

OVERVIEW OF INTERNATIONAL MOBILITIES

– A MAPPING STUDY CREATED BY
THE NEXT STAGE PROJECT'S PARTICIPANTS

This document serves as a **guidance resource** for early-career artists and cultural managers navigating the landscape of international mobility. Compiled from the experience reports of the participating cultural managers and artists, it maps a range of mobility opportunities — from festivals and touring networks to residencies, research visits, and professional gatherings.

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INTRODUCTION OF THE PROJECT

Next Stage is a collaboration formed in 2023 between three emerging producers and their associated organisations: Mara Nedelcu (DE)/ Nedelcu & Hauser Gbr; Brigitta Kovács (HU)/ Workshop Foundation; Nikos Mavrakis (GR)/ TooFarEast.

The project is built on the notion to foster sustainable support structures in the performing arts that can serve as a safety net and solid background for emerging and mid-career artists in Europe. The partners offer an international incubation program for a new generation of managers, who can collaborate with more experienced colleagues to create safe spaces and sustainable career paths for emerging and mid-career artists. It aims to strengthen the resilience of micro-organisations and associated artists.

The initiators are key professionals in their respective local communities, and already have great experience in the international performing arts scene as well, working with several artists and organizations in the field – however, they are experiencing a barrier to upscale their activities due to the sectoral and political challenges.

The project offers an incubation for their management initiatives through three main pillars.

Young Creatives Incubation Program: On-the-job upskilling program that offers a holistic overview of the international performing arts scene for emerging and newcomer managers.

Knowledge sharing events: An international workshop series tackling key aspects of international collaborations: fair practices considering the different cultural and socio-political contexts; cross-border collaborations in time of environmental crisis; diversity aspects.

International mobility opportunities: To expand the international network of cultural managers and associated artists, offer dialogue opportunities with international peers and improve the visibility of the Eastern European performing arts field in the sector.

More information about the project:

www.nextstageproject.com

A video about the project can be watched here:



WORKSHOP FOUNDATION:

Workshop Foundation was set up in 1992 with the aim of providing support for independent artists, encouraging their artistic development in order to facilitate the development of the Hungarian contemporary dance scene as a whole. Its main strategic objective is the encouragement of border-crossing – both geographically and among artistic disciplines. Led by director Gergely Talló, the organization **works with nearly 300 Hungarian and foreign artists yearly and runs 4 studios**. Their work supports independent performing artists by offering infrastructure, administrative and production help, career development support, consultations, education. In 2018 they have set up the **Artist Partnership Programme, focusing on emerging and mid-career artists**. The goal of the programme is to follow a given artist's work and career on a long-term basis and provide him/her/ them with personalized support through regular professional consultation, sharing of (professional) contacts, providing infrastructure for the rehearsal period of a given production, joint application for grants, financial management and administration, fulfilling management tasks, co-operation and co-planning.

The Foundation plays a **crucial role in advocating for better conditions in the independent performing arts scene and the international representation of the Hungarian professional community in the field**. They have an extensive and branching, well-functioning net of international liaisons and is one of those Hungarian organizations that are internationally recognized and widely known. Their **existence throughout different cultural political landscapes** through 3 decades demonstrates **strong resilience** and their **ability to build long term alliances** to rely on, **innovate and daringly stand up for artistic freedom and democratic values**.

wsf.hu



NEDELCU & HAUSER:

Nedelcu & Hauser production office is a structure dedicated to the management of artistic projects in the field of performing arts. In this frame, the managing partners Mara Nedelcu and Franziska Hauser are building a solidary environment for artistic initiatives and interdisciplinary exchange to unfold while being dedicated to the ongoing inquiry of the potential of art and culture for everyday life. Committed to sustainability, care practices, and inclusive approaches internationally, they collaborate with artists, public and private organisations or funding bodies from their region as well on international level. They are co-founders of the professional collective **Kompliz:innen.space**.

For the last few years, the office managed some of the main festivals in the region dedicated to contemporary dance: the internationale tanzmesse nrw and Tanz NRW Festival. They are in charge of the Dance Research NRW programme of NRW Kultursekretariat, fostering mobility and artistic research.

komplizinnen.space

Kompliz:innen

TOOFAREAST:

Founded in 2018, **TooFarEast** is a production company based in Athens, focusing on the international development, touring, and promotion of contemporary dance, theatre, and performance. Led by cultural manager Nikos Mavrakis, active in the field since 2014, TFE has collaborated with major institutions such as the Athens Epidaurus Festival, Onassis Stegi, Greek National Opera and Eleusis 2023 – European Capital of Culture. The company has collaborated with artists like Mario Banushi, Romeo Castellucci, Chara Kotsali, Christiana Kosiari, Euripides Laskaridis, Prodromos Tsinikoris, Sasha Waltz and others, and is known for combining high artistic quality with socially inclusive approaches. In 2025, they are taking over the management and **reviving Thessaloniki's historic experimental Amalia Theatre to support emerging artists**.

toofareast.com



MOBILITY MAPPING

FOREWORD

The *Next Stage Project* — supported by [Creative Europe](#) — was founded to strengthen the independent performing arts sector in Central and Eastern Europe through collaboration, capacity-building, and professional exchange. Within this framework, the program offered a dedicated mobility module, designed to support participants in exploring international professional environments and to open pathways for artists and producers at the beginning of their global journeys.

This [Mapping Study on International Mobility](#) is the result of those experiences. It brings together the voices of the program's participants — artists, producers, and cultural managers — who travelled across Europe and beyond, attending festivals, residencies, markets, and platforms such as Avignon Off, Tanzmesse, and Hungary LIVE in New York. Their reflections, collected here, illuminate how different forms of mobility shape both individual careers and the wider artistic ecosystems they belong to.

Through their stories, we see how mobility fosters visibility for underrepresented regions, builds confidence and agency in early-career professionals, and contributes to more balanced international collaborations. We also see its challenges — the need for sustainable funding, accessible opportunities, and structures that recognize care, equity, and inclusion as essential conditions for participation.

The insights gathered in this publication serve as a [guideline for future generations of artists and managers](#) who wish to navigate their own international paths. It offers practical advice on choosing mobility programs that fit one's goals and context, from short study visits to long-term residencies.

Most importantly, it affirms that international mobility is not just about movement — it is about connection. Every journey, every meeting, every shared stage contributes to the collective reimagining of how the performing arts can cross borders while remaining rooted in care, collaboration, and curiosity.

— *The Next Stage Project Team*

The Mapping Study is compiled from the experiences gathered through the following mobilities pursued throughout the project:

TFE	Nikos Mavrakis	New York	APAP	January 2024	Nikos Mavrakis represented TFE's artists at APAP, met producers participating in the Festival Academy. The visit resulted in expansion of TFE's network globally, and an invitation of a production managed by the organisation to Under the Radar Festival.
WSF	Brigitta Kovács	New York	APAP, GPS meeting	January 2024	Brigitta Kovács represented Hungarian artists and Workshop Foundation at APAP. Together with Gergely Talló they attended the Global Practice Sharing annual meeting in New York. Brigitta and Gergely both run exchange projects between the US and Budapest, which provide crucial opportunities for artists to create mutual understanding between the two contexts, and spread their work globally.



N&H	Franziska Hauser	Freiburg	Tanzplattform Deutschland	February 2024	Franziska Hauser represented the artists N&H is working with, as well as the production team of Tanz NRW and Tanzmesse at Tanzplattform Deutschland.
WSF	Brigitta Kovács	Freiburg	Tanzplattform Deutschland	February 2024	Brigitta Kovács & Gergely Talló represented Hungarian artists and Workshop Foundation at Tanzplattform Deutschland. They learnt about trends in Germany and possibilities for touring in the region.
N&H	Mara Nedelcu	Brussels	Kunstenfestival-desarts	May 2024	Gathering professionals from around the world, this festival became a regular meeting point for Mara Nedelcu and her team to deepen into the current artistic discourse and concerns.
WSF	Ladder Art Company	Avignon	Festival d'Avignon	July 2024	Next Stage contributed to Ladder Art Company's tour in Avignon, where they presented their show, Awakening, to the French and international public. The tour was an important milestone for the company, opening doors to more international tours and higher visibility in the performing arts field.
WSF	Brigitta Kovács	Düsseldorf	tanzmesse	August 2024	Brigitta Kovács and Nikos Mavrakis took part at the tanzmesse, the biggest international market for contemporary dance, organised by the German project partner, Nedelcu & Hauser. The three partners presented the Next Stage project at the Producers Meeting, met fellow managers, talked about potential future collaborations. They also represented the artists they are working with, initiating new presentation and exchange opportunities.
TFE	Nikos Mavrakis	Düsseldorf	tanzmesse	August 2024	
WSF	Brigitta Kovács	New York	APAP, GPS meeting	January 2025	Brigitta Kovács represented Hungarian artists and Workshop Foundation at APAP. Together with Gergely Talló they attended the Global Practice Sharing annual meeting in New York. Brigitta and Gergely both run exchange projects between the US and Budapest, which provide crucial opportunities for artists to create mutual understanding between the two contexts, and spread their work globally. Brigitta also prepared the Hungary Live Festival, which will present contemporary Hungarian works in September 2025.
N&H	Tammo Walter	San Sebastian	Dferia	March 2025	Tammo Walter took part in the professional program of Dferia festival and represented artists he is collaborating with in the market place of the festival. He also connected with fellow producers and festival makers of The Festival Academy atelier.

N&H	Tammo Walter	Paris	ONDA Rencontre	March 2025	Tammo Walter took part in the international meeting of ONDA in Paris. The conference connects presenters and producers mainly from France to exchange on pressing topics and to network.
N&H	Tammo Walter, Nikos Mavrakis	Ljubljana, Rijeka, Zagreb	Moving Balkans Platform	May 2025	Tammo Walter and Nikos Mavrakis visited the first edition of the Moving Balkans Dance platform with stops in Ljubljana, Rijeka and Zagreb. The platform is a collaboration of 12 partners in the Balkans and provided a beautiful occasion to get to know local artists, venues and contexts.
N&H	Tammo Walter	Brussels	Kunstenfestival-desarts	May 2025	Tammo Walter visited the renowned Kunstenfestival des Arts in Brussels. He connected with presenters and producers from all over the world and participated in the showcase format Plat(e)form(e).
N&H	Tammo Walter	Utrecht	SPRING Festival	May 2025	Tammo Walter visited SPRING festival in Utrecht. He connected with presenters and producers from all over the world and strengthened his international network.
N&H	Tammo Walter	Barcelona	GrecFestival	July 2025	Tammo Walter visited the professional weekend of Grec Festival in Barcelona. At the renowned festival for theatre and dance he could connect with many international curators and producers during specific professional events and visits to performing arts spaces of the city.
N&H	Tammo Walter	Santarcangelo	Santarcangelo Festival	July 2025	Tammo Walter visited Italy's oldest performing arts festival, discovered new artists and connected with many of the more than 300 professional guests and curators present.
N&H	Tammo Walter	Athens	Athens Epidaurus Festival	July 2025	Tammo Walter had the chance to visit the ancient theatre of Epidaurus and get to know the biggest greek festival for performing arts and its rich program. He met with various curators and artists.
N&H	Tammo Walter	Kalamata	Kalamata Dance Festival	July 2025	In the beautiful city of Kalamata, Tammo Walter could discover international and local artists and connected with many programmers. This visit gave the possibility for future collaborations and insights into local dance communities.
TFE	Kyriakos Christodouloupoulos	Narva	Freedom Festival	August 2025	Kyriakos Christodouloupoulos visited the Freedom Festival of theatre in Narva, Estonia, right next to the borders with Russia. He met various artists and curators, and followed closely the program of the festival, which had a focus on documentary theatre from countries that are undergoing oppressive systems or are in conflict.

TFE	Nikos Mavrakis	Gorizia / Nova Goriza	Spring Forward	April 2025	Nikos Mavrakis visited the european platform Aerowaves in Italy and Slovenia, connecting with professionals and curators and making connections with the directors of local theatres.
TFE	Nikos Mavrakis	Berlin	IETM Plenary Meeting	May 2025	Nikos Mavrakis participated in the Plenary Meeting of the International Network IETM in Berlin
TFE	Nikos Mavrakis	Brussels	Kunstenfestival-desarts	May 2025	Nikos Mavrakis visited the festival for the first time to see the unique and risk-taking performances that are presented in this festival, one of the most progressive and cutting-edge festivals
N&H	Mara Nedelcu	Brussels	Kunstenfestival-desarts	May 2025	Gathering professionals from around the world, this festival became a regular meeting point for Mara Nedelcu and her team to deepen into the current artistic discourse and concerns.
TFE	Nikos Mavrakis	Vienna	Wiener Festwochen	June 2025	Nikos visited the festival in Austria to connect with professionals and discuss co-production and collaboration opportunities
TFE	Nikos Mavrakis	Lisbon and Montemor-o-Novo	Portuguese Performing Arts Platform	June 2025	Nikos visited the Portuguese Performing Arts Platform in Montemor Novo and Lisbon, to discover the work of Portuguese artists and meet with professionals

EXPANDING THE NOTION OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

BY NIKOS MAVRAKIS, MANAGING DIRECTOR
TOOFAREAST, ATHENS

When I first started working in international relations, the term itself was *terra incognita* for me. I had already been working in production for a few years when I happened to attend a workshop about “internationalising your projects” by Iva Horvat at the Athens Epidaurus Festival. It was eye-opening. For the first time, I was introduced to the complex system of international distribution.

Until then, anything that had to do with “sales” felt narrow, technical, and somewhat awkward. It took years of trial and error to understand how it truly works - how to build networks based on trust and reciprocity. I realised it was less about movement and more about exchange, less about selling yourself or your work and more about connecting with people.

BEGINNINGS: WORKING WITH EMERGING ARTISTS

My early experiences were shaped by collaborations with emerging artists - people without access to networks, funding, or visibility, but full of urgency and vision. Working with them proved to be the most demanding job I have ever had. I found myself in a position where I had to not only build a network from scratch but also try to convince that network to trust unknown artists.

I failed many times. People wouldn't listen. So I started mapping festivals and trying to understand where I needed to be. International platforms and showcases became my natural habitat: concentrated gatherings of curators and programmers in a few intense days. I discovered that smaller, less institutional environments - outside the major European festivals - were often more fertile. They were more human. In a showcase in Kosovo, a platform in Singapore, or a small village in Portugal, I could find myself having lunch with a major artistic director - an encounter that would have been almost impossible in a more formal context.

The key was to build trust and remain human. Not to sell the artist, but to show that working with me meant dealing with someone reliable, reasonable, and honest - someone who could navigate the intensity of a festival without drama. In the festival world, where things must happen fast and with minimal friction, trust is everything.

I also learned to be meticulously prepared: to have all the necessary materials at hand - videos, photos, information, technical riders, financial and touring conditions. Working with emerging artists taught me that “distribution” begins long before a premiere. It starts with listening, with understanding what an artist truly needs to take a first step outward. Often, that meant thinking small: minimal casts, flexible formats, tour-friendly or even non-existent sets, and unconventional spaces - a studio, a garage, a rooftop - whatever could hold the spark of encounter.

These beginnings were humble, but they revealed something crucial. The act of sharing work is political. It asserts presence, voice, and belonging. Supporting emerging artists was not only a practical job - it was a form of advocacy, a way of opening doors that had long remained closed.

NOT ALL WORKS CAN TOUR

This was a difficult truth to communicate, both to myself and to the artists I worked with. Relevance, representation, and a complete artistic identity were prerequisites for international touring. Does the work speak to people of different backgrounds? Who are you as an artist, and what is missing from international stages?

It's not enough to create a beautiful piece - it must fit within a complex global ecosystem. The role of a tour manager is not only to communicate this to presenters but also to help artists understand that not all works can or should tour. This doesn't mean the work must look or feel “international,” nor should it be forced into a mold. But there are cycles of relevance: themes emerge, fade, and return; aesthetics rise and evolve; certain art forms suddenly become urgent. You have to stay alert, to sense what resonates now.

Artistic directions, mandates and priorities change every few years. Keeping track of who wants what, and for what purpose, is an ongoing challenge. Are they programming long-term? Are they filling an urgent gap? Understanding context is as important as understanding art itself.

EXPANDING THE FIELD

As our projects grew, so did our field of vision. I started to see distribution as a cartography of relationships. Mapping festivals, networks, residencies, and institutions became a way of understanding the ecosystem we belonged to. It was no longer about "getting in," but about locating resonance-where a work could find its audience, where an idea could match with context.

I learned the importance of presence: being there, writing to people, asking questions, emailing and keeping people updated. The myth of "being discovered" quickly dissolved. No one else will have your motivation. You have to create the conditions for discovery yourself. This kind of work isn't glamorous - it's patient, steady, and deeply human. You meet people, you listen, you follow up. Over time, these gestures accumulate and form networks of trust.

WORKING WITH ESTABLISHED ARTISTS

Experience eventually brought new collaborations - with artists already touring internationally, or with companies whose names began to circulate by word of mouth. The challenges changed. Scale brought responsibility: detailed contracts, complex logistics, financial clarity, and communication plans that stretched across continents. Newsletters were finally being opened, read, and replied to. Yet the essence remained the same: preserving trust, integrity, and dialogue. Staying true to what you have promised and honoring the people who showed you trust.

CREATING A PLATFORM: AMALIA THEATRE

The creation of the Amalia Theatre in Thessaloniki marked a turning point. After seven years of sending artists out into the world, I felt the need to build a space that could also create conditions and potentially act as a platform. Amalia was born from the impulse to support young creators.

I had reached a limit: I couldn't take on more projects. I couldn't be everywhere at once with an ever-growing portfolio of artists. Larger agencies and production offices in Western Europe have the structural support-grants, subsidies, institutional backing-that allows them to maintain visibility abroad. We didn't have that luxury. So we turned inward.

Amalia is not just a venue; it is becoming a platform for adventure. With the little we can offer - a stage, technical support, and our knowledge of the international field - we plan to research the local scene and help new voices emerge. You never know where you will find the next artist whose work has to be seen internationally.



CLOSING THOUGHTS

In the end, international relations is not romantic-it's demanding, unpredictable, and seriously resource draining. You need to invest not only time, but also your own money, energy, and patience, without any guarantee of success. I was fortunate at times, but it remains a draining and uncertain path. What truly sustains it is stubborn persistence and a consistent methodology. Choose a few key festivals and platforms each year, reserve your resources wisely, and make the most of them: study the participant lists, reach out, meet people, open conversations. Even if not every meeting leads somewhere, the process itself builds your network and sharpens your understanding. Consistency is what eventually turns effort into opportunity.

Looking back, everything I have written here - working with emerging artists, expanding the field, supporting established artists, and creating a platform like Amalia - comes down to the same principle: building connections that last. International relations is not about chance, but about persistence, clarity, and faith in the long journey of making art travel.

INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATIONS: DECONSTRUCTION THE BORDERS IN YOURSELF

BY BRIGITTA KOVÁCS, PROJECT MANAGER AT WORKSHOP FOUNDATION, BUDAPEST

Building a career as an independent performing arts professional – I decided to take that path 8 years ago. Since then I have worked as an artist manager, international project manager and festival manager, all of which require different approaches but a same kind of dedication.

I've met people I can call family now, travelled to amazing places, learnt about different realities and have built a network that serves as my professional safety net. It did not come without its challenges though – the independent performing arts sector does not offer financial stability, nor clear career paths and is highly affected by cultural politics and ever changing social contexts. In order to navigate it one must find stable pillars to hold onto – for me that is what international relations mean.

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS – AN INVESTMENT THAT PAYS OFF:

In each of my roles, partnership defines the way I work. Partnerships however take time to establish and require nurturing, reassessment of motivations and regular communication. It is an investment – of time, money, and there is no short-term return on this investment.

I have received many requests to distribute works internationally, with expectations of quick results. I learnt quite soon that for me it is not the way to go. Instead I felt more self-identical when I took the time for more in-depth conversations, mapping of different contexts and common challenges with my international peers, and started to design joint projects and exchanges.

Artists:

I integrated this mindset into my work with the artists. When working with artists, I always emphasize that our relationship is interdependent. It's not a traditional model where I "build" their careers as a manager; rather, we actively contribute to each other's professional growth. I make it a priority to sit down with them regularly for strategic conversations—stepping back from the constant workload to consider what truly makes sense for their trajectory. Together, we identify which opportunities to pursue, map the partnerships around us, and decide where to focus our energy. This collaborative approach is essential, especially given that the financial environment in Hungary doesn't allow us to rely on stable, regular funding. Instead, our sustainability depends on partnerships and on strengthening our international network.

Workshop Foundation:

I found the same mindset when I started to collaborate with Gergely Talló & Workshop Foundation. It was essential for me as a freelancer to find a supportive environment and a legal entity that can stand behind my ideas and support my professional growth. I've also learnt that different networks can feed each other and new ideas can emerge from merging the experience and know-how of those. My work with the Foundation plays a crucial role in expanding my international presence, and offered me a new perspective besides artist management, as I have become part of curatorial and jury teams myself. Due to this I gained a better understanding of decision making processes and criteria in the international sphere. One of the biggest learnings for me was that it really stands out if someone understands the international context, structures and is able to position oneself clearly within the ecosystem of the performing arts scene. Workshop Foundation also stands behind the idea of Next Stage as a legal entity, sharing and actively engaging with the mission of the project.

Next Stage:

The partnership of the Next Stage project dates back to the IETM (International networks for contemporary arts) Campus organized in 2019, where I met Mara Nedelcu and Nikos Mavrakis. We followed each others' career paths and regularly discussed our views on sectoral needs, challenges and innovative ways of working together – even during the pandemic we kept in touch. After the lock-downs we were finally able to meet again in person during the 2022 tanzmesse, where we laid the foundations of a Creative Europe application. The conversations have evolved into a thorough need analysis, providing a foundation for our co-designed project, Next Stage.



TAKING THE FIRST STEPS

When beginning to build an international network, the first steps often involve simply showing up: visiting platforms, showcases, and smaller professional meetings. These spaces allow you to observe how the field operates, understand who is active, and start building organic connections. Our own collaboration, Next Stage, began this way—at the IETM Campus in 2019—which is a good example of how informal encounters can later grow into meaningful partnerships.

HOW MOBILITIES CAN SUPPORT THIS PROCESS?

Defining your vision

Before seeking partners, it is important to understand why you need them. What gaps can collaboration fill in your artistic or professional development? Mobility experiences provide the distance and perspective needed to clarify this vision.

Identifying potential partners

Mobility opportunities help you recognize who is around you—both locally and internationally. Consider:

- Who are the people or organizations whose values or interests are aligned with yours?
- What motivates them, and how does that intersect with your own motivations? Sustainable partnerships only work when benefits and drivers are mutual.

Taking time to understand each other's challenges, contexts, and available resources is essential. These elements will shape the framework of any future collaboration and determine what is realistically possible for both sides.

- Before a project: get to know your needs, others' needs
- Map different contexts – be able to position yourself in the international sphere
- Advocate yourself: self-representation, communicating your concerns, interests, activities is key
- Find your peers and find a common ground

GOING BEYOND EUROPE – KEY OPPORTUNITIES IN THE U.S.

During my practice connections and exchange projects between New York and Budapest play an important role. I've found that even though the geographical distance is huge, we often share the challenges we face.

For European artists and arts managers exploring international mobility, the United States offers several established platforms that support networking, residency work, and the development of joint projects.

CEC ArtsLink

A major transnational exchange program offering hybrid and in-person residencies in the U.S. for socially engaged artists and cultural leaders. Fellows receive tailored placements with U.S. host organizations, mentorship, and long-term networking through the ArtsLink community.

Trust for Mutual Understanding (TMU)

A grant program that funds exchanges and collaborative projects between U.S. nonprofits and partners from many Central and Eastern European countries. TMU supports residencies, research visits, and long-term partnership building.

Under the Radar Festival (UTR)

A leading international festival of contemporary and experimental performance in New York. Its annual Symposium gathers hundreds of presenters, producers, and artists, providing high-visibility opportunities to share work, join conversations, and build U.S. contacts.

APAP (NYC) Conference

The largest U.S. performing arts presenting conference, held each January in New York. It features extensive artist showcases, pitch sessions, professional development forums, and a major exhibition space—making it one of the most efficient entry points for meeting U.S. presenters and tour partners.

ISPA Global Fellowship

A prestigious international program for mid-career performing arts managers. Fellows attend the ISPA Congress in New York, receive mentorship, and gain access to a global network of cultural leaders, supporting long-term professional relationships and strategic collaboration.

These programs provide structured, credible entry points into the U.S. performing arts ecosystem—inviting Europeans to engage not merely as visitors but as genuine collaborators. They foster sustainable, long-term relationships through residencies (ArtsLink), curated exchanges (TMU), professional forums and pitch platforms (Under the Radar, APAP), and international networks (ISPA). In addition, many of these initiatives offer financial support or valuable in-kind benefits such as visibility and networking opportunities, significantly lowering the barriers to establishing a presence and developing projects in the U.S. market.



GUEST EXPERIENCE - A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR EMERGING PERFORMING ARTS' PRODUCERS

BY TAMMO WALTER, YOUNG CREATIVE AT NEDELCO
& HAUSER DÜSSELDORF

Being generously hosted and taken care of in any circumstance is something that is culturally handled differently around the world and changes of course from context to context. Though it always comes from a wish to share in solidarity.

Festivals and venues of performing arts host audiences as their guests and do their best to provide an experience that will make them return. Professional guests often have multiple reasons to be a guest at a festival. As a programmer and curator, one watches shows to get to know and follow artists, assess whether a performance is suitable to invite for their own context and to connect with fellow professionals and audiences. Agents and Producers take the opportunity to meet the programmers present to engage in conversations about the artists they are representing and to learn about how a festival is structured and curated.

Discover festivals as celebrations of many different kinds, orientations and focuses. Annual, biennale and triennial. Local, regional and international. Audience, professional centered and market formats

I like to visit a mix of different kinds of festivals. Some, like the **Santarcangelo Festival**, attract a big crowd of professionals, producers, programmers and artists without having a dedicated program for them. **Kunstenfestivaldesarts** in Brussels is always visited by curators from around the world due to their many world premieres. Some marketplaces like **international tanzmesse nrw** are a platform for exchange where institutions also present themselves. Some festivals like **Dferia** in San Sebastian have a big marketplace and provide accommodation and catering for professional guests. Though most festivals cannot provide financial support for their guests.

Providing smooth logistics, preparation and accessibility for guests, frames their experience of the events they take part in significantly. A festival centre for example provides an important place for sharing and connecting between audiences and artists. Clear communication on schedules and transportation with enough time to network, supports personal planning and an experience without stress. A festival guide document that includes info on local transport and restaurant recommendations is a very handy tool to prepare guests and give an overview of what to expect.

When mapping my travels, I choose the festivals I visit depending on various factors: program, region I don't know yet, affordability, presence of professional audience

Having experienced so many different festival models there are some that were more rewarding for me than others. Often small festivals provide the opportunity to connect more meaningfully with programmers as well as artists. Marketplaces can provide a good overview of a region's art field, though connections stay mostly superficial and demand a lot of research and follow up work to establish lasting relationships.



Photo: Pietro Bertora

I feel most welcome in festivals that manage to be embedded in the local community and at the same time provide an infrastructure and program that is attractive for professionals to meet. **Festival de la Cité** in Lausanne is an example that worked well for me in this sense. It is an open-air city festival that gathers the whole city's people around performances, concerts, workshops and catering, while at the same time providing the most possible care for artists and professionals who have a dedicated space to relax, connect and exchange.

Furthermore, I am grateful for the privilege to have gained an extensive network of fellow producers and friends around the world which helps me to find ways to organise affordable logistics which make festival visits not just financially more accessible but also gives yet another opportunity to understand and dive into the local context.

I personally thrive in traveling, connecting with local people, listening, sharing and experiencing art in its multidisciplinary facets

Festivals that have specific programs for professional guests, either programmers or producers, are attractive to visit for me to network and connect with new people and those I know to deepen relationships. In programs I look for well-known artists on the one hand, to discover their work and understand references that other works might have to their language. On the other hand, I look for new and emerging artists as well as representation from countries outside of Europe. I try to visit festivals in multiple regions and am curious to discover those that I don't know yet or are not well represented in many of the western European programmes. Here I'm thinking about South-East-Asia, SWANA, South America and also Eastern Europe.

Artistic mobility is a tool against fascism

Being a guest to the world is to listen, care and learn. With this in mind traveling becomes a means to connect and encourage sustainable exchange. In a world where polarization pulls away social groups in isolation and fear, travels of artists and cultural workers can carry stories and ideas that unsettle homogenous narratives and reveal the richness of multiplicity.

Each encounter across borders, whether through a public performance, a conversation over dinner, or an exchange of best practices, builds a web of empathy and understanding that resists the simplification of identities. Mobility, in this sense, is not only about professional growth but about maintaining the porousness and curiosity that keep societies open and democratic.

BABY ON BOARD: MOBILITY OF PARENTS

BY FRANZISKA HAUSER AND MARA NEDELCU

MANAGING PARTNERS AT NEDELCU & HAUSER DÜSSELDORF

The first day of the Next Stage project happens to also be the birthday of Kawn. At the same time, Benno was nearly one year old. As independent arts managers, becoming parents was a transformational experience marked by a shift in personal and professional priorities shared by so many others primary caregivers. Every journey is individual and we will talk about some of the learnings of the past two years, knowing that paths cross and we may meet you in one or the other adventure.

When it comes to career development, mobility is a key driver of success in the performing arts field, allowing artists and cultural operators to access better opportunities. However, parents, especially those without institutional support, struggle to participate in international projects due to logistical constraints. 2024, the [Creative Pulse study](#) - a survey on the status and working conditions of artists and CCS professionals in Europe, found that mobile art workers report better working conditions, highlighting the need for targeted mobility support.

"Care is absolutely pharmakon, i.e. healing and wounding" were Maggie Nelson's words in an interview on *The Wounds of Care* and the Pleasures of Ordinary Devotion. So we navigate mobility and career dilemmas of how to frame and negotiate travels and how to stay connected professionally.

Care time as valid professional experience

How did the career break impact your visibility or professional confidence?

Franzi: The key lies in the word break. I found it difficult to step away completely from professional processes. I had a strong urge to stay informed and connected, yet I had to acknowledge that I needed the pause — to arrive in this new chapter of life and respond to its challenges. When care work was shared in a way that allowed me to slowly return, it seemed perfectly natural to everyone else that I was suddenly back, as if I never even missed. My visibility, therefore, did not seem to have changed much outwardly — but internally, I had to rediscover how to balance this new private life with the familiar rhythms of my work.

Mara: It does something with one's brain to turn to such intensive physical and emotional performance, starting from the blow-up of the day-night sleep rhythm to the overwhelming virus attacks which began with the first socialization phase of the little one. It was like being shaken at the core, I surrendered to change and transformation. One day I realised that my daily social circles (and by extension the professional ones too) shrieked so much that it felt like a new start to come back to desk duties. And new dawns bring new horizons, so I was encouraged to look for original challenges and open different career chapters.

What helps you stay active professionally while parenting?

Mara: I depend on a support network (of family, daycare) which allows time frames I can dedicate to professional development and grow.

Franzi: I can fully relate to that — only when the so-called village steps in does space open up to stay professionally engaged. At the same time, I would also turn the question around: staying connected to my work life has, in return, helped me remain active and inspired in my parenting life.

What kind of advice made a difference?

Franzi: Trust your gut. It may sound cliché, but the more time I spend being a mother, the more I rely on my intuitive sense. It has a quiet precision — a way of knowing instinctively how to respond to whatever circumstances arise.

Mara: Sleep whenever the baby sleeps! Joke aside, the restorative practice felt quite meaningful and gave me the means to re-center. Especially when it comes to intensive travel schedules, I need to keep in mind that returning home I am expected to give 110% energy in.

Re-frame mobility

What started to matter more now than before?

Mara: To give an example, for the last 7 editions I've visited the programme of [Kunstenfestivaldesarts](#) in Brussels, to gather with professionals from around the world and deepen into the current artistic discourse and concerns. Even if the festival programme goes for 3 weeks, I had to admit in the last two years that I can no longer commit to extensive travel. Planning a trip became a project which involves much more people than the one who eventually takes the journey, so sharp coordination, communication and contingencies in any aspects became essential.

Franzi: At times, planning my absence from home feels like a production task in itself. As a mother, I've also become more sensitive and softer, more aware of the need to create a sense of comfort and safety even while travelling. Yet, every trip so far — no matter how demanding the preparation — has been enriching for everyone involved. Even everyday life at home benefits from these moments of challenge; it's also a valuable experience for my partner to take full responsibility and succeed in it.

Another kind of experience has been travelling with both my child and a caregiver. That's what I did for [Tanzplattform Deutschland 2024](#) in Freiburg. While it was beautiful to be together, I felt more than ever caught in between — unable to fully do justice to either my work or my child.

What kinds of mobility worked for you?

Mara: I started prioritizing short stay, flexible schedule, hybrid formats.

Franzi: ...and always making sure to include generous breaks between trips, so as not to overstretch the home routine.

How do you experience hybrid or remote collaboration?

Franzi: Remote work makes balancing a job and child much more manageable. How often have I found myself rocking a sleeping, sick child in a carrier while attending a meeting? Parenting and work can be exhausting, and sometimes you wonder whether one always comes at the expense of the other. Yet the immense satisfaction after a day in which both were managed speaks for itself. Digital tools have been an incredible support in making this possible.

Mara: Sometimes when organising a trip simply does not work, gathering online is a blessing. For the mid term meeting of Next Stage project, all the teams but us met in person in Stockholm hosted by the associated partner [Johnson & Bergsmark](#). We could join the exchange through video conferences and established quite a bond. I became more skilful at expressing personal or even intimate standings and connecting emotionally over teleworking.

A family of choice - mobility of care and knowledge

What do you gain from connecting with other colleagues?

Franzi: Without the close connection to my network of colleagues, freelancing would not be possible. We have each other's backs, inspire and inform one another, and complement each other every day.

Mara: The octopus who can activate nine brains may be a good description of the connection we built within the team. As we faced personal restrictions in mobility, we invited other colleagues to join our team and bring along their eagerness to travel and discover. From their journeys, they passed on information and knowledge and they could also represent the projects at different international gatherings like festivals or platforms.

How can peers with similar challenges support each other?

Mara: I like to think of our team as a group of people who intentionally form kinship bonds based on mutual care, support, and emotional connection in order to pursue their agreed purpose. This kind of connection helps us grow on shared values.

How do you connect and build up networks while caring for family?

Mara: Start small and build trust.

Franzi: Entering parenthood opened the door to an entirely new network. Now we're also part of the "parents' club," and if you look around openly, connecting doesn't feel difficult at all. More than ever, we're all in the same boat.



CASE STUDY BY BEATRIX TRISHA SIMKÓ

ASSOCIATED ARTIST AT WORKSHOP FOUNDATION BUDAPEST

In terms of touring experience, I have around ten years of practice, and through the Next Stage project I'm sharing some new reflections as a supported and represented artist.

As a core member of this project, Brigitta Kovács has been my manager for the past six years, which has allowed us to develop a smooth and effective way of working together.

We continued this strategy within the project, integrating Young Creatives directly into these touring processes.

Their role became a much more significant element, providing strong support across different tasks and stages of touring.

In practice, this meant that communication — and sometimes even accompanying us on tour — became part of the Young Creatives' involvement.

While financial and management matters were handled by the Next Stage team, the touring process and its realization were closely developed together with the Young Creatives.

During the first two years after my child was born, I continued touring together with her, which offered important and formative experiences both personally and professionally. Within the framework of *Next Stage*, I entered a new phase, as it became possible to travel independently again. My child is now turning four, which allows me to leave her at daycare or with family members — making it possible for my partner, who is also involved in the production as an artistic collaborator, and me to travel together.

This shift, however, introduced new practical and emotional aspects to my work, especially concerning time management and periods of absence. For instance, the nine-day tour to New York was our longest separation so far. Through these experiences, I have learnt a great deal about balancing responsibilities and boundaries, and when new opportunities arise, I always consider them from her perspective, planning schedules and tours accordingly.

This year we returned to Romania for the second time with our piece *#Orpheus#Eurydice*. This occasion provided valuable insight into touring and cultural exchange within neighbouring countries — focusing more on our own region rather than only on Western Europe. I truly appreciate these opportunities and have been aiming for some time to strengthen touring possibilities and connections within the Central and Eastern European area.

This year I had two other key mobility experiences. One was returning to a long-standing **dance festival in Oulu**, Finland, which serves as a great example of building sustainable partnerships within the touring system. The other was traveling with our piece and connecting with local communities and colleagues through offering workshops — something that was realized this year in New York as part of the **Hungary LIVE Festival**. I'm beyond grateful for these opportunities.





Face direction of travel



LADDER ART COMPANY AT AVIGNON OFF FESTIVAL 2024

BY ESZTER LOVRITY, YOUNG CREATIVE AT WORKSHOP
FOUNDATION, BUDAPEST

Date: 29 June -21 July 2024

Location: Avignon, France

Event (if relevant): Avignon Off 2024

In 2024, **Ladder Art Company** participated in the **Avignon Off Festival**, one of the most important independent theatre events in the world. The company aimed to present itself to an international audience - one that is familiar with the genres of **physical theater** and **contemporary circus**, which form the foundation of Ladder Art Co.'s artistic work. In addition, the company specializes in **nonverbal theater**, a form that communicates through movement and body language rather than words, allowing their performances to be understood both in Hungary and internationally. Their stories unfold through the expressive power of the body, leaving space for personal interpretation, poetic reflection, and emotional resonance.

Why it was important to attend the event

For Ladder Art Company, attending the Avignon Off Festival was an essential step toward international recognition. The festival gathers thousands of theater professionals and audiences from all over the world, providing a unique platform to meet programmers, producers, and fellow artists. In the current cultural climate in Hungary, where independent artists face many challenges, this opportunity offered the company visibility and professional growth.

How the mobility served professional goals

During the three and a half weeks of the festival, Ladder Art Company performed **20 times**, reaching the attention of over **50 professional programmers**. As a direct result, the company received invitations to perform several times in **France** and **Israel**, opening new pathways for international touring and collaboration. This experience also deepened their understanding of international production standards, promotion strategies, and audience engagement, all of which will help them develop future projects and strengthen their presence both at home and abroad.

How it served the local community

By representing Hungarian contemporary performing arts at such a high-profile international festival, Ladder Art Company contributed to the visibility of the **Hungarian independent theater scene**.

Recommendations for fellow professionals

For artists and companies considering participation in the Avignon Off Festival, Ladder Art Company offers several key recommendations:

- **Work as a team** — Come in a large enough group to delegate tasks efficiently. Marketing, promotion, and production management all require constant attention.
- **Invest in promotion** — Everyone at the festival is competing for visibility. Combine street performances, flyers, posters, and online marketing to reach your audience effectively.
- **Be organized** — Production management is crucial. Your show must be mobile, adaptable, and punctual to fit within the festival's tight schedules.

- **Network actively** — The Off Festival organizes many events for professionals to meet and collaborate, but it's impossible to attend everywhere. Research in advance, choose your focus, and target the people and programmers you want to connect with.
- **Prepare financially** — Participating is very expensive. Every detail, from accommodation to theater lighting and meals, must be accounted for in the budget. Start fundraising and reach out for funds to your funding bodies.
- **Visit before participating** — If possible, attend the festival once as a visitor to observe how it works, identify what aligns with your artistic goals, and plan your future participation accordingly.

Overall, Ladder Art Company's participation in Avignon Off 2024 was a major milestone in their artistic journey. It strengthened their professional network, expanded their international visibility, and provided fresh energy to continue their creative work - both for themselves and for the broader community of independent artists in Hungary.



CREDITS

Mapping Study:

International Mobility in the Independent Performing Arts

A publication by the partners and participants of the *Next Stage Project* (Creative Europe, 2025).

This document serves as a **guidance resource** for early-career artists and cultural managers navigating the landscape of international mobility. Compiled from the experience reports of the participating cultural managers and artists, it maps a range of mobility opportunities — from festivals and touring networks to residencies, research visits, and professional gatherings.

Each case study details the **personal viewpoints** and **impact** of the mobility experience, highlighting how these opportunities contribute to both personal development and the international visibility of local artistic communities.

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