

Četrtek 19. 3. 2026 - Platforma Trigger

13:30 – 15:30: Cukrarna

Asociacija and EAIPA working session:

**Beyond Performance: Sustainable Artistic Careers and the Need to Reinvent Oneself.**

Dear members of this round table, dear audience,

Invited by Polona as a former performing artist, working for almost 40 years as a freelancer, I had various changes in my career. My name is Sabina Potočki and I worked for 20 years as a contemporary dancer, but parallel to dancing, I was also organiser and program coordinator in our dance group. Later on, I continued to work as organiser, producer and program curator in different non-governmental art organisations. I worked as well as responsible for PR, took care of video documentation for the street theatre festival, occasionally worked as a translator, editor, and I wrote several articles. Since the late '80 I've been running movement training for non-dancers and in my free time and now as a retired person, I work as a teacher of somatic movement for the retired people and occasionally also as masseuse.

I am turning 66 and live a precarious, single life with a small pension in a rented apartment. My current pension is approximately 730 EUR net, and the apartment I rent in Ljubljana costs me 600 EUR per month. I have applied for the Republic Recognition Allowance, a special mechanism in Slovenia that, based on the quality of your work and your social status, can provide approximately 300 EUR net additional pension as support. This is a specific financial benefit in Slovenia granted to retired artists and cultural workers who have made significant contributions to Slovenian culture. The Ministry of Culture decides on the allocation after consulting an expert commission. Payments are processed by the Pension and Disability Insurance Institute of Slovenia (ZPIZ). After an exhausting five-month procedure conducted by a bureaucrat at the Ministry of Culture, I received the final decision last month, so hopefully from April I will have a slightly higher pension. To survive, I had to take on additional jobs to cover the basic cost of living.

Since our round table is related to precarious working conditions and options to adapt our careers over time, I will focus on performing arts in the non-governmental sector, since in this field I worked for many years and I know the situation best. This round table is taking place on the TRIGGER platform, representing independent performing art. There is another platform, called GIBANICA, the Biennial of

Contemporary Dance Arts in Slovenia. Both initiatives are organised by non-governmental performing art organisations, trying to join forces to internationalise contemporary independent performing arts and contemporary dance. Probably both supported with small funds.

I worked in the Ljubljana Dance Theatre as a contemporary dancer (between 1984 and 2004) and as a manager and organiser (between 1984 and 1997). Later on, I moved to the City of Women—The Association for the Promotion of Women in Culture, where I worked in a much broader framework, representing different fields of contemporary arts at the International Festival of Contemporary Arts City of Women (1997-2007). First as a program assistant and executive producer and later on as a program coordinator and co-selector of the festival program. Besides performing art events, we presented music, film, video, visual arts, literature, theory, and various workshops in different venues in Ljubljana. From the clubs, concert halls, and theatres to the main cultural house of Ljubljana, Cankarjev dom, which was for many years the City of Women festival co-producer.

After City of Women, I returned to my basic field, contemporary dance and performing arts, at the Emanat Institute run by choreographer, dancer, and teacher Maja Delak. I was working as a program coordinator, organizer, programmer, and editor of the online choreographer's directory Slovenia.

I moved to Ljubljana at 25 from Maribor, where I finished studies at the School of Economics and Business. The reason to move to Ljubljana, at least as explained to my parents (who were hoping that I would find a job as an economist in Maribor), was my desire for humanistic studies at the Faculty for Social Studies in Ljubljana. So, I started to study my third year of sociology, but at the same time I joined the dance group established by the very talented Slovene choreographer Ksenija Hribar.

Beside Ljubljana Dance Theatre, City of Women, and Emanat, there were several other non-governmental art organisations and, for one year, even one governmental cultural organisation, where I worked as a freelancer occasionally. With most of those organizations I decided to work because I had an interest in the jobs proposed, but at the same time it is very important to mention, as most freelance workers in Slovenia know, the financial position in our non-governmental art organisations was most of the time on the edge of survival. We were subsidised on the project base, sometimes for one year, sometimes for several years, with no guarantee how much financial support we would get. Although in most organisations mentioned, I was

involved in financial decisions, mostly we couldn't pay decent or steady authors fees for our work. If we achieved additional funding from various local and foreign financial sources, this was related to extensive additional work for the same payment.

I started to work professionally in the arts in the socialist state of Yugoslavia; at the time, political changes were already on the horizon. After the death of Tito, internal political disagreements and conflicts between Yugoslav republics started to grow, including hidden political and geostrategic interests from abroad to dismantle Yugoslavia. Yes, I can say that being part of Slovene civil society and the so-called alternative in the '80s and '90s was an interesting period. We established the first professional contemporary dance company; we were one of the first registered freelance contemporary dancers, and we were proud to be freelancers. We were dancing a lot, the audience loved us, and we were sufficiently paid for our work. We had enough funds to create several dance and dance-theatre performances per year; we were dancing in Ljubljana, Slovenia, Yugoslavia, and even touring abroad. In 1996, we got our small production and performing space, which we achieved exclusively with a lot of effort and negotiations from our side. With our new space we somehow improved the infrastructural needs of Ljubljana Dance Theatre, but we couldn't change or influence much regarding the position or general status of contemporary dance inside our political structures. We were just lucky to be the first to introduce to Slovenia an interesting and new performing arts genre with the enormous support of critics and audiences, but we were not really aware what freelance status acutely means in the long term and how is going to change, we didn't know how we should fight for better working conditions. We had basically no idea about capitalism and we didn't really understand that we are workers and we should learn how to fight for our rights... *(At the end of my presentation, I will mention a very interesting article written by Union Zasuk in Slovene, titled When will your eighties finally end? which truly shook me, and I recommend that you all read it.)*

As the contemporary dance field in Slovenia expanded in the last 40 years, less money was available, no dance studios were provided in Ljubljana and other Slovene towns, and more competition and unhealthy attitudes started to take place inside the growing and competing dance scene.

Since contemporary dance was not very supported in socialism as some kind of bourgeois art, we are treated as a rather young artistic form, although there were

contemporary dancers working in Slovenia already before the Second World War as well, to a smaller extent also in socialism. Compared to other art forms such as literature, theatre, visual arts, or film, which had strong professional associations and institutions established already in socialism, contemporary dancers and freelance performing artists didn't have any supportive organisation to present and defend our work. We didn't have strong political connections to move forward with appropriate institutions.

In the past 40 years, there have been two proposals to establish the Centre for Contemporary Dance Arts. The first attempt in 2011 failed, and with the recent government, it is still unclear whether this officially established centre will become operational. Unfortunately, this government has decided to move the Centre for Contemporary Dance Arts outside Ljubljana, even though the majority of contemporary dance production takes place in Ljubljana. I simply want to emphasise as someone knowledgeable in this field that I have serious doubts about this decision. All key figures from the Slovene contemporary dance and performing arts scene should organise a meeting with the future Minister of Culture to openly discuss our problems and propose solutions. There are certainly enough advisers at the Ministry of Culture who understand our sector and are able to negotiate with the dance community, and can provide professional opinions and advice to the Minister of Culture. With the current arrangement of two dislocated centres for contemporary dance in Celje and Nova Gorica, the Ljubljana contemporary dance scene, which is the most vibrant and strongest in the country may receive no direct support.

For the last few years, we have been following good institutional and structural development of Slovene film. With bigger financial support and probably with the sufficient infrastructure available. Just in a short time, this brought very good results with numerous international awards to our film productions, with much better quality and an improved number of local and international audiences. True, there is a much longer tradition of film and video production and industry in Yugoslavia and Slovenia, and they have well-established institutions, (including the Slovenian Film Centre, film studio Viba Film, and established film institutions, venues and networks such as Slovenska Kinoteka, Kinodvor, Art Cinema Network Slovenia etc.). It took a really long time to improve the Slovene film sector, but my personal opinion is that this was possible only with the support of professional film institutions, which convinced the current Ministry of Culture to finally improve the position of the film sector in Slovenia. And now we can all see the result. Even those in Slovenia, who don't care

much about the arts and culture and Slovene film production, could see the improvement.

And with all my knowledge regarding contemporary dance and performing arts in Slovenia, we have the absolute capacity to do the same if cultural policy would invest in the field and take us seriously. And we have definitely enough experts to develop our sector.

As a contemporary dancer, performing arts producer and selector, following all the challenges in our institutionally under-supported and under-represented art field, I can state only this: to ensure sustainable artistic careers, contemporary dance in Slovenia requires **strong financial, infrastructural and organisational support**. We need professional institutions within which we can decide on how to develop our field. We also need understanding from the Ministry of Culture and from local municipalities, especially in Ljubljana, where according to the number of active contemporary dancers, choreographers, performing artists and organisations the demand and need are greatest. If this does not happen, we may well approach the second part of this round table's title: "The Need to Reinvent Oneself." In the current situation, much of the contemporary dance scene may gradually cease to function. Or, as some people in Slovenia now even publicly suggest, freelance artists and NGOs should continue to volunteer in their free time without any state financial support.

It is certainly valuable to learn more about the supporting organisations in Switzerland, EU and Austria, which Mr Oliver and Mr Cristian represent. I am sure that Asociacija as one of the main drivers and advocates in negotiations with cultural institutions may gain useful information to include in their proposals.

But in the field of non-governmental contemporary dance and performing arts in Slovenia (as well as for all other art fields without strong institutional support or strong professional umbrella organisations), we can only dream about strategic support for performing artists. Compared to my experience from the past, there is almost no change or improvement regarding the subject we are discussing today. The only way to navigate our precarious working conditions and to adapt our careers over time is still mainly our individual burden and task. We have few supportive organisations, like Asociacija, the Contemporary Dance Association Slovenia; we have Zasuk Union trying to improve working positions of freelance artists in Slovenia; we have some web portals for information in the field of culture or newsletters for the

self-employed in culture; and there might be a few other non-governmental and union-based initiatives, but they could not really help you with the concrete questions we are addressing here.

If contemporary dance and performing arts do not get strong financial, institutional, educational, and infrastructural support, including archives with an efficient Centre for Contemporary Dance and Performing Arts, most can soon close the doors and change careers. Or work on the stage only in their free time. Without strong representative institutions, there is very little chance we will get any European support to develop sustainable artistic careers, so there will be nobody out there to help us on *sustainability, health, and long-term professional development*.

Each time I changed or tried to develop my profession in the past, I had to invest my free time and money to learn new skills. When I was too tired, I would collapse, and last time it took almost two years to get back on my feet after a serious illness. Although most contemporary dancers could not dance after certain age, there is no special retirement scheme, professional insurance, or occupational pension for contemporary dancers. There are some kinds of regulations for ballet dancers inside their ballet institutions, but nothing for freelancers.

I could talk as well about my precarious working conditions inside the City of Women, but if interested, you can find an online article by Katja Praznik with the title **"City of Women between a Structural Subordination and Effects of Concealed Class Relations During Post-Socialist Transition,"** which was published in the Journal for the Critique of Science in 2015 under a special City of Women focus. Katja wrote an excellent analysis of the position of the City of Women Association and festival, stating that the organisation is socially subordinated on several levels, presenting female artists, and belonging to the independent/non-governmental cultural sector. In her research of the City of Women's financing during the first twenty years, she was analysing double discrimination related to the festival and the association's position inside cultural policies.

Thank you for your attention.

Sabina Potočki

-----

Some books and articles related to freelance artists position in Slovenia and in a broader context, which are important to me, but I didn't have time to talk about:

*Books:*

(English and Slovene)

- Katja Praznik: [Art Work: Invisible Labour and the Legacy of Yugoslav Socialism](#) (UTP, 2021) / [Delo umetnosti. Nevidno delo in zapuščina jugoslovanskega socializma](#) (Maska, 2023)

Book (Slovene)

- Katja Praznik: [Paradoks neplačanega umetniškega dela](#) (Borec, 2016)
- Mark Fisher: [Kapitalistični realizem](#) (Maska, 2021) / *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (2009)

*Articles:*

Slovene with short English introduction:

- ČKZ (Journal for the Critique of Science, for Imagination and New Anthropology) - [Mesto žensk med strukturno podrejenostjo in tranzicijsko utajo razrednih razmerij](#) / **City of Women between a Structural Subordination and Effects of Concealed Class Relations During Post-Socialist Transition** (Katja Praznik, article, 2015)

ČKZ - issue No. 261 - City of Women / Concealed Histories II

<https://ckz.si/en/publications/journals/261-city-of-women-concealed-histories-ii>

Slovene:

- [Kdaj bo že konec vaših osemdesetih?](#) / (Poslanica sindikalne konfederacije Glosa – ZASUK ob 8. februarju) / **When will your eighties finally end?** (Message from the trade union confederation Glosa – ZASUK on February 8th, slovene cultural day) / thor: Zasuk | Feb 6, 2024 |