



Trans Nordic Project

Mapping of Independent Cultural Centres in the Nordic and Baltic Countries and
a Basis for Further Collaboration



1. The Aims of the Project

The Trans Nordic Project is a collaboration project between the cultural centre Mejeriet in Lund, Sweden, and the network Trans Europe Halles (TEH). TEH is a European Network of Independent Cultural Centres founded in Brussels in 1983 (www.teh.net). The network currently has 45 members in 25 countries. The objective of the Trans Nordic Project has been to collect and share best practices between Nordic and Baltic cultural centres. Another objective has been to support emerging independent cultural centres in the Nordic and Baltic countries to establish and reinforce their contacts with partners in Europe. After an initial research and mapping of cultural centres in the Nordic and Baltic region, the aim of the project was to construct a database of all partners and to develop a close collaboration with Arts Management Educations. The main aim of the Trans Nordic Project has been to lay down the basis for the setting up of a platform for Nordic and Baltic independent cultural centres using the connections, knowledge and experience of Trans Europe Halles.



2. Summary

Hundreds of organizations were contacted to help with the research and mapping of independent cultural centres in the Nordic and Baltic countries and as a result nine new members and associated members (Friends of Trans Europe Halles) have joined the network. Information about the project has been published on a regular basis in the newsletter of Trans Europe Halles and spread to other organizations and networks. Collaboration has been established with the network ENCATC that will make it possible for Nordic and Baltic cultural centres to find interns from Arts Management Educations in 39 countries. A database has been constructed where the Nordic and Baltic cultural centres can find information about their Nordic and Baltic colleagues concerning organizational structure, main disciplines and activities. The database also makes it possible for the Nordic and Baltic cultural centres to find project partners in the rest of Europe as all members of Trans Europe Halles are included. The Trans Nordic Project Meeting was held the 16th of May 2007 in Vilnius, Lithuania. 16 cultural centres from six different countries participated. During the meeting the cultural centres were given the chance to get to know one another and exchange ideas and experiences. There was a great interest in collaborating and the cultural centres presented several different project proposals that are now being discussed further together with the project partners. The cultural centres were mostly interested in collaborating when it comes to exchange of artists and professional development for Nordic and Baltic cultural operators. No formal platform has yet been established, but thanks to the Trans Nordic Project a new basis for collaboration between the Nordic and Baltic cultural centres in TEH has been established.

3. How the Project was realised

The Trans Nordic Project was initially managed by the TEH Coordinator Birgitta Persson. Emma Ernsth was later employed as the Project Manager of the project. Emma Ernsth has earlier been coordinating the TEH Meeting in Italy in Spring 2005 and organized a 4-day seminar about European Voluntary Service in connection to the TEH Meeting in Slovenia in Spring 2006. Emma Ernsth is currently employed as a Project Manager at the Coordination Office of the network.

Mapping and Research

Several methods were used to find the different cultural centres in the Nordic and Baltic countries. In the first phase as many organizations as possible were contacted, in order to spread the information about the project. The first, general information letter was sent out to encourage associations, organizations, institutions, festivals, artists' unions and other networks in the cultural sector to send us information about independent cultural centres in the Nordic and Baltic countries. To find these organizations different search engines on the internet as well as bigger national and international web pages within the cultural sector were used. We have contacted, among others, the Arts Councils and Department for Culture in the different countries as well as Cultural Contact Point-offices and the Nordic Association (Föreningen Norden). Other networks such as Baltic Sea Net, Norsk Kulturhus Nettverk and Huse i Danmark have also contributed with their contacts.

Another technique to find cultural centres has been to do research on webpages of different cities. However, the most efficient way to find independent cultural centres has been the contacts that were given to us from the project's different partners as for instance Tou Scene, Kaapelitehdas and Arts Printing House.

Once the mapping and research was done, a more specific information letter was sent out to the cultural centres per post with information about the Trans Nordic Project and Trans Europe Halles. The letter was followed by a phone call to ask the cultural centres about their interest in Nordic/Baltic collaboration. During the phone call questions were also asked about the eventual difficulties that the cultural centres experience as hindrances to engage in Nordic/Baltic collaboration projects. The cultural centres were also asked if they were interested in being part of a Nordic/Baltic platform of independent cultural centres in TEH and if they saw a point in Nordic and Baltic cultural centres acting together concerning lobbying for Nordic and Baltic cultural issues on EU-level. It turned out that the cultural centres considered these issues very important and interesting. In the information letter the cultural centres were offered to join Trans Europe Halles and invited to the next network meeting. The cultural centres were also asked if they wanted to subscribe to the monthly TEH newsletter and that way get information about the Trans Nordic Project as well as other European collaboration projects, job opportunities etc.

Thanks to the Trans Nordic Project the number of Nordic/Baltic subscribers to the newsletter has increased considerably. The newsletter also makes it possible for smaller cultural associations and organizations to establish and reinforce their contacts with other organizations in Europe, and keep up to date with the Trans Nordic Project, even if they chose not to/didn't fulfil the membership criteria to join Trans Europe Halles. Finally, the information campaign was followed up with a number of visits to the cultural centres Subtopia (Stockholm), Södra Teatern (Stockholm), Röda Sten (Göteborg), Konstepidemin (Göteborg), Kulturhuset Mazetti (Malmö), Drömmarnas hus (Malmö), Arena Vestfossen (Vestfossen) and Parkteatret (Oslo). General information about the project was sent out to hundreds of organizations, associations, institutions and networks. A more specific information letter was sent to thirty-five cultural centres in the Nordic and Baltic countries. Four cultural centres later joined TEH as members, namely Parkteatret (Oslo), Arena Vestfossen (Vestfossen), Subtopia (Stockholm) and NOASS (Riga). Five cultural centres joined the network as associated members (Friends of Trans Europe Halles), namely Röda Sten (Göteborg), Konstepidemin (Göteborg), Kulturhuset Mazetti (Malmö), Drömmarnas Hus (Malmö) and Ramybe (Palanga). Apart from the original project partners of the Trans Nordic Project these cultural centres have actively engaged themselves and contributed to the realization of the project.

Collaboration with Arts Management Educations

As described in the application, the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki had, among others, shown a great interest in the project already from the beginning. However, instead of collaborating with individual universities, a collaboration with ENCATC was established. ENCATC is an international network of Arts Management training centres that the Sibelius Academy is a member of. ENCATC currently has 127 members in 39 countries (www.encatc.org). The Project Manager of the Trans Nordic Project has, during 2006 and 2007, participated in the network meetings of ENCATC. A possible collaboration has been discussed with the Executive Director of ENCATC, GiannaLia Cogliandro, as well as with their board. The idea has been to collaborate concerning the construction of a database for match-making of interns and cultural centres. Arts Management-students who are studying at a university connected to ENCATC would, in this database, be able to find internships at independent cultural centres in the Nordic and Baltic countries as well as the other cultural centres of TEH. The cultural centres would also be able to search for potential interns from all Arts Management training centres connected to ENCATC. The coordination and match-making would be administrated by ENCATC.

To find out about the interest of this collaboration among the cultural centres, a research was performed in connection to and after the TEH Meeting in Bremen in September 2006. A questionnaire showed that more than 95 % of the members of TEH were interested in collaborating with ENCATC. Not only would the collaboration increase the cultural centres' contacts with universities in 39 countries, but it would also give the cultural centres the opportunity to exchange experiences and increase their intercultural competence by hosting Arts Management-students from ENCATC members.

However, both ENCATC and TEH:s resources are limited and at present no external financing to support the construction of the database has been found. A collaboration concerning financing has been established with Utrecht School of Fine Arts and we will continue our discussions with them in the near future. While both ENCATC and TEH continue the search for financing the networks have agreed to publish calls for internships in the networks' respective newsletters.

Constructing the Database

Apart from the mapping of cultural centres, it has been important for TEH in this project to get a better understanding of the different realities of the Nordic and Baltic cultural centres. This has been achieved with the help of questionnaires, interviews and the construction of a database. The database contains facts about legal structure, activities, main disciplines, audience and number of employees at the different cultural centres. The database makes it easier for the cultural centres to find project partners as it is very easy to find information about what cultural centres do circus or host artists-in-residency for instance. The Nordic and Baltic cultural centres were given priority in the construction of the database.

A questionnaire was sent out in Spring 2007 and in April and May the database was filled with information about the Nordic and Baltic cultural centres. The facts are available for the project partners on TEH:s website and will also be made available to the public during the later half of 2007. As all members of TEH will be included in the database it also makes it easier for the Nordic and Baltic cultural centres to get to know and find project partners in all 25 countries where TEH has its members.

The database was of great help in the planning and realization of the Trans Nordic Project Meeting as it helped the Project Manager to present an overview of the differences and similarities between the different cultural centres. This overview proved to be very useful to start a structured dialogue between the participants about the different realities of the cultural centres. It also helped the cultural centres in their discussions about what kind of Nordic/Baltic collaboration projects they would like to realize together in the future.

Planning and Realizing the Meeting

The Trans Nordic Project Meeting was realized the 16th of May 2007 in connection to TEH Meeting 63 in Vilnius, Lithuania. A trip was made to Vilnius in February 2007 in order to plan and discuss the meeting with the host of the TEH meeting Arts Printing House (www.menuspaustuve.lt). The

staff at the Nordic Council of Ministers Office in Vilnius were kind enough to host the Trans Nordic Project Meeting. 19 cultural centres from seven Nordic and Baltic countries were invited to the meeting and 16 cultural centres from six countries participated. The cultural centres were invited both for the Trans Nordic Meeting and the TEH Meeting the 17-20th of May. The aim of the Trans Nordic Project Meeting was to give the cultural centres the opportunity to get to know each other better and that way see within what areas they would like to realize projects together in the future. The day begun with a presentation of the cultural centres based on the information in the database. The presentation made it possible for the cultural centres to get an overview of the other participants and in the dialogue during the presentation different stories and experiences were shared. The rest of the morning session consisted in a presentation by Chris Torch who is the Artistic Director of Intercult in Stockholm (www.intercult.se). Chris Torch had been invited to present a best practice example of a Nordic/Baltic collaboration project and presented the project SEAS. Chris Torch was generous in sharing experiences and constructive failures that Intercult had encountered in the project. Mr. Torch also gave some valuable tips about what to keep in mind in the different phases of a project cycle. The afternoon was left for discussion and brainstorming about what kind of projects the cultural centres would like to realize together. At the end of the day several concrete project proposals were presented.

After the 16th of May the general TEH Meeting 63 17-20th of May continued where the participants from the Trans Nordic Project Meeting participated as well. More than 120 participants from TEH member centres plus guests participated in the meeting that included seminars, guided tours and discussions. The conference day “Exploring Territories” the 18th of May was open to the public and gave an insight into the prerequisites of the independent cultural life in Lithuania today. Independent cultural organizations and cultural centres from Belarus, Russia and Ukraine had also been invited to the TEH meeting.

4. Results and Evaluation

As always you learn the most from your mistakes. The misjudgements that we have made and the surprises that we have encountered mostly concern the following areas:

- The amount of time needed for mapping and research
- Difficulties in finding independent cultural centres
- The interest for Nordic and Baltic collaboration among the cultural centres

The Amount of Time Needed for Mapping and Research

The moving of the Coordination Office of the network from Helsinki to Lund, Sweden, had a big impact on the project as it was very time-consuming. But even if this would not have happened one can still note that we were too optimistic as to how much time it would take to realize the project, especially when it comes to the research. The process to do research on, map out and get in contact with the different cultural centres took a lot more time than we had estimated. It also took a lot more time to interview the different people at the cultural centres about their needs and what eventual hindrances they experience that stop them from engaging in more Nordic and Baltic collaboration. The reason why this took so much more time than expected was simply because the people at the cultural centres had a hard time finding a moment when we could do an interview.

Difficulties in Finding Independent Cultural Centres

Thanks to the mapping TEH got a lot of new contacts in the Nordic and Baltic countries which we find very positive. Thanks to the information campaign that was carried out within the project the knowledge about the existence of TEH has been spread to the cultural sector in the Nordic and Baltic countries. It has, however, been hard to get any response to the general information letter that was sent out, even if it was followed up with phone calls. It was very hard to get any tips about additional

cultural centres from non-TEH-sources. It didn't seem as if institutions or authorities in the different countries had done any thorough research themselves in an organized way (gathering information about cultural centres in an Excel-file or a database for instance) that we could get information from. The closest we got to valuable information from outside TEH was that we were sent lists on organizations that had been awarded different grants from the different Arts Councils. Therefore our own members remained the most valuable resource during the research-phase.

Among the different Nordic and Baltic countries we found it most hard to find more independent cultural centres in Denmark and on Iceland. In Denmark we mostly received tips about different venues that only organize concerts. TEH:s only member, Huset in Århus, is currently in a critical situation and in conflict with its local politicians and was unable to participate in the Trans Nordic Project Meeting. This meant that unfortunately Denmark wasn't represented at the meeting. However, we have recently established contact with Biz-Art in Vejle (www.biz-art.dk) and will also continue our search for more independent cultural centres in Denmark in the future. On Iceland we got in contact with the cultural centre Bank, situated in an old bank in Reykjavík. However, when we got in contact with the people who had run this cultural centre they had already been forced to close since they had lost the right to organize cultural activities on the premises. No matter what it was very interesting to hear the story of Bank from the people who had been running it, and one of the positive side-effects of the project has been that TEH has learnt a lot about what it is like to start and run an independent cultural centre in the different Nordic and Baltic countries.

The Interest for Nordic and Baltic Collaboration Among the Cultural Centres
Once we got in contact with the cultural centres they showed a greater interest in Nordic and Baltic collaboration than we would have dared to hope for. The cultural centres also engaged themselves and became very active project partners. From our point of view it has been very gratifying to see that even if we have seen a decrease in Nordic collaboration the last thirty years, these cultural centres still considered it important to collaborate, for instance in order to get a stronger, unified Nordic voice in the EU. The cultural centres that were contacted also considered it valuable to start a closer Nordic/Baltic collaboration within the frame of a network/future platform for Nordic and Baltic cultural centres. For TEH it has been very inspiring and satisfying to follow the process of the cultural centre Parkteatret from being a cultural centre that was contacted by the Trans Nordic Project to the most active member of the network that they are today.

5. Possibilities for the Future

What came out during the Trans Nordic Project Meeting was that the cultural centres were first and foremost interested in collaborating with the exchange of artists and professional development. They also expressed a wish to get support from TEH in forms of project management and coordination in order to be able to realize the projects proposed. Thanks to the fact that the Trans Nordic Project has been successful and the cultural centres have expressed an interest in doing projects together, TEH has decided to look into the possibilities of realizing different projects and supporting further networking between the project partners. Below you will find a short list of the different project proposals that are now being discussed (of which the first one has already been financed):

Aurora Borealis

- a project that aims at developing the collaboration between Nordic/Baltic cultural centres and cultural organizations in the Barents region. The project has been initiated by Parkteatret in Oslo that has already received a grant from the Norwegian Ministry for Foreign Affairs to realize the first part of the project; a conference in Oslo in 2008.

Collaboration with Belarus

- a project that in a most pragmatic way wants to support the democratic movement in Belarus by offering 10 young artists and cultural operators the opportunity to do internships at cultural centres in the Nordic and Baltic countries.

Nordic-Baltic EXPRESS

- an exchange of artists and their art between Nordic and Baltic cultural centres in TEH.

Professional Development

- a professional development project between Nordic and Baltic cultural centres; partly with the help of staff exchange, partly by organizing thematic 2-day-conferences.

A Basis for Further Collaboration

No formal platform has yet been established for the Nordic and Baltic cultural centres, but a basis for Nordic and Baltic collaboration has definitely been established. Future will tell whether or not this collaboration should be formalized and managed by Trans Europe Halles. Discussions and planning for further financing, both for individual projects and a structure for collaboration is taking place at the time of writing. The TEH-meetings in Helsinki and Stavanger in 2007 and 2008 will leave space for further planning and discussions.

As far as TEH is concerned it will continue to be important to support synergy effects in Nordic and Baltic collaboration and to further develop and support the possibilities for the Nordic and Baltic cultural centres to collaborate with other European cultural centres. The maintenance of the database as well as the continuous spreading of information about Nordic and Baltic collaboration projects via TEH Newsletter are other obligations that will continue to fall on TEH. The TEH Coordination Office will continue to be a contact point for the project partners, other cultural organizations that have been contacted within the project as well as the public in the Nordic and Baltic countries.

Lund, Sweden, 2007-06-05

For Trans Europe Halles and Mejeriet

Emma Ernsth

Thanks to:

Photographer Rune Guneriussen
Anna Storåkers
Arena Vestfossen
Arts Printing House
Drömmarnas Hus
ENCATC
Huset
Chris Torch, Intercult
Kaapelitehdas
Karin Hallström, Storasöder
Konstepidemin
Korjaamo
Kulturhuset Mazetti
Kultuuritehas Polymer
Lund 2014
Månteatern
NOASS
Nordic Council of Ministers Office in Lithuania
Nordisk Kulturfond
Parkteatret
Ramybe
Röda Sten
Subtopia
Torsten Schenlaer, Counsellor for cultural affairs,
Embassy of Sweden
Tou Scene
Verkatehdas