



SPACE

Supporting Performing Arts Circulation in Europe

SPACE/TRAVELOGUE:

connecting data in a
transnational production
space

Joris Janssens, Dries Moreels, Bart Magnus, Ann Olaerts (Vlaams Theater Instituut)

Thu 10 Dec 2009

Summary

This text is an introduction to 'Travelogue', a transnational project to link and exchange data about international touring in the performing arts. It is an initiative of SPACE, a new European network devoted to Supporting Performing Arts Circulation in Europe. One of the aims of SPACE is to enhance data exchange and to develop research about international mobility in the performing arts production. To meet this objective, Travelogue will be developed, an on-line prototype meant to map the international mobility of the performing arts using Semantic Web technology. To do this, the situation of data collection in every European country is being mapped. Organisations collecting data are encouraged to share their information in order to show the mutually enhanced relevance that linked data can mean.

What is SPACE?

During the last decades, international exchange has boomed in the performing arts sector. Political, technological and economic developments helped to turn Europe into a seemingly self-evident biotope for the production and presentation of performing arts. However, there are clearly some imbalances in this transnational performing arts sphere. Touring internationally seems to be more self-evident for some than it is for others.

Recently this approach has been the starting point for a new platform, dedicated to Supporting Performing Arts Circulation in Europe: SPACE. SPACE has 9 founding members: Vlaams Theater Instituut (VTi), Theater Instituut Nederland (TIN), Ente Teatrale Italiano (ETI), British Council, Pro Helvetia, Office National de la Diffusion Artistique (ONDA), Red House Centre for Culture and Debate (Bulgaria), Arts and Theatre Institute (Czech Republic) and NTIL (Latvia). (+ Zentrum BRD des Internationalen Theaterinstituts (Berlin)? Its members share a position in between politics and the artistic field in their own countries. They share the belief that one of the cornerstones of a European cultural policy will be to facilitate and support the circulation of performing arts across Europe. The aim of SPACE is to analyze current imbalances in the performing arts circulation and to develop instruments to tackle these imbalances.

An important step in this trajectory was the conference 'Home & Away: comparing national policies to support international live arts touring', which IETM and VTi (support centre for the performing arts in Flanders) co-organized in May 2008 in Brussels. It was attended by cultural policy makers from different European countries, dealing with international co-operation in the performing arts. The findings of the seminar have informed SPACE's EU application as a pilot project for the 'networking of existing structures supporting mobility in different cultural sectors', which has been granted subsidies from the European Commission for the term 2009-2011.

In close cooperation with other networks and partners, SPACE is ready to run a project on three levels: data exchange and research about international mobility in the performing arts production; training programmes; institutional capacity building. This text introduces 'Travelogue', the part of the project dealing with the exchange of data about international touring in the performing arts, by first looking at some relevant trends in international performing arts practice.

Some facts: the emergence of a transnational production space

As far as the production and touring of performing arts is concerned, a transnational production space is emerging. International coproductions and the trajectory of a lot of artists who work, produce and tour in different countries cannot be reduced to one single national culture, scene or identity. Since support for the performing arts is still mainly done by institutions operating on the national level - governments, agencies, funding bodies, cultural institutes,... - the emergence of this transnational space poses quite some challenges for policy making and data collection about international activities.

International coproduction is booming

Recent decades, international exchange has become more important in the performing arts in Europe. The situation can be illustrated with some statistics from Flanders. A large percentage of the Flemish performing arts organizations develop intensive international activities. In the period 1999-2003 about a third of all Flemish stage productions crossed the Belgian border. The figures were highest for dance. A good 40% of all Flemish dance performances between 1999 and 2003 were given abroad.

However, international activities involve more than just import/export. They also involve an increasing exchange in the area of (co)productions. VTI's field analysis [*Metamorphoses. Performing arts in Flanders since 1993*](#) is a research project is based on the VTI-database, containing information about 6,653 performing arts productions staged between 1993-2005. An analysis of these data led to the identification of some major trends in the performing arts production, a.o. internationalization and interdependence.

On the one hand, we see that the traditional image of 'work going from one country to another' is becoming obsolete. Production is happening more and more in an international network situation. In the period under consideration, the international interdependence is strongest in the sub-segment of dance. Nevertheless, developments in dance appear to have set the trend for the performing arts as a whole. An increasing share of the productions in VTI's database are international coproductions, with Flemish and foreign partners.

On the other hand, it is also clear that this transnational production space is still largely a Western-European phenomenon. In the period under consideration there is some diversification, with Eastern- and non-European partners gradually getting in the picture. But even for dance, 95% of the input still comes from countries which were already in the EU in 1995 (before it opened up to the east). So this transnational production zone still appears to have clear-cut frontiers, leading to imbalances and asymmetries for mobility and mutual exchange.

The individual perspective: the example of Mette Ingvarsten

We can also look at the transnational production space from the perspective of an individual artist. Let us explore one example of a young choreographer, and google 'mette+ingvarsten' on the web... You will find links to a lot of documents, for example:

Travelogue: connecting data in a transnational production space



- [Mette Ingvartsen's Facebook profile](#) - she is a person in a network of friends.
- [Mette Ingvartsen's own site](#) - providing information about her productions and a [performance schedule](#). We see that she has an intensive international touring schedule.
- Indeed, venues in different countries provide information about the shows, [Kaaiteater](#) in Brussels, Belgium for instance or [Kanuti Gildi Saal](#) in Tallinn, Estonia. Click on the links and you will see these venues tag Mette Ingvartsen differently - at Kaaiteater she is called 'the young Danish choreographer', in Estonia her work is tagged '/Denmark>Belgium/'.
- Indeed, the work is supported - or claimed - by different national institutes. Google directs us to some promotional information by national institutes: [Danishperformingarts.info](#) - here you will see she works in Copenhagen, Brussels and Berlin - and [Vlaams Theater Instituut](#) - where you can learn she has studied in Brussels and Amsterdam.
- Institutes in different countries are documenting Mette Ingvartsen's work: this is again done by [Vlaams Theater Instituut](#) but also by [Theater Instituut Nederland](#) (because she works with Dutch coproducer, Danswerkplaats Amsterdam). Interestingly, tags at the TIN website do not include 'Denmark' but 'Belgium' and 'Germany' instead (so the logic does not follow the nationality of the artist, but the address of the coproducing organisation).
- You might find a link to the [statistics of the Estonian Theatre Agency](#), since - as we have seen above - *to come* was presented at the Nu Scandik Festival in 2006. One of the pages lists imported shows at Estonian festivals in that year, where Mette Ingvartsen is tagged as being 'Taani' (Danish).

Googling Mette Ingvartsen on the web reveals links to a lot of information about her performing arts activities. She is clearly a performing arts professional with a markedly international trajectory on different levels: education, production, touring, living... Interestingly, the perspective on her (national) identity seems to be shifting depending on the source. Here she is a 'rising star in Danish dance', there she is located in

'Denmark > Belgium', a third source says she works in 'Copenhagen, Brussels and Berlin' and her work is produced in Essen, Brussels, Amsterdam...

Interestingly, different sources contain only partial of the information. Sometimes the information is contradictory. For the same production, different première dates are being mentioned:

TO COME

Aantal voorstellingen:	4
Seizoen:	2004-2005
Datum première:	02/06/2005 20:30 (Essen)

ORGANISATIES

WERKHUIS /producties

[PACT Zollverein/Choreographisches Zentrum NRW](#)
[DansWerkplaats Amsterdam](#)

PERSONEN

Mette Ingvartsen	choreografie
Mette Ingvartsen	dans
Naiara Mendioroz Azkarate	dans
Manon Santkin	dans
Jeftha Van Dinther	dans
Gabor Varga	dans

Titel	To Come (I Like to Watch!)
Producent	DWA danswerkplaats & dansproductiehuis WERKHUIS / producties PACT Zollverein
Premièredatum	2006-02-17
Premièrezaal	De Brakke Grond, Amsterdam
Discipline	Dans
Trefwoorden	België , Duitsland , Moderne dans , Seizoen 2005/2006
Productiecode	200501340.009
Personen	Ingvartsen, Mette (choreografie) Mendioroz Azkarate, Naiara (choreografie) Santkin, Manon (choreografie) Dinther, Jeftha van (choreografie) Varga, Gabor (choreografie) Ingvartsen, Mette (concept) Defays, Jennifer (decor) Defays, Jennifer (kostuums) Lenaerts, Peter (geluid)
Uitvoerenden	Ingvartsen, Mette (uitvoerende) Mendioroz Azkarate, Naiara (uitvoerende) Santkin, Manon (uitvoerende) Dinther, Jeftha van (uitvoerende) Varga, Gabor (uitvoerende)

So, not only is the (national) identity of Mette Ingvartsen as a transnational nomad is shifting. We also see that a lot of information is being gathered on different locations in a redundant way, while different sources seem to gather only partial - and sometimes contradictory - information.

Challenges for data collection and exchange

Both the increase of coproductions and the case of Mette Ingvartsen show the 'national' perspective is out of sync with the arts practice, that has become deeply international and interdependent. Work going from one country to the other is no longer the model. Coproductions cross borders in many directions. So how does all this affect the efficiency of international cultural policies of the nation states? Are policies ready to recognize the complexity and necessity of this international dimension? And how are different countries dealing with mapping and monitoring international mobility?

Home & Away survey

In May 2008, VTi and IETM organized the conference 'Home & Away: comparing national policies to support international live arts touring' as a first step

- to develop our understanding of the current situation in the international exchange of performing arts productions and
- as a discussion platform for the development of innovative policy models to tackle current asymmetries.

In preparation for this meeting, VTI and IETM gathered existing information about the international dissemination of contemporary performing arts productions: statistics and analyses of import and export of performances. They sent out a mailing campaign to research and information centers and ministries to be able to map the current situation as far as the mobility of performing arts productions in Europe is concerned, asking:

- Who collects information about productions, performances and (international) touring in different countries?
- Has this information been handled statistically? Are there overviews of how many groups are touring internationally, how many performances, how long the tours are, to which countries the productions travel, etc.? National correspondents were asked to send these reports.

Disparity in approaches

The Home & Away survey led to the identification of a striking disparity in approaches. Representatives from 25 productions reacted to our request. Correspondents in some member states replied that their countries do not map the international activities of their performing arts companies. Others sent in information which in general tends to vary greatly. Thus the feedback to the VTI and IETM survey is very instructive: it clearly demonstrates the incomparability of different national approaches dealing with mapping their international activities. The dissimilarity is to be situated on different levels:

- Diversity in type of documents: Those states that do map international exchange have sent in very diverse types of documents: performance yearbooks, Eurostat statistics, research papers, simple excel sheets with listings, online databases and datawarehouses...
- Source of the documents: The sources of these documents tend to vary: sometimes this kind of information is gathered by (relatively autonomous) research centers, sometimes by ministries. This difference is important since it may have an impact on the width of the field covered by the data, either covering only the supported projects or attempting to cover the whole field in their country.
- Granularity of the measurement varies: Some of these documents contained aggregated numbers only, other contained raw datasets with different levels of details.
- Import, export or exchange? Some give view on trade balance type of information, mapping mostly export and (much less frequently) import. Transnational co-productions are only exceptionally an issue in this type of mapping of international activities.
- Database criteria tend to vary greatly: Most datasets register different parameters: sometimes but not always counting productions, number of performances of productions, companies, target countries, regions of origin, venues, audience numbers & age....
- Quantitative and/or qualitative approaches: Quantitative approaches are predominant, though some studies try to complement this with a qualitative approach. A recent research Dutch report – commissioned by the Council for Culture and the Ministry of Education – is an example of this, combining quantitative & qualitative methods (for instance by the quantification of reputations).

Different rationales, logics and ambitions lead to a disparity in approaches. Sometimes you see a re-active approach, limiting itself to an a posteriori monitoring of government spending (accountability) or the impact of projects/initiatives (results). Sometimes these data are used to pro-actively shape or influence policy making: governments evaluating their policy objectives or policy instruments which might lead to justification, amendment or abolishment of policy instruments and objectives. Data may be put to use by cultural organizations or cultural observatories as a tool to lobby, to gain more recognition for a certain body of work, sensitizing governments....

So the difference in approaches to monitoring of international support via data collection and analysis has an obvious explanation. The deployment of such research is often politically colored and – given the fact that cultural policy through the principle of subsidiarity is mainly to be situated at a regional / national level – makes that the supranational approach is lacking completely. The architecture of the data collections is often associated with political objectives at infranational or national level (e.g. monitoring audience participation ,or taking into account the regions of origin of theater companies).

The necessity of a transnational approach

There is a clear lack of data mapping the international mobility of performing arts productions. In order to be able to address current imbalances in the international dissemination of performing arts productions, there is a strong need for open data and research on the mobility of performances. Different rationales, logics and ambitions lead to a disparity in approaches as far as the collection of data is concerned. The current dissimilarity of approaches obviously obscures our view on and understanding of the transnational dissemination of performing arts productions in Europe. The supra-national, European approach of the data exchange project is crucial for several reasons:

- In order to map the current situation, it is necessary to make the existing information comparable between member states (in some cases even infranational comparability is lacking). As a first step, it is necessary to stop working on islands and create links between the existing data.
- It is crucial to be able to take into account not only export or import, but also transnational productions and other types of mutual exchange.
- Identifying current asymmetries is the basis to identify interesting options for the development of future EU policies. SPACE will formulate recommendations in this respect.
- Through the openness of the project to partners with different types of data and the involvement of partners wishing to develop datasets, existing asymmetries in way European states have developed the monitoring of international mobility of cultural works will be addressed directly.

Travelogue: connecting data

In the context of the concerns expressed in the EU Agenda for culture in a globalizing world, SPACE will undertake three actions to address this lack of data and research:

- the organization of workshops in SPACE member countries: bringing together organisations with relevance to data collection. This will help to map the situation of data collection throughout Europe and collect as many existing data as possible to include in the 'Travelogue' prototype. The first workshops, held in Paris (November) and Rome (December) were a success. As both France and Italy are big countries with a complex structure of the cultural field, they are a good indicator for the potential of Travelogue on the supranational level of data collection. Moreover, Travelogue tends to work as a powerful trigger to start or strengthen collaboration on a national level. Similar workshops will be organised in January in the UK and Germany.
- the development of 'Travelogue', an online prototype useful for mapping the international mobility of performing arts works. This will be the foundation needed to develop guidelines and recommendations required to link, share, harmonise and compare data about the international mobility of performing arts productions on a transnational level.
- the organization of different training sessions and a conference (May 2010), aimed at institutional capacity building about standards and methods for linking, sharing and comparing data between countries and between sectors. Guidelines will be written, both aimed at organisations who want to share

their existing databases in linked open data and at organisations who want to start collecting data. By doing this, the experiences and knowledge originating from the Travelogue practice can be maximally shared and exploited.

As a pilot project to enhance the comparability of the information existing at this stage, SPACE wants to develop links between existing databases containing relevant information on the mobility of performing arts. The databases of for instance VTI, TIN, ONDA, Pro Helvetia, ENICPA members are evident starting points, but the technical setup should allow for all relevant datasets from pan-European institutions (cultural observatories, ministries, sector institutes for different disciplines,...) to be connected in this project.

Linked data methodology and further reference

How will we map international mobility in this transnational production space? The idea is that we stop working on islands and start linking the existing data which are being gathered in different European countries. To return to case of Mette Ingvarsten, we should create links between the different existing datasets:



This can be done using recently developed web technology. Techniques from the Semantic Web ('cool URIs' and RDF - using the approach of the linked data project) will guarantee an open and low-threshold IT framework. Linked Data is about using the Web to connect related data that wasn't previously linked, or using the Web to lower the barriers to linking data currently linked using other methods. More specifically, Wikipedia defines Linked Data as 'a term used to describe a recommended best practice for exposing, sharing, and connecting pieces of data, information, and knowledge on the Semantic Web using URIs and RDF.'

Linked data is a method of exposing, linking and sharing information on the web - allowing browsers and search engines to connect related information. A lot of databases have already been published on the web: a.o. Eurostat, DBpedia (Structured information from Wikipedia), Geonames (world-wide geographical

database), Musicbrainz (music and artist database), Project Gutenberg (literary works in the public domain), Revyu (community reviews about anything), World Factbook (country statistics, compiled by CIA),...

<http://linkeddata.org/> exists to provide a home for, or pointers to, resources from across the Linked Data community, a.o. an [essay](#) by Internet founder Tim Berners-Lee and a [tutorial](#) about publishing linked data on the web.

Travelogue is working on adapting the current techniques and existing vocabularies in order to be able to monitor international touring. The development of the Travelogue prototype will be complemented with guidelines and training sessions about linked data, data exchange and information gathering with partners in countries and institutes which do not yet collect this information.

Partners

VTi coordinates the work on data exchange and research. The co-organizers of SPACE are partners in Travelogue, in close collaboration with two European networks: IETM (Informal Network for Contemporary Performing Arts), La Belle Ouvrage and ENICPA (European Network of Information Centres for the Performing Arts).

More importantly, SPACE is looking for other partners:

- ministries, information centers,... holding existing data on international mobility and interested in linking this information;
- those who intend to start collecting such information and who are interested to develop this in a low-threshold way that allows international exchange.

Contact

Joris Janssens, Dries Moreels, Bart Magnus

Vlaams Theater Instituut
Saintelettesquare 19
B-1000 Brussels

joris@vti.be
dries@vti.be
bart@vti.be

T 0032 2 201 09 06
F 0032 2 203 02 05