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Position Paper of the Access & Transformation WG (AG Zugänge & Transformation) of the German Association of Independent Performing Arts

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* The Access & Transformation WG (AG Zugänge & Transformation), the working group of the Bundesverband Freie Darstellende Künste (BFDK, German Association of Independent Performing Arts), currently includes representatives from the Berlin, Hamburg, Lower Saxony and North Rhine-Westphalia member associations, staff from the office and members of the board of the BFDK, as well as associated members from initiatives and associations in the independent performing arts.

* We speak from different positions and life experiences and engage with each other with respect and on an equal level in order to support the necessary processes of change for fairer working conditions in the independent performing arts.

The work of the Access & Transformation WG is based on the voluntary commitment of the individual members. Thus, despite our wish to implement all the goals set for us, we need to focus on what is possible within the framework of voluntary work. To this end, we aim to cooperate with the branches and members as well as the regional associations of the BFDK and use common resources where possible to ensure continuity and sustainability in our work.

Goals

Our goals:

- * Communicate political attitudes and position ourselves against discrimination.¹
- * Engage in cultural policy lobbying against all forms of discrimination together with the BFDK.
- * Influence funding structures, presenting institutions (e.g., theatres), cultural policy, cultural production, jury compositions and curation policies.

¹ For this, we refer to the scope of discrimination that, as an extension of the federal *Allgemeines Gleichbehandlungsgesetz auf Bundesebene* (AGG, General Equal Treatment Act), is defined in Berlin's *Landesantidiskriminierungsgesetz* (LADG, State Anti-Discrimination Act). From our perspective, the LADG has a broader understanding of discrimination. Accordingly, we speak and act against discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnic origin, race, anti-Semitism, language, religion, world view, disability, chronic illness, age, sexual identity, gender identity as well as social status.

- * Forge alliances outside of the cities, i.e., become active in the field.
- * Draw attention to existing and marginalised knowledge and expertise, transfer knowledge and create visibility (e.g., through databases).
- * Create spaces for empowerment and networking.
- * Provide critical support and impetus and act as mediators.
- * Establish a mindful² way of working internally with each other and use the cooperation between us to lead and advance dialogue.
- * Translate the following attitudes into concrete actions and proposals for action for the different actors in the independent performing arts scene:
 - * A critical examination of Eurocentric perspectives.
 - * Take historical responsibility, especially regarding Germany's colonial history, the Holocaust and the entire Nazi period.³
 - * Develop and establish a multi-perspective and intersectional attitude and way of working.

Initial situation & founding impetus

The performing arts do not exist independently of social structures. In the German context, there is a special historical rootedness and accompanying responsibility that affects all areas of social coexistence. In particular, the crimes of colonialism and National Socialism have had far-reaching consequences that we in the independent performing arts cannot ignore. Unequal and unjust conditions perpetuate themselves and continue to cause structural exclusion and discrimination. These are clearly evident, for example in the underrepresentation of marginalised perspectives, both in artistic positions and in administrative roles or leadership functions. Their effect is subtle, for example, in the design of contracts, in funding criteria, in programming at theatres and festivals, in institutional procedures or in the expectations of permanent action and measurable results.

Current discourse and developments testify to an increasing awareness of these gaps and injustices. However, inclusion, active participation and comprehensive awareness of all actors in the scene are still far from guaranteed - and this must change. For this reason, we advocate for a discrimination-sensitive and diversity-oriented way of working in the independent performing arts, both at the federal and state levels. To this end, our aim is to analyse existing working cultures in a power-critical way and to work towards diversification within our sector.

² We often use the terms "softness" or "care" when describing mindful interaction.

³ See, for example, the approach of "multidirectional memory" by historian Michael Rothberg, in a German interview with Elisabeth von Tadden: *Wir brauchen neue Wege, um über Erinnerung nachzudenken* (We Need New Ways of Thinking About Memory), in *Die Zeit*, 27.03.21, retrieved 28.03.22.

Specifically, we focus on the complex interaction of institutions and the allocation of funding and production structures in order to drive sustainable structural change.

Political positions, goals, impact intentions

* The BFDK's Access & Transformation WG is a power-critical monitoring body and impulse generator and aims to act through solidarity and intersectional feminism in its cooperations. Furthermore, we want to share our own practices with our colleagues in the independent performing arts scene. We want to take responsibility for better access for previously marginalised people in the independent performing arts and actively shape working contexts in which there is no room for discrimination. In doing so, we refer to the scope of discrimination that, as an extension of the federal Allgemeinen Gleichbehandlungsgesetzes (General Equal Treatment Act), is defined in the Landesantidiskriminierungsgesetz (LADG, State Anti-Discrimination Act)⁴ in Berlin. We open up spaces for discourse in which actors in the independent scene can exchange, network and empower themselves in power-critical, discrimination-sensitive and diversity-oriented transformation processes.

* This takes place in the awareness that many different networks, artists, collectives, and activists are already working and have worked on the topics of the working group and that we can draw on critical knowledge from marginalised and underrepresented people. In the working group, we use the structures of the BFDK to combine and communicate transformation processes. Information, ideas, thoughts, and perspectives are compiled on the BFDK website and shared on behalf of the BFDK as the superordinate body, both with the national associations and with all interested stakeholders. Through this, we want to critically support current discourse and make it more visible and more accessible, thereby further advancing and intensifying multi-perspective and discrimination-sensitive practices in the independent performing arts scene. In this context, it is also important for us to exchange with other actors from related fields, such as cultural journalism, in order to anchor discrimination-sensitive language in communication around the arts and artists.

We are aware that “diversity” as a marketable label is thriving, but that it is often treated superficially and used for profit. It has become commonplace to address or invite marginalised people based on their experiences and, in so doing, tokenise them.⁵ The Access & Transformation WG thus wants to look at the deeper layers

⁴ <https://gesetze.berlin.de/bsbe/document/jlr-ADiskrGBEpG1>, (German), retrieved 04.05.22.

⁵ Tokenism or tokenisation describes a practice that instrumentalises marginalised people and uses them as supposed representatives of an imaginary homogenous group in order to express a certain emancipatory attitude. At the same time, the old structures are preserved. See: [Micossé-Aikins, Sharifi: Kulturinstitutionen ohne Grenzen? Annäherung an einen diskriminierungskritischen Kulturbereich](#)

and mechanisms of diversity and question the complex interaction of institutions, allocation of funds and production structures from a power-critical perspective.

Working method

* It is important for us to remain emphatic and simultaneously “soft”⁶ in our criticism and our intention to make an impact. In this context, we leave room for emotions, work slowly, reckon with frustrations, remain open to new formulations and reformulations and are mindful of the possibilities and our capacities. Together, we experience how soft and methodical action makes avoiding discrimination much easier. We act in the knowledge that oppressive (power) structures, such as racism, sexism, rejectionism, classism, etc., lead to exhaustion, especially for those who are marginalised in multiple ways. Thus, within the working group, we maintain an open and methodical approach to critique and learning (or relearning) that does not need to be loud and absolute but caring. Through this attitude of caring, we look out for each other and establish a practice in which different speeds, capacities and social positionings have space, and where more privileged positions are ready to make room.

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Our invitation

In addition to facilitating exchange and networking, we would also like to invite stakeholders of the independent performing arts scene in all their diversity to become involved in their local structures so that we can work together to make the independent performing arts more equal and sensitive to discrimination. We would be particularly pleased if those of us from underrepresented perspectives would like to contribute their energy and experiences - sustainable changes are only possible through the presence of different perspectives and lived realities of life.

Current members of the Access & Transformation WG:

Anngret Schultze, Dachverband freie darstellende Künste Hamburg (Hamburg’s umbrella organisation of independent performing arts)
Ann-Kathrin Allekotte, Postheimat Netzwerk

(Cultural Institutions without Borders? Approaching a Cultural Field Critical of Discrimination), (German), retrieved 27.3.2022.

⁶ Also, to be understood as “mindful” or care-oriented, i.e., looking out for each other

Chang Nai Wen, United Networks

Ciglia Gadola, BFDK Office

Dorothee de Place, Dachverband freie darstellende Künste Hamburg (Hamburg's umbrella organisation of independent performing arts)

Fernanda Ortiz, Dachverband freie darstellende Künste Hamburg (Hamburg's umbrella organisation of independent performing arts)

Helge-Björn Meyer, BFDK Office

Julia*n Meding, Initiative für Solidarität am Theater (Initiative for Solidarity in Theatre)

Melmun Bajarchuu, Initiative für Solidarität am Theater (Initiative for Solidarity in Theatre)

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Mey Seifan, LAFT Berlin, Dachverband Tanz (Berlin's umbrella organisation for dance)

Mutiara Berthold, neue deutsche organisationen (New German Organisations)

Nina de la Chevalerie, BFDK Board

Serfiraz Vural, Dachverband freie darstellende Künste Hamburg (Hamburg's umbrella organisation of independent performing arts)

Ulrike Seybold, NRW Landesbüro Freie Darstellende Künste (NRW's independent performing arts association), BFDK Board

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Yara Schöler Castanheira, BFDK Office

The previous Diversity WG (AG Diversität) of the BFDK initially included members from the state associations. Following the UTOPIA.JETZT 2020 federal congress, members from initiatives and networks dealing with anti-discrimination issues in the performing arts were invited to contribute their expertise to the working group.