

Good morning, thank you for inviting me to join you today. My name is Nadja Dias. I am a white middle-aged woman with straight, shoulder-length blondish hair, wearing my reading glasses and a black jumper – I identify as non-disabled.

I have been asked to share my observations and thoughts as an independent producer and consultant who has supported and worked for nearly 20 years now with performance makers and artists, particularly disabled artists, across the UK, specifically in Scotland, and since 2017 from my home country Germany.

My experience draws, amongst others, on my work with Candoco Dance Company from 2005-2015 and since 2014 with Claire Cunningham. For those that don't know Claire –she is a Scottish, self-identifying disabled performance maker whose latest production TYVM features an ensemble of four disabled performers. It was co-produced & commissioned in 2019 by MIF & NTS with Perth Festival, Hong Kong Festival, Dance Umbrella London and tanzhaus NRW in Germany and in its new 2023 iteration with Kunstenfestival with its premiere last night- that some of you might have experienced.

As producer, I consider myself an ally and long- term partner to disabled artists. I aim to bring together all the different parts and partners required to make, tour and present their work.

My focus is on productions that might challenge us and the way we experience the world. These productions may hold up a mirror for us to recognize that we are part of the problem. That we have organized and structured how we live and work in ways that exclude those whose lived experiences differ. We have created barriers to participation and contribution, and it is now up to us to take responsibility as sector and policy makers to reduce barriers and change structures and processes, in order to train, employ, fund, present and co-produce disabled artists.

To address all elements would exceed today's session and with an eye on the allocated time I like to highlight some key elements that have supported us in building Claire Cunningham's body of work and the team around her to make this way of working possible.

This is by no means an exhaustive list, nor does it mean we are not faced with ongoing struggles when addressing costs, capacity and additional resources required to work in an accessible way, that allows access to be embedded in our work... but maybe we can take and build upon some of these positive examples.

1. Project Funding, prioritising diversity/ inclusion that is not outcome or production focused.

Firstly, we have had the benefit of having in Creative Scotland a national funding body that named disability, inclusion and diversity as one of their priorities since at least 2012 –

Further we have a project funding programme that is not production and outcome focused but one that also covers research and development. This lays the groundwork for all new artistic endeavours and ideas to flourish yet is specifically relevant to disabled artists as they often enter their chosen art form through non-standardized routes due to a lack of accessible training courses. Funded studio and research time that is targeted at their specific, individuality can be incorporated allowing one's skills and practice, technique and tools to be developed as well as contract other professional, artistic peers with whom to research, train and develop with.

Further Creative Scotland's project funding is structured in a less time pressured fashion by having a year round application process and a project duration of up to two years – all of which gives us planning flexibility as well as security as it recognizes the need to fund producing capacity to approach national and international presenters, festivals, arts organisations to gain their support in artistic risk taking, project development leading to co-productions with touring incorporated at a project development stage.

2. Dedicated funding programmes such as Unlimited- aimed at disabled makers

Secondly, we benefited from a dedicated UK wide fund 'Unlimited', aimed exclusively at disabled artists to address the lack of disabled artists making and touring work. It is a strategic investment into disabled artists practice and in Claire's case we have not only been able to scale up her production but also start to co-produce internationally with partners in Germany, Scotland, England and the USA thereby building a supportive producing structure.

That led to Claire's most successful production to date with a total of 62 performances, at 26 venues across 4 countries.

On a more practical, yet not less important, level their dedicated access budget allowed us for example to purchase access equipment, such as an audio description system, which we now can tour with and here I named it.

An access budget – separate to the production or project budgets is to me one of the most effective tools in order to make a significant impact on how we – not only as makers, producers but as a sector can work together in creating more accessible working conditions, accessible programs and projects as well as to make productions accessible to diverse - therefore wider audiences ...

It means we can declare our access costs separate to our organisational/production/creation and touring costs – it means we are not penalized for reducing barriers to work and for making our work accessible - we are not forced to compromise and reduce our artistic spent or project costs in order to include access...- we don't have to pitch quality against access.

To me an Access Budget does level the playing field as it means one is not put at a disadvantage when working with disabled artists who may require different ways to travel, sign language interpretation or a Personal Assistant – or indeed different working patterns, time planning and support- It also means that presenters through their own respective access budgets are able to share into the costs of making their program accessible – the responsibility for access does not lie with the disabled artists alone. With an access budget in place on both sides we can be open about costs incurred but also insist that presenters pull their weight when programming us – something to this day is a rather difficult and drawn out conversation when producing work and trying to make rather limited budgets stretch further.

To end I want to try to further break down the intricate mesh of partners and supporters an artist needs by briefly highlighting the national and international aspects of our work. In order to sustain a career most disabled artists, often making cutting edge work with audiences found in more urban, international cities, rely on national and international partners as residency hosts, presenting partners and co-producers.

For these partners to organize and work together through international touring and producing networks is key. We need partner networks that use their own organizational resources to take on the role of coordinating, planning and strategically supporting artists – in accessible ways. These networks can not only share costs and expertise but are also offering more effective ways of touring and development leading to long term sustainable ways of working for disabled makers.

We should recognize that we are part of the problem – we have designed systems that exclude- Inaccessibility is a huge barrier to break through. It affects everything and everyone. And it is up to us together to address and reduce those together as allies and partners.

THANK YOU.