funding is very important as we have almost no support from the municipality. We are trying to become gradually less dependent on public grants and to generate more income of our own. The balance comes from the bar, ticket sales, private supporters, sponsors and occasionally from European grants. It’s frankly a bit of a mess. But we understand how it works. To enable us to renovate the New Synagogue we ran a big crowdfunding campaign that was supported by over 2,000 people. Some of them still send us money every month. So we manage lots of different income streams and relationships, which mean we have to put a lot of energy into communicating with donors, institutions, visitors and volunteers. So my training in social work, which is after all about communication, has been useful to me.

One unique thing about this organisation is that almost all staff do admin and write applications. The basic idea is that people manage their own projects – they can do what they want, they just have to find the money and do the work. So we need strong

members of staff. We have never advertised vacancies. Usually, a person starts as a volunteer working on a specific project. If after, say, two years, we can see that they are also capable of fundraising for other projects, we know that they are good enough to join the team. But we have no financial security ourselves and so we can't offer it to anyone else. This is the natural state of affairs and we are quite used to it. Also, there are no big differences between staff members, everyone gets paid at a similar level.

There are currently 13 of us working for the organisation on a daily basis. Most of us are freelancers. Then there are lots of workshop leaders and at least a couple of European volunteers working with us. We have always had lots of volunteers from other countries who come to us for up to a year, and this has been tremendously important.

As a multi-arts organisation we collaborate with several national and international networks and institutions. When we started there were hardly any cultural centres like this in Slovakia, but there is now a growing movement. I believe Stanica has a reputation as a well-established and highly respected cultural centre.

Sometimes I think of my work as a painting. I help to create arts spaces where people do their own thing, and then the places themselves come to life and tell their own stories. Whether painting or building a space, the ambitions are similar. For me it's all art.

We describe Stanica as a 'cultural node'. That came from a vision we formulated with the help of an organisational development specialist. We had a workshop and were asked what we thought our cultural space would be like in 10 years' time. We agreed as a team that our vision for Stanica was for it to be really alive – like a beehive, with something going on all the time. It would be a place where people could work with their ideas and projects in a critical discourse. Our role would be to help but not be so involved. And now it's a kind of node, or a junction, where people from different backgrounds and countries come together and work on their artistic and intellectual projects. So the activities

are very varied. In the morning we might have a school coming to see a film, in the afternoon there might be workshops and in the evening there could be a theatre performance or a concert. So it's alive from morning till night. The space itself is like a magnet; we just bring people together and they start to collaborate.

Because there is a lot happening and a lot of people involved, we have a simple way of maintaining an overview: regular one-hour meetings once a week. But people don't have to attend. Only those who have important things to talk about go along. In fact we have a minimum of structure and use very few administrative tools, because everyone is obsessed with their own projects, visions or ideas. Where necessary we form small working groups. We have one – only one – shared calendar which we enter all our activities into. To communicate between ourselves we just use emails. This way of working reflects the trust that binds us together. We don't control people. I don't know what my colleagues are doing but I trust that they are using their time and resources effectively. They usually do much more than they are paid for.

Nevertheless, this organisational freedom has brought with it some conflict and a number of problems. For example, we used to have one person responsible for programming each of the art forms: theatre, visual art and music. There was a time when the person responsible for music programmed too many experimental noise concerts, which we don't have much of an audience for. So we changed the way we communicated. When you want to promote a concert now, you don't just email one person in the organisation to tell them about it, you send the information to six people, including non-programmers. That gives us more openness and we have more discussion about what goes into our programme. Now, everyone in the organisation can programme events, and even I, a non-programmer, will sometimes organise concerts and plays.

When we had our financial crisis a couple of years ago, we decided not to produce events that would only attract very small

audiences. This was not an artistic compromise but a decision based on the fact that we were based in a small town. When we want to put on heavy experimental stuff, we include it in a festival that reaches a bigger audience. Nowadays we work hard on communication to make sure we bring people in to our events. We have been more conscious of the need for audience development, based on better knowledge of the theories in this field and the training workshops we have attended.

The Trans Europe Halles network has been really important to us. Their twice-yearly meetings give us an opportunity to meet and talk to experts. We can call them at any time and find out how others have achieved success with their cultural spaces. I always leave these meetings inspired and full of ideas.

Both Stanica and New Synagogue are multicultural spaces, but they are also international. Half of the programme is international, which also gives us more funding options. More importantly, we see ourselves as an international venture. Because we have a lot of volunteers from abroad, we hold our meetings in English. The upshot is that we were initially more known abroad than amongst the local population. There has been a snowball effect in this respect too. I remember when it was difficult to find partners for collaborations. Now we have to refuse offers to be part of international collaborations because we haven't got the capacity for additional projects.

We have had many rules over the years. One is that “the artist is God”. It means that our *raison d'être* is to provide artists with the best possible conditions in which to do their work. Whatever they want to do, they can do it. It's very much a live rule and one that we regularly talk about; any staff member not sharing this attitude will be fired.

Sometimes I have to be the ‘bad guy’ dealing with a difficult situation. For instance, when we were left with debts after our financial crisis, I knew I would have to make some people redundant. I was totally overwhelmed by the situation and couldn't see a way forward. So I asked for advice from a friend of mine,

a psychologist who helps companies and organisations in crisis. He said, “Let’s go for a beer, and I will tell you what to do”. I was so happy to be in good hands! But he prescribed strong medicine: “If you can’t clean up this mess, you should have closed several years ago.” And then he left. It was harsh, but the best possible advice. When we laid people off, we borrowed money to pay their salaries for the next three months. We got into greater debt just so that they would be OK, but we resolved the situation, in our own way. And we have survived.

In retrospect, one lesson we learned about conflict management came out of the fact that we were a close circle of friends trying to become a more structured organisation. When we had a discussion about this in 1998, half of our group were against that route, saying that we would lose our core value of friendship and end up being like an institution. We had a big disagreement about this, which we tried to deal with by hiring a trained mediator to support us as a group. Again, we remedied the situation by asking for advice.

In general, the basis of a good working environment is healthy relationships. If relationships work, everything is easy. That’s the ideal, but of course life is full of conflict. Sometimes we have had situations that have put our normally flat organisation to the test, and someone has had to take a decision to deal with a problem. We realise there is a need for a hierarchy now and then, but we usually aim for flexibility and more ad hoc ways of working.

It’s difficult to say how I would like to develop personally in my work because I don’t see myself from the outside. But what I do know is that I would like to work more for the organisation as a whole and less on projects. That would benefit more people. However, I could definitely be better at prioritising, planning and recognising what is most important for the organisation in the long run. It can be far too easy to invest time and energy on things that you enjoy doing instead of the things the organisation needs you to do. And then suddenly it’s too late.

We are in the process of developing a new concept for the management of cultural spaces in the future. The concept is called The Third Landscape and it is based on the ideas of the gardener and garden designer Gilles Clément. We are working on it with friends from other cultural centres in Europe, mainly with Manifatture Knos in Italy. As a concept it is the opposite of the classical cultural management models that are based on excessive planning and business goals predicated on profit. It is an approach based on indecision.

It's important to find time to reflect. We do a lot, but I would say that we don't often think about usefulness. We say that art is necessary and that is why we love to do it. It would perhaps sometimes be wiser to connect more with people's needs. At a time when the world is changing rapidly, we should also be responding to events and striving to be even more meaningful. We produce art, but there isn't always a clear meaning to it. For instance, I'm currently involved in helping an artist to build a very large sculpture in a village outside Žilina. I help in whatever way the artist requires, but at the same time people are fleeing for their lives around us.

After I left Stanica I switched to social work for a few years. As manager of an NGO in Bratislava, one of my jobs was trying to assist Roma communities. It felt meaningful to be able to improve the lives of people living in extreme poverty. I wanted to bring about change in that situation; I had the right education and it was a positive thing. But in the end, it was difficult to combine work in one city and family life in another, so I returned to Žilina and got involved in the arts again.

I love what I do, but sometimes I have my doubts about the importance of it. When people talk about art for social change, I get very sceptical. We have run several programmes on that basis, but for me it is better to work specifically on the social side; I think social work is much more effective as it provides more direct support.

The concept of cultural leadership is a difficult one for me. At Stanica we talk about ourselves as workers, or cultural workers.

The fact that I was once an artist has been important in enabling me to learn about creative processes, but it also reminds me that I actually gave up my artistic ambitions. Since doing so I haven't combined administrative work with artistic output, I have worked to serve others. I am much more energised by helping an artist than I am by creating my own artistic product. I can truly say that I live my dream. I am so grateful to be doing what I love.

The Fika Project: Empowering Cultural Change Makers

What is it?

Fika is a social institution in Sweden. There has been evidence of the word *fika* for over a hundred years. It is a transposition of “kaffi” (a variation of the Swedish word for coffee). *To fika* means to take a break from work to have a coffee with colleagues. You may well have buns and cake along with your coffee. And a chat – a *fika* break is a great opportunity to discuss anything and everything.

In similar fashion, **The Fika Cultural Leadership Programme** offers you a chance to replenish your reserves, both physical and mental, and helps you to develop your work in a significant way. These are challenging times and **The Fika Programme** is about building leadership capacity to face these challenges.

How did it come about?

The Fika Project was developed in five steps:

1. An examination of the leadership CPD (Continuing Professional Development) needs of the cultural sector, focussing on Europe: summary on the project website: thefikaproject.org;
 2. A survey of existing cultural leadership training in different parts of the world: summary on thefikaproject.org;
 3. *Narratives by Cultural Change Makers*: international case studies of the professional lives of ten cultural leaders published in book form and made available on thefikaproject.org;
 4. *Perspectives on Cultural Leadership*: an anthology of research and essays published in book form and made available on thefikaproject.org;
- ... and will finally result in:
5. *The Fika Cultural Leadership Programme*: an intensive residential and distance learning programme that invites cultural change makers across the world (particularly – though not exclusively – those operating at small scale) to take a break

from their day-to-day responsibilities. Not just to drink coffee and eat cake, but also to meet colleagues and mentors, share experiences, learn from others, take the opportunity to reflect, access new networks and make new collaborations (information – and application form to follow – on thefikaproject.org).

Who did it?

We are the partners behind **The Fika Project**, which is supported by the EU Erasmus+ education and training programme and Region Västra Götaland in Sweden:

Karin Dalborg (Project Manager), Anna Johansen Fridén and Mikael Löfgren, Nätverkstan Kultur: independent cultural organisation based in Gothenburg, Sweden, providing education, financial and technical services, project management and consulting to the cultural sector: www.natverkstan.net.

Birgitta Persson, Trans Europe Halles: European-based network of cultural centres initiated by citizens and artists: www.teh.net.

Sue Kay and Annick Schramme, ENCATC: European network for cultural management and cultural policy education: www.encatc.org.

Sandy Fitzgerald and Paul Bogen, Olivearte Cultural Agency: providing wide-ranging supports to the European arts and cultural sector: www.olivearte.com

THE  PROJECT

Narratives by Cultural Change Makers is part of *The Fika Project* (thefikaproject.org) which aim is to design a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) concept for cultural leadership development capable of meeting the demands of our complex and changing times.

Narratives by Cultural Change Makers consists of interviews with ten prominent cultural leaders from different parts of the world. Active in different countries, in different types of organisations and with different art forms and types of culture, they tell us about life and work, education and training, professional experiences, success and setbacks, dilemmas and solutions.

Accompanying this book is the newly-published *Perspectives on Cultural Leadership*, an anthology of research and essays. Rather than aiming to be all-encompassing, the book seeks to open up discussion by offering thought-provoking perspectives on some of the waters that cultural leaders these days are obliged to navigate.

Together, these two books will hopefully serve as inspiring examples and interesting perspectives for the readers to test against their own experience.



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