

IN FRONT OF CLOSED HOUSES

A new theatre season has begun, but for the independent dance / performance / theatre scene in Vienna it is the "**Season of Closed Houses**":

- Tanzquartier Wien has closed completely due to the renovation of the studios and will only open again under the new artistic directorship at the end of January 2018. Meanwhile the rent for Halle G is still being paid though the space remains unavailable.
- Brut theatre is operating exclusively in a "nomadic mode" for the entire upcoming season, since the main venue in the Künstlerhaus is being renovated and is therefore unavailable for any presentations.
- Due to the change in the artistic directorship, the theatre / performance venue in the WUK will only open at the end of November.

Our main venues and most important infrastructures are therefore unavailable. The renovation of the Tanzquartier Wien is being financed from the current artistic budget of the house. This means that this autumn the dance / performance scene will be short of coproduction fees and services in the estimate of 450,000 Euros. The daily training in the TQW Studios, which is important for the artists, has also been cancelled without any form of substitution.

This "absence" of the Tanzquartier Wien and the Halle G as its main stage remains, even at the beginning of the season, unknown to the wider public, and also we, who have been directly affected, were only informed of these facts in the last few months.

All the above-mentioned events have been taking place without any consultation with the artists. This communication deficit seems to us as symptomatic of the value placed on the independent dance and performance scene from the side of the cultural policy makers.

Not only were there no alternatives offered from the responsible persons, but also proposed initiatives by the artists to mitigate the misery were simply rejected by the MA7. Removing an institution that we have helped build from the public sight for nine months can neither be in our interest nor in the interest of the city.

For these reasons - **the non-communication with the independent scene** and the lack of resources available to the independent scene - more than 200 active Viennese artists have joined forces under the open, constantly expanding platform named **Wiener Perspektive**. We want to deal with the situation fundamentally, in order to create lasting improvements in the communication between art makers and political administration as well as to create a clear articulation of our agendas. We advocate for communication on equal terms and transparency in the procedures involved. We want to be included in the essential decisions that affect us.

AS WIENER PERSPEKTIVE WE ARE ATTEMPTING:

- To enable and strengthen the dialogue, networking and discussion between the dancers and performers of different artistic orientations and generations;
- To discuss and shape the representation of this community of artists;
- To develop political agency and mutual empowerment through acts of solidarity;
- To promote active participation in the cultural policy activities and decisions, such as the dialogue with the decision-makers and institutions: *Nothing About Us Without Us*;
- To create visibility of the increasing knowledge of the Viennese dance and performance scene and to bring it together in order to develop future measures and visions.

AS WIENER PERSPEKTIVE WE ARE GOING PUBLIC:

- To make our working conditions known.
- To achieve better standards in our cooperation with the city, its magistrates, and the institutions that are subsidized by them; to create synergies and to optimize space use.
- To address problematic personal constellations in decision-making, problematic decisions and plans, and to demand transparency.
- To announce the series of events named "**Fictional Season**" that will be organized by the "Wiener Perspektive" starting at the end of November 2017. In two evenings we will discuss three different focal topics, conduct an inventory of our working conditions and the funding situation, and develop perspectives together with artists, experts and interested parties, in order to find solutions to the presented problems.

FIRST POSITIONINGS REGARDING THE TOPICS

as well as the basis for the first two events of the "Fictional Season" are:

- 1) Our working conditions and the basis of funding
- 2) The availability of workspaces, venues, rehearsal rooms and institutional spaces
- 3) The transparency of municipal budgets, funding decisions and appointments of institutional posts that are crucial to the scene

1) ARTISTIC WORKING CONDITIONS: 5 EXEMPLARY PARADOXES

Paradox 1

The independent scene is getting more and more institutionalized.

The majority of work is being done under the increasingly precarious conditions.

Paradox 2

The infrastructures of the independent scene are getting more and more centralized and controlled by the houses and respective structures. This leads to predefined artistic formats due to the limited resources (such as working hours, team sizes, presentation forms, etc.).

The artists are compelled to fulfil these institutional requirements, even though it is their activities that legitimized the establishment of these institutional structures in the first place. Flexibility is necessary in order to grant the creative processes a certain artistic freedom.

Paradox 3

It is not possible in the long term to maintain an innovative dance and performance scene in Vienna without any high-quality, internationally recognized, and subsidized (further) education and training in the respective field.

In addition to that, new transdisciplinary training and practice models are needed, which would enable diverse, innovative forms of artistic thinking and activities. These include, for example, more flexible, cross-genre artistic production methods or promotion of artistic research, etc.

Paradox 4

Since 2004, the sum of project funding as well as one-year and two-year funding has been stagnating at around 2.6 million euros. Since the introduction of concept funding (2005), it has not been possible for the subsidized independent dance / performance groups to grow significantly above an annual budget of 200,000 euros.

It is necessary to raise the financial support in order to meet the real growth and the development of the independent scene. The number of artists, administrative expenses, living costs and inflation have risen significantly since 2004 (= 14 years).

Consequently, there are in fact massive losses for the artists. In contrast to Vienna, the funding sums of the independent scene in Berlin have been significantly increased. The metropolitan culture fund has just raised the budget for projects from 10 million euros to 15 million euros. At the same time there is also a larger number of foundations and funding instruments available in Germany. In Vienna, there are no appropriate models or approaches to deal with this situation.

Paradox 5

24 million euros will flow into the renovation of the Volkstheater this year.

The renovation of the Tanzquartier Wien (estimated costs of 450,000.- Euro) is being paid from the operative budget of the TQW, which should actually benefit the artistic co-productions and the services for artistic work.

2) THE AVAILABILITY OF WORK AND PERFORMANCE SPACES

Already in 2008, an inventory of the dance and performance scene (Round Table Infrastructure Group) showed that there was an acute lack of work, rehearsal and presentation spaces. From 2008 till now the situation has worsened significantly. Some of the groups, who were giving their spaces to colleagues under favourable conditions, had to either hand them over or close them due to the lack of support or budgetary cuts. This had been happening, as mentioned above, while the number of producing artists was consistently rising.

Artist-run spaces are currently only sparsely subsidized. Their running expenses and maintenance costs are being paid out of artistic budgets and not from infrastructural budgets.

Many artists have no access to the spaces at all.

3) TRANSPARENCY

We want to be involved in all the decision-making processes that are relevant to our working conditions. The current unsatisfactory situation can be improved through:

- Transparency in the entire use of all institutional budgets.
- Transparency in the cross-financing within the City of Vienna; for example, the cash flow between Tanzquartier Wien and Wiener Festwochen, Wiener Festwochen and Theater an der Wien, etc.
- Transparency in the decision-making procedures of the appointments of jury members and artistic directors.
- Clear and individually verifiable funding agendas, which are then also applicable as the mandatory general criteria for any decision-making personnel replacements.
- The urgent omission of accumulation of functions and of power concentration among individual decision-makers, as well as a clear separation of personnel in different boards of curators, juries and committees.
- Separation of infrastructural budgets and artistic production budgets.
- Transparency regarding infrastructure funds, location subsidies or structural support. Which budgets are outsourced from which funding pots? Who makes these decisions? What are the basic criteria and how are these resources actually made available to the independent scene?

WIENER PERSPEKTIVE PROPOSES THE FOLLOWING APPROACHES:

- 1) Separation of the funding system and the social security system is necessary in order to guarantee living standards for the artists beyond the poverty limit. Both agendas need to be developed further and worked on. All freelance artists need a statutory social protection in the cases of unemployment and illness. Furthermore, artistic support must not be bound by hidden age limits. The precariousness of artistic working conditions - due to the lack of or insufficient funding - leads to an increasing and acute poverty risk for a considerable number of artists. In this regard, European comparisons should be employed, and subsequently, respective solutions developed.
- 2) In addition to the exclusively production-oriented funding model of the city of Vienna new forms of subsidies and support are needed, such as interdisciplinary research and development grants and scholarships, fellowships, support for further education, etc., which would cover the different requirements of artists, enrich the scene and relieve the production budgets of the resources allocated for productions.
- 3) All the city-supported structures should offer their resources, especially space resources, to the independent scene under favourable conditions, whenever those are available. We are addressing here "the scene related institutions", e.g. Kosmos Theater, Hamakom, Tanzquartier Wien, Eldorado, Werk X etc., but also the large municipal institutions such as the Volkstheater. A workable model in this context is the structure of "Workspace Brussels".
- 4) Artists need not only spaces to work, train and realize their artistic projects, but also spaces to exchange and network. We need spaces that are independent from institutions, and that can be designed and used according to our own needs.
- 5) Additionally, it is necessary to ensure or rather establish a wide-ranging daily training for the professional freelance dancers and performers.
- 6) Co-productions cannot only be named as such, but must be actually co-produced. The co-production sums have in the recent years drastically declined and do not justify the definition anymore. As co-productions we understand the funds that are made available for artistic production, and are provided in addition to the institutional infrastructure such as the performance and rehearsal spaces and the technical equipment. From now on, we will refuse to name mere cooperations as co-productions if they are not accordingly financially co-produced.
- 7) We see the urgent need to legislate an Arts Funding Act in Vienna, which would link cultural expenditures to the municipal total expenditures. The fact that Vienna is the only federal state in Austria to have no such legislation cannot be accepted any longer.
- 8) As an immediate measure, we demand that the city of Vienna invests the 450,000 euros, which the independent scene was deprived of due to the renovation of the Tanzquartier Wien, into the development and establishment of new work and space models for the independent scene that would consequently generate adequate working, training and performance conditions and facilities.

WIENER PERSPEKTIVE (to the date of 26.09.2017)

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