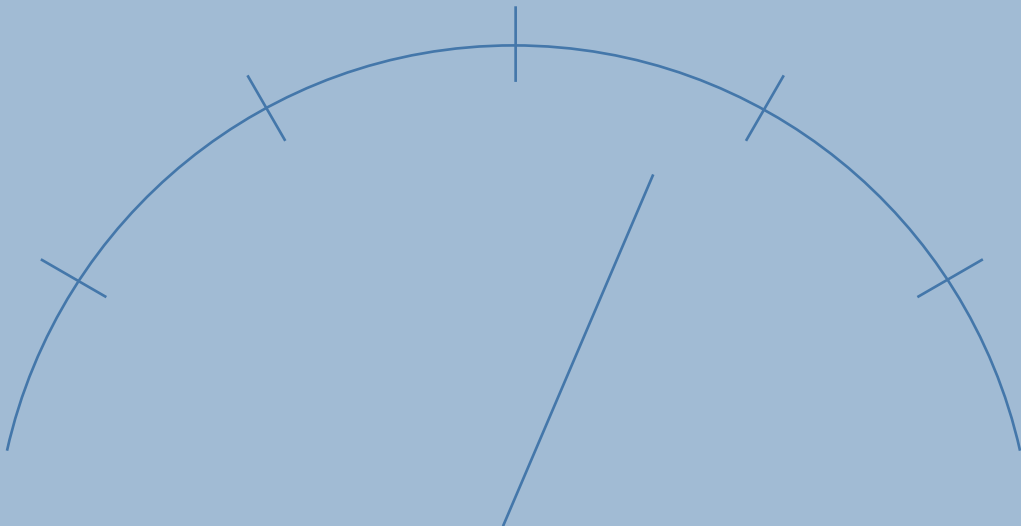


On the Move, A Brief History

by Mary Ann DeVlieg



Beginnings: 2000 – 2005

'Perhaps I don't know, but I do know someone who does know...'

On the Move (before it even had a name) was born from an increasing demand for information and contacts regarding artists' mobility and transnational exchange, and directed at the then-small IETM Secretariat in Brussels. In many cases we didn't know the precise answer to questions but we knew who did, and directed the knowledge-seeker to the source. IETM - international network for contemporary performing arts had researched and published various guides to EU funding for the arts and culture sector since the 1990s and had been offering 'soft training', that is, informal sharing of knowledge, expertise and contacts regarding transnational arts collaboration and exchange,

FEASIBILITY STUDY

In 2001 a feasibility study was supported by the European Culture Foundation, and our first partners included the City of Helsinki, KulturKontakt (Austria) and Relais Culture Europe (France). IETM contributed over 10,000 euros to the conception, design and creation of a prototype, searchable website, based on artists' needs. We made mistakes – how many categories, nuances, details, possibilities could we make searchable? Which languages? What did people really want to know? Our research showed that young professionals did not describe themselves

ON THE MOVE WEBSITE

The On the Move website was launched in 2002 at the British Council offices in Brussels. Users' behaviours and suggestions were followed closely. Initially imagining the database would be more used than the newsletter, we found quite the opposite – although the news had to be linked to more detailed info in the database, aka website.

since its inception. So, naturally, our members and others in the performing arts or cultural policy sectors, would call us and ask, 'who is doing this sort of work?', or 'how do you fill in this EU funding application?', or 'who might be interesting for my company or festival, in this other country?', or 'where do you find information on who's who in the arts in that country?' Our small team of 2.5 staff members were happy to serve others but by 2000 it got to the point where arts professionals were asking us who to contact in their very own country! And so, a long discussion with our webmasters was begun...

with one single art form only, that IETM members rarely performed only one function in the sector, and that many potential users would not search for a precise, well-defined opportunity in a single geographic location but rather just wanted to know where they might go to do something professionally enriching! Through the help of Tela Leão in Portugal, of Ruud Engelder in Amsterdam, and patient web designers, we slowly began to conceive of and test what Ruud named, 'On the Move'.

In 2003 the European Commission (DG EAC) granted IETM 110,000 euros towards the creation and development of more or less what we see now (well, rather LESS than what we now have!): www.on-the-move.org. The Dutch Performing Arts Fund contributed towards a business plan to see if OTM could be self-financing, but after many

discussions we rejected charging for information sought or posted, for paid subscriptions or for advertising on the site. We believed information should be free, and furthermore not manipulated by commercial motivations. This is a topic revisited more than once over the two decades of OTM, especially in 2014 and the slim budget years

STRUCTURATION

2004 and 2005 saw big changes. OTM became an independent non-profit, international association under Belgian law (aisbl) in 2005, and in 2004 Judith Staines was employed (through 2009) as site/newsletter editor. She defined a sharp and successful editorial policy based on the correct assumption that the more focused the information was, the more useful it would be to users already inundated with too much information, even in those early days. OTM would only publish concrete, feasible, useful opportunities for professional exchange and travel – for example, no announcements of festivals unless artists were welcomed to send in their own propositions. Judith also wrote some of the first reports and 'thought' articles for OTM. In 2005 OTM's on-again, off-again support from the European Commission (DG EAC) began with a two-year subsidy that part-funded OTM. Meanwhile the European Culture Foundation's new project, the European LAB for Culture, in its own research, found that whereas the LAB's website was relevant to cultural researchers and policy analysts, OTM was seen as particularly useful (and used) by artists. Alongside

after. The response has always been the same: our information should be free. OTM's first main national partners in Portugal, France, the UK and Germany joined, and thus began OTM's engagement not only with information but also training and capacity building with and for partners.

partners such as Fondazione Fitzcarraldo / the Cultural Observatory of Piedmont Italy, and the cultural policy researchers' network, ERICarts in Bonn, OTM training took off, with sessions around Western and Eastern Europe on European cultural exchange evolution and mechanisms, conceived and delivered by Corina Şuteu. The City of Nantes and OTM co-organised a seminar for the emerging digital implications for the cultural sector; the conference papers were published by the Observatoire de Grenoble the following summer.

These four main foundations of On the Move would remain as strong pillars throughout its constant growth and changing financial fortunes: free information prioritising funded opportunities for artists; strong collaborative partnerships; a focus on training and capacity building, first in all parts of Europe and then globally; and useful, free downloadable publications and reports which would accompany OTM's famous 'guides' to mobility resources nationally, regionally and transnationally.

Development years: 2006 – 2015

Readers, the first draft of this 'brief history' was 17 pages long and attempted to list achievements per year over more than twenty years. It's impossible to be brief and yet capture the excitement of so many fruitful discoveries – new national partners, talented and dedicated staff in the office, Presidents and Board members. By 2007, OTM was partnering with its network of 'Connectors' and 'Editorial

Collaborators' in Finland, Germany, Ireland, Spain, Poland, Portugal, Russia, and the UK, as well as the Open Society Institute's network of Central Asian Arts and culture coordinators. Needless to say the size of the database and number of announcements in the newsletter was constantly increasing dramatically as were the site visitors.

GEOGRAPHICAL SCOPE

From 2011, OTM **enlarged** its geographic interests and reach, but it also opened up from a focus on performing arts to the broader range of arts and culture. Thus it was exciting also to continually identify **new useful topics to research, publish and distribute** – issues explored early and not commonplace as they are today, such as digital and virtual mobility; co-production and touring; tax and social security (revisited several times with partners such as OTM's own Mobility Info Points, IETM,

Pearle * – Live Performance Europe, and ECAS – European Citizen Action Service, and providing much needed information to the sector and the European Commission); the status of freelance independent workers; ecological mobility (the partnership with Julie's Bicycle was particularly fruitful and resulted in OTM's Charter for Sustainable and Responsible Cultural Mobility in 2013, and a number of continuing OTM partnership activities regarding climate change).

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

OTM also saw its role rise further as a **coordinator of peer arts mobility organisations**. With OTM member Foundation Fitzcarraldo and ten other cultural organisations from six EU-countries, the PRACTICS project (2008-2011) **set up what then became the national Mobility Info Points, which provided relevant and reliable information, available transnationally at a glance, to facilitate**

cross-border mobility in the cultural sector. OTM's 2011 seminar of mobility projects in Budapest brought together representatives of sixteen major EU-funded projects involving close to 140 affiliated partner organisations including networks, foundations, independent spaces, and public and private organisations in Europe in the fields of visual, performing and interdisciplinary art practices.

CULTURAL MOBILITY FUNDING GUIDES

OTM was becoming adept at producing **international and regional guides to arts mobility** and mapping research regarding the status, needs and gaps in the arts and cultural sector. With Interarts Foundation and the PRACTICS partners – who eventually became the Mobility Info Points (MIP) mentioned below – OTM published the first *Guide to Funding Opportunities for the International Mobility of Artists and Culture Professionals in Europe*, updated for Italy, Sweden, Norway, France (with support from the Ministry of Culture in France since 2013), the Netherlands (thanks to DutchCulture), Spain (thanks to the Ministry of Culture and Sports) and Macedonia in 2013 and at regular intervals since, adding territories and updating info such as for the Nordic-Baltic countries (Denmark, Poland, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Latvia, Lithuania and Russian Federation) via a partnership with ARS BALTICA and with Touring Artists Germany for that country, for Slovenia and Kosovo with the support of Bunker / Balkan Express Network, and for

the United Kingdom with Wales Arts International. These guides and partnerships gradually extended throughout and beyond Europe, always in partnership with others: for and with Asia (Asia-Europe Foundation, Res Artis and Asialink, Australia Council for the Arts, and the Ministry of Culture, Taiwan); Africa (Art Moves Africa, British Council, French Ministry of Culture, Institut français); Latin America and the Caribbean (Arquetopia Foundation and French Ministry of Culture); the MENA and Arab counties (KAMS Korea, with input from the Roberto Cimetta Fund and the Arab Education Forum, and further support of Med Culture and later Institut français for the first translation in Arabic); the USA (Martin E. Segal Center and Theatre Without Borders). Another landmark document was the guide for young and emerging mobile artists in Europe, *Move on! Cultural Mobility for Beginners*, updated regularly, and the *Fund-Finder Guide to Funds Beyond the EU's Culture Programme*, produced by IETM; a guide produced under the GALA

project for funds directed specifically at culture and environmental sustainability; a guide to private funding in France... The list goes on... introducing new tendencies and reflecting common concerns in the arts and culture sector.

Developing its training and capacity building

activities has been a natural step for OTM, promoting the transnational exchange of artists, works, practices, knowledge, contacts and resources. When OTM's own financial stability has been challenged as in 2006 - 2007 and 2013 - 2015, requests for OTM's expertise led to mentoring programmes, tailored training, and eventually to toolkits and impact and evaluation projects for funders and colleague organisations such as IETM, IN SITU, European Theatre Convention, and ENCC - European Network of Cultural Centres.

In 2010, OTM was recognised with an operational grant for 2011-2013 by the European Commission and grants from the Ministry of Culture and Communication in France; the Ministry of Education

in Finland / Finnish Theatre Information Centre (TINFO); Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and the Arts Council of Ireland. Strengthening its position as Europe's main network on cultural mobility information, OTM added partners and supporters such as the Nordic Culture Point and 'La Grande Région' of Luxembourg, France, Belgium and Germany, cooperating with Plurio.net (Internet portal for cultural information in the Greater Region of Luxemburg). OTM also co-organised with the support of ASEF and Arts and Theatre Institute the first Mobility Funders' meeting in 2013 and joined the Arts Rights Justice EU Working Group. Yet despite providing essential support, coordination and critical research findings regarding artists mobility, crucial for the sector, member states and the European Commission alike, August 2014 saw the rejection of OTM's European Commission network funding application. Marie Le Sourd and Elena Di Federico, who had formed the OTM secretariat team since January 2012, saw their contracts cancelled.

Renewed energies: 2016 – 2019

From summer 2016 OTM was able to offer OTM's secretary general, Marie Le Sourd, a part-time contract again. As part of its Action Plan for Culture, the European Commission invited On the Move (together with Pearle *) to present its work and to provide content and speakers for the 'Stock-taking meeting, Mobility of artists and cultural professionals', which demonstrated the strength of OTM's network of members and the Mobility Information Points – IGBK/Touring Artists, DutchCulture, TINFO, MobiCulture and Kunstenloket (now called Cultuurloket). However, the loss of substantial EU funding from 2014 had provided an opportunity, as such events often do, for OTM to rethink and reconfirm its mission, strategies and business model. OTM became a trusted partner for several EU-funded projects such as IN SITU; Creative Network for Culture, a new Erasmus project on

entrepreneurship; Creative Climate Leadership; and European Theatre Lab, an EU project coordinated by the European Theatre Convention that documented necessary skills and models of public theatre funding and new technologies' support. Constantly updating its training and evaluation services, OTM provided strategic guidance to Cambodian Living Arts; mentored France-based artists and professionals (PARI!) through a multiannual subsidy from the French Ministry of Culture and with the support of Institut français; and produced a free, downloadable evaluation toolkit for ENCC, The Evaluation Journey.

Internally, OTM developed the concept of working groups within its ever-growing membership. Working groups were set up regarding the Mobility Info Points (MIP), later to be joined by the (En)forced Mobility and Mobility Funders groups.

In early 2019, On the Move also became an organisation with two legal seats when a new association, On the Move France, was opened in Paris, focusing on collaborations and training with French partners. Five years after the withdrawal of the EU's regular funding, On the Move's budget reached its highest ever level in 2019: 193,910 euros including both French and Belgian associations. This covered regular updating and nourishing of the website, the guides, new and existing publications, training, mentoring, evaluations, strategic advice, many presentations at conferences and meetings, and constant collaborative partnership-building.

Forever faithful to its foundational aim, OTM contributed much input, sound experience, and research to the European Commission's steps toward creating a new mobility fund for arts and culture in Creative Europe countries. Recognised as the main mobility expert in Europe, OTM's preparation of a position paper in 2018 led to a landmark report commissioned by the Goethe Institut in 2019 for the new pilot i-Portunus mobility scheme, analysing the current state, and future needs, of mobility in the cultural field. The report drew on OTM's catalogue of past research, a statistical analysis of the calls published to its website, and the input of many OTM members contributing to the contents, disseminating the online survey, giving interviews, and providing other support.

2020 and onwards

The work goes on. In 2020, the year that the Covid coronavirus entered all of our lives, and changed some of us forever, an 800-item strong resource page was created in collaboration with Circostrada, attracting the highest attention ever on OTM's Facebook pages. Coronavirus updates shared the situation in the sector related to the virus, while highlighting the positive actions of On the Move's members. Although Covid delayed some of the more than 30 planned mentoring projects, all were implemented thanks to the support of various partners. A major three-year research project started to look at performing arts and disability artists and audiences in collaboration with the British Council as part of Europe Beyond Access. In 2020, working with its partners, On the Move maintained a catalogue of 70 guides detailing funding opportunities for cultural mobility, and in partnership with Pearle * and the European Festivals Association, translated

into French and released *Le guide ultime pour les managers culturel.les, L'affranchissement du droit d'auteur pour le spectacle vivant dans un contexte international* ('The Ultimate Cookbook for Cultural Managers – Artists Taxation in the International Context').

2020 was the year we all learned how to 'travel' on Zoom: OTM's events were in partnership or collaboration with On the Move members, including Wales Arts International, Tamizdat, Howlround, Dachverband Tanz Deutschland, Liv.In.G, FACE - Fresh Arts Coalition Europe, IGBK, Nordic Culture Point, DutchCulture, Motovila, and Culture Funding Watch. Among these collaborations was a special discussion on (En)forced Mobility, livestreamed in partnership with Howlround in June 2020, and involving members of the associated working group.

A CONSTELLATION OF CONTRIBUTORS

Among On the Move's greatest strengths is **the people in and around it**. Space does not permit naming all of the names who have contributed research, intelligence, ideas, funding and other support, including past and present staff! Following

Tela Leão's early foundation, certainly Judith Staines and Marie Le Sourd have been researchers, partnership builders, visionaries and knowledge contributors par excellence. But there have been so very many more, including the committed, hard-

working presidents that followed my own, first mandate: Maria de Assis, Martina Marti, Maria Tuerlings, Anna Galas-Kosil, and Marie Fol as well as Silja Fischer (for On the Move France). On the Move's members rarely have engaged only lightly. This was illustrated in 2020 when news came of the passing of Javier Brun, director of the Centro Dramático de Aragón in Spain, Board member 2010-2011 and a true anchor in Spain, responsible for OTM's news translated and circulated in Spanish. Javier, like many of the Board members and OTM Presidents, believed in the mission of the organisation; they believed and believe in transnational arts and cultural exchange, the power and impact of people-to-people reciprocity. People-to-people and face-to-face mobility was, of course, marked by the Covid-19 pandemic and its disastrous and long-term impact on many people's lives.

In 2021, more than 140,000 users visited the On the Move website, and the monthly newsletter passed 6,000 subscribers, growing daily. On the Move ended 2021 with a membership of 50+ organisations and 10 individuals coming from countries around the world. Pretty inspiring progress for a small idea of how to be practically useful to the sector. The news of the return of EU co-funding through its Network strand, for the period 2022-2024, was met with relief, pride and even more than usual OTM energy. This support will amplify or build existing activities;

it will initiate new activities based on OTM's cultural mobility knowledge and data but also on identified gaps such as access or resources. It will reinforce the outreach capacity of the OTM network, while strengthening the capacity of its members to further address cultural mobility issues.

If the 'how' of On the Move has diversified, the 'why' has certainly remained true. As OTM's 2020 annual report states:

The arts and cultural sector has been deeply affected, and particularly the international dimension, with touring, collaborations and residencies brought to a halt and incomes and opportunities drastically reduced. In this context, On the Move's role has stayed constant: to continue to provide reliable mobility related opportunities and to strive to implement other projects (including guides and mentoring programmes) thanks to the support and close collaboration of partners, members and funders.

More than ever we will drive our energies into advocating for and putting further into practice the belief that mobility must be part of a conscious process in relation to the social, economic, political, environmental and ethical implications it embeds.

**ON
THE
MOVE**



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