

Our aim in this text is twofold: first, to offer a preliminary overview of cooperative activities between Slovenian and Macedonian ballet and dance artists, national institutions and non-governmental organisations in the last 25 years, that is, in the period of independence of both states, with a short excursus into the time preceding that period; and second, to offer a kind of a *prima vista* analysis of the main achievements as well as obstacles in those collaborative practices. In the period of its existence the Yugoslav Federation provided not only material support to professional theatre institutions, but also stimulated cultural collaboration among federal republics. Especially non-verbal forms of artistic expression, such as ballet and dance, were adequate communicators in a multinational and multilingual state as was the Socialist Yugoslavia. The official cultural policies of the newly established states declaratively (i.e. in ratified bilateral agreements) advocated the preservation of cultural connections that existed from the era of the former Yugoslavia. However, the level of intercultural exchange presupposed in these bilateral agreements is rather modest and unambitious, especially in the field of dance. The processes of dissolution of the former Yugoslavia and the establishing of the independent states of Macedonia and Slovenia produced significant changes in the field of dance and opera theatre. The main characteristics of these changes were, on the one hand, a rapid diminishing of the collaboration between national ballet and opera institutions, and on the other hand, a gradual increasing of cooperation between non-governmental organisations active in the creation, promotion and exchange of contemporary dance productions.

Keywords: ballet, dance, Slovenia, Macedonia, collaborative practices, dance festivals

From Yugoslav Ballet to Post-Yugoslav Contemporary Dance:

Permutations in Collaborative Practices between Macedonian and Slovenian Dance Scenes

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The corpus of historiographical and theoretical studies of Macedonian and Slovenian ballet and dance has been significantly growing in the last few decades, but we are still lacking a synthetic study on the mutual collaboration of Macedonian and Slovenian artists and the interstate exchange of guest performances. Our aim in this text is thus twofold: first, to offer a first (and rather preliminary) overview of these cooperative activities in the last 25 years, that is, in the period of independency of both states, with a short excursus into the time preceding that period; and second, to offer a kind of a *prima vista* analysis of the main achievements as well as obstacles in the collaborative practices between Slovenian and Macedonian ballet and dance artists, national institutions and non-governmental organisations. In addition, we will offer some basic insights into the bilateral collaborative practices in the field of opera, rather as a supplement (or a corollary) to our focus on ballet and dance.

At the very beginning of the research process, we were eager to see whether the analysis of the hard data we collected within our research project could detect some broader aspects of the social context. In other words, we were concerned with the question: is it possible through dance – as an art that deals with the aesthetic side of shaping the body as the basic medium of expression – to detect and decode a wider context with all its features on the social, political and cultural level? Can we identify a certain *modus operandi* of the social and political tendencies in these collaborative practices, especially on the level of both national and bilateral cultural policies? To put it shortly, how are these two spheres (dance and politics) connected and possibly even interdependent?

One of the first dance artists trying to answer this question was American dancer and choreographer Martha Graham. In her text “A Modern Dancer’s Primer for Action” she wrote “art does not create changes, it only records them” (166). In other words, any

attempt to proclaim art as a tool for social change would be unrealistic and would impose a heavy burden on artistic practices; on the other hand, *recording* changes through dance, including collaboration practices related to it, might offer a useful source for exploring specific relations between dance practices and social, political and economic circumstances of its production in respective historical contexts. Not only Graham was interested in defining the relationship between society and art production. In his essay entitled “Theatre Sociology”, Italian theatre theoretician and historiographer Marco De Marinis comments on the impact of society on artistic production and, more specifically, on performing arts practices: “Presentation and performance both derive from the current cultural norms of the time they exist in, they change influenced by them, ultimately functioning as a ‘secondary modeling system’, expressed by the words of the Russian Formalist Lotman” (63). Slovenian sociologist and cultural theorist Rastko Močnik has developed a productive theory of a specific relation between art and society also inspired by Russian Formalists (although not by Yuri Lotman but by Pavel Medvedev). In his seminal essay “Eastwest”, Močnik explains that art practice does not relay directly to social reality but takes the already ideologically “refracted” reality as its material and “works upon” it: “In this sense, artistic practices perform a sort of *secondary elaboration* upon ideologically ‘refracted’ material” (21). Andrew Hewitt takes a different position in his book *Social Choreography: Ideology as Performance in Dance and Everyday Movement* proclaiming that choreography is not only a secondary representation but also a primary performance of the modern organisation of society: “I wish to demonstrate how choreography has served not only as a secondary *metaphor* for modernity but also as a structuring *blueprint* for thinking and effecting modern social organization: it is not only a secondary representation but also a primary performance of that order” (14). These are only several inspiring theses on the subtle relation between art (or, more specifically, dance) practices and the social reality. We could mention many others. However, since this text is based mainly on empirical research, we will continue with presenting the data collected within our project and analysing it in the context of collaboration between Macedonian and Slovenian dancers and the exchange of their performances.

Ballet as a catalyst of cultural exchange in the former Yugoslavia

In the last century, Macedonia and Slovenia were part of the same state for just over 70 years. In the period between WWI and WWII, that state was the Kingdom of Yugoslavia; in the period after the liberation until 1991, it was the Socialist Federative

Republic of Yugoslavia. Due to this long common history in the 20th century, it is not surprising that cultural collaborations and exchanges between Slovenia and Macedonia in the last 25 years are based on the continuity of cultural connections from previous decades. Having in mind these facts, it is useful to compare the level of cultural interactions in the Yugoslav period with that in the period after these two countries gained independency. The connections and relations in the federal state from 1945 till the last days of Yugoslavia were mainly designed and promoted by the governing bodies. In her essay “Cultural Policy and the Political Nature of Culture”, Carole Rosenstein writes about cultural policy and its connection with politics and the centres of power:

Policies impact the distribution of cultural resources: policies project and promote certain cultural values and narratives as being shared and public; they shape the ways in which people gain access to places where legitimate and valorized expressions of this shared public culture are created; and they can provide opportunities for people to develop their capabilities to critique and restate such shared and public values in terms that resonate with their own experiences. (24)

Although Rosenstein analyses contemporary democratic society, yet during the period of socialism, the way that cultural policies could be modelled in accordance with a particular ideology was even more visible. The best reflection of this tendency can be found in the slogan “brotherhood and unity” promoted by president Josip Broz Tito as one of the fundamental values of the federation. A grid of institutional collaboration, the exchange of guest performances on festivals and other manifestations, etc., supported the idea of increasing cultural ties with an emphasis on the presentation of the nation’s own culture, but at the same time, accepting the culture of others (including their ethnic and national diversity) in order to strengthen the unity, cooperation and integration into a great multicultural image of the Yugoslav socialist society. Regular cultural exchange among the republics of the former Yugoslavia was an integral part of the official cultural policy on the level of the federation as well as of the respective republics:

The Cultural Community of Slovenia encouraged cultural co-operation with other Yugoslav nations. The republics put forward a list of cultural projects of shared importance (approx. twenty projects every year) for which the republics agreed to cover the entire costs of the participation of their own groups (for example, the opera and ballet biennial, drama meetings, meetings of poets and writers). Some of these events were highly respected by cultural workers. (*Cultural Policy in Slovenia* 229)

Regarding institutional cultural ties between Macedonia and Slovenia in the period of the former Yugoslavia, the three most significant manifestations connected with opera and ballet are of our crucial interest: the Ballet Biennale and the Meeting of Yugoslav Ballet Dancers located in Ljubljana and the festival May Opera Evenings located in Skopje.

The first Ballet Biennale took place in Ljubljana from 30 June to 10 July 1960 in the frame of the 7th Ljubljana Festival. At that time, it was called the Revue of the Yugoslav Ballet (*Revija jugoslovanskega baleta*). Due to bad weather conditions, all the performances were performed on the stage of the Slovenian National Theatre Opera and Ballet Ljubljana¹ (instead of the open-air stage Križanke, the usual location of Ljubljana Festival events). Along with ballet performances from five Yugoslav institutions (Ljubljana, Belgrade, Sarajevo, Zagreb and Skopje), two accompanying programmes were presented: a congress of Yugoslav ballet artists (1–2 July) and an exhibition of Yugoslav ballet (1–12 July, in Moderna galerija).² The ballet ensemble of the Macedonian National Theatre from Skopje took third prize and its member, Natka Penušlika, won the prize as the best classical solo dancer.³ It was the first and the last time at the Ballet Biennale that Yugoslav ballet institutions and artists competed for prizes in different categories; already at the second Ballet Biennale this practice was abandoned. This manifestation was continuously organised (with short interruptions in the late 1960s and the early 1980s) until 1989, when it took place for the last time. In addition to 1960, the ballet ensemble of the Macedonian National Theatre was represented at the festival editions in 1962, 1972, 1974, 1981 ... In the 1970s, the Ballet Biennale experimented with a new practice – along with guest performances from Yugoslav ballet institutions, several editions of the festival presented special joint productions (ballet concerts) with ballet dancers from these institutions, including some participants from Skopje.

The positive experiences of concert ballet performances with dancers from all around Yugoslavia gave rise to establishing a new ballet manifestation in Ljubljana called the Meeting of Yugoslav Ballet Dancers (*Srečanje jugoslovanskih baletnih umetnikov*). The first meeting took place in 1978 and was organised annually until 1989 (twelve editions in total). The first six manifestations were organised by Slovenian ballet dancer Lidija Sotlar⁴ and her group, while from 1984 on, several other organisers took care of it (Iko Otrin 1984, Vlasto Dedović 1985–87 and Ivo Kosi 1988–89). Macedonian ballet dancers were regularly invited to this manifestation, among them Marin Crvenov, Aleksandar Hadžimanov, Ana Husein, Zoica Purovska, Jagoda Slaneva, Snežana Spasovska (also as choreographer), Zoran Veleviski ...⁵ Every edition of the Meeting was an important cultural event in Ljubljana. The manifestation was important as a kind of “showcase” of many

1 At that time the official name of the theatre was Opera of the Slovenian National Theatre in Ljubljana. See also footnote 14.

2 Artefacts selected for the exhibition came from ten Yugoslav ballet institutions and were documented in an exhibition catalogue. However, it was not the first publication of its kind – a monograph on Yugoslav ballet intended for international readership (the language of the edition was English) was published in Belgrade in 1958.

3 For a more detailed report on this event, see “Prva nagradna revija” and Neubauer 64–65. The first four editions of the Ballet Biennale are extensively described and visually illustrated in the recently published book *Ko se zgodi ples. Zapisi, dokumenti, spomini* (Kraigher 130–167).

4 Lidija Sotlar was a renowned Slovenian ballet dancer and choreographer. She was the selector of the last Ballet Biennale in Ljubljana (1989) and a member of the jury (as well as a member of the Advisory Board in the last years of its existence) of the Yugoslav Ballet Competition (*Jugoslovensko baletsko takmičenje*) in Novi Sad, another festival of Yugoslav ballet established in 1982 by ballet critic Branka Rakić and devoted to young dancers from Yugoslav ballet schools and theatres. The festival was organised for the last time in 1991.

5 For a more detailed list of dancers and choreographers, see Sotlar 154.

leading ballet dancers from all Yugoslav ballet ensembles and at the same time it was a meeting point for them, that is, it offered them a possibility to meet at least once a year to collaborate on a joint project and to keep vivid old (or to establish new) professional ties.

May Opera Evenings (*Majski operски večeri*) is a manifestation established in 1972 as an opera festival. In the early period, soloists, conductors and ensembles from Yugoslavia and neighbouring Balkan countries were invited. Later on, the programming concept of the manifestation changed; the programme originally based on Yugoslavian and Balkan collaborations was enriched with artists coming from Europe, America, Asia and Australia. Apart from operas, the programme included concerts and ballet performances. Performances were held in general in the Macedonian National Theatre, but in the first decade there were three concerts in the Hall of the Macedonian Philharmonic Orchestra and three concerts in the Church "Saint Sophia" in Ohrid.⁶ "At the very beginning, every opera house from the former Yugoslavia's opera centres had an evening with complete soloists casts and a conductor. The opera houses from Belgrade, Zagreb, Ljubljana, Sarajevo and Novi Sad were presented continuously" (Кочишки 26).⁷ The data from the programmes at the May Opera Evenings show that this trend was carried out consistently in the first decade of the festival. As part of the manifestation May Opera Evenings from 1973 to 1983, the competitions "Meetings of young opera talents – Tome Grncharovski" were held, in which young Slovenian opera singers were constantly present from the very beginning until 1981. In 1984, the principle of representation of opera houses with complete teams was abandoned and a new festival tendency was creation of performances featuring soloists from different theatres. Slovenian singers and conductors were frequent guests at the May Opera Evenings, but their number significantly decreased after 1984, because of the transition to a different model/concept of organisation. Despite this negative trend, Slovenian artists were still present. On the other hand, it is difficult to understand why there was not a single guest appearance of Slovenian ballet on the May Opera Evenings in the previous 45 years. Unlike the constant presence of Macedonian ballet artists at the Ballet Biennale and the Meeting of Yugoslavian Ballet Dancers in Ljubljana, the Macedonian audience in Skopje has not been able to follow the performances of the Slovenian national ballet. This deficit on the side of the Slovenian ballet (non)appearance in Macedonia could not be sufficiently explained on the level of the proclaimed cultural policy of the former Yugoslavia, thus there must be other reasons for it.⁸

⁶ For a detailed analysis and data of the festival, see Кочишки.

⁷ The entire cast of soloists with the conductor from the Slovenian National Theatre Ljubljana performed on May Opera Evenings is as follows: *Aida* (1972), *Carmen* (1973), *The Barber of Seville* (1974), *Madame Butterfly* (1975), *La Bohème* (1976), *Il trovatore* (1977), *Carmen* (1978), *Rigoletto* (1980), *La Bohème* (1981).

⁸ As the main focus of our research was the period 1990–2015, we limited the analysis of ballet and dance exchange practices between Macedonia and Slovenia in the time of Socialist Yugoslavia to festivals, leaving aside other forms of collaboration from that period, such as respective exchanges of individual artists or performances. Needless to say, individual guest performances (starting with Taglioni's and Lindpaintner's *Danina* choreographed by Pia and Pino Mlakar and performed in Skopje in 1951) and guest choreographers (such as Pino Mlakar's choreography of *Devil in the Village* in 1955 or Maks Kirbos's choreography of Stevan Hristić's *The Legend of Ohrid* in 1956, both in the Macedonian National Theatre in Skopje, to mention just a few early examples) would require a separate analysis with a different research focus.

Institutional and interstate exchange after 1991

The previous tendency of relatively frequent cultural exchanges between Macedonia and Slovenia also continued in the Yugoslav federation's last year of existence, in the period when the disintegration process was gradually intensifying. In 1990, four Slovenian singers were guests of May Opera Nights (Neven Belamarić in *Nabucco*, Ciril Cvetko and Ferdinand Radovan in *Rigoletto* and Zlatimira Nikolova in *Aida*). This number from the 1990 season is larger than the number of guest appearances in the field of ballet and opera performances in the research period of 25 years. In addition, Jasna Knez created choreography for the theatre performance *Cardboard Box* that premièred in January 1991 in the Turkish Theatre in Skopje. Reciprocally, from the Macedonian side, Jagoda Slaneva worked in the Slovenian National Theatre in Ljubljana as part of an inter-institutional state cooperation. She choreographed Euripides' *The Bacchae* with the ballet ensemble in the 1989/90 season. Singer Boris Trajanov sang in the Slovenian National Theatre Opera and Ballet Ljubljana in Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* in 1990 and in Mozart's *Così fan tutte* in 1991.⁹

The official cultural policies of the newly-established states declaratively advocated the preservation of cultural connections that existed (in a very active and well-developed form) from the era of the former Yugoslavia. This approach could be traced in ratified agreements between Slovenia and Macedonia in the field of culture. The "Agreement on Cooperation in Education, Culture and Science between the Government of the Republic of Macedonia and the Government of the Republic of Slovenia," which established the basis for further cooperation at the level of national governments, was signed on 8 July 1993.¹⁰ This agreement provided an appropriate legal background for further normative acts (called "Programmes") that regulated concrete ways and forms of collaboration in culture. So far, four such "Programmes" were signed between Macedonia and Slovenia.¹¹ In the first two "Programmes" the field of theatre was elaborated more precisely, including the list of manifestations and

9 From the methodological point of view of the research project of which this article is a part, we make a difference between so called "guest artists" and "resident artists" (see the introduction by Ana Stojanoska and Aldo Milohnič for a more detailed elaboration). It is the reason that among the names of "guest artists" mentioned above there are no names of the artists born in Macedonia but settled in Slovenia for a fairly long time (for instance, ballet dancers Redjep Ramadani and Slavčo Stoleski who have been permanently employed as ballet dancers in Slovenian national theatres in Ljubljana and Maribor since 1990).

10 This and other interstate documents regulating bilateral cultural cooperation between Macedonia and Slovenia were kindly provided by Maja Žužek and Tadeja Marinič from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia and a representative of the Sector for International Cooperation and Cooperation with UNESCO in the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Macedonia.

11 Cultural cooperation programme between the Government of the Republic of Slovenia and the Government of the Republic of Macedonia for the period 1995 to 1997 (signed on 30 March 1995); Cultural cooperation programme between the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Slovenia and the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Macedonia for the years 1998, 1999 and 2000 (signed on 10 June 1998); Cultural cooperation programme between the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Slovenia and the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Macedonia in the years 2004, 2005 and 2006 (signed on 24 March 2004); Programme of cooperation in the field of culture and art between the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Macedonia and the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Slovenia for the years 2010 to 2013 (signed on 24 September 2010; valid until the conclusion of the new Programme).

festivals which were recognised as major agents of the interstate cultural collaboration at that time – in Slovenia: Festival Ljubljana and the International Youth Singers Festival in Celje; in Macedonia: Ohrid Summer Festival, Interfest Bitola, May Opera Evenings, Youth Open Theatre and International Jazz Festival (the last three in Skopje).¹² In the period covered by the first “Programme” (1995–97), opera theatres in Ljubljana and Skopje were expected to exchange three singers (soloists) and one conductor. Drama theatre exchange would be represented by one guest performance “of smaller theatre groups and individuals”. The “Programme” stipulated some other, albeit more general provisions, such as governmental support for “the exchange of theatre directors, scenographers, costume designers, actors, etc.” and “staging plays by Macedonian playwrights in Slovenia and plays by Slovenian playwrights in Macedonia”. Our general impression is that the level of intercultural exchange presupposed in these bilateral agreements is rather modest and unambitious, especially in the field of dance where the exchange of folkloristic dance groups is explicitly stipulated (“one or two guest performances by folklore ensembles in larger Slovenian and Macedonian cities”) while exchanges of ballet and contemporary dance performances are not mentioned at all. Furthermore, it seems that Slovenian and Macedonian governments lost interest in more detailed arrangements of cultural exchange towards the end of the 1990s; it is quite obvious when we compare the first two “Programmes” signed in the 1990s and those signed in 2004 and 2010 – the last two “Programmes” are far less elaborated, written in a more general diction, especially in articles regulating bilateral exchanges of theatre artists and performances. Even more, in the last “Programme” there is an explicit statement that it is “valid until the conclusion of the new Programme”. And eight years later, nobody knows when (if ever) the next bilateral “Programme” will be signed ...

Nevertheless, in the first years of independence, Macedonian opera art was fairly present in Slovenia. For instance, singer Boris Trajanov performed in *Don Carlos* in 1993; Cvetan Stojanovski was invited to the Slovene National Theatre Maribor in 1995 where he performed in Donizetti’s *Lucia di Lammermoor* and Verdi’s *Troubadour*; three ballet dancers – Goran and Aleksandar Božinov in the season 1995/96 and Ivana Kocevská in the season 2004/05 – danced in annual programmes of the national theatres in Ljubljana and Maribor. Although a first impression might be that established relations had continued, the situation changed drastically. As emphasised in Singh’s theory of international cultural policies, “the constructivist ideas of regulative (quotidian) versus constitutive social norms and facts are also relevant [...] in demarcating the lines between what ‘is’ and ‘how’ it came into being” (6). Respective national strategies which were based on bilateral collaboration between state organisations like national theatres or festivals, put on paper these

¹² This presupposed framework for exchange of artists and theatre institutions was supplemented in second “Programme” by several new manifestations (Sintezis in Skopje; Festival Lent in Maribor and Summer Theatre Festival in Koper).

established relations from the previous political system, but this projection did not function that well in practice. In fact, all the mentioned artists and their artistic appearances in Slovenian theatres were part of other kinds of initiatives (open auditions, personal invitations, etc.) rather than part of the existing programmes of the interstate cultural collaboration between Macedonia and Slovenia. Despite these bilateral state agreements and programmes, the national opera and ballet institutions – Macedonian Opera and Ballet,¹³ Slovenian National Theatre Opera and Ballet Ljubljana¹⁴ and Opera and Ballet of the Slovene National Theatre Maribor¹⁵ – as well as the festivals with a long tradition (of which we wrote about earlier in this text) did not show enough interest in continuing the cooperation. The data for the period 1990–2015 shows a rather disappointing image of the continuation of collaboration between the national opera and ballet theatres after these two former Yugoslav republics gained independence. As a result of the connections at a higher official institutional level, only three Slovenian artists were guests of the National Opera and Ballet in Macedonia in the last 25 years: Maksimilijan Ćenšić conducted *Nabucco* in 2009, Simon Krcić was assistant conductor on *Simon Boccanegra* in 2014, and Mojca Majcen was assistant choreographer on *Red room* in 2016. The Slovene National Theatre Maribor presented the ballet performance *Romeo and Juliet* on the Ohrid Summer Festival (Festival Ohridsko leto) in 2006, the only guest ballet performance from Slovenia presented on this festival so far. Another Macedonian festival that presented at least one guest ballet performance from Slovenia¹⁶ was the *Dance Fest* in Skopje, presenting *Yin & Yang*, a ballet performance of the Slovenian National Theatre Opera and Ballet Ljubljana in 2008. This is the only ballet performance which the Macedonian audience could see from the Slovenian national theatre in the more recent history of the Macedonian National Theatre; the result of the activities of an independent non-governmental organisation led by Risima Risimkin. On the other hand, only one Macedonian choreographer, Risima Risimkin, worked in the Slovenian national ballet institutions in that period; she staged her author's project *Samorog* in Ljubljana in 2010. But this collaboration was also the result of various personal connections rather than official interstate agreements and proclaimed programs of cultural cooperation.

13 The structure of the Macedonian National Theatre (previously consisted of drama, opera and ballet ensembles) established in 1945 was changed in 2004, when MNT continued only as a drama ensemble and was dislocated into a new building. The opera and ballet ensembles became a new organisation named the Macedonian Opera and Ballet.

14 The Slovenian National Theatre Opera and Ballet Ljubljana is the official name of this national institution since 1992. Until 1968, it was called the Opera of the Slovenian National Theatre Ljubljana and from 1968 till 1992, the official name was the Opera and Ballet of the Slovenian National Theatre Ljubljana.

15 At the beginning, the ballet ensemble of the national theatre in Maribor was not represented in the official name of the theatre. However, only a few years after the renaming of the national theatre in Ljubljana, the name of the national theatre in Maribor has been also changed to the Opera and Ballet of the Slovene National Theatre Maribor.

16 Otherwise the *Dance Fest* has managed to establish cooperation with many regional and European national ballet companies which became part of the festival programme in the last ten years: National Theatre Belgrade, Serbia (2005); State Ballet Ankara, Turkey (2005); Hungarian National Ballet Pecs, Hungary (2006); State Ballet from Hildesheim, Germany (2006); National Ballet Lisbon, Portugal (2007); National Ballet Theatre Istanbul, Turkey (2008, 2011); National Theatre Prishtina, Kosovo (2008, 2010, 2014); Netherlands Dance Theatre (2011); National Ballet Theatre, Antalya, Turkey (2013); State Opera and Ballet from Izmir, Turkey (2016).

Contemporary dance as a new common denominator of collaboration

The processes of democratisation, followed by the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia and the process of gradual integration into the European Union have created quite different social conditions. The centralised system of maintaining the cooperation among Yugoslav federal republics was replaced by a new approach of cultural institutions to initiate, realise, achieve and maintain cooperation on their own and to increase and develop intercultural relations based on the European principle of the development of cultural values. Unlike the bulky organisation of the national institutions, which did not respond to the new needs in terms of cooperation, exchange and networking, the new non-governmental organisations that have intensified domestic and international cooperation in this period have established themselves as a parallel system of the cultural offer. Within this group, our special interest is devoted to the most propulsive independent (non-governmental) centres that have involved dance in their programmes, dominantly or segmentally, at different levels – production, education, festival programmes, etc.

In 2006, Tanzquartier in Vienna hosted several theatre artists and researchers from the former Yugoslavia who came to the residency with an ambition to create a kind of manifesto for a laboratory they provisionally called “East – Dance – Academy”. A text with the same title, which was later published in several theatre journals and anthologies, is important for the second vector of research we are developing in this paper – contemporary dance and its material as well as organisational preconditions. Although we focus here on relations between Macedonian and Slovenian ballet and dance artists and institutions, “East – Dance – Academy” might be the right place to start.

The authors of the manifesto remind us that there are hidden histories of the Eastern European art (including dance). On the other hand, performing arts production in Eastern European countries in the last few decades of the 20th century “incorporated not only material elements of dance but – and that is even more important – a mental operation of ‘thinking-through-dance’, which was not merely aesthetic, but also had important political implications” (Janša et al. 20). The main thesis of the manifesto is that in the political circumstances of the “Real Socialism” (Eastern/Soviet Block) as well as the “Self-governing Socialism” (Yugoslavia) dance could not find its own institutional status and was instead “piercing through” other performative media, such as visual arts, performance art, experimental music and theatre, etc. In other words, “in the Eastern context, dance and performance arts were produced in rather poor material conditions, in a spontaneous manner, and even on the edge of political or/and cultural incident” (Ibid. 22).

In Slovenia, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the neo avant-garde groups OHO and the Pupilija Ferkeverk Theatre put on the agenda the issue of corporeality in theatre and performance. This concept was partly maintained in the early 1970s by the experimental theatres Glej, Pekarna and Nomenklatura, while in the late 1970s and early 1980s it was revived in performances stimulated by the opening of the ŠKUC Gallery in Ljubljana (1978). Corporeality was only constituted in a developed and thus conceptualised form in the 1980s, when it was accepted and treated as such by theatre critics but also thanks to the emerging contemporary dance scene. A turning-point in the history of Slovenian contemporary dance was the year 1984, when a renowned Slovenian dancer and choreographer Ksenija Hribar founded Dance Theatre Ljubljana (Plesni Teater Ljubljana – PTL) as the first professional contemporary dance company in Slovenia. PTL was an integral part of the alternative cultural scene in Ljubljana¹⁷ and at the same time an important incubator of dancers and choreographers (Tanja Zgonc, Sabina Potočki, Andreja Obreza, Sinja Ožbolt, Mateja Rebolj, Sanja Nešković, Mare Mlačnik, Branko Završan, among others); many of them are today leaders of propulsive dance groups and/or cultural non-governmental organisations (Iztok Kovač – EN-KNAP, Matjaž Farič – Flota, Branko Potočan – Fourklor, Mateja Bučar – DUM, etc.).¹⁸ At the end of the 1990s, PTL opened the first permanent theatre venue for contemporary dance in Ljubljana (probably also in Slovenia) which became a place for production as well as rehearsal and dance education.

In the 1990s, the Slovenian contemporary dance scene was strongly influenced by a “new wave” of Flemish choreographers such as Jan Fabre, Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, Jan Lauwers, Wim Vandekeybus ... A confirmation of that trend in Slovenia was the theatre festival called “Belgian Explosion” which took place in Ljubljana in 1990. A year after, PTL launched the Video-Dance Festival; the Slovenian producer Miran Šušteršič and two guests from Belgium – Cis Bierinckx and Koen Van Daele – curated the festival. At that time, several Slovenian-trained dancers, mostly from the circle of PTL, went to Belgium and then, as returnees, brought back to Slovenia new knowledge, contacts and experience. An important achievement was also the establishment of the Contemporary Dance Association Slovenia in 1994 (the Association of Ballet Artists of Slovenia was founded already in 1962). According to data collected by Rok Vevar, in the second half of the 1990s, the quantity of the contemporary dance production in Slovenia grew by over 50% (Vear, “The Story” 91).

There is evident continuity in the development of contemporary dance in Slovenia from the 1980s until today and precisely that continuity is probably the biggest achievement of the non-governmental organisations in that field of art production

¹⁷ The contextualisation of PTL within the alternative culture in Ljubljana is elaborated in Vevar and Založnik, “Metamorphic Punk”.

¹⁸ At the beginning, Ksenija Hribar collaborated also with choreographer and founder of the Plesno gledališče Celje (1976) Damir Zlatar Frey, but he stayed with PTL only two years before he founded a small theatre house called Koreodrama.

and education. However, dancers and choreographers in Slovenia are still working in precarious conditions. In such circumstances, the freedom of the dance profession cannot be more than an illusionary substitute for poor working conditions and the struggle to survive. More intensive international collaboration in such an unstable situation is hardly possible and it is quite understandable that Slovenian dance artists and their organisations cannot develop as close collaboration with their potential partners from Macedonia as we may expect.

In Macedonia, the second half of the first decade of the new millennium brought new ways of collaboration and opened new perspectives, especially in the field of dance art. Two non-governmental organisations were important for continuity in the dance collaboration between Slovenia and Macedonia: Interart and Lokomotiva. Interart (1996) and Macedonian Dance Centre – MDC (2002) were founded by Risima Risimkin as non-governmental organisations aiming to promote modern and contemporary dance through art productions. She also established the festival *Tanc Fest* in 2005.¹⁹ Biljana Tanurovska-Kjulavkovski and Iskra Shukarova, among others, founded Lokomotiva, the centre for new initiatives in art and culture, which commenced its operation in 2003. This centre works to accomplish a dance-related programme; it is focused primarily on further education and on creating conditions for realisation of co-productions of foreign artists and domestic choreographers as well as on exchange of performances. Lokomotiva was also the organiser of the *LocoMotion* festival from 2008 to 2015.²⁰ In its programme framework, it adopted the criteria for staging only performances from contemporary dance production, which gives uniqueness to the festival. Interart and Lokomotiva represent a new form of organisation characterised by the quick and active establishment of connections and relations leading to cultural and artistic fluctuation and distribution. Their mobility reflects the wish to be part of the global processes, to accept the norms of European cultural action and to promote issues that sometimes are not included in the official national cultural policy. These new cooperative practices are developing vivid regional networking processes where production and educational experiences are intensively exchanged, shared and joined. Their way of networking is characterised by the exchange of productions, experiences and contacts established through numerous festivals, platforms, collaborations and joint projects. In her article “A Historical Construction of the Development of Contemporary Dance Scene in Macedonia”, Biljana Tanurovska-Kjulavkovski tries to define the new way, idea and functioning of this structure:

¹⁹ The most recent collaboration between Slovenian and Macedonian dance scenes was the dance project *Orlandina* choreographed by Risima Risimkin and performed by Slovenian dancer Rosana Hribar. This coproduction of PTL (Ljubljana) and Interart (Skopje) premièred in PTL in March 2018 and the following month it opened *Tanc Fest* in Skopje.

²⁰ Since 2015, a new project space for contemporary performing arts and culture called Kino Kultura was established by Lokomotiva. Contemporary dance projects are regularly included in its program, such as Platform(a) for Contemporary Performing Arts etc. In the frame of Kino Kultura several Slovenian performers and performing arts theoreticians were presented to Macedonian audience in the last few years. More about it on www.lokomotiva.org.mk and www.kinokultura.org.mk.

The new perception of the dance or the introduction of new dance practices as well as the expansion of the field of choreography did not happen only in the institutions but began to live in a whole new segment, that is, in the civil sector. As a need to introduce innovations and to stimulate new dance expression, in the first decade of the 21 century as part of the civil sector or the independent cultural scene, there appeared initiatives and organizations that supported different production processes, logic and philosophy about the dance art and choreography. (Tanurovska-Kjulavkovski and Zdravkova-Djeparoska, online)

As a result of these new artistic organisations that showed a particular degree of independence and their own vision, the once completely interrupted cooperation in the sphere of dance art now continued and intensified. The first official appearance of Macedonian artists organised by Lokomotiva was the presentation of Macedonian contemporary dance on the *Platform of Contemporary Dance* in Celje in 2003. Kire Miladinovski as a choreographer and Kire Georgievski as a dancer presented the performance *Short Cuts 2* in 2009 as part of the programme prepared by Fičo Balet in coproduction with Lokomotiva.²¹ In the programme of *LocoMotion*²² but also of different programmes²³ and festivals,²⁴ Slovenian dancers are constantly present on the Macedonian stage (which was not a regular practice in the previous period). Collaborations in the process of choreographing became a characteristic production model of the contemporary dance scene in both countries. In that sense, one creative duo is of specific interest in the frame of this research, that is, the choreographers Iskra Shukarova from Macedonia and Dejan Srhoj from Slovenia who worked together on the dance project *Formula*. This choreography can be named “work in process”, because the audience can follow the results of this long-term creative process through several presentations. *Formula* was presented at the *Regional Contemporary Dance Event* in Skopje in 2005, and then on the festival *LocoMotion* in Skopje in 2008. The Macedonian-Slovenian choreographic team realised a residency in Kanjiža, Serbia, with the world renowned choreographer Josef Nadj. They performed *Formula* on the *Balkan Dance Platform* in Athens, Greece, in 2007, and on *Dance Festival* in Orleans, France, in 2009. This performance reveals its own vitality, actuality and mutual relations which are not set at the level of the exchange of products (visits), but at the level of the exchange of experiences, creative concepts and a collaborative research process.

21 In 2011, Miladinovski returned to Ljubljana with his choreography *Bug's* performed by Dance Studio Zodijak (Prilep) at the festival Exodos.

22 Slovenian dancers and choreographers are frequent guests at the *LocoMotion* festival: Goran Bogdanovski with *John* in 2008; Dejan Srhoj and Iskra Shukarova with *Formula* in 2008; Bara Kolenc with *Atelier* and Jurij Konjar with *Ulysses* in 2008; EnKnapGroup with *Cut Out / Brake / In Between / Sky* in 2009; Snježana Premuš with *MOVE-AS/Stories of the Body 4* in 2010; Sabrina Železnik with *Movement of Love* in 2015.

23 In the same year (2005) when *Formula* was performed on the *Regional Contemporary Dance Event*, Dejan Srhoj held a few seminars with students of the State Ballet School in Skopje within the organisation of Lokomotiva.

24 For instance, since 1995, a number of Slovenian dance performances as well as theatre performances with prevailing choreographed components were presented at MOT Festival in Skopje, mainly produced by Glej Theatre and directed by Matjaž Pograjc (*Every Word a Gold Coin's Worth*, 1995) and Tomaž Štruel (*Xanax*, 1996; *Hamlets n' Roses*, 1996; *Jezus F.*, 1998) but also produced by Cankarjev dom / Vitkar (Branko Potočan's *Melancholic Thoughts*, 1998) and Mladinsko Theatre (*Nijinsky's Last Dance*, 2011).

The regional network Nomad Dance Academy was established in 2005 by six organisations from Belgrade (Station), Ljubljana (Fičo Balet), Sarajevo (Tanzelarija), Skopje (Lokomotiva), Sofia (Brain Store Project) and Zagreb (Tala Dance Center) as a platform for collaboration, creation, promotion and education in the field of contemporary dance. By establishing the network, the partners responded to real and urgent needs to foster professionalisation of contemporary dance in the region, to develop education and research opportunities for dancers and choreographers, to improve production conditions in the sector, and last but not least, to develop the audience and to promote dance as a socially relevant art practice. The network activities resulted in many collaborative projects, among them several dance festivals, including *LocoMotion* in Skopje and *Pleskavica* in Ljubljana (in 2012 it merged with several other initiatives into *CoFestival*), cultural advocacy projects (such as *Nomad Dance Advocates* aiming to stimulate the development of regional cultural policies in the field of dance as well as to improve the working conditions for dancers and choreographers in the region) and many other regional collaborative projects (one of the most recent examples is the *Balkan Dance Tour*, co-organised by NDA for the partners of the European Dancehouse Network who visited Ljubljana, Zagreb, Belgrade, Skopje and Sofia in 2018).

Another important project with regional characteristics which also involve Macedonian and Slovenian performers and choreographers is the *Balkan Dance Project*.²⁵ Igor Kirov from Macedonia is involved in this project as a choreographer, while Adrijana Danchevska from Macedonia and Mojca Majcen from Slovenia participate as dancers in an international dance team.²⁶ As a part of this joint project, the group performed Kirov's choreography *Stories* in Velenje,²⁷ Sarajevo and Belgrade in 2015. *Balkan Dance Project Vol. 1* had a mini tour in Macedonia (Skopje, Bitola, Veles and Shtip) in the same year. As a part of the joint project *Balkan Dance Project Vol. 2*, Kirov's choreography *The Cube Untold* with Slovenian dancer Mojca Majcen was performed in Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and Croatia. *Balkan Dance Project Vol. 3* involved the same creative team, but unfortunately without appearances in Slovenia and Macedonia.

Collaborative platforms like the *Balkan Dance Project* and the *Nomad Dance Academy* show a new initiative and a new way of establishing connections and fostering collaboration among artists from the region, including bilateral collaboration between Slovenian and Macedonian dancers and choreographers. These activities could not

²⁵ This initiative should not be confused with the *Balkan Dance Platform*, a project initiated by Cosmin Manolescu and Dessy Gavrilova in 2000, co-curated by Exodos (Ljubljana) and Lokomotiva (Skopje), among others (more about it on <https://balkandanceplatform.wordpress.com/balkan-dance-platform-2011>). It is among the collaborative projects that appeared after 2000s in changed cultural and political landscape in the region in order to intensify collaboration between the contemporary dance scenes on the Balkans.

²⁶ Other performers and choreographers involved in the project that are not in the focus of this research are not listed.

²⁷ The beginning of his collaboration with the Velenje Festival as a choreographer was the performance *He, he, helium* in 2013 (dancer Mojca Majcen was involved in this project as well); the same year the performance was invited to Autumn Music Festivities (Esenski muzički svečenosti) in Skopje.

be possible without highly dedicated and professional work of the artists based in Macedonia and Slovenia. Of course, a number of young dancers who were educated abroad have stayed there and continue their work outside their homelands, but the mobility is an integral part of contemporary culture. An obvious example is Igor Kirov, who associates his career as dancer and choreographer with the countries of Western Europe (currently he is head of the Ballet of the Croatian National Theatre in Split), but at the same time he is a representative of Macedonia in the *Balkan Dance Project*.

Lessons learned and prospects for the future

At the beginning of our research, we could only presuppose that politics strongly influences not only the basic social order and everyday life of people, but also the way artistic practices are being performed. Now, when we are approaching the end of our journey through the collaborative practices between the Macedonian and Slovenian dance scenes in the last 25 years (and briefly also in the 45 years of the existence of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia), we can say that we got confirmation for that hypothesis – yes, artistic practices and especially the way that artists and their institutions collaborate, cannot be studied and analysed in isolation from a broader political context. In the period of its existence, the Yugoslav federation provided not only material (financial, infrastructural, etc.) support to professional theatre institutions, but also stimulated cultural collaboration among federal republics. Even more, the very existence of the federation as a political frame lead to many initiatives – not only politically dictated from above but also spontaneously generated from below – of cultural exchange among Yugoslav nations. Especially non-verbal forms of artistic expression, such as ballet and dance, were adequate communicators in a multinational and multilingual state as it was the Socialist Yugoslavia. Besides many other direct and indirect professional ties between Slovenian and Macedonian dancers and choreographers (but also opera singers, composers and conductors), there were also important festivals in Ljubljana (the Ballet Biennale and the Meeting of Yugoslav Ballet Dancers) and Skopje (the May Opera Evenings) where they regularly met, collaborated in joint festival projects and exchanged their performances. The functioning of these manifestations as well as other channels of communication and collaboration was certainly not perfect. There were also different misunderstandings and distortions, but the motivation for collaboration and the federal political context were synergic and stimulating for the development and maintaining collaborative practices of Macedonian and Slovenian dance artists.

After 1991 and the dissolution of Socialist Yugoslavia, Macedonia and Slovenia became independent states and the previous common political frame disappeared. What remained was the memory of almost seventy years of living in the same country (albeit with different political regimes) as well as personal and professional ties

among people. Official connections between cultural institutions, however, were diminished and in some cases, even broken. Both ballet manifestations in Ljubljana ceased to exist, priorities of international collaboration have changed (especially in East–West relations). Macedonian and Slovenian governments signed the agreement regulating interstate cultural cooperation already in 1993, followed by four bilateral programme documents in 1995, 1998, 2004 and 2010, but they were rather modest and unambitious, especially in the field of dance. Not only these bilateral normative acts, but also concrete, hard data collected and analysed within our research project, give us sufficient material evidence for the following conclusion: the processes of dissolution of the former Yugoslavia and establishing of the independent states of Macedonia and Slovenia produced significant changes in the field of dance and opera theatre. The main characteristics of these changes were, on the one hand, a rapid diminishing of collaboration between national ballet and opera institutions, and on the other hand, a gradual increasing of cooperation between non-governmental organisations active in the creation, promotion and exchange of contemporary dance production. The organisations like PTL, EN-KNAP, Flota, Fičo Balet, Fourklor, Emanat, Maska, etc., in Slovenia or Interart and Lokomotiva in Macedonia have opened new perspectives in bilateral cultural collaboration between the newly established states. Even more, they have been willing and able to initiate and develop new platforms of regional collaboration, such as *Nomad Dance Academy* and *Balkan Dance Project*. However, cultural non-governmental organisations in Macedonia and Slovenia are working in poor material conditions; some of them are even struggling for survival. We hope that the national cultural policies of both countries will finally recognise their importance and more generously support their efforts to improve dance production in their local environment as well as to develop their bilateral, regional and international collaboration. Furthermore, we would recommend a more proactive governmental policy in fostering bilateral cultural cooperation on the level of Macedonian and Slovenian national cultural institutions in general and theatre, ballet and opera institutions in particular.

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