

MOVING — IN MOVING — ON

#3

**TEH Startup Support
Programme 2018**

Featuring:
Cinema ARTA in
Cluj-Napoca, Romania



teh.net

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

1. THE TEH STARTUP SUPPORT PROGRAMME: WHY AND HOW
2. CHALLENGES OF CREATING ART SPACES IN THE BALKANS: REGION & CONTEXT
3. CASE STUDY: CINEMA ARTA, CLUJ-NAPOCA, ROMANIA
4. BUILDING A COMMUNITY
5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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TEH Startup Support Programme 2018
Publication #3
Cinema ARTA in Cluj-Napoca, Romania

Trans Europe Halles is a network of cultural centres initiated by citizens and artists. Our mission is to strengthen the sustainable development of non-governmental cultural centres and encourage new initiatives by connecting, supporting and promoting them. We facilitate international cooperation, provide opportunities for learning and sharing, and promote the practice, impact and value of arts and culture.

Read more at www.teh.net



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1. THE TEH STARTUP SUPPORT PROGRAMME: WHY AND HOW



Through an open call, launched in December 2017, TEH invited upcoming initiatives to apply from **Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia & Turkey.**

Trans Europe Halles is a network of more than 100 cultural centres – initiated by citizens and artists who have revitalised post-industrial buildings for arts, culture and activism across Europe. We started our work in 1983 in Western Europe and we're now supporting creative and cultural spaces in the Balkans, Eastern Partnership (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine) and Southern Mediterranean countries too. That's why we've kickstarted the Startup Support Programme – offering access to all the knowledge, the experience and the skills that we've gained in Europe over the past 36 years.

Why now? From 2017-2020, we're running a wide range of activities under the strapline ***Factories of Imagination: Investing in Cultural Changemakers***. This project is motivated by an urgent concern: In many European countries, non-governmental cultural centres are under-resourced and don't have the funds in place to support the professional development of their staff. These issues are preventing them from fully achieving their potential. This is especially true in regions and countries where neither

civil society nor critical artistic production is encouraged – and indeed is sometimes actively discouraged – by public authorities.

This is particularly true in the Balkans, which was the focus of the first year of our **Startup Support Programme**. It's a region of faltering economies, hostile leaders, high unemployment rates and massive brain-drains – but it's also a place of upcoming communities of defiant young artists and activists who are determined to reclaim the vacant buildings and neglected public spaces in their cities.

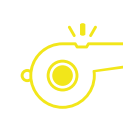
Their ambitions dovetail with TEH's core values: to revitalise spaces that have the potential to become exciting social and artistic hubs. They are drawing on the energy of civil society in places where unsympathetic public authorities, irresponsible capitalism and social conservatism are conspiring to create an atmosphere of stagnation. At the same time, they have a strong understanding of their responsibility to mobilise the power of arts and culture for the public good and conscious urban transformation.



ANALYSIS



MATCHMAKING



COACHING



NETWORK

DECEMBER 2017
APPLICATIONS OPEN

JANUARY 2018
APPLICATIONS CLOSED

FEBRUARY 2018
SELECTION

MARCH 2018
SCOPING VISIT

APRIL 2018
STUDY VISITS TO
OTHER CENTRES

MAY 2018
TEH CONFERENCE

JULY 2018
WORKSHOP IN ARTA

AUGUST 2018
POP-UP EVENTS
PLANNED

SEPTEMBER 2018
TEH CAMP MEETING

MAY 2019
PUBLICATION

The [Startup Support Programme 2018](#) aimed to reach out to these kinds of initiatives across the Balkans. Through a process that included an initial open call, a selection committee, scoping visits, conference participation, online coaching, organisational workshops and written

reports, we are very pleased to now welcome three of these initiatives into the TEH network:

- [Communitism](#) in Athens, Greece
- [Cinema ARTA](#) in Cluj-Napoca, Romania
- [Anibar/Kino Jusuf Gërvalla](#) in Peja, Kosovo.

2. CHALLENGES OF CREATING ART SPACES IN THE BALKANS: REGION & CONTEXT

The economic, political, social and cultural context is very different from one Balkan country to the other. But in general, some of the vital ingredients that make it possible for civil society initiatives in Western Europe to energise post-industrial buildings are missing in the Balkans. These include::

- a clear status of the ownership of the venue;
- a cultural policy that makes funding accessible to new initiatives;
- an interest among (younger) audiences and media in upcoming artists and their work;
- a minimum of financial security for artists and activists;
- a certain understanding among municipal authorities of the potential contribution of new arts initiatives to the economy (and gentrification) of their cities;
- a tradition going back several decades of reclaiming vacant buildings for the common good;
- and a sense among younger citizens that they have the right, even the entitlement, to create new collective spaces where those

do not yet exist.

The latter is also triggered by people's motivation to stay in their cities and improve them, instead of planning to move away at the first opportunity.

Even when these elements are all in place, it is never easy to create and maintain new spaces in old buildings. Across Western Europe, financial constraints, an overdose of regulation and a populist suspicion of the arts are conspiring to produce an environment of ongoing precarity, causing many new initiatives to falter and disappear. But the lack of even the most basic factors in the Balkans region make it even more difficult to make a success of initiatives like these.

All three of the startups we worked with in the Balkans over the past few months looked promising and inspirational at first sight. Getting to know them better – through our scoping visits, online conversations and local workshops – we discovered how wide the gap is between their current situation and the realisation of their dreams.

The challenges are daunting. But these three initiatives, although their environment is insecure, are working day and night to realize their ambitions.

3. CASE STUDY: CINEMA ARTA, CLUJ-NAPOCA, ROMANIA

In the heart of Cluj-Napoca, Romania, just around the corner from the central Piața Unirii (Union Square), stands the oldest functioning cinema in Romania: Cinema ARTA. This cinema first opened its doors

to the public in 1913. After the downfall of Nicolae Ceaușescu in 1989, the family of the cinema's founder David Sebestyen started a property restitution trial to reclaim ownership of the building. It took them 18

ARTA PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT - THE CINEMA COMING OUT OF THE CITY



years. But now the great-granddaughter of the founder, Monica Sebestyen, is the owner and manager of a movie theatre waiting to be transformed into a lively, multidisciplinary cultural centre.

The expectations are high, but Monica feels supported in her clear vision about what Cinema ARTA should become. And it will be much more than a cinema. Around its gradually expanding programme of screenings of arthouse movies, classical cinema, documentaries on urban issues and films presented in cooperation with social and cultural NGOs, ARTA will organise programmes, debates and children's events, with special attention focused on Hungarian and other minorities living in the region.

One of the main cultural attractions of the city is the annual Transylvania International Film Festival (TIFF), which attracts more than 80,000 visitors. For a city this size (more than 300,000 residents), Cluj-Napoca counts a surprising number of cinemas – seven within the city limits, some of them multiplex, most of them state-run. No wonder TIFF thinks Cluj should call itself cinema city – with its festival, academies, movie theatres, its new Association of Film in Transylvania and Cluj Film Fund.

As well as this spirit of enterprise, Cluj also boasts a tradition of active citizens, who are known to rally and protest on matters such as public space and urban issues as well as campaigning for Roma and LGBTQ rights and cultural diversity. It makes sense, then, that Cinema ARTA aims not just to return the oldest cinema in town to its citizens, but also to combine movies with public activities and debates.

The building itself will be very visible, with its façades used as a public exhibition space. It will also be very accessible, with a streetside bar, foyer and terrace. ARTA will be a statement. This is not just a commercial cinema, where people go in and out. It is a vibrant arts space, a cultural hotspot where people will meet before and after going to the movies, discussing what they've seen at a large central table, initiating and taking part in the public discussions that Cluj now lacks.

Highlighting the future vision, progress in the renovation and the connections with future partners should also result in the start of the organisational structure. Starting last summer, organising pilot events together with other groups and individuals proved to be a good way to test fresh collaborations and to scout potential team members, who

could start as volunteers and develop into paid co-workers that share the venue's vision, once the financing has been secured.

Within the building, Monica has signed an agreement with a crucial partner: the Flying Circus – the bar, lounge, music and party club in the basement of the cinema. With its daily programme of both serious and wild events, it attracts a large, young crowd that will partly overlap with the cinema audience in the future. The agreement is that Flying Circus will run the bar in the cinema foyer.

The floor, the bar, the lighting and the furniture of the foyer were mainly renovated last year. Once the doors open to the public, there will space for the bar and terrace run by Flying Circus; small screenings on the walls; workshops for students and children; movie-related dinners; a two-person cinema in the tiny room linked to the foyer; open calls for film students; selling movie-related merchandise, including the ARTA brand (plus postcards and/or large prints of the posters inspired by movies that now grace the façade). The renovation of the cinema hall itself has been a painstaking process, but is nearing its completion now. Once that has been done, the whole building is ready to open its doors to the public on a daily basis.

In the meantime, the ARTA team has been organising focus groups and pop-up events, carrying out audience surveys and reaching out to possible civic partners. A summary of their target audience groups includes:

- Students of the film department at both local universities: ARTA could provide screenings to fit into their curriculum; students could work at ARTA as interns; work created by students could be presented at ARTA.
- The same goes for students at the media department of the arts academy.
- ARTA will organise educational screenings and programmes for schoolchildren, including workshops for them to make their own short films.
- Connections are being made with local NGOs, to provide screenings on selected social, political, activist and urban issues.
- through presenting a varied agenda, Cinema ARTA should be able to attract regular visitors aged 25-35, but also those above 50, who have become more sociable in recent years.

AFTER A LONG TIME OF INVOLVEMENT IN THIS PROJECT A DISTANT VIEW WAS MORE THAN WELCOMED TO IDENTIFY WHAT WE ARE STILL MISSING OR SHOULD IMPROVE, BUT ALSO TO BE MORE AWARE OF OUR STRONG POINTS.

**FROM ARTA EVALUATION REPORT
OF TEH STARTUP PROGRAMME 2018**

Monica is now busy preparing schedules for the future: monthly agendas, selected movies and distributors, partners in organising screenings and events, team profiles, annual budgets and timelines. She is constantly updating these, in order to be prepared once the final part of the renovation has been completed.

At the moment, fundraising is still aimed mainly at the last part of the renovation. A grant for the digital projection system has recently been secured. Possible funding for the team and first activities is also important, through applications submitted

to the Ministry of Culture and other public or private grants, which have been secured for separate projects, but not on a structural basis.

Cinema ARTA will have to run on a model that combines NGO status with a for-profit company, as well as fundraising through public funding and commercial sponsorships, as well as ticket sales, external rent and merchandising. Only time will tell whether Cinema ARTA can be managed on a sustainable level, to accommodate all the ideas and ambitions that are currently swirling around the building.

4. BUILDING A COMMUNITY

A multi-disciplinary arts centre should ideally reflect the city around it. It works like a city square with a roof. The doors are open, the crowd is diverse, the topics are varied – whatever's on the agenda is relevant and real. Elevated and intensified, of course, by the language of the arts.

This means, by definition, that the centre's team cannot be the only curator. The programme will be filled with contributions from other artists, citizens, local and international organisations. While the team will take care of hospitality, logistics and the criteria for the artistic level and social relevance, it is the city and its people that will help to define the content.

Cinema ARTA aims for exactly this: through its focus groups, audience surveys, calls for volunteers and interns, and outreach to civic partners, it has been building an active community that is brimming with ideas (and will take its audience with it) once the doors of the cinema are finally open again every day.

But building a community isn't easy. To begin with, it hinges on the good choice of the first partners. These should be truly gifted, active, committed people who understand the vision – and trigger the imagination of others. They should understand what's in it for them and that their interest is a two-way street with the new centre itself. To attract them, the centre's team will have to place itself in the other's position: what can they offer for the other to grow a sense of spiritual (and in the long run maybe even financial) co-ownership?

Cinema ARTA has been wise to identify its first partners across a wide range of artistic, academic and social initiatives. This way, these partners will not feel that there is competition in their own field, within the walls of the centre. Their knowledge and networks are compatible with others. To future visitors, this also guarantees that, whatever they come to witness at Cinema ARTA, they will also run into unexpected other topics and presentations. This mix of partners assures anyone that a visit to the cinema will always offer more than what they came (and paid) for.

Keeping these partnerships alive and productive is hard work. Although there will always be enough to do within the cinema itself, the team will always have venture outside as well, visiting partners and their events, scouting for new talents, visiting them on their home turf to understand where they come from, studying what they study etc. To show your curiosity and loyalty in this way will always bring returns in the longer term.

It also helps to set up and/or participate in networks of local artists, activists and organisations – even if their goal does not directly relate to the centre. If they are vital to the city and its people, they will in the end be vital to your centre too. For example, Cinema ARTA can be involved in associations and networks concerned with public space, urban development, minority rights, academic transformation or cultural policy without immediately benefiting itself. And yet, the show of commitment and support for the bigger picture will very often lead, sooner or later, to surprising events at the cinema itself.

Building a community cannot be delegated to one or two people within the team. They will take the lead, for sure, but it is important for members of the wider community around the centre – from single visitors to official partner organisations – so they feel that they are being welcomed and recognised by everyone working at the centre. In this way, team members will be able to connect active community

members to one another, which is the next step to strengthening and sustaining the community bonds throughout the city.

* Go to teh.net/resources for workshop and visiting reports from Anibar's journey during TEH Startup Support Programme 2018

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✦ The next step for new centres like these is to build a consistency in their public events, even when this has to happen on a small scale in the startup phase. By opening the doors on a regular basis and presenting a coherent programme, you can build up an audience from like-minded communities and share the responsibility for offering art and activism to the city.
- ✦ To introduce new team members, volunteers, communities and partner organisations to the vision and mission of these centres, a one-page manifesto highlighting the ambitions and the organisational codes can be most helpful.
- ✦ None of these centres have much experience of running a good bar (possibly including food), while this is vital to the atmosphere, the number of visitors – and, if done well, can help to create an independent source of income. Among the TEH members, there is a lot of experience with business models for the combination of hospitality, content, food and drinks. This might well be a specific topic for the next phase of supporting new initiatives.
- ✦ These centres share the sense of responsibility for improving public space and real estate development in their

cities. But they struggle to be recognised by the local authorities. To strengthen their influence, which in the long term should also lead to a transparent local cultural policy, we encourage these centres to take the initiative for setting up a reciprocal, outspoken network of local cultural initiatives. This can help to resolve legal, bureaucratic and formal challenges as well as helping to establish long-term cooperation between municipal bodies on the one hand and civil society organisations and communities on the other.

- ✦ The new TEH Balkan Hub is a good initiative to link similar centres across the region, exchanging knowledge and applying collectively for international funding, in order to create a shared basis of continuity.
- ✦ International funding (through embassies, foundations and EU grants) is often earmarked to fulfill the donor's agenda, which is often more social than artistic, and varies from one donor to the next. By applying for international funding, the centres run the risk of getting distracted from their own goals by having to comply with the donor's agenda. It is up to the centres themselves, as well as wider networks like TEH, to point out this potentially counterproductive situation.

Two international experts worked closely with the TEH staff to make it all happen. Irena Boljunčić Gracin was the managing director of Rojc Association's Alliance, Community Centre Rojc in Pula, Croatia and currently serves on TEH's executive committee. Chris Keulemans, a travelling writer and moderator, was the founder and artistic director of Tolhuistuin cultural centre in Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

#3

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