



The Time We Spend Together

1-3 September 2023

At the invitation and in the context of the Varna International Summer Festival

3-days retreat and work space on Arts and Well-being, facilitated by Rarita Zbranca and Mahir Namur

Report

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Vision and mission from the Workshop

The 3-days retreat 'The Time We Spend Together' in Varna at the invitation and in the context of the Varna International Summer Festival and the city of Varna gave the space for a workshop on Arts and Wellbeing conceptualized and facilitated by Rarita Zbranca (Director and Co-founder of AltArt Foundation and Programme Director at Cluj Cultural Centre and co-founder of Fabrica de Pensule) and Mahir Namur (Existential Coach, Lecturer & Trainer, Project Manager).

The vision of the programme was centred around art and wellbeing, emphasizing the role of arts for individual and collective welfare and the need for forging collective values and behavioural change to address our complex, uncertain and challenging global realities.

This vision aimed to enable cultural participation and co-creation to bring about awareness about our role and possibilities we have as festivals. The purpose was also to include a bigger group of people that festivals communicate with, navigating away from extraction and exhaustion towards a better eco-system characterized by empathy, care, and joyous sharing.

In this vision, the cultural sector, the enabling force of this soft transformation needs to integrate care, empathy, and reciprocity in its own ways of working.

As a whole, the Arts and Wellbeing Program, hosted by EFA, aims to empower festivals by helping them recognize their potential and redefine their role in promoting wellbeing.

- Through awareness-building, reflection, and practical support, we guide festivals to integrate wellbeing principles into their activities and ways of working, to the benefit of the communities they serve and of their own teams.
- By offering workshops, conferences and coaching sessions, we inspire collective thinking, enabling festivals to be part of a positive transformation, within and without, from separation towards togetherness, from exhaustion to care, and from drifting in confusion to imagination and purposefulness.



Report from the workshop



General conclusion

Arts and Culture connect and create connectedness between people in a very short time. Through this connection we create empathy and love for each other. Throughout these three days, it was realised that as individuals we are part of a bigger context. The retreat helped participants to connect with this bigger context. It was recognised that the field of arts is one of the few fields that are led with the emotions, the senses and cognition. However, there is a general feeling that we are putting more weight on the rational than on the emotional side. These three days helped us to rebalance this and put some more weight on the emotional side of the scale; as one of the participants wrote in the second day: “I carry from yesterday the joy to know how easy it is to connect if care is taken care of.” At the same time, another of the participants said: “our collective sinews are not just about art and culture but really also about sharing and enabling others to do /enjoy the same. It is imperative to protect ourselves for the process to continue” meaning that it is imperative to not forget this emotional and ‘human’ part unique from this sector.

In fact, throughout this workshop, the importance was emphasised of adopting a human-centered approach and empathy with one another in what we do, to remind that we are together in this collective process, as one participant remarked: “there are many things that I enjoyed, and one of them was the ‘humanness’ and hope that this workshop gave access to. Seeing that there are so many people who still want to give their best, who still want to have a contribution to the well-being state of the arts and culture sector kind of smashed



the feeling of loneliness that we could otherwise be overwhelmed by”. Many participants resonated with this perspective, one especially agreed with the last part of this statement: “I had a sense during the workshop that seeing that a challenge was not isolated to the person speaking was a kind of comfort”.

Within this togetherness, many questions were raised throughout the duration of the workshop that inspired many different answers that fed the debates: How do we fill the gap between the difficulties in our life and the aspirations we have? How could your work contribute to the concept of well-being? What is our responsibility together to change systemic problems? What can we change in a way that we are kind with ourselves and with the others?

Proceedings

Rarita and Mahir guided us by starting from the basis: **what brought each of us together and why were we there?** And at the same time, they took us to our origins and first contact with the arts. This was the first day one in a timeline for the three days in which the first one would correspond with the past, the second one with the present and the third one with the future.

The aim of their idea was to first reflect and reconnect in a personal level with our own **vision** in life. By sharing the different experiences from the different participants throughout their lives many expressed to have encounter a “feeling of connection and common understanding within the diversity”. Many of these experiences were linked to having worked in the cultural sector for many years and having seen the fruitful results but also many struggles and obstacles in the way.

In this way, Rarita and Mahir facilitated that people could reconnect with their vision and explore: **‘What does it bring in you to be connected to this vision?’**. For this they presented the participants with the world of possibilities (ideal world, your vision) and the world of reality (in how much this vision can be put in practice in the real world). It was shown that we as humans are longing for a harmonious world.

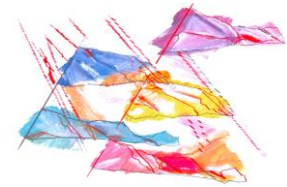
It was learnt or remembered, depending on each of the individuals, that when you are connected to the vision of the ideal world you find **meaning** and **hope** to keep moving forward towards something you believe in. Arts and culture provide this hope, here you can find some examples of how the participants drew and imagine this ideal world:





At the same time, we are aware that we have limitations, but our vision gives us the compass to navigate all the issues. When the horizon is clouded by the obstacles, then there is a need to look at the vision, as a way of reminding. The values that make up our ideal world can be brought up to the current reality, while being aware that the capacity might be limited. In order to explore further these limitations and the obstacles found in each of the participants visions, as well as to travel from the personal experience to the organisational and global level, Rarita and Mahir presented the follow questions: Which are the obstacles for your vision at a personal, organisational and global level? Why is this urgent for you? What is yours to do? What is within your capacity to do?

Many participants agreed that by talking about their challenges they might find solutions to tackle very similar problems instead of expending lots of time and energy on their own on something that someone else has figured out. As one of the participants phrased it: “the more diverse we are, the better - nationality, age, gender, background, etc. Everybody has its unique experience that could be shared and actually be eye opening on a personal level. I experienced it during the meetings in Varna on a personal level simply talking to someone with more experience in his life and his career”. All participants shared the challenges and obstacles found with regards to their vision, putting them in common helped them, as one of the participants said “the feeling of togetherness gave me the courage to tackle some important issues in the workplace”.



However, they also claimed to be left with hunger for a more concrete approach to the topic, they were happy to have had the embodied experience but now they would like to approach it in a more practical way. In this sense, some ideas were proposed such as: “focusing a bit more on role play and actual case-study and work on it in teams” or “giving people access to certain models, certain possibilities that they can bring home and test and re-design with feedback from the communities they activate within. I think this will help the whole conversation on art, well-being and health to become more and more tangible”. The facilitators believed that these concerns arose due to a fundamental expectation shared by most managers: to approach tasks in the most efficient manner possible.

In this way, this workshop embarked the participants in the journey of exploring a future vision for the sector and tackling similar challenges together. This was just the start of the journey, without exception, all participants appeared to recognize the importance of the topic of well-being and felt a sense of responsibility to address this issue further. Rarita and Mahir believe this was the primary objective of the workshop, and thus, we can consider the workshop successful.

In this way, if this can become an annual get together, workshop, it will be rethought the ‘how’ part in order to achieve more tangible goals and adapt to the audiences wishes. In other words another of the participants said:” It became exclusively a voyage of self discovery but for it to be an annual retreat somewhere it needs to give something more to participants that will allow/ encourage them to drill down into this pace creatively when they go back to their teams and festival communities”. To conclude, this experience brought enough mandate to go on for the next years with this topic and ‘retreat’ format.





Reading list

Impact of arts on well-being

- CultureForHealth Report. Culture's contribution to health and well-being. A report on evidence and policy recommendations for Europe, Culture Action Europe (2022), https://www.cultureforhealth.eu/app/uploads/2023/02/Final_C4H_FullReport_small.pdf
- Summary of the report: https://www.cultureforhealth.eu/app/uploads/2023/04/C4H_SummaryReport_V11L_P_shortsmall.pdf
- The Culture for Health and Well-being Compendium - A Guide for Practitioners, https://www.cultureforhealth.eu/app/uploads/2023/06/C4H_Compndium_V4_LP.pdf
- The Impact of Arts and Cultural Engagement on Population Health, Findings from Major Cohort Studies in the UK and USA 2017 – 2022, <http://sbbresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Arts-and-population-health-FINAL-March-2023.pdf>

Reflections on work-wellbeing and how to ensure a motivating and caring work environment in culture

- RESHAPE - experimental, collaborative, bottom-up process/project to create instruments for transition towards a new, fairer arts ecosystem (valuable reading under Zeitgeist and tools under Prototypes), <https://reshape.network/>
- The Situation of Artists and Cultural Workers and the postCOVID-19 Cultural Recovery in the European Union, EU, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/234839/PE652.250.pdf>
- Bruised, Exhausted and Burnt-out: A discussion about regenerative approaches to human resources in cultural centres, ENCC
- https://encc.eu/sites/default/files/2022-07/bruised_and_burntout_pdf_hyperlinks.pdf

THE MIKI KASHTAN COLUMN, The Radical Implications of Staying within Capacity, <https://thefearlessheart.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/2021-radical-implications-of-staying-within-capacity.pdf>



Participants list

Name	Organisation	Country
Joost Fonteyne	Klarafestival/Walden Festival	Belgium
Alexis Paterson	British Festivals Association	UK
Davinia Galea	ARC Research & Consultancy	Malta
Mario Frendo	ARC Research & Consultancy	Malta
Danas Skramtai	Vilnius Festival	Lithuania
Mariana Todorova	Off the Beaten Path	Bulgaria
Colm Croffy	AOIFE / IFEA Europe CLG	Ireland
Lorena Copil	Cluj Cultural Centre	Romania
Nadin Deventer	Jazzfestival @ Berliner Festspiele	Germany
Dessy Georgieva	Varna International Summer Music Festival	Bulgaria
Mario Hossen	Varna International Summer Music Festival	Bulgaria
Stanislava Yordanova	Varna International Summer Music Festival	Bulgaria
Radostina Uzunova	Bulgarian Festivals Association	Bulgaria
Ognyana Serafimova	EIT Culture and Creativity	Bulgaria/international
Svetlomira Stoyanova	UNIMA World	Bulgaria
Silvia Hristova	Varna Dance Theater	Bulgaria
Karina Ilieva	Varna Dance Theater	Bulgaria
Mahir Namur	<i>Facilitator</i>	Turkey
Rarita Zbranca	<i>Facilitator</i>	Romania
Kathrin Deventer	<i>EFA</i>	Belgium
Ana Benavides Otero	<i>EFA</i>	Belgium