

Commentary on the 2017 AMATEO Annual Conference:

“Traditional art forms as a foundation for modern European culture – building communities through active participation in amateur arts”



Pecs, Hungary, 28-30 November 2017

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The conference programme was very ambitious and, therefore, it, of course, gave many various inputs for later thoughts while it did not go into depth with the different subjects many of which could have been the theme of conferences themselves.

Katy Spicer, the Chief Executive and Artistic Director of the English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS), UK, set us out for the journey over the next days with her key note speech on “The challenges of traditional art forms in the 21st century” in which she pointed to the links between traditional art forms and its appearances in nowadays performative arts, including the social inclusion aspect of traditional arts forms, folklore, amateur and voluntary arts in general. This speech was given in the Cella Septichora, the sepulchral building with seven apses, built around 4th century Christian burial sites that are part of the UNESCO world heritage.

The next day continued the subject with special focus on folk and pedagogy/heritage with important contributions from the Flemish ethnomusicologist Anaïs Verhulst, the Hungarian folk researcher Julianna Matókne Kapási and the Slovenian folk researcher Tomaz Simetinger on folk as well as the Urska Bittner-Pipan, project leader from the JSKD, Slovenia, Dr. Tvrtko Zebec of the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research in Croatia and Jozsef Birinyi of the Hungarikum Society of Hungary on pedagogy/heritage.

Now, participants went on to study successful models to address barriers to cultural participation with inputs from represented AMATEO member organisations in Croatia, Denmark, Flanders, Netherlands and Slovenia. One general comment that was concluded from this session was – as it has been stated before – that we need EU-wide and even pan-European comparable statistics on active participation in cultural activities.

The next session presented different projects from member countries, e.g. Backpack in Croatia, a pilot project to bring professional culture to remote areas, cultural guides in different countries, heritage houses in Hungary, student theatres in Slovenia. Another presentation from different member countries was of experiences up till now of the AMATEO concept of the week or the day of amateur arts, and Damien McGlynn, Information Resources Manager of Voluntary Arts UK & RoI, presented the project “Get Creative and Up for Arts” that work together with BBC and other organisations to promote creativity through local networks as well as through a national festival.

The conference ended with a focus on choral singing, being the participative art form with 37 million singers throughout Europe, measuring to 4.5 pct. of the peoples of Europe, a major cultural activity. This was documented Wolfgang Ziegler, former President of the Austrian Choral Federation, Sonja Greiner, Secretary General of the European Choral Association/Europa Cantat (ECA-EC), and representatives of the

Night of Choirs, which started in Budapest, moved to Pecs, and now is going to Tallinn, a weekend festival of choral singing in the streets of a European city.

In connection with the conference, AMATEO celebrated its first 10 years of existence since the founding conference and meeting in Ljubljana in June 2008, planning for the celebration next year in Ljubljana, and giving consent to the Board's last preparation for the final implementation of the Arts Take Part project which has been co-financed by the European Commission with EUR 250,000 during 2017-20.