

Conference on Collaboration in Culture

2020 Culture Get-Together Conference
Final Report

16 – 17 September 2020
Municipal House, Prague

About Nová síť, Organizer

For eighteen years Nová síť has been supporting performing arts and collaboration in culture. As an open cultural organization it connects Czech regions with Prague and with abroad, strengthens communication between public administration and individual stakeholders of cultural life, and promotes decentralization, development, and cultivation of civil society in the Czech Republic. Nová síť's main projects include the CZECH CULTURAL NETWORK NOVÁ SÍŤ, MALÁ INVENTURA festival of new theatre, communication platform PRALIN connecting Prague and Berlin, and ART-IN-RES, a new project promoting artists residencies. Nová síť is a service organization for performing arts, particularly for theatre and dance.

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INTRODUCTION

Nová síť has launched a unique conference, Culture Get-Together, that took place in Prague on 16–17 September 2020 and included international online participation. The conference aimed to facilitate meeting of representatives of mainly independent performing arts (including organizations of theatre, dance, and new circus). The first day of the conference was focused on Prague, the second day explored topics related to Czech regions. Moderated by Marta Ljubková and Saša Michalidis, the inaugural edition of the Culture Get-Together conference examined the theme of collaboration in culture. It was streamed online.

Each speaker had exactly eight minutes to introduce his/her umbrella organization and outline the organization's most pressing issues related to inter-cultural collaboration.

“We firmly believe that a meeting of all top representatives of private culture will point out the extent and power of joint communication outside independent culture, and not only that; it will also suggest problematic areas that require our attention,” stated Adriana Světlíková, chair of Nová síť.

The conference's format was inspired by the conference Industry Get-Together Berlin whose organizers participated with their video presentations or joined in using telebridge. Opening remarks were presented by Janina Benduski, director of the Performing Arts Programm Berlin and chair of the German Association of Independent Performing Arts. Together with her colleagues Benduski discussed the original ambition for the founding of the Berlin conference, introducing topics examined in the past editions and elaborating on the conference's development. In the end, she elaborated on its current status and future direction.

The 2020 Culture Get-Together conference did not aspire to resolve specific problems but was designed to map the current state of Czech cultural community and evaluate how it communicates internally and externally. The goal was to first establish a communication channel which would allow for both sectors to get together once a year and contribute to eliminating barriers. It is important to facilitate and streamline mutual communication and articulate the essential. For Nová síť, the conference's output is a summary of topics identified as most pressing for both parties.

The conference was designed mainly for professionals in the independent performing arts industry (including industry organizations, independent cultural professionals, art community, and expert public) and representatives of public administration. It was streamed live; the recording is available [here](#).

The 2020 Culture Get-Together conference partners included the **Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic, International Theatre Institute ITI, Arts and Theatre Institute ATI, Czech-German Future Fund, Performing Arts Programm Berlin, and Prague City Hall**. The conference is part of PRALIN—the project of cultural collaboration between the city of Prague and Berlin under the patronage of Ms. Hana Třeščíková, council member of the City of Prague for culture, historic heritage conservation, exhibition management, and tourism.

DAY 1: FOCUS ON PRAGUE – 16 SEPTEMBER 2020

All speakers were asked the following questions, addressed in their 8-minute presentations

1. *Why were you established?*
2. *What is the scope of your activities and what makes you unique?*
3. *Name problems that fall outside the scope of your activities yet they must be resolved and, as such, make your operation more difficult. You would welcome help from others—colleagues, industry organizations—in these matters.*

MARTA SMOLÍKOVÁ

The Czech centre of the International Theatre Institute ITI is an open platform for Czech theatre professionals represented therein by professional organizations, representatives of theatre and dance education system, and individual members; it is managed by the Arts and Theatre Institute ATI. Ms Marta Smolíková spoke on behalf of ITI.

“ITI is a Czech centre for local theatre and performance organizations; it engages in education and youth, and international collaboration on both national and international levels. ITI’s mission is to stimulate and foster dialogue on key topics related to Czech theatre culture, express and represent its common interests, become a platform for sharing information relevant for performing arts disciplines, and furthermore to carry out activities arising from the programme of the international organization ITI according to its 2017 Charter. Our work centres on cultural advocacy; each year we dedicate time to the matters of state budget, and right now the Covid situation. In the meantime we develop and implement projects such as the World Theatre Day and International Dance Day.”

“One of the main tasks that we have worked on is international solidarity. The reason for or goal of networking is to share information and, at the same time, possibly agree on joint positions, because it is always important to arrive at a coordinated opinion that could be carried through, and a lesson can be learned from it.”

ŠÁRKA MARŠÍKOVÁ

Cirqueon – Centre for New Circus is an umbrella organization for support and development of new circus in the Czech Republic. Cirqueon’s activities are based on four key pillars: education, art production, information, and research and development. Cirqueon is a partner in and coordinator of a number of EU projects. Currently it coordinates an unofficial platform for professionals in the new circus area in the Czech Republic. Cirqueon is a not-for-profit organization, Šárka Maršíková is the organization’s director.

“We were established in 2009 essentially based on a critical need to bring new circus to the Czech Republic, because at the time there was not much happening here except for the festival Letní Letná, for which I worked. Already back then we agreed on three pillars which we have been monitoring since: first, education, then support for art production and, let’s say, creative

space, and also an information centre, providing information in general about what the new circus is and why it should be recognized and supported, what are the benefits.”

“We strive to collaborate across organizations, so we really create a network of Czech circus professionals, those who work in the Czech Republic. We aim to identify the new circus’s current problems and needs.”

PETR PROKOP

The Czech Association of Independent Theatre is an open association of theatres, production houses as well as individual creators who work throughout the Czech Republic for and at independent theatres not established by public authorities. The main goals of the association include promoting uniqueness of independent theatre industry, facilitating networking with public administration and communication among theatre members. By doing so, it contributes to the system’s transparency and improves conditions under which independent theatres conduct their creative activities. Petr Prokop is chair of the association’s board.

“The problem is particularly in infrastructure which has not been fully developed. If it had, it would be capable to support in time of crisis operation of the arts—independent arts, theatres, and individual artists. It is not only about physical space but also about umbrella organizations and institutions, for instance those with members of support professions, such as technicians, production managers, and so on. This issue—an absence of umbrella organizations for technicians and others—should be approached as an investment. It is necessary to support investment projects capable of production and co-production providing support for individuals, freelancers.”

MARIE KINSKY

Vize tance (Vision of Dance) is a professional organization for independent professionals, individuals and organizations, in dance and movement theatre. Vize tance began working formally in 2008, continuing activities carried by an unofficial expert group of the same name whose members met for the first time in January 2006. Marie Kinsky, chair of the Vize tance, represented the organization.

“Vize tance was established in 2008. We are the first Czech professional organization dedicated to dance and physical theatre. We collaborate with both individuals and organizations. We do our best to ensure that the entire field keeps evolving and growing. We strive to map the situation in the field, collaborate with our members, discuss the needs, and promote development of relationship and collaboration with government and non-government institutions. Medialization of dance is vital for us.”

“We struggle over the conditions under which the Czech independent culture operates. Our members must juggle several jobs to make living—their art cannot tap into its full potential under such conditions. Another pressing issue is absence of a permanent space for our meetings. Of course, finances are yet another challenge, which often means that members of Vize tance work for free and in their spare time; therefore lack of time is another problem, we cannot do our

work as professionals, not as we would like to. Please let's connect and collaborate, it is imperative!"

LINDA SVIDRÓ

The Czech Association of Dance Professionals (Asociace tanečních umělců ČR), former Czech Dance Association (Taneční sdružení ČR) has been since 1990 a professional organization for dance institutions, individual artists (including dancers, choreographers, teachers, ballet masters, and dramaturgs), critics, theoreticians, and other professionals in this industry. The association's main mission is to increase prestige, knowledge, and accessibility of dance art. Linda Svidró is chair of the Czech Association of Dance Professionals and art director of the Prague Chamber Ballet.

"The association's main mission is to help advance dance art and increase its prestige, not only in Prague but across the Czech Republic. Regarding improvement in economic and social conditions, I think that the most pressing issue right now is to deal with the status of an artist. In addition, giving publicity to dance is very important to us."

"In conclusion, I would like to address two matters: first, to seek a representation in audition and grant committees and in advisory bodies, and to promote and protect common interests of the Czech theatre culture, particularly in respect to public authorities."

YVONA KREUZMANNOVÁ

Founder and director of Tanec Praha (Dance Prague) since 1991. Tanec Praha was established for the purpose of organizing the international festival of contemporary dance and movement theatre Tanec Praha, and has expanded to include the Czech Dance Platform and PONEC – the theatre for dance. Kreuzmannová worked as a consultant to the Czech Minister of Culture (2006–2008), she was also responsible for the official opening of the Czech Republic's presidency of the Council of the EU in Brussels (2009). She co-founded various European projects, including Trans Danse Europe and the platform Aerowaves. She participates in European networks (IETM, EDN) and collaborates on international projects.

"In 1989 the Prague cultural centre established Tanec Praha as a festival. It helps look back and reflect on the achievements of those 30 years. Nevertheless I could see the following weak points: the most important thing is to speak the same language because we use the language of arts while the public administration speaks another language, and it is crucial to find a sort of translator—a transformation line, a bridge—so that we can understand each other. It is a long-term process which I call a life-long effort to raise public awareness."

"Identifying things in negative way is wrong: non-government, non-profit, everything begins with no, no, no. Yes, we do public service in culture and it should be constantly repeated."

"Another weakness is a high turnover of politicians: in thirty years I have met twenty ministers of culture and twelve mayors. It is of course also a matter of personnel staffing at the ministry, because we know, yes, it was mentioned earlier, that the only clerk for dance and theatre is about

to retire, actually she was already let go; at the present time the position of an independent clerk for dance is vacant.”

“Film makers managed to unite in the last decade and set up and benefit from film incentives and all programmes that the Ministry of Culture created for film arts; we are not even close to that point. It is certainly the film makers who could be our local inspiration.”

“The third weakness is insufficient coordination of international relations, because, without any doubt, it is art and culture that open the door to foreign countries for Czech businesses. Our artists are those who represent us. For me non-verbal art such as dance is at the forefront because dance does not require translation.”

JAKUB VEDRAL

Director of the Prague street theatre festival Behind the Door (Za dveřmi). As a production manager and producer, Vedral has been long collaborating with prominent Czech independent theatres. Furthermore, he participated on the presentation of the Czech Republic at world trade expositions EXPO in Aichi, Shanghai, Milan, and Astana, providing either dramaturgy or direction. He is a co-creator of the largest drive-in festival Art Parking. Jakub Vedral is founder and director of the companies ART Prometheus and ArtProm.

“Production, a theatre production, may be and should be considered an independent art genre. Therefore, as a graduate of theatre production I consider myself to be, to some extent, an artist.”

“It is necessary to connect art world with business world.”

“Almost ten years ago, in 2011, we decided to found a company ArtProm to focus on ‘exporting’ our projects to abroad. We provide various companies, including really large firms, with consultations regarding a format of their social events, and we assist them with their production. By doing so, we are about eighty percent independent on grants and grant policy, which I consider a great success. The remaining twenty percent is very important for us because it allows us to produce our beloved street theatre festival Behind the Door and thus help theatre companies create. Nevertheless, for us grants represent something like an investment incentive.”

MILAN NĚMEČEK

Deputy minister of culture of the Czech Republic for performing arts, and director of the Department of Art, Literature, and Libraries; lecturer at the Department of Arts Management, University of Economics, Prague.

“I am not sure how to help communicating with the government, because it is not much about the government as it is about the Ministry of Finance. Ministry of Finance is simply the watchdog of government money, an uncompromising one.”

“One should not blame colleagues from the Ministry of Industry and Trade for not understanding certain things. At the end, there are many things that even we, officers, do not comprehend, such

as understanding of the nature of those professions and how they operate and how individual projects are produced; it is very important information which we need to absorb now, and in order to do that we need those organizations.”

“We are in constant communication with Prague; however when it comes to regions and local administration, it is a bit of a problem which became clear in connection with the relief package of the Ministry of Culture, particularly in regards to the measures directed towards state-founded sector. We are more focused on problems that have occurred in connection with our, the ministry’s relief package, which includes determining requirements for the provision of a Covid subsidy by the Ministry of Culture; the ministry has decided that the founding authorities should not significantly decrease benefits to the state-founded organizations. We sent out letters on behalf of the minister to all regional offices and city halls so that they would comply if possible.”

HANA TŘEŠTÍKOVÁ

Czech film producer, director, and the City of Prague council member for culture, historic heritage conservation, exhibition management, and tourism. Since 2014 she has been a representative and council member for Prague 7; since 2018 deputy mayor for the city district Prague 7 and representative and council member of the City of Prague. Concurrently, she was elected in the 2018 municipal elections a representative to the Prague City Assembly as an independent for the civic movement Praha sobě (Prague Together).

“Regarding Prague, we would like to tell you here at this plenum that you are very important partners for us, for any debate and expert discussion.”

“For us these are always important moments to both listen to the entire spectrum of opinions, to hear the wide spectrum of opinions, and try to identify weaknesses related to Prague cultural policy or which we could work on.”

“What to watch for: a debate on a new grant programme for 2022–2027 in which we particularly need you to participate, in the discussion. It will be a long process, but it requires to be completed by the middle of next year. What has been defined so far is that within this system we will pay attention to and emphasize mainly excellence, talent support, innovative projects, community and space development, and international collaboration. It goes without saying that difficult years are to be expected ahead of us.”

“Weaknesses: fragmentation or isolation of individual interest groups. Today is an example of how you are able to meet and debate and discuss some points relevant to everyone, nevertheless it is complicated to constantly work on tiny problems or small problems of individuals. Another weak point is your mistrust towards politicians at the city hall or towards the city hall as such. Finally, as a sort of feedback: we often hear or receive from you information about what does not work, what you need, a rather negative information; yet we are ready to listen also to concrete and constructive proposals.”

JIŘÍ SULŽENKO

Director of the Department of Culture and Tourism. Former director of the project Pilsen 2015 – European Capital of Culture, and DEPO 2015. He also served as a curator for the programme of Pražské náplavky (Prague Boardwalks), operated by TRADE CENTRE PRAHA. He teaches at the Theatre Faculty, Academy of Performing Arts in Prague.

“In 2019, which was a successful year for everyone, economy in Prague in cultural sector drove consumption in the amount of circa CZK38.3 billion. It generated CZK14.8 billion in tax revenues just for the state budget, that is the amount paid to the state budget from cultural industries in Prague, which I think were quite good numbers given the fact that today we are talking about supporting the sector in crisis with one, two, or three billions. At the same time we should be aware that in 2019 about 50,000 people were employed in cultural industries in Prague, about half of them were artists, the other half technical professions; and now there is a threat of losing employment or jobs, and considering the optimistic scenario which counted on a full reopening in September—even with this optimistic scenario we were expecting about 14,000 jobs to be lost, of which about 7,000 to be artists positions and 6,000 support professions. I think these numbers could be taken into account when arguing for a support of freelancers.”

“We will definitely need your participation in the debate on a new grant policy for the years 2022–2027, which was mentioned earlier by council member Ms. Třeštíková, because the current policy is about to end. I believe it is one of the systemic changes as it needs to reflect priorities as well as expectations of some reduction of financial means available for grants.”

PAVLA PETROVÁ

Arts and Theatre Institute ATI is a state-founded organization established by the Czech Ministry of Culture. ATI’s mission is to provide Czech and foreign public with comprehensive services in the field of theatre and partial services in other arts (music, literature, dance, and visual arts). Pavla Petrová is director of ATI and general director of the Prague Quadrennial PQ 2023.

“Should I characterize where ATI stands at the moment, I would say that we are above all a research organization, and then an intermediary organization. What I mean is an intermediary for individual disciplines, for instance for individual genres within each field; but we also facilitate with public administration, regions, and so on. As you can see we strive to provide a range of services with a very wide scope of activities.”

DISCUSSION 16 SEPTEMBER 2020

Marta Smolíková concluded during the discussion her first presentation: “What is essential is to agree on common positions within the cultural sector, that is on ‘a coordinated and informed opinion which could be carried through.’ The call to action Covid Culture shows that the state (administrative and political representation) does not know cultural sector well. It results in underestimating a whole chain of connections... Now the ball is in the state’s court; the situation has been emphatically communicated particularly by the music industries, yet the state has not sufficiently responded, it has not taken adequate actions.”

Zuzana Zahradníčková, the only representative of the Ministry of Culture, responded in the discussion regarding funds from the relief package that have not been used: “We intend to spend these funds, there will be a second call to complete funding of the year-long activities. Another problem is the personal policy of the Czech Ministry of Culture, understaffing, and lack of preparedness for a crisis; it is the Covid situation that pointed to shortcomings in the Ministry of Culture’s operations (for instance, impossibility to support for-profit projects). Furthermore, there are gaps in communication among the ministries, although for example the Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Industry and Trade have a good relationship. Unfortunately, the government decree was issued before the situation was examined, resulting in the Ministry of Culture’s inability to respond quickly.”

Jakub Vedral stated in the discussion that: “...it is necessary to also support new projects that respond to the situation, to open grants on a rolling basis. Czech Ministry of Culture should be aware of the fact that we are a creative sector which may not simply fit in a category within the existing system. Technical professions shall not be left out. It is a state of total crisis.”

Yvona Kreuzmannová pointed out: “The entire relief package is a non-investment, and that is a big problem. Plus, the support of individual artists. Would it be possible that trade organizations could apply for the artists? EU commissioner Maria Gabriel has clearly called on the member states to dedicate 1.5 percent of their relief package to culture, hoping that the state would do so.”

Marta Smolíková concluded the discussion with the following two comments:

1. The state institutions do not understand the sector and underestimated the number of professions that are connected to the production of works artists do. It is a large number of people who will lose their economic income; it has far-reaching consequences.
2. It is necessary to “look for common interest /goals, collaborations, and the same language/,” yet despite the all above being clearly communicated, nobody got a grasp of it, nobody took it seriously.

She furthermore said during her summarizing contribution to the discussion: “There is only a handful of representatives in both the state administration and the political representation whom we can respect for their comprehending of the needs of the field, which causes tremendous frustration and bias against them, and mistrust grows. The film makers managed to sit down at one table with them, and they convinced each other about their common interest, and they began communicating.”

“It is vital to find a solution, one can change a government decree, propose a programme that can help. All professions must be considered, investment support is needed for an infrastructure capable of keeping independent arts in operation.”

Eva Měříčková agreed: “It has become clear today how much we need the status of an artist as well as a mechanism which could ensure that individuals, the artists who stand at the end of art production line, are not left without any help. This could be resolved by, for instance, implementing all involved positions into grants. The problem with the current Ministry of

Culture's relief package is the lack of definition, it is necessary to include some formulation, or how to allow partial reimbursement of authors' fees—not only expenses—for cancelled performances.”

Questions were asked as well to **Milan Němeček**, including the key question asked by the director of Nová síť **Adriana Světlíková**: “The state cultural policy is about to end, it should be finished by the year's end. What is the status? Will it, the preparation or the materials, be postponed for next year, and who has been working on it?”

Milan Němeček answered” “...there is the notion that state cultural policy should at least be discussed in some way at some form of public hearings. People from the Cabinet are working on it. ...As it turned out the status of an artist and other topics, which we have repeatedly postponed, are missing, they must be addressed and worked out and included in the new state cultural policy. That is why we would like to take advantage also of the fact that there is a will at the highest posts at the office to push through these themes in the state cultural policy. Personally, I would not like to see to have the new state cultural policy postponed for too long and having have to extend the existing one instead.”

Yvona Kreuzmannová immediately responded: “Regarding the state cultural policy, we would be very interested in knowing whether it is feasible to postpone the deadline, so that, due to having those public hearings and so on, it could be prepared in quality that satisfies all of us – we, the expert public, as well as you, the public administration. I would like to ask you not to rush its government approval by the end of the year, not to fear a couple of months delay, and instead really work out definitions, because the status of an artist is a hot issue, and it is this crisis situation that has proved how important it is to have in place a status for artists-freelancers, not just for employed artists.

Milan Němeček responded: “As far as the state cultural policy is concerned, obviously nobody will be pushing it to be completed by the end of the year. Needless to say we will see. The progress of the public hearings will determine the deadline. So, stay calm, I think that reason still governs at the ministry, we will not just blindly push for meeting the deadline.”

Zuzana Zahradníčková repeatedly mentioned in the afternoon discussion how critically understaffed the Czech Ministry of Culture is; a problem of establishing a service position; they even lack funding to hire an intern in place of Ms. Zichová who left this year. Regarding an issue of providing funding for multiple years she added that it could not be done due to restrictions imposed by the state budget; one option to help with the Covid situation is to loosen the budgetary rules, but that is in the competency of the Ministry of Finance, an office with power.

DAY 2: FOCUS ON CZECH REGIONS – 17 SEPTEMBER 2020

Speakers who presented the regional situation were asked the following questions:

1. *Why were you established?*
2. *What is the scope of your activities and what makes you unique?*
3. *Name problems that fall outside the scope of your activities yet they must be resolved and, as such, make your operation more difficult. You would welcome help from others—colleagues, industry organizations—in these matters.*

JAN KUNZE

The Opava Cultural Organization OKO Jan Kunze has worked in since its foundation is a state-founded organization with a goal to provide activities and services that ensure a comprehensive cultural development of the city of Opava.

He briefly introduced activities of the Opava Cultural Organization OKO which he founded and built from the ground up twelve years ago. Today the organization operates three buildings. Nevertheless, the situation has been turbulent lately, particularly in connection with the municipal elections. Kunze himself has become politically active. He explains it as a sort of second natural step arising from his more general effort to change one's surrounding. The first step was to take part in culture, which according to Kunze should be regarded as a kind of first form of "community activity." He mentioned an example of abuse of power by political representation, which in his opinion recently took place in Opava.

Kunze applies his recent experiences with implementation of cultural policy in politics in the city of Opava. First, it is a common perception that culture is dispensable, leaders without prior experiences are often selected, which is based not on professional evaluation but political nomination.

Kunze called for participation of politicians at conferences similar to Culture Get-Together, a practice that could provide an opportunity for their cultivation.

LIBOR KASÍK

Singer(tenor)-turned cultural manager, PR specialist, and politician. Kasík has served as director of a unique multipurpose theatre Uffo Trutnov for the last ten years. Since 2014, he has been a member of the Civic Democratic Party, council member of the City of Trutnov, and co-creator of cultural policy currently prepared by the Civic Democratic Party.

A crisis is an opportunity! Today, in the time of crisis, culture has an opportunity "to make a move," to improve its perception by political representation and others, and its ranking in the eyes of the public in respect of its value. We have been seeing for some time a continuous growth in cultural and creative industries. Kasík introduced his own approach to cultural policy. First, it is necessary to define the path we take, ask question regarding our approach to taxes, legal form, and most importantly to find answer to why culture matters, and in this respect why

should culture be funded from public resources. Kasík argued by stating examples of how it affects society; culture therefore has a capacity to cultivate.

JAN ŽŮREK

Director of the non-profit organization DW7 in Olomouc that operates Divadlo na cucky (Theatre in Pieces), Gallery XY, and a community garden Za()hrada. He has collaborated as a dramaturg and producer with a number of festivals, including the Flora Theatre Festival. He is currently a representative of the Olomouc Region for culture and historic heritage conservation. He is also deputy chair of the Czech Association of Independent Theatre and member of expert committees at the Czech Ministry of Culture.

Žůrek introduced activities of the Czech Association of Independent Theatre conducted in respect to the regions. He summarized the members' structure (independent theatres, stagiones, platforms). Furthermore, he talked about: activities of the association in regions, advocacy, discussion on cultural policy, problems regarding grant procedures, a need to participate as experts in pre-election discussions, and about cultural infrastructure which directly effects cultural accessibility. Infrastructure is a big topic for the regions, and so is the lack of funding in both the Czech state budget and the EU. Collaboration and partnership: the association has been successful in connecting with other stakeholders of cultural life. As a result, it has been able to achieve specific results in a number of "regional cases," for instance in the case of a rescue of grant programmes with the public administration (South Bohemian Region), done through open letters, interventions, and discussions.

KAROLÍNA KOUBOVÁ

Karolína Koubová is a Czech politician and cultural manager; since 2018 she has been mayor of the City of Jihlava which represents the city and coordinates activities in all matters of local administration.

"The city's role and role of cultural stakeholders are sort of in conflict because while the city should set up a system, help us create an environment to grow in—it should also help create demand for culture. To do so it employs grant incentives. On the other hand we expect from the creative community certain boldness, in such as it will enter this environment, it will look for niches and it will be able to fill them. Each of us speaks a different language, perhaps we strive for the same thing but we see it in a different perspective. We managed to draw up in 2017 a strategy for leisure, culture, and travel industry in Jihlava. Thanks to the way it was prepared, the strategy was very participative, we succeeded in connecting both parties, and the very important conflict, which I think is necessary to correctly set up the system and support creativity well, we actually clarified, the expectations, and the system helped us very much and is still helping us."

"The strategy is divided into three parts, one of the outputs is that we hired at the city hall one person to manage each part, and that person was directly responsible for execution of the strategy. Jihlava educates through culture, we know how to connect the two requirements, and using a project-based method we teach children all possible themes through culture."

“We succeeded in creating a grant system for first-time applicants and also connecting with business sector. The last area is the city’s image, which is by contrast an untouched area for us. We have not been fully successful. Until now, Jihlava did not have an institution taking care of culture or the brand. Therefore, in June the city founded an organization, the deadline for open call for a director is in September, and we will begin the work of identifying products, including a tourist destination card. How can we help each other? What worked for us was participation. Right from the beginning cultural stakeholders were involved in collaboration; the city and cultural stakeholders meet regularly. What may not function that well is human factor. A simple absence of ‘chemistry,’ which should be there, can trigger a conflict of the ‘system’ and ‘creativity,’ and it does not work well.”

KATEŘINA CHURTAJEVA

Head of the Culture and Historic Heritage Conservation Department for the Hradec Králové Region. Churtajeva spent over five years in Bulgaria as director of the Czech Centre, and four years in the Caucasus where she participated in development assistance with post-war reconstruction of the region and construction of a quality civic society.

“The regions have been in operation for twenty years; in our case there has never been a cultural concept in place, things happened as they came. So we decided to think about what our region actually does, what are the expectations and why it is done. Our system has not been set up right, we have had also an issue with the fact that most of the national cultural strategies come to an end this year and we do not know what the state plans to do next and how to respond, therefore we make our own plans, without the state, which is a shame.”

“From my perspective, we have decided to do it in order to point to the tremendous power of culture, culture can prompt positive changes, it represents a power behind the region’s development, it has capacity to cultivate the public space. Cultural and creative industries have a great potential for innovation, culture in the end can considerably contribute to economy whether through direct investments, creative employment, or cultural entrepreneurship.”

“Gradually culture is becoming the talked-about topic in the Czech Republic. It has appeared in regional strategic documents, which I consider a great achievement—it is not mentioned just in two or three rows but covers several pages. What I find even better is that we have managed to open up and began connecting cultural stakeholders across the entire region, particularly through networking in culture, bringing know-how, and strengthening cultural and social capital. As far as I know it is really the first time that the Hradec Králové Region has developed a policy for culture.”

“We approached it with honesty, participation, and from the bottom-up. We involved partners during the preparation and implementation of strategy, we are open to the idea of people participating.”

“For now we are not able to provide stable environment for support of culture in the region.”

What we cannot completely influence, and we would very much welcome it, is our society's approach to culture. If we as society could recognize culture's value instead of challenging it—the value that has something to do with, for instance, our identity so that we, as regions, are involved in the right way on national level in planning, in strategic processes.”

JAN PETRUŽELA

Fujaré is a creative, dramaturgy and production collective which, without having its own space, organizes cultural and community activities in Rožnov pod Radhoštěm. Petružela is a theatre researcher and editor-in-chief of *Divadelní revue* magazine (Theatre Revue) published by the Arts and Theatre Institute ATI.

“I returned to my native town to find out that there was, in short, insufficient cultural engagement, and that I would have to figure it out on my own. Fujaré is a creative, dramaturgy and production collective, it does not have a space of its own. Which means that we are bound to seek collaboration. Perhaps we are those who are capable to create and inspire, which has its pros and, of course, also cons and conflicts.”

“The city assigned the city-founded organizations to include significant public anniversaries into their programming. We chose 17 November, in collaboration with the city library. It is actually quite functional and simple. What matters is the collaboration. The mayor, however, is a member of the ruling ANO party. Among other events, we also organized the demonstration Million moments, so our event was cancelled. Here we actually experienced an impossibility to collaborate because of a specific political interest.”

“We do not want to consent to such language, we do not want to accept such discourse which is for most of the part political, and actually we do not want to agree on a topic of cultural war. And now the question is how to lead a dialogue, it requires at least two participants.”

ONDŘEJ CHALUPSKÝ

Executive director of the Bolek Polívka Theatre since August 2013. In 2013–2019, he was a member of a grant committee for professional theatre projects at the Czech Ministry of Culture.

“A newly established platform for independent scene in the city of Brno. The question is whether it is being established or was established.”

“It should be said that communication with the city has significantly improved during the two election periods, that is the current period and the one preceding, compared to what it used to be. The situation is worse on regional level.”

“I think that the Covid situation could be perhaps enlightening for some politicians, maybe I am unnecessarily optimistic, but finally they have a chance to learn how our sector works, and that while the state-founded sector somehow operates based on regulations for state-founded institutions, in the other, private sector we actually often try to do professional, or sometimes semi-professional work, yet under completely unprofessional conditions, whether it relates to

how to employ (or not to employ) our workers on technical positions as well as artists actually. Nevertheless, also thanks to the meeting with the city management, mayor, deputy for culture, and council member for culture, we arrived to a conclusion that it would be appropriate to somehow use this activism. And because we operate in Brno across cultural sector and communicate, of course, also with the state-founded scene, a dialogue has been established across the cultural sector.”

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Libor Kasík explained his approach to cultural policy which follows the path of so called art councils—institutions not financed by government. “The important factor here is that there is an independence on current policy of particular elected officials. This ensures stability in decision-making in respect to culture funding.”

Markéta Málková leads an artist residency centre Rezi.Dance in south Bohemian Komařice. The centre’s main goal is to provide artists residencies which is unique as it’s not just one of several activities they conduct, a case with most residency providers in the Czech Republic. Their operation is very specific in the region, however it comes with certain feeling of isolation and loneliness. Each region pursues their own cultural policy which is challenging according to Málková. When a region does not support independent culture then a small town like for instance Komařice does not stand a chance to change anything. She sees umbrella organizations such as Nová síť to play a key role in this respect. Independent companies have a chance to be supported by the Ministry of Culture which then acts as a sole donor. In addition if local administration does not support independent culture, there will be no performances by guest artists which helps with regional development. Only a fraction of subjects, speaking of contemporary theatre (Tanec Praha, Malá inventura), takes regions into consideration. She argued that cultural policy should be implemented in regions so that the same rules apply everywhere. We could then avoid local animosity and a disregard for rules.

Jan Žůrek mentioned the definition of independent culture as discussed by colleagues from the German Association of Independent Theatres who call it “the second pillar of culture.” Libor Kasík specified that “in a situation when municipalities and regions are absolutely autonomous, it is not possible to give them orders.” Málková added: “...certainly it is not about giving orders, but a way how to carry through the cultural policy also in regions should be found.” And she concluded: “... without regions there will be no Prague.”

Yvona Kreuzmannová continued in the discussion on cultural policy. “In the past a number of meetings regarding a form of cultural policy already took place, and although autonomy must be respected there is a range of solutions for how to approach the problem. The whole thing stalls every time on one thing—lack of political will. Negotiations between the regions’ representatives and the Ministry of Culture take place on a completely instrumental and administrative level without a hint of solution for any conceptual questions. We need a minister who would inspire. That is crucial at this moment. The second issue is a pressure from bottom up, pressure from trade organizations which may convince the minister to come to the table for an open and constructive discussion with regions.”

Jan Kunze believed that “independent culture is done in regions by strongly self-motivated individuals, yet they could not do much on their own in time of crisis. And this is the place for platforms like this one, networking is absolutely essential for their operations.”

Jan Žůrek added that “cultural policies work better within framework of cities rather than on regional level; he misses particularly some kind of ‘methodical effort from the Czech Ministry of Culture.’ It was well demonstrated on the case of *de-minimis* or so called block exemption. It should not happen that for instance a region has not implemented into its regulations a block exemption, which is a five-year-old EU legislation. Czech Ministry of Culture should provide guidance in respect to these methodical and conceptual matters!”

Zuzana Zahradníčková responded to what had been said regarding the relation between the Czech Ministry of Culture and the regions. “The regions are truly autonomous and the Czech Ministry of Culture cannot order them anything. The only way, except for various intercessions within political negotiations, is to apply pressure through grant negotiations (the condition for receiving a subsidy from the Czech Ministry of Culture is a concurrent application at the place of the event). The Czech Ministry of Culture simply does not have the tools to supervise regions.”

Markéta Sabáčková, city of Liberec, asked Karolína Koubová a question. “The region regards our city as self-sufficient (Liberec is large), but it is the other way around. The city needs cooperation as any other city. The problem is with exchange of information; therefore the problem is the communication between city – region – ministry.” Koubová confirmed that also Jihlava faces challenges with communication. “What is essential is the human element, the particular people. They cannot exceed their authority as city employees.” Chalupský confirmed that also Brno deals with a complicated situation in relation to the region. Koubová added: “If there is a self-evident reluctance at a region, there is no way to change the situation. At least a minimum political support is also crucial. That leads us to the topic of political engagement of stakeholders and what it all entails.” Koubová mentioned, what she figured out also on political level, that “culture has not been regarded as essential, people absolutely do not make connection between attendance of theatre or concert and their own approach to society, their surroundings, and other people, but also economic impacts.” Koubová further said that “in culture we tend to be abstract, what cultural professionals do may not be comprehensible for people and politicians.

Marta Smolíková described the situation at the Czech Ministry of Culture: “The same scenario happens over and over—new people from political representation arrive and the dialogue has to be restarted in the same way; they do not have knowledge of the field and their way of thinking is outdated. What I would like to demonstrate is that it does not make sense to wait with education until after election of a particular representative.”

Jan Petružela continued saying that one can get involved also on another level than in executive politics.

THEMES

As organizer of the Culture Get-Together inaugural edition, Nová síť reflects on six fundamental areas identified as most pressing or challenging. The following material should serve as a guide for the next, first edition, and will be available for cultural community and particularly umbrella organizations. We would like to ask them to become patrons for each area listed so that progress and coordinated collaboration or participation in key meetings could be evaluated. Improvement in each of the following identified areas could be achieved only providing that there is good communication, collaboration, and shared information:

1. *STATUS OF AN ARTIST*
2. *(INTERSECTORAL) COOPERATION*
 - » *CZECH MINISTRY OF CULTURE (CMC) + PRAGUE CITY HALL (PCH)*
 - » *CMC + MINISTRY OF FINANCE (MF) + MINISTRY OF SCHOOL, YOUTH AND SPORT (MSYS) + MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS (MFA) + MINISTRY OF INDUSTRY AND TRADE (MIT)*
 - » *CMC + REGIONS*
3. *STATE CULTURAL POLICY + INITIAL DATA*
4. *COMMUNICATION (language, argumentation, trust, understanding)*
5. *FUNCTION AND ROLE OF CMC / operation within departments, personal audit, CMC vs. CZECH STATE CULTURAL FUND*
6. *REGIONS – CULTURAL STRATEGY (method of implementation of state cultural policy, cooperation of public representatives and cultural stakeholders), methodology, academics, communication (Culture Get-Together and regions), state-founded culture vs. private culture*

1. The first theme centres on absence of the status of an artist in the Czech Republic. It is a fundamental problem. A comprehensive research, analysis of the status of an artist and its implementation into state cultural policy have been long overdue. The theme has gained support across cultural sector, and fortunately even CMC has acknowledged its strategic impact for realization of cultural policy in the Czech Republic. A right definition of the status of an artist is absolutely crucial especially from practical point of view (as can be observed now during the Covid-19 second wave). The theme requires a close collaboration of cultural sector with CMC; without intersectoral collaboration the situation cannot be improved.
2. Collaboration was the Culture Get-Together conference theme, and intersectoral cooperation was the second topic frequently mentioned in presentations. Each of identified areas of collaboration links to CMC and its cooperation with other ministries or public administrations, namely CMC + PCH; CMC + MF + MSYS + MFA + MIT; and CMC + REGIONS. As emerged from the discussion and presentations, cooperation of CMC works fairly well with Prague, however it faces challenges in relation to regions, even deputy Němeček admitted so. Collaboration between individual ministries is also insufficient, as stated during presentations at the conference, not being systematic or lacking professionalism or competence. One of the questions most difficult to resolve, at least according to deputy minister Němeček and acting

director of CMC department, Ms. Zahradníčková, is collaboration with regions and municipalities which are autonomous entities. CMC does not have any direct tools to force them to collaborate. Despite that it is absolutely crucial that collaboration takes place particularly in case of preparation of the new state cultural policy and its implementation into regions' cultural strategies, but also in other cases for instance when implementing critical EU legislation.

3. State cultural policy is an immense theme on its own, the conference could only scratch its surface. The state cultural policy for 2021–2026 is being drawn up at the moment. Deputy minister Němeček nevertheless declared during Q&A that he would not insist on the approaching, end-of-the-year deadline. We would like to bring to everyone's attention on behalf of Nová síť that it is very important that the new cultural policy is correctly and sufficiently communicated with everyone and that current data are used, it is the only chance it has to bring a real, positive change in development of culture, particularly performing arts. The matter of data collecting, their relevance and use, is already a subject of work done by the Association of Independent Theatre and the Arts and Theatre Institute ATI. It is imperative to conduct analysis of needs and collect critical supporting material for cultural policy, intersectoral argumentation, and allocation of financial means across grant procedures.
4. One of the most frequently articulated problems was absence of the same language in communication between cultural sector and public administration. Two different opinions were expressed regarding communication. First, it is necessary to search for the same language which will ensure that we speak about the same subject (simply said: cultural community tends to be too academic, by contrast representatives tend to downplay culture's value). Secondly, there is another aspect of this problem, an unavoidable conflict between cultural stakeholders and local administration, public administration, when, on one side, there is the state apparatus/local administration/office which operates a particular segment and sets conditions, on the other hand there are cultural stakeholders who are subjects to these conditions and therefore they adamantly negotiate for them, or criticise them and require revisions.
5. Other important themes include CMC role and operation. It is a complex matter which may be better suited for analysis and discussion in less critical situation than the one we experience right now. Today we can only point at the current understaffing of clerks in charge of performing arts.
6. Another topic related to CMC and its operation are cultural strategies of regions and municipalities and CMC's power regarding their creation and implementation of their rules. Political will and resourcefulness of staff at regional and municipal offices play major role in drawing up individual strategies. Based on practical experiences, described in particular by Kateřina Churtajeva, head of cultural department at the Hradec Králové Region, and Kateřina Koubová, mayor of the City of Jihlava, it is imperative to employ participatory approach which will ensure that the resulting document has a real impact and brings positive effect on cultural sector in each region and municipality.

CONCLUSION

The inaugural edition of the Culture Get-Together conference on collaboration in culture mapped current state of Czech cultural community, pointed out numerous facts, and brought about a number of impulses that could inspire both the independent cultural scene and public administration representatives. The conference was organized by not-for-profit organization Nová síť on 16–17 September 2020 at the Municipal House in Prague.

The conference did not aspire to resolve particular problems but to map the current state of Czech culture and how it communicates internally and externally. It strived to establish communication channel which, once a year, could bring both sectors together and contribute to eliminating barriers.

Both days of the conference had seen several very interesting conclusions. One of the most frequently articulated was the issue of not speaking the same language for communication between cultural sector and public administration. Without mutual understanding, agreeing on anything becomes complicated. Council member for the City of Prague, Hana Třeštíková, addressed this problem in her presentation. She appealed to both parties to trust each other, listen to each other, and approach the City Hall with concrete ideas (in particular the representatives of cultural organizations). Petr Prokop, Marta Smolíková, and Eva Měříčková emphasized during the discussion the sensitive topic of support professions (for instance technicians, production managers) without whom artists could not create. This was also subject to a debate on freelancers and the long-term need to introduce the “status of an artist.”

Pavla Petrová stressed the need to carry intersectoral collaboration among the ministries, particularly the ministries of school, culture, finance, and industry. The Czech Ministry of Culture representative, Zuzana Zahradníčková, followed with a response confirming the current alarming understaffing at CMC for clerks in charge of administration of performing arts, and tried to explain the difficult situation regarding communication and collaboration of CMC with regions. Regions’ representatives would welcome to participate on drawing up the new state cultural policy which would consequently play a strategic role and set a methodology also for further communication. Regarding the question of financing, participation and dialogue with the Ministry of Finance are crucial. Jakub Vedral pointed out the current Covid situation that has clearly tested the non-systematic operation of culture and exposed the misunderstanding of its mechanisms, which has led to incorrectly crafted relief programmes and their inefficient use.

During the conference day focused on regions, participants emphasized significance of the relationship between the capital and regions. Jan Kunze pointed out that it is mainly the regions that consume Prague culture therefore a close collaboration is necessary also in this case. Regions’ representatives greatly appreciated the position of Nová síť which as a service organization facilitates dialogue and communication, including between so called state-founded and private cultures, and in time of crisis it represents independent culture. The fact that arts and culture also represent work, which undoubtedly impacts economy, is still for many public administration representatives incomprehensible and often also very abstract. According to Yvona Kreuzmannová that is why it is in both parties’ interest to open constructive dialogue, speak the same language, and trust each other. Only under these conditions it is possible to build new bridges.

Outputs and materials from the Prague conference are being processed and will serve as a foundation for the next, first edition, which will take place in 2021. Recording of the streamed conference, with English subtitles, is available for general public as research material and basis for argumentation.

Culture Get-Together drew inspiration from our partner conference Industry Get-Together Berlin which had its eight edition in 2020. Their programme featured also Czech representatives as a result of our project PRALIN, an inter-city collaboration between Prague and Berlin.

The following speakers participated at the 2020 Culture Get-Together conference: Adriana Světlíková – Nová síť, Janina Benduski – BFDK Bundesverband freie darstellende Künste (German Association of Independent Performing Arts), Felizitas Stilleke – Industry Get-Together Berlin, Marta Smolíková – Czech Centre, International Theatre Institute ITI, Šárka Maršíková – Cirqueon, Petr Prokop – Czech Association of Independent Theatre, Marie Kinsky – Vize tance, Linda Svidrů – Czech Association of Dance Professionals, Yvona Kreuzmannová – Tanec Praha, Jakub Vedral – Art Prometheus, Milan Němeček – deputy minister of culture, Performing Arts Section, Hana Třeštíková – City of Prague council member for culture, historic heritage conservation, exhibition management, and tourism, Jiří Sulženko – director, Department of Culture and Tourism, City of Prague, Pavla Petrová – director, Arts and Theatre Institute ATI, Jan Kunze – Opava Cultural Organization, Libor Kasík – cultural centre UFFO Trutnov, Jan Žůrek – Czech Association of Independent Theatre, Karolína Koubová – mayor, City of Jihlava, Jan Petružela – Fugaré, Rožnov pod Radhoštěm, Kateřina Churtajeva – head of the Culture and Historic Heritage Conservation Department, Hradec Králové Region, Ondřej Chalupský – a newly formed platform for communication in Brno

Culture Get-Together conference was organized by not-for-profit organization Nová síť – www.novasit.cz

The 2020 Culture Get-Together conference partners included the **Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic, International Theatre Institute ITI, Arts and Theatre Institute ATI, Czech-German Future Fund, Performing Arts Programm Berlin, and Prague City Hall.** The conference is part of PRALIN—the project of cultural collaboration between the city of Prague and Berlin under the patronage of Ms. Hana Třeštíková, council member of the City of Prague for culture, historic heritage conservation, exhibition management, and tourism.

The recording of the conference with English subtitles, including individual video presentations, and other materials are available here.