

## **BUNKER – LJUBLJANA, SLOVENIA**

**Key words:** by habit | by choice | by surprise | community rooted | place | organisational change | partnership

### ***Synthetic data sheet***

Full name	Bunker
Address	Slomškova 7, SI - 1000 Ljubljana, SLOVENIA
Legal status	Private institute, non-profit organization
Year of establishment	1997
Website	<a href="http://www.bunker.si/">http://www.bunker.si/</a>
Social Media	Facebook, Twitter
Area of activities	Multidisciplinary
Kind of activities	Education, research, production, festivals, networking, trans-national cooperation
Total amount of budget	800.000 €
Sources of funding	% of public funding: between 90 and 95 % in the recent years
Number of employees	9
Number of volunteers	35
Number of annual attendances (estimated)	30.000

Data refer to 2015

### ***Background information***

Bunker is oriented to performing arts. It was established in 1997 as a private, non-profit institute in order to promote young performing artists through the Mladi Levi festival that was initiated in 1998. Since many other festivals have started to present emerging performing artists Bunker has expanded its commitment to performing arts through following areas: performing arts production, festivals, international cooperation through networks and collaboration projects, educational programs, discussion evenings and management of the venue located in the outskirts of Slovenia's capital city of Ljubljana. The venue is in an old power station converted into the performing arts centre. It is used by Bunker, but is also service/space for other performing arts organizations.

Bunker works on permanent, full-time basis with the program being set predominantly in the venue of "Stara Elektrana" ("Old Power Station") but the programme activities also migrate around the neighbourhood and wider area. The organization was growing and developing throughout the years through, among other, many European projects, which

helped Bunker to increase the number of employees. Still, due to inconsistent nature of local funding and national budget cuts for culture, number of employees decreased in 2015 from 13 to currently 9 employees. Bunker is financed by national and local sources, EU programs, and other international sources and from ticketing income. Its mission is creation of conditions and space (mental and physical) for socially engaged contemporary performing arts. Bunker works on the crossroad of social, economic, environmental and educational fields at local and trans-international level.

Even though it is an arts-led organization, its artistic vision is very audience oriented. Bunker believes that artists cannot exist without audience, as Koprivšek said "...every artists wants to expose his work to be seen by somebody else." Bunker's program selection attracts mostly young, urban and educated audience. The organization also invests energy in diversification of its audience, and depending on the program, it tries to include arts professionals, trans-gender people, children, youth, local community, etc.

### ***What do they want? Goals and achievements***

Owing to the legacy the organization has developed over the past 20 years, Bunker has its own regular audience, mainly "audience by habit" and related to Ljubljana's arts scene. But Bunker also targets different audiences, depending on the content of the program. The organisation initiated various programs (volunteer program, community projects, educational program) through which its audience base became more diverse, thus transitioning towards more audience-oriented organization. Enlarging and diversifying the audience are important for Bunker, but the main criteria for the organization is not following the logic of audience numbers but the quality of the arts and fostering meaningful relationships between artistic content and audience. In that sense, Bunker tries to create spaces for community where changes could develop. In order to provide more concrete impacts, Bunker provides space for laboratories in which explores new possible locations for AD. Deepening the relationship with the audience is done by personal contacts and discursive program while diversification is done through implementation of educational programs for young people or various participatory projects in local community. In that way Bunker has reached "audience by surprise", people who come to see performances even they do not know what to expect and who usually do not attend Bunker's type of events. Using various methods, such as subtitles, kindergarten, free admissions, etc., Bunker also gathers "audience by choice", people who are interested in specific themes, artists and events.

Bunker's motivation is to present its own productions, and in doing so, Bunker uses, invents and applies different strategies. In order to present a new production, they organize cultural days for high schools or present it within the framework of conference. To present contemporary arts, Bunker produces a festival in collaboration with schools. Through different channels, Bunker reaches different audiences. This approach seems necessary in a small city such as Ljubljana where, as Selimović explained, "performance is seen by the core of 200-300 people who make up the Audience by habit". During the festival, Bunker provides sub-titles and offers a "kindergarten", for visitors with children. They organize opening events, celebrations and other cultural events in collaboration with local associations (e.g. catering is always done by association of elderly women). Due to the economic crisis, Bunker has decided to invest more time in fund-raising and not to charge for festival tickets. Instead they started to collect donations. According to Koprivšek, the audience recognizes this approach as an investment in the festival and not as Bunker's way of earning money. Through these kinds of actions Bunker builds its audience by gathering people who otherwise would never come to see any performances, and they are beginning to feel part of Bunker. This also resulted in expansion of collaborations with new partners.

Despite all its efforts, Bunker's activities are not widely recognized by a general public. The ideas advocated by Bunker are still peripheral to the mainstream political decision-making processes and, as such are not integrated in the national or local policy structures and provisions. Bunker's staff does not identify any direct economic impact of organisation's AD strategies and programmes. Although European, national and local cultural policies encourage all cultural organizations to provide quantifiable indicators for AD, Bunker has devised its own way of processing audience data which is based more on a qualitative approach and related to the fact that developing audience is embedded in the core of organisation's ethos. Due to serious financial cuts suffered last year, a subsequent decrease in the number of people and the fact that the contract for the venue expires at the end of 2016, Bunker does not have a plan for further AD building. Currently, it is more focused on maintaining existing production.

Digital tools are one of Bunker's weakest points. Most Bunker's staff are in their 40s; their experience with digital tools differs from younger generations, although the organization regularly uses Facebook and Twitter but mainly as information platforms. Although Bunker does not believe digital tools can change its core business, the staff plans to devote more attention to further development of digital strategies.

### ***How do they do it? Making it happen***

Reflecting the need to find useful methods in approaching complexity that defines today's conditions in arts and culture, Bunker explores new strategies for AD and shifts towards the audience-centric organization. It is recognized as an organization that tries to involve artists and audiences in complex reflexive and critical dialogue. Working directly with different people and opening up various topics are extremely important for Bunker because in Slovenia, as Koprivšek stressed, "the media space for contemporary culture does not exist any more".

Bunker's approach to AD is not project based, but more process oriented and holistic. This organic model means that AD is integrated to the overall work of organization. As Bunker's organizational structure is horizontal, employees share responsibilities and each of them is in charge of content and budget of a certain project, Bunker's structure does not develop top-down approach to AD. Over the time, Bunker has changed the mode of work and starts to operate more trans-disciplinary (collaborates with urban planners, sociologists, educators, etc.), and participates in many different networks at the local, national or international level. When Bunker works in specific area, then it cooperates with experts, academics and researchers of particular field. To get more information on its audience, the organization conducts researches in the neighbourhood. Based on these data Bunker started few new projects. Bunker invested a lot of effort in organizing series of events to connect with local community and the most important result is the establishment of informal network of arts quarter Tabor that represents Bunker's neighbourhood and subsequently the space in which Bunker inscribes its work in order to improve the quality of life in this local district.

Cultural education in Slovenia does not offer sufficient programs in cultural production and many professionals are auto-didactic. Although Bunker recognizes that gaining diverse knowledge of operational work is crucial for its further development, it has not

developed any strategy for staff training in AD. Instead, the organization develops its capacity in more implicit manner, based on practices of sharing knowledge between peers. An important channel for gaining knowledge for the organization is mobility and exchanges at conferences, forums, gatherings, festivals, etc. Bunker is aware of the necessity of education of audience, which can help increase numbers of visitors and deepen the relationship with audience so, the organisation creates educational programs for the public and provides space for debates on different cultural issues. The reasons for implementation of educational programs lie also in a lack of audience in contemporary arts and out-dated and insufficiently developed school and higher education curricula in culture in Slovenia.

Through collaborations Bunker was introduced to new ways of work (audience participation in discussion with artists after the performance, real audience participation in performances, etc.) that organization implements in different participatory projects. Based on the experience of production of some of its most successful projects, such as "Cargo Sofija Ljubljana", Bunker has changed the mode of operation, type of production and curatorial decision. It started to look for projects that would be produced locally by using the artistic ideas that could be adopted to the local concept and with local people. Bunker's participatory projects reflect interest of artists and producers.

**Interview:** Nevenka Koprivšek - Artistic Director; Alma Redžić Selimović - Development Manager

**Interviewer:** Dea Vidovic, Kultura nova Foundation (Croatia)