

# Strategic management in Saint Petersburg's contemporary dance community

A case study of organizations and individual professionals  
on a journey to define their mission

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<p>Abstract</p> <p>This thesis investigates strategy formation and its use in the Saint Petersburg contemporary dance community. In Russia the 1920s was the golden era of contemporary dance, however, this period only lasted for a few years. As the development of the industries, modern and contemporary forms were hindered by political and societal changes. During these ambiguous times, only classical ballet and folk dance were widely accepted in the country. Still today, there is inequality in the Russian dance field between different genres since classical ballet as well as folk dance are provided government support both financially and through educational opportunities. As a result, restrictive policies and uncertainty appear in the everyday life of contemporary dance practitioners and they are part of a somewhat divided community.</p> <p>The main research question of this thesis is 'How do actors in the Saint Petersburg contemporary dance industry understand their mission and what kind of strategies do they have in their use to pursue this?'. This study aims to understand their strategic planning processes; to identify the community's current engagements in strategic management and how the actors utilize operational tools such as SWOT analysis or the inspection of goals and mission statements within the organizations. In addition, the study analyzes how these objectives can be transformed for the benefit of the industry.</p> <p>This research is a qualitative case study and its primary data are five semi-structured interviews conducted in Saint Petersburg in July 2019 with local contemporary dance practitioners and professionals. The materials are analyzed using applied thematic analysis and grounded theory. This study contributes to the theoretical discussions of strategic management in arts organizations and oversees how the power of a mission statement is understood and operational planning tools are used.</p> <p>There is still a need for actions in building sustainable infrastructure in order to ensure the continuation of financial support for contemporary dance. The main results of this research suggest that the organizations have become aware of the tools they need to use to influence and ensure the future of contemporary dance in Russia. An objective of the dance community is to increase individual engagement of contemporary dance in order to elevate this visibility of the discipline amongst decision-makers and new audiences. By not focusing on internal competition, the actors in Saint Petersburg can turn their skills into resources for the whole industry. This thesis will help to demonstrate the attempts of these professionals and the whole community and lastly, bring new topics of advocacy into discussion among the actors in the Saint Petersburg contemporary dance community, institutions and the whole cultural and creative sector in Russia.</p>		
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# 1. INTRODUCTION

There is a large body of academic literature, which emphasizes the importance of dance among the arts. In this literature, dance is often seen as one of the main art forms in addition to music, theatre and visual arts. Sachs described the peculiar nature of dance in 'World history of the dance' in these words: "The dance is the mother of the arts. Music and poetry exist in time; painting and architecture in space. But the dance lives at once in time and space" (Sachs, 1937, p. 3). Researchers have also paid attention to the societal role of dance. Kassing contributes to the study of dance by situating "dancers, dance and dance works [...] within the larger contexts of geography, history, society, and culture" (Kassing, 2007, pp. 5-6). Hereby the importance of dance to society is evident and has "a context or ecology, and a history" (Hanna, 1999, p. 26).

My work draws from the understanding of culture as elaborated in the field of cultural studies, rooted in the 1960s Birmingham school of cultural analysis. This approach understands culture as a wide range of social practice, highlights its production and consumption, and focuses often on the economic and political restraints that determine this production (cf. During, 1999). As Kai Lehtikainen summarizes this approach in his book of dance analysis, cultural studies explores "how cultural meanings are produced, transmitted and received within the social, political and economic boundaries of a given culture" (Lehtikainen, 2014, pp. 56-57). In addition to the British school of cultural studies, I also draw my approach for this research from the cultural policy studies. Debates about cultural policy emerged in the 1960s, and the focus was on creative arts. As Throsby (2010, p. 1) writes, a UNESCO meeting in Mexico in 1967 brought forth the following questions: how arts contribute to society, how to improve the education system, how people can be attracted to the arts and what is the way to write about it in the media. These same questions are still asked over 50 years later and are a part of this study as well. Dance can be labeled as an instrument of change (Giurchescu, 2001, p. 110). The change usually emerges in the communities and their activities. In this sphere, the strategy plays an important role as the societies do not transform automatically, and practical strategies are implemented by change-makers and members of the community.

It is commonly known that Russian performing arts and contemporary dance are in a challenging position. It suffers from a lack of funding, infrastructure, visibility, operational structures, inadequate educational system and general understanding of the art form among decision-makers and ordinary Russians. In this research I will study the contemporary dance in Russia and examine it via Saint Petersburg based organizations as well as individual practitioners. The research recognizes the main communities and independent professionals in the field and the general position of contemporary dance. At the core of this thesis are both topics; to understand what their strategies are and examine their mission and its implementation. The research focuses on how the actors in the field use different strategies to achieve their goals or how their strategies might be connected and the general position of contemporary dance in Russia.

Furthermore, the objective of this research is to categorize the strategic activities of contemporary dance practitioners, look at the role of each organization, their background and position in the Saint Petersburg contemporary dance community and interests to develop the industry. As I assumed before conducting this research, a lack of a clarified mission statement and active strategic planning could be weakening the understanding between the dance field practitioners, new possible audiences and institutions, and the assumption was somewhat correct as seen below in this research. It is necessary to look at the practitioners' activities in more detail to get a comprehensible take on the contemporary dance industry's potential in Russia.

### **1.1. Aims and structure of the study**

This thesis aims to identify strategic planning processes and strategies in use among the Saint Petersburg contemporary dance organizations and individual professionals working in the field. Additionally, the focus is on finding actions that are changing the general perceptions and creating sustainability for the industry. Furthermore, the study examines whether the professional community has a common understanding of the current state of the industry and their own missions. This study aims to achieve an understanding of the field in Saint Petersburg at large by asking how strategic planning is visible in the contemporary dance organizations. Generally, it can be considered if the current challenges are caused by an outdated system, lack of connection with the institutions, nonexistent strategic management skills, or some other obstacles inside and outside the community.

One of the goals for this research is to emphasize the current engagements in strategic management of the contemporary dance scene in Russia. These are studied through five cases that present a versatile picture of the current actors and practitioners in Saint Petersburg. Through the acts of individuals and communities, this research defines where the industry is now, presents its obstacles, predicts possible opportunities and ways to achieve them. Oliver, a choreographer and an associate professor of dance, summarizes that "You better know your community so that you know whom you are dialoguing with about your work. You better be able to have conversations with your peers about what is it that you are doing, they are doing, and a whole lot of other folks are doing" (Oliver, 2017, p. 109). Although this research concentrates on the regional actors, it reflects the scene around contemporary dance in the whole country and looks at the organizations' activities vis-à-vis Russian-wide.

Overall in Europe and the US, there is a good amount of research related to dance. These works talk about how dance promotes healthy lifestyles and sustainable societies or they focus on dance as a practice from the artistic viewpoint, or from the method, choreography or education point of view. Regarding the studies

of the Russian contemporary dance field, the emphasis seems to be somewhere else than the managerial or strategic aspects of the organizations. The existing studies are not connected to the institutions, where the major funding of arts comes from and the structural changes are made in but is examining the issues of dance as a physical form of expression or presenting different schools of thought of modern ballet, modern and/or contemporary dance. The lack of proper information from the general management or administrative perspective on the arts organization is missing. In general, it is hard to find a study related to the activities of arts and culture organizations. Besides, most of the literature found and used in this thesis described a context, which does not fit the Russian culture seamlessly. No specific book or article was found that would be focused on specifically Russian art and culture organizations' strategies or in general managing Russian dance companies. The results of this thesis are bringing new knowledge to the field and are useful for Russian dance practitioners whether they are working with production, higher education, journalism or with other entities.

With this thesis, I wish to call attention to the whole sector, dance organizations, higher education providers, and other professionals working close to the field. On that account, this qualitative case study aims to identify the status of the Russian contemporary dance scene and especially the local communities through five cases that represent the field and actors from different perspectives.

The research question of this thesis is 'How do actors in Saint Petersburg contemporary dance industry understand their mission and what kind of strategies do they have in their use to pursue this?'. This question is analyzed with the help of a road map of the strategic management, and operational tools for arts organizations and classified strategy types by Lidia Varbanova, who is a consultant, educator and coach specified in strategies, management and entrepreneurship in the arts, and William J. Byrnes, a professor in arts administration. This thesis also creates an up-to-date overview of the contemporary dance industry in Saint Petersburg and explains the future direction and perspectives of the community's activities. The research data was collected in Saint Petersburg in July 2019 through interviewing the local actors in the community. This material is analyzed using grounded theory and applied thematic analysis that both are traditional tools for qualitative research.

This thesis consists of nine chapters. After the introduction, the second chapter presents the concepts of contemporary dance in Russia, including its history, division of genres and the community today. This is followed by the third chapter, which outlines the theoretical framework and presents strategic management of arts organizations, labeling the types of strategies and different operational tools such as SWOT analysis and a mission statement the practitioners might use. The fourth chapter concentrates on the methods; performing qualitative case study with applied thematic analysis and grounded theory. The fifth chapter introduces the findings and starts analyzing the results beginning at defining the importance of strategy and

mission. This is followed by the sixth chapter, which outlines the Saint Petersburg contemporary dance community's status and activities supporting it. The seventh chapter is about critical challenges, e.g. the lack of infrastructure and funding, while the eighth chapter provides new advocacy in the field from the perspective of intercultural and international collaboration as well as education and communications. In the last chapter, the conclusions of the study are presented and some future objectives for the Saint Petersburg contemporary dance community discussed.



## 2. CONTEMPORARY DANCE IN RUSSIA

This chapter presents an overview of contemporary dance's position in Russia from the perspective of history and social events, portraying legacies of cultural practices and today's contemporary dance community's status.

### 2.1. History and background

Vasenina (2011, p. 3) writes: "Contemporary dance in Russia is about the same age as Gorbachev's Perestroika". Still, the first forms of it occurred as early as the 1920s due to the influence of American Isadora Duncan, who has even been titled as the mother of Russian modern dance (Wilson Center, 2008). As Magriel (1997, p. 56) verifies, she toured in Russia in 1907 and by request founded a school of dance in Moscow in 1921. She was a pioneer in the field of modern dance, as Hanna (1999, p. 51) describes, Duncan "was instrumental in catalyzing the acceptance of dance as self-expression". Her revolutionary approach to the language of dance was ahead of her time. Additionally, Duncan had a vision to bring contemporary dance closer to visual arts (Magriel, 1997, p. 56). She was precise with her vision of esthetic creations and she always kept her eyes open for new ideas, being a change-maker of her time. Although the impact of Duncan's legacy to the industry is no longer so obvious, historically Duncan has been a figure of great importance.

A few years prior to Duncan, a dancer and choreographer Inna Chernetskaya had an influence on the birth of contemporary dance and its visual language in Russia: "Chernetskaya called her dance 'synthetic' because she wanted to bring together dance, painting, music and drama"(Sirotkina, 2018, p. 35). Moreover, both world-known Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey, embodied modern dance and developed it greatly with theories on breathing techniques, setting free the torso by creating new movements and giving dance new terminology (Hanna, 1999, pp. 52-55). Some years after Duncan's influence, a theorist and dance artist Rudolf Laban focused on the dynamics of movement and elements of dance. Even though the interest to Isadora Duncan's modern movements strengthened in Russia, Au (2002, p. 84) points out that Ballet Russes first wave had come to an end as important choreographers Nijinsky and Fokine had left their positions around 1914. Au (2002, p. 106) continues to add that Ballet Russes was in a symbiotic relationship with the avant-garde in Russia. This indicated that the country's art world was, in fact, changing.

Soviet authorities forcibly shut down almost all the Moscow private dance schools and studios in 1924 and only left the ones open which were receiving state support, such as the Bolshoi Theatre School and the Duncan School (Sirotkina, 2018, p. 37). Over a long period of time, Socialist Realism defined the framework for all arts and there was a hiatus in the development of the contemporary dance field. According to this

statement, contemporary dance did not meet the expectations of decision-makers or follow Russian government's direction in cultural policy of the time. As a matter of fact, among other art forms, contemporary dance was repressed and therefore its institutional development suffered.

In the midst of change, classical ballet and folk dance were some of the very few accepted dance forms. Closer to the end of Soviet regime, in an article to *The New York Times* Kisselgoff (1984) wrote that "in recent years, the application of Socialist Realism has been less extreme, but Soviet ballet has still had to fulfill requirements of being accessible to a wide public". Still, even ballet had its restrictions and in some cases, it had to explain itself. In Dickason's (2013) interview with Janice Ross, a professor of theatre and performance studies in *Stanford News*, Dickason formulates how in the Soviet Union, ballet was experienced as a political protest and self-authorship was visible especially in the works of a revolutionary choreographer, the ballet master Leonid Yakobson. Dickason (2013) suggests in her article that Yakobson "struggled to maintain a safe balance between artistic freedom and state censorship". Only after some decades later, in the 1980s and 90s, western modern influences spread around the whole country and contemporary dance had room to develop once again.

After the collapse of the Soviet regime and a long period in the doldrums, contemporary dance had no experts. In the Soviet times, a lack of teachers with knowledge on dance theory and practice prevailed (Moyzhes, 1998, p. 52). One perspective to understanding contemporary dance's formation is that its roots are within movement theatres and mime groups, not in dance companies (Moyzhes, 1998, p. 53). Some of these ensembles emerged already at the end of the 1980s and operated until the late 90s. The dance style was not palpably established at first and it had to define its status through activities and time; back then the first groups started to practice and perform, forming a completely new varied mix of styles, which now is known as contemporary dance.

From the perspective of cultural economics, Desmond (2017, p. 44) says that "above all, acknowledging the legacies of cultural practices and charting their routes of circulation—the political economy of dance—is crucial to setting the stage for the social and political changes we wish to bring about." From a historical point of view, the reason why contemporary dance is an important topic and deserves to be discussed, is sketched by Laermans (2015, p. 70): "like every currently existing art world, contemporary dance indeed primarily actualizes its potential self-reflexivity in a social way, not only through thinking or conscious acts but predominantly through public statements". Normally contemporary dance is seen as a part of democratic societies. Kunst (2017, p. 567) convinces that contemporary dance "has no history in socialist countries, [contemporary dance is] something that has to establish itself anew somehow as a practice, and something that has to be professionalized and institutionalized as similar practices are in the West." This work has continued in Russia since the 1990s.

## 2.2. The relationship between traditional and contemporary genres

Even though dance in the Soviet Union was supported by the state both financially and politically, the subsidies were tied mostly to classical ballet and folk dance. These were given special attention regarding rehearsing and performing places, finances, and visibility whereas modern contemporary forms of dance were labeled bourgeois, decadent and alien to the workers (Sirotkina, 2018, p. 37). This classification is supported by Moyzhes' (1998, p. 51), earlier observation on how "the governmental policy in dance put the highest priority on classical dance and folklore, concerning these genres as "norms" that are to be observed by everyone and providing lavish subsidies to support them". Harss (2017) underlines that contemporary art forms had no chance to progress due to the strong and dominant nature of Russian ballet. Today, the classical practices and methods still enjoy a privileged position and ruling in the cultural field of the country and there is a glimpse of moving towards even more nationalistic traditions in the performing arts.

The differentiation between traditional and contemporary art forms dates back but still is partially visible in today's attitudes and esthetics. Shay (2002, p. 62) approaches the theme from the perspective of considering how the creativity has not been at the core of classical genres. On the contrary, Russian ballet companies have been known for their extraordinary technique and style of performing even decades before the Russian revolution. During the Soviet times performing arts, which portrayed young, happily smiling faces were according to Shay (2002, p. 65) the equivalent to safe dance, promoting nationalistic feelings and pride. The conventional expression of contemporary dance shocked this conception.

Buck and Rowe (2014, p. 176) prove that not much has changed from the 1990s, and they express the problematic idea of how some dance genres, their practitioners and practices are more important than others. Keuchel (2015, p. 100) claims the opposite as, in her view, terminating the shared cultural canon, there will be more space and freedom for all artistic-creative expression to flourish: "as a result, clear artistic values such as certain forms of art being more valuable than others vanish". These legacies of cultural practices set contemporary dance in a specific compartment where it is controlled by political decision-making. In practice, it shows as funding opportunities, infrastructure, and visibility. Collaboration with institutions and investing in the contents of education happens mostly in the sphere of traditional dance genres and only recently different institutions have begun to give a foothold to contemporary dance.

Today, the discussion often revolves around the values of organizations regarding their connections and supporters. The article by Harss (2017) in *The New York Times* delves into Diana Vishneva's work with Context contemporary dance festival and the measurements of success. Understandably, the lack of public subsidies reflects the profile of privately funded actors and Vishneva, a former ballerina from Mariinsky Ballet draws attention with her charisma. Not all see someone with glamour and sponsors as a positive sign for the whole

community but rather creating a competitive setting. Harss (2017) writes “most of the Context performances I attended in Moscow were packed. There were roving society photographers and selfie walls”. This kind of visibility and effort has its advantages but also presents an obstacle to the alignment of the contemporary dance field because people have different opinions whether it is possible to succeed with or without sponsorships. Following the circumstances described above, the question is, what is the core of contemporary dance for its practitioners and the community, what do they understand as their mission: freedom of artistic expression, technical quality, attracting a large audience or measure a public recognition or something else. Depending on whether one is talking about small independent players or large commercial companies, there can be a great deal of disagreement within the community about such matters.

Vinogradova (2017, p. 153) has emphasized that “if ballet today attracts the audience with its decorative and virtuosity of performance, then modern is the art of newest times, conquering the minds of young people and intellectuals who are trying to find new ways in art, reject the rules and canons”. This defines the issue that contemporary dance is facing all around the world and it is also visible in Russia, where the language of dance has been part of the debates in history. Ross (2015, p. 251) describes how Leonid Yakobson, mentioned in the previous chapter, was concerned that in his times, ballet’s terminology was not flexible enough to adapt to the new and modern expressions. Yakobson’s radical thoughts were connected to the fact that he viewed ballet being rather trapped instead of following the path of innovations other art forms portrayed at that time. It is not only the vocabulary but also the visual language that is a central part of the dance. To stay up to date both parts have to be updated as these points realize what kind of audience will find contemporary dance.

Contemporary dance is constantly redeeming its place in society. This can also be interpreted from Noisette’s (2011, p. 74) opinion, where in comparison to classical ballet “contemporary dance has had to swim against the tide by rejecting pure performance in favor of anonymity and (relative) democracy on the stage”. While the other more traditional and known dance forms were relying on more relatable storylines, enchanting performance and hierarchies of roles. These forms of understanding and attitude still widely exist in Russia, although there has been a change in recent years as new spaces open up their doors and contemporary dance spreads wider and closer to new audiences.

### **2.3. Saint Petersburg contemporary dance community**

Professionals such as producers, choreographers, and dance artists are spread all around Russia. Saint Petersburg, as well as Ekaterinburg, have higher educational programs and contemporary dance is presented nation-wide in different arenas. Still, the leading dance events, companies, and groups are, however, in and

around Moscow, e.g. the annual Golden Mask Festival, Bolshoi Theater and Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko Moscow Music Theatre (Vasenina, 2011, p. 5). Another factor influencing community formation is the location of the Russian dance professionals. The communities around the country including Saint Petersburg suffer from instability since many dancers and choreographers who have leave to study abroad, also stay there and do not necessarily return to Russia to contribute to the development of the field. This phenomenon is not new as confirmed by Vasenina (2011, pp. 4-5): several dance experts have not returned to Russia after graduating from European degree programs and only later visited there to hold workshops. Various professionals prefer to pursue a career outside their home country due to the political climate which has hindered possibilities for support to pursue their profession.

The whole community in Saint Petersburg is in need for new, bold statements, stronger advocacy and changes in relation to the hierarchical institutions and outdated support structures. Mediators and professionals are needed for coming together in building passages step by step and to show the significance of contemporary dance in modern Russian society. Desmond (2017) has stated how cultural practices are ever-changing. the role and responsibilities of each community members and their exchange of information are in the center:

*The question we must ultimately come to terms with as dancers, choreographers, audience, scholars, and critics is not so much simply who takes what, because cultural practices always move across boundaries and circulate across communities, but how and with what effects translations, transferrals, and transformations take place. (Desmond, 2017, p. 44)*

Sirotkina (2018, p. 32) has described the contemporary dance as a movement that combines art and social changes. Despite the new openings generated through Perestroika, the infrastructure around contemporary dance has not been offering sustainability for the practice and its presence in Russian society (Vasenina, 2011, p. 5). The unstable foundation does not offer room to develop and prepare the field for the future in the cultural industries – at least on the subject of its status, not the artistic perspectives. According to O'Connor (2005, pp. 52-53) cultural field in Saint Petersburg has been disintegrated; earlier it “lacked the language of policy-making and had little history or means of articulating its needs as a sector” and still today, the traditional cultural institutions are creating the brand of the city. The new direction of lobbying and advocacy is present in the creative sector in Moscow, where four large culture centers that have come together and published a manifesto of their Union of Creative Clusters last year (Soyuz kreativnykh klasterov, 2019). Although not directly related to contemporary dance, it can be an example of a path to follow more broadly in the field of arts and culture.

### 3. STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF ARTS ORGANIZATIONS

This chapter explores strategic management, practical activities of an arts organization and operational tools they use to fulfill their mission and objectives. Varbanova (2013, p. 121) verifies that in academic literature *strategy* is a rich term with many definitions, depending on the authors. Usually, it is seen as a direction of action and it is connected to the goals and objectives of the organization. Whereas strategic management means all the plans and processes that will help the organization to follow their strategy. These actions build commitment and engage people in the organization to pursue shared goals.

#### 3.1. Types of strategy

In this chapter I present and identify the strategies and strategic management tools. "Strategy is often defined as a plan designed to achieve a particular long-term aim or goal" (Tschirhart and Bielefeld, 2012, p. 68). Varbanova (2013, pp. 38, 121) calls strategy a set of actions and a device, which offers organizations a tool that is used to understand their resources, achieve long-term objectives and their mission. Varbanova (2013, p. 38) classifies strategic issues to be 1) fundamental questions, 2) policy-related matters or 3) critical challenges: these all affect how the organization functions, regarding its management, objectives and financial structure.

Strategies structured for several purposes according to Varbanova (2013, p. 122) are:

- **Main organizational strategies** having intensive growth, stability, innovation, survival or building capacity at the center
- **Programme (product)- market strategies** aiming at market or product development,
- **Competitive strategies** focusing on cost leadership, e.g. competitive advantage by costs or differentiation
- **Strategies for integration, cooperation and networking** paying attention to partnerships, co-productions, integration and lobbying advocacy
- **Functional strategies** focusing on HR management, financial or technological strategies.

Byrnes for his part talks about strategy as a direction that forms the framework which ultimately leads to goals the strategy approaches and distinguishes four types of strategies (Byrnes, 2009, pp. 136-137):

- **Stability strategy** equals satisfaction to current status with no reasons to move off in new directions

- **Growth strategy** is aiming to new markets, starting new programs, increasing their actions and events, another type is advancing community involvement
- **Retrenchment strategy** is targeted on cutback or elimination of some of the organization's activities
- **Combination strategy** means using the three above-mentioned at any moment.

This list seems to be better suited for large, established art institutions intend to make a profit. Still, there are some similarities with both of the classifications. For example with growth, Byrnes (2009, pp. 136-137) refers to searching for a bigger share in the markets where Varbanova's programme market strategy which aims at market or product development. When developing the strategy, Kotler and Scheff (1997, p. 212) consider growth not only as adding new programs but improving the quality of works, performance space, or thinking about new channels to distribute artworks thus, their method is closer to Varbanova's. By interpreting the operating environment, Poisson-de Haro and Menot (2013, p. 25) mention competition between organizations and especially in funding issues: of arts and culture "rivalry is considered to be high in a sector that is very fragmented".

### **3.2. Road map of strategic management**

Within the framework of this study, the term strategic management refers to all the issues and practical activities that are executed in arts organizations: plans, processes, and finally the results of their work. Varbanova (2013) describes how the size of an arts organization defines its approach strategy. She mentions that small arts organizations rely on previous experiences that usually mean working based on improvisation and intuition. By contrast, larger organizations tend to trust on once established models and they "may not implement strategic management because they do their business 'as usual'—they rely on their regular audiences and clients, receive sufficient financial support from external sources and 'feel good'" (Varbanova, 2013, p. 37). Both of these approaches can be risky.

People change their thoughts over time – reflecting on what their work represents, what emotions it may evoke and how to set new perspectives for it. According to Kotler and Scheff (1997, p. 189) as a performing art form, dance is built on experiences. Hence it is essential to consider the whole audience and how members of it may experience the performances. The means to create a sustainable organization model require a developmental perspective. By serving only one person's preferences, the organization cannot please the whole audience.

Varbanova (2013, p. 29) has introduced the processes of strategic management and created a road map (Figure 1), where various choices are made in a specific timeline to reach the final and wanted outcome. The

fundamental questions are; what is the organization’s current status and position, where they want to be and what are their aims and ambitions for the future. To achieve these, the organizational strategy helps to provide an answer to “how do we get there?”, as formulated by Varbanova (2013, p. 29). An organization rarely has only one strategy they count on as outlined also in this road map.

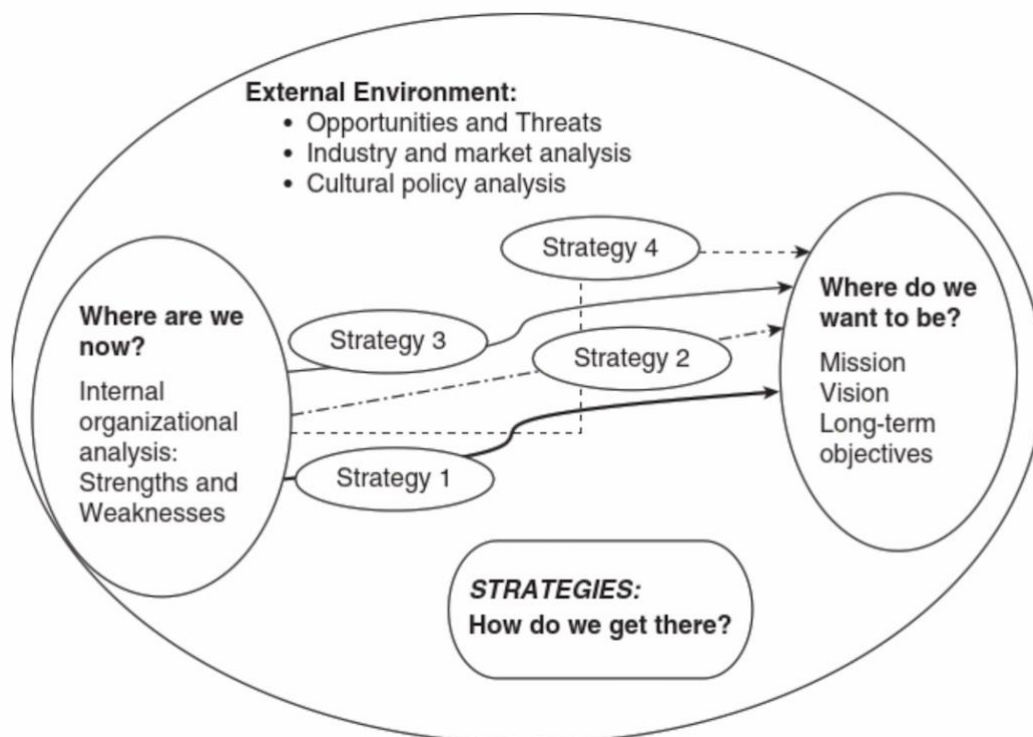


Figure 1: A road map of strategic management (Varbanova 2013, p. 29)

In arts organizations, strategic management works as a road map – it sets the main questions that help the organization to reach a preferred status. The road map also analyzes the operating environment, resources and capabilities, governance structure, values in management, strategic processes and decisions (Poisson-de Haro and Menot, 2013, pp. 3-5). From an operational perspective, organizations use different tools that assist them to accomplish the necessary goals and to reach a sustainable position in the field. Both Varbanova (2013) and Byrnes (2009) classify several types of strategies and this study intends to present and combine those, and by doing that, the goal is to identify in which way and for what purpose the Saint Petersburg’s contemporary dance communities and independent professionals use their strategies. The main themes are compared to their missions and based on this, their overall direction is decoded. There are not a lot of up-to-date research or materials about the state of Russian contemporary dance today. Therefore this thesis has



potential to offer new information about the current trends of the field in Russia and the future possibilities for dance in national and international levels.

### 3.3. Operational tools for organizations planning process

Strategic management consists of several stages and operational tools that will help the organization to reach its goals. Byrnes (2009, p. 137) adds that in order to the strategy to work, the organization has to have the right means of which a mission statement and SWOT analysis, that stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, are the most important ones. The backbone of this process is to follow a well-defined strategic plan. Byrnes (2009, p. 126) describes it as “a set of comprehensive plans designed to marshal all of the resources available to the arts organization to meet defined goals and objectives derived from the mission, vision, and value statements”.

Strategic planning process according to Byrnes (2009, p. 129) consists of three phases:

1. Organization analysis
2. Establish priorities and formulate a strategy
3. Develop goals, objectives, action plans based on strategy and evaluation.

As determined by Byrnes, the first stage includes defining the mission, vision, values and creating a SWOT analysis (Byrnes, 2009, p. 129). The second stage is dedicated to formulate the strategy and the third stage is the practical work, for example, the desired outcomes need and create assessment tools. Tschirhart and Bielefeld (2012) also recognize the structure and present ‘general strategic planning model’ (Figure 2) which similarly has three steps.

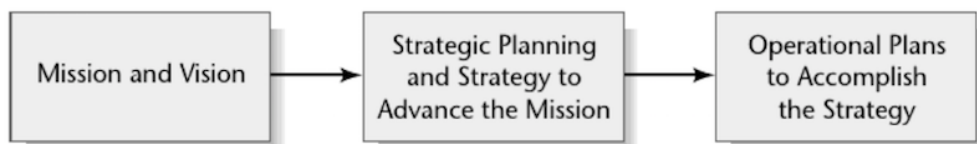


Figure 2: General strategic planning model (Tschirhart and Bielefeld, 2012, p. 93)

Different practical steps of the work can be added to a road map. Three strategic management phases are also in the structure of Clarke and Fuller (2011, p. 85), who highlight problem-setting, direction-setting, and

structuring; according to them, this shows if the organization needs development. They also claim that the implementation of strategies lacks elements of collaborative management (Clarke and Fuller, 2011, p. 85). These three steps reveal the need for development and help to identify the stakeholders, which then again define common goals linked to the desired future activities. Clarke and Fuller (2011, p. 86) add that structuring “might include creating the structures to support and sustain their collective appreciation and ongoing activities”. This being just one model, generally, collaborative strategic management has to be based on a commitment from all parties: after the partnerships are formed, a resource check is performed and strategic plan, which is later implemented, is created.

### **3.4. SWOT analysis and mission statement determining the course of action**

In Varbanova’s (2013, pp. 60-61) opinion, “the mission (purpose) is the reason for existence, the fundamental value system of an organization which expresses its essence and unique characteristics.” She lists 12 possible themes for a mission, based on general expressions and adds that depending on the organization’s background (non-profit, state subsidized or business oriented), the contents may vary. A mission statement can cover social economic and political aspects of development and it usually examines the external sphere of an organization’s activities (Varbanova, 2013, p. 61). In addition, it should take into consideration different target groups such as the audience, external stakeholders, society as a whole, and in the organization itself, all have to understand their tasks (Varbanova, 2013, p. 60).

When talking about a time frame, a mission statement is usually formulated for long-time purpose and therefore it does not have to be too precise. Just as Jeyarathmm (2007, p. 13) writes, it is needed to define what the organization does, why they do it and where they want to be after a few years. Byrnes (2009, pp. 128, 150) sees it as an organization’s top priority, a basis that supports the strategic plan and provides instruments for them to exist in the future. He (Byrnes, 2009, p. 135) continues that all partakers examine the mission statement from a different point of view and therefore the core of the mission is very important; in Byrnes’ opinion a weak mission statement is like “an out-of-focus photograph”. Varbanova (2013, p. 61) agrees, as specified by her, organizations unexpectedly do not always define their mission statement as attentively as they should which might later cause difficulties on how to keep their direction clear.

Somewhat different from the above-mentioned, Poisson de-Haro and Menot (2013, pp. 124-126) mention that there are three types of mission statements in arts and culture organizations: an artistic, educational or a scientific mission. According to them (2013, pp. 124-125), the first focuses on establishing conditions which respect the artist’s work and leave room for creation. The educational mission then again aims at public awareness; raising awareness through activities and events as well as interest in offering education and

developing it (Poisson de-Haro and Menot, 2013, pp. 125-126). The scientific mission presented by Poisson de-Haro and Menot (2013, p. 126) is more suitable for other art fields such as for museums, where the cultural preservation of works is in the focus but it applies to publications in journals as well. None of the sources specifies if a mission can have priorities, such as primary or secondary content.

The SWOT analysis, also referred to as a situation analysis, is one of the most used planning tools that analyzes an organization’s activities (Tschirhart and Bielefeld, 2012, p. 95). It appears at all organizational levels; in business, nonprofits, governmental and municipality organizations. The tool is divided into both, internal (strengths, weaknesses) and external parts (opportunities, threats), that together form the direction of an organization and help to identify sustainable practices and processes. A SWOT analysis does not prioritize the factors (Tschirhart and Bielefeld, 2012, p. 95) but recognizes organization’s resources and is of aid with its daily operations what can be done, and particularly tries to find a direction for the future activities, what must be done (Poisson-de Haro and Menot, 2013, p. 67).



Figure 3: The strategic diagnosis (Poisson-de Haro and Menot 2013, p. 67)

The model (Figure 3) of ‘The Strategic Diagnosis’ by Poisson-de Haro and Menot (2013, p. 67) creates a routes an arts organization’s strategy takes. Kotler and Scheff (1997) recommends defining the rank factor (high/medium/low) with the traditional SWOT analysis. To reach success, they suggest that the most important part of analysis is opportunities, which should be given extra attention to (Kotler and Scheff, 1997, pp. 58-59). According to Byrnes (2009, pp. 134-136) a SWOT is more like an analysis of a situation and based on his idea, the next and complementary step is to assess the organization’s “internal human, material, technological resources, and operating system.” He stresses the importance of monitoring these plans and in the process of defining the SWOT, being truthful but also critical of the organization’s current status

(Byrnes, 2009, pp. 134-136). In Varbanova's (2013, p. 105) opinion, the relations between strength and opportunities as strategic capabilities and then again the connection between weaknesses and threats as restraining forces.

### **3.5. Developing goals and following the operational plan**

Resources and competencies from the SWOT's internal analysis are the key elements to understand the strategic capabilities of an organization. The external environment then again defines the necessary aspects of development. Goals are formulated in a phase where an organization's strategy, mission statement and SWOT analysis are already defined. Poisson-de Haro and Menot (2013, p. 61) define strategic capability to be "an ability to do what is required to survive and prosper thanks to the organization's resources and competencies". Still, Varbanova (2013, p. 37) adds how due to different reasons, methods of strategic management are not always implemented in arts organizations. Psychological resistance can emerge from managerial level but also from practical reasons, a lack of time or other urgent work can prevent means to express strategic activities in a written form.

Arts and culture organizations' goals are usually set on different sections of work, such as programming, marketing, fundraising, etc. Byrnes (2009, p. 138) links objectives and goals together, them being organizations' action plans where specific objectives are seen as part of a general goal. Jeyarathmm (2007, p. 17) sees these two terms as synonyms and also verifies that "objectives are formulated from mission statements". Goals can be called plans that split into three: short-, intermediate- or long-term ones. They are usually set for one year or less, one to four years or over five years span (Byrnes, 2009, p. 125). The strategies organizations use inevitably affect their goals as they portray the desired outcome of an organizations' activities (Byrnes, 2009, pp. 137). To reach these results, the strategic diagnosis with internal analysis is a central factor as it functions as a basis for the organization's course of action and helps to formulate the right objectives.

## 4. METHODS AND DATA

This chapter describes the research methods and data of this qualitative case study. Grounded theory and applied thematic analysis were applied to this study. The purpose of the study is to investigate the strategic management of Saint Petersburg's contemporary dance organizations, the communities, individuals and their experiences. A case study as a method aims to accomplish a comprehensive understanding of the field and its phenomena.

### 4.1. Qualitative case study

The case study is one of the most recognized forms of qualitative research methods (Creswell, 1994, pp. 11-12). According to Schwandt and Gates (2018, p. 341), there is no single understanding of what is case study's definition – it can be applied to a rather large group of study and the technique can be applied to both qualitative and quantitative research. The method also suits to use both in micro and macro assessments and is usually viewed through critical or realist lenses, where the subject is both “real and constructed” as described by Schwandt and Gates (2018, pp. 342-343). In a qualitative study, there is obviously communication between the researchers and participants of the study (Creswell, 1994, p. 6). Leavy (2014, p. 2) agrees that in qualitative research it is essential to share knowledge and she describes it as an umbrella term that represents a wide range of research practices.

According to Woodside (2017, p. 6) the main objective in a case study is to create a profound understanding of a certain group, actors and their relations through a certain period. In light of this fact, defining the research question is important. Strauss and Corbin (2008, p. 24) refer to the research question as a statement and continue how it “identifies the topic area to be studied and tells the reader what there is about this particular topic that is of interest to the researcher.” From early on was clear that the most optimal way of conducting this research is a case study, as it enables to focus on details from a micro-perspective and offers a deeper understanding of the topic compared to, for example, large survey research. Even though Gomm, Hammersley and Forster (2009, p. 98) have criticized case studies for not offering generalizable outcomes, but still it offers a chance to reflect the previous knowledge and debate on the subject and therefore it logically works well for this research.

## 4.2. Data collection – material and interviews

Prior to this research, the field of contemporary dance was familiar to me only through my interests and professional networks. I have not directly worked with it in Finland, Russia or elsewhere. The charm of a new subject inspired me to continue exploring the topic further.

This case study is realized in Saint Petersburg and it presents five cases from the field of contemporary dance. With a long history and traditions as the Russian cultural capital, the city was a good choice. Also for practical reasons, because I come from Helsinki, Saint Petersburg is geographically and time-wise easy to reach. To find suitable respondents, I outlined the environment and field of actors in early spring 2019 but even before that, I had made connections to the local dance communities especially in Saint Petersburg and Moscow. Through these contacts in the dance industry, I got acquainted with more people. To centralize the focus of this study correctly, I rationalized the research idea with thesis supervisors. These discussions led me to get in contact with the interviewees who are a mix of performers, curators, choreographers, and writers of dance.

A case study research can concentrate on certain groups such as organizations and individuals, which were both participants of this study (Strauss and Corbin, 2008, p. 24). "Multiple cases also enable broader exploration of research questions and theoretical elaboration", Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007, p. 27) confirm. My choice was to include participants who have differing experiences; years they have been active, the volume of their activities, their background and professionals in different positions who can present a diverse perspective to the topic. The study views their strategies, roles, position and activities in the Saint Petersburg dance community. The chosen participants are:

- SDVIG Performing Arts Studio, dancers, choreographers, the core members Anya Kravchenko, Kamil Mustafaev, Anton Vdovichenko
- An independent writer, dance critic and journalist, Anya Kozonina
- Saint Petersburg State Conservatory, A senior lecturer at the Ballet Directing Department, Maria Dudina
- Vaganova Ballet Academy, A researcher, dancer, choreographer and curator of Master's program Artistic practices of contemporary dance, Tanya Gordeeva
- Kannon Dance House, Director, Vadim Kasparov

To collect abundant data, interviews serve as the most proper material. Rapport (2012, p. 57) has presented "talking-partners", a term that focuses on creating collaboration and refers to interviews as "a thing-of-itself" in which the social or cultural norms are not over specified by them. According to him, interview settings are ever-changing: "it is far from being a known, unproblematic, shared or deterministic social frame

or cultural convention” (Rapport, 2012, p. 57). To reach this level of talking-partners, I conducted semi-structured interviews that happened face-to-face, apart from one which was conducted via Skype. Semi-structured interviews are the most common types of interviews, especially in human and social sciences (Brinkmann 2014, p. 293). Thus it was also a logical choice for this research.

The list of questions was sent in advance to all participants and the interviews were conducted in Saint Petersburg. The language of the interviews was English. Since the conversations focused on very personal matters, building trust was essential. Therefore as an interviewer, I intended to maintain a friendly approach, giving enough space for the interviewee to answer the questions and tried not to interfere too much. A term describing this position defined by Strauss and Corbin (2008, p. 26) is ‘a sensitive interviewer’, who understand how to give space to the interviewees and let them decide, when to continue. Brinkmann (2014, p. 287) adds how “the interviewer is often portrayed as a “traveler” together with the interviewee, with both involved in the co-construction of whatever happens in the conversation”. To create a safe and comfortable atmosphere, interviewees also had the chance to choose the location for the meeting. This made the situation pleasant and confidential before the actual interview situation.

From the beginning, regarding ethical considerations, I had no intention to create anonymized research. The decision was obvious when I realized, from the early informal discussions with people who are part of the scene, how small the community in Saint Petersburg is. Interviewees also talked openly about the other practitioners by their names. As a researcher, is necessary to consider how the study might affect the field where these individuals work. In any case, hence the question types and the nature of the research, they would have been recognizable. All the interviewees have agreed to the fact that their name is published in the thesis and that the interviews are recorded, transcribed and used for my research.

### **4.3. Grounded theory and applied thematic analysis**

Grounded theory and applied thematic analysis are theme-based analysis methods and have many similarities. In them, the importance of research question types is evident. Regarding the analysis, Guest, MacQueen and Namey (2012, p. 260) emphasize categorizing the research data; they recommend “to review all of the themes associated with a particular question or set of questions asked of the respondents”. The area this research covers is supported by categorized questions. This way, starting the analysis process is not too difficult.

In the opinion of Bernard and Ryan (2010, pp. 56-60), the interview protocol produces the main themes of the work. Guest, MacQueen, and Namey (2012, p. 259) call these as "high-level themes", which can be either

conceptual or content-driven and usually indicated in the hierarchy. Based on this characterizing, grounded theory and thematic analysis, both as theme-based approaches, focus on creating themes and codes. Strengths of both styles are that the analysis can focus on social processes and cultural norms, which are very important in this research, rather than only viewing the individual experiences of people part of the dance industry (Guest, MacQueen and Namey, 2012, p. 17). Grounded theory is also proven to be better for a smaller amount of data while applied thematic analysis fits more on large data sets.

In accordance with the presented analysis methods, the starting points for this research are sampling the data and outlining the themes. Bernard and Ryan (2010, pp. 54-55) write that the points helping to recognize categories from raw data, both written and recorded, are e.g. repetitions, metaphors, local terms or classification of schemes, transitions such as changes in tone of voice and similarities and differences in the sentences. Some of these require a deep analysis of the transcripts and I chose to rather look at the repetitions, terms and finding where the material varies and/or matches and what can be interpreted of it.

There are several words used for a theme when analyzing qualitative data. Bernard and Ryan (2010, pp. 54-55) talk about discovering them in a text, defining the core, turning it into code or also identifying hierarchies, attaching themes to the actual research text and linking with the theoretical models. In this work, I use the concepts of themes and categories together as they match the best to the research question. Coding signifies making a list of themes and interpreting the chosen phenomenon, which in my work is the contemporary dance community. The core of this method is an observation of people, groups, and organizations.

The viewpoint of Boyatzis (1998, p. 29) is that there are three ways of developing thematic codes: theory-driven, prior data-driven and inductive methods on working with the data. Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007, p. 25) state how using inductive theory, new data is constructed from the cases and research data. In this research process, when transcribing the interviews, I noticed certain emerging themes, topics that all the informants addressed. To create a dialogue between theory and material I used inductive reasoning which provided observations that carried the work forward.

One way of sorting the materials is to create a pile of similar topics, sentences or words that can help to create themes under the chosen categories. To complement this method I also used word lists by identifying the keywords from the data. As Bernard and Ryan (2010, pp. 63-69) explain, those are completed with looking at the usage of certain words. This is a more difficult technique that is typically used with grounded theory and onto a text that has rich narratives and it is applied at the late stage of the analysis. Guest, MacQueen, and Namey (2012, pp. 264-265) encourage using quotes that contain detailed examples.



#### **4.4. Analyzing the data**

The research question 'How do actors in Saint Petersburg contemporary dance industry understand their mission and what kind of strategies do they have in their use to pursue this?' will analyze both the status of contemporary dance in the society as well as the existence and pursuit of Saint Petersburg's community. From the strategic part, the research question is answered through the actions and plans the organizations have and how they understand themselves in their sphere of activities.

In the introduction to applied thematic analysis, Guest, MacQueen, and Namey (2012, p. 17) present a comparison between phenomenology, grounded theory and applied thematic analysis. According to them, the thematic analysis focuses on finding the key themes that form codes and initially can be grouped into a codebook. Boyatzis (1998, p. 9) argues how a researcher's task is to identify the codable moment and be open to all information. This method functions as a basis for my work. In addition, based on these definitions, researchers must have an ability to sense themes and interpret the information. Similarities are obvious in these two styles of analysis and they supplement each other. To conduct a complete research I chose to use both of them in my research.

After transcribing the data and documenting all the material, I looked through the full data and condensed the written material and my notes even more as the themes began to take shape. To understand the deeper meanings of the themes and the nature of this material, I repetitively read through the interview data. From this I formed a general understanding of the main topics and it provided a basis for further realizing the themes which are the significant part in grounded theory and thematic analysis. To analyze and outline the data, I created tables and grouped the findings according to themes. Since the amount of data was small, I used manual coding in spreadsheets and other documents and did not need a data analysis software. To understand the overall picture, I created a diagram to show the relationship between the themes. Because the interview questions were already categorized, it made it possible to match the findings under certain groups at an early stage. I was, for example, looking for patterns to understand meaning of the codes. The key themes emerging from the research materials are intertwined around the community, its challenges and future changes towards sustainability.

## 5. UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF STRATEGY

In this chapter, I will present an analysis of the interviewees' perceptions of strategy and community. As Byrnes (2009, p. 137) and Varbanova (2013, p. 122) have noted, organizations can use one or more strategies. This chapter sets the basis for how the Saint Petersburg dance community understands the starting point for their strategic actions. Later chapters will take a closer look at how they use them to answer the challenges they are facing.

Both Byrnes (2009, p. 129) and Tschirhart and Bielefeld (2012, p. 93) have noted that strategic planning has three stages; analyzing the organization (mission and vision), formulating a strategy based on priorities (advancing the mission), and using the operational plans to accomplish the strategy (goals and objectives). However, based on the empirical findings, this commonly considered logical approach is not fully suitable for Saint Petersburg actors. Their work methods do not follow the practice presented in the study of strategic management. The research data shows that the interviewees recognize and notice the basic functions and the features of the strategy, but they lack consistency in measuring those. In proportion to the results, organizations' and individual professionals' planning is uncertain mainly due to the lack of systematic approach, governmental restrictions and overall status of contemporary dance in Russian society. To comprehend this from the practitioners' point of view, the paragraph below shows how each of the interviewees has ended up working in the field contemporary dance.

To understand the results in connection to the theory and to capture the essence of the data, I have analyzed the data by using both grounded theory and applied thematic analysis to it and identified three key emergent themes, which are:

- 1) A divided community struggling to exist
- 2) Critical challenges that hinder development
- 3) Change-makers aiming at new advocacy.

These themes are later divided into sub-categories that consist of several codes. The three main themes and their sub-categories are presented in the following chapters but first this analysis chapter discusses the practices and processes: the importance of a strategy and common understanding of the organization's mission.

## 5.1. Saint Petersburg actors entering the field of contemporary dance

The significant question of practitioners in Saint Petersburg is, how to sustain a living working for their passion. All of the interviewees have different backgrounds in establishing their profession or in general entering the field of contemporary dance in Saint Petersburg. In reference to the empirical material, they have faced the same questions of the sustainability of their profession and being a recognized expert in the community and the eyes of public, institutions and decision-makers. In the past, social changes and weak foundations around contemporary dance in Russia have set the frame for the whole industry (Vasenina, 2011, p. 5). Today, an attempt to enhance something that was pressed down before is a strenuous task.

The SDVIG group expresses how they have a strong will to create sustainability to the dance scene in a situation where in Russia, it is still led by uncertainty. The people who now run the studio are dancers and choreographers themselves. In addition to Vdovichenko confirms that they need “the space to rehearse and show the works” whereas Kravchenko calls the emergence of SDVIG as “a coincidence of interests”. In the beginning, the performance space was initiated in the creative cluster, Berthold Centre when Alexander Kondratenko and Maria Gorokhova were thinking about what kind of businesses to invite to the building. They had interests to invest time and money in contemporary dance studios creation and after a few months, they invited Vdovichenko to take over this space. In addition to the three members presented in ch. 4.2, also Maria Sheshukova is part of SDVIG’s core group.

Gordeeva’s position these days is somewhat different. Rather than fully focusing on her work as an artist, as a representative of the Vaganova Academy’s Master’s program, she articulates how “it is important to talk about artistic practices” (Gordeeva). This is her survival strategy in the Russian dance world, which is dominated by ballet especially in the field of higher education. Regarding the educational program, Gordeeva states that those who teach at the Academy’s Master’s program, are the forerunners by having a possibility to develop and transform their practices within each group of Master’s program’s students. Now, after functioning for a few years they know “what to bring, how to connect and what is the emphasis” (Gordeeva). With this, they are creating an impact through their program.

Again, from a different background comes Kozonina, who ended up attending a laboratory of a prominent choreographer a few years ago. As a journalist, she later wrote an article about it to a magazine. After receiving respectful feedback from to her previously unknown professional community, Kozonina felt encouraged to continue writing about contemporary dance. Residing in Nizhny Novgorod at the time, she later visited the Open Look Festival in Saint Petersburg and started to understand that this professional community in fact exists. At the beginning she wrote only about one article in every three months, but even

starting with not that frequent pace, she and her journalist talent were recognized and she started to feel her input to the field become essential.

Since the beginning of establishing Kannon Dance, Kasparov has had a desire to influence the field even though his original profession is something else. Their dance school was established mainly because Kasparov's wife Natalya had an education in another field and she had interest to get a professional dance education in Europe. The couple did not want to move outside Russia and instead they wanted to bring contemporary dance to their hometown Saint Petersburg. Their approach and practices rely on personal values and Kasparov confirms how their place in the business is in connection to this: "we try to say, this is what we believe in, it is valuable for us and we, for a long time, go with this what's valuable for us." Since 1997 they have been prominent players foregrounding the industry in Saint Petersburg.

Dudina, a graduate of the Saint Petersburg State Conservatory, and currently a Senior lecturer at the Ballet Directing Department, started her innovational activity by examining the structures of the educational program and its characteristics inside the faculty. Preparing a new contemporary dance-focused Bachelor's program in the conservatory, she also attempts to create meeting points for people in the world of contemporary dance. Furthermore, she has a need to establish a professional community, which discusses the state of the art form (Dudina). She has a strong will to highlight today's context in contemporary dance and she is endeavouring towards it.

## **5.2. Mission statement as a basis for strategic operations**

The means of strategic management and organizational thinking in Russia's art and culture sector are reflected in practical activities. Even though formulating a mission statement in a written form was not something the interviewees had done, traces of statements were recognizable from the discussion. Due to the fragmented field and as an attempt to understand the divided community of Saint Petersburg dance practitioners, defining a mission is viewed in later chapters based on Varbanova's (2013, p. 61) themes mentioned earlier and attached in the template of interview questions (Appendix 1).

The participants were asked to value 12 themes according to their importance and based on their answers these were divided into two groups (Table 1). One of the interviewees was hesitant to define significant parts of their mission based on these pre-given terms from theoretical materials. The result of the last interview question from four other interviews performed can still serve participants and community members in two ways; first, as a starting point for outlining their own mission and secondly, to help unify the scattered field by understanding what other actors in Saint Petersburg are aiming at in their activities.

**Table 1: Themes for a mission**

<b>Primary themes</b>	<b>Secondary themes</b>
Developing professional networking in the arts	Acting as a catalyst for a change
Exchanging experiences and generating ideas	Engaging lobbying and advocacy
Facilitating a platform for debates and dialogue	Promoting access to arts and participation in the art
Promoting intercultural dialogue, communication and collaboration	Supporting the identity and diversity of an art form

Actors of the community are well aware of their resources and are showing that they have strategic capability according to Poisson-de Haro and Menot's (2013, p. 61) description. By using concrete key terms (Varbanova, 2013, p. 61) the above-mentioned style of defining missions is easy and creates a functioning structure for understanding the organizations' work. Also, another way of outlining a mission can be done based on Poisson-de Haro and Menot's (2013, pp. 124-126) three types of mission statements. Both of these factors, as well as goals, are discussed in more detail in the following paragraphs as part of the three main themes.

## 6. A DIVIDED COMMUNITY STRUGGLING TO EXIST

The contemporary dance industry is fragmented and the Saint Petersburg community divided. A fundamental question is, why there is no apparent consensus on how the community members understand their position as practitioners in relation to others. As Varbanova (2013, p. 29) notes, to understand their possibilities the organizations should examine their future ambitions stronger. The empirical data of this research shows that all of them are in an identical situation: the practitioners are living in a survival state of mind while looking for security and sustainable practices for their own field. Still a shared strategical mindset to make a change is missing.

The interviewees all mention that the community in Saint Petersburg is weak and according to some, even nonexistent. The reasons for this are mainly sought from outside rather than in their internal activities. SDVIG group articulates that the community is formed around contemporary dance events or certain venues. In the opinion of Kravchenko “for now the community for me is people who make something, so people who show their work”. Vdovichenko stresses how the community equals certain names and personalities. One of the strongest characters is Kasparov, whose company Kannon Dance has been very active in bringing visiting international teachers to Russia and producing several events as well as the Open Look festival. Kasparov himself is aware that they have done a lot in the community and have been in the industry for longer than others. The main question is, how to outline the community’s shared mission of the field from this starting point when exchanging experiences and generating ideas (Varbanova, 2013, p. 61) are not a part of their visible activities.

### 6.1. Policy-related issues slowing down the recognition of contemporary dance

The research exposes that one of the essential themes is, in whose voice should this community speak? Not all are equally aware of the effect of the different channels and means of influence and some have not started trying to change the inadequate structures. The interviewees themselves describe contemporary dance as a marginal practice of subcultural groups. Under this setting, its vulnerable status in Russian society is revealed.

In O’Connor’s (2005, p. 52) opinion, the cultural field in Saint Petersburg has been fragmented for a longer period. Even with a rich history of avant-garde and non-conformist art, in today’s Russia, contemporary dance has had a minimal role along with other non-mainstream performative art forms. Based on several sources mentioned in this work, contemporary dance has an indefinable status. In this context, there are no evident traditions or practices which would give it a more noticeable position compared to classical forms like ballet

or folk dance or other popular and entertaining dance genres. Concluding from this, changing the structures is not effortless but there is an evident need for it.

The majority of interviewees mention that government policies are restricting as they rather hinder than facilitate new entrants to the field. The permanent setting with the long-standing genres overrules and leaves contemporary dance out of the system somewhere in between theater and traditional dance forms. In the opinion of Kasparov, those who are behind the subsidies and the money have the responsibility and contemporary dance is part of the politics these days. He mentions that “the political situation is very influential for the cultural activity and exchange”. Gordeeva agrees with this unequal situation as she thinks “it gets appropriated by some structures who have money and use it for their own reasons”. A similar distinction remains within the community. Mustafaev sees contemporary dance as a privilege of an inner circle that is already part of the community.

*It functions as a supportive practice for other occupations such as making theater or movies. It's not yet self-sufficient to be visible and understood and something clear by itself, as a phenomenon. That's why there is not yet one clear term for contemporary dance, because it also can be some kind of pop dancing, it used to be misunderstood and misread. (Mustafaev, 2019)*

Kravchenko says that in Russia, contemporary dance is unnoticed in the eyes of institutions and the general public, and one reason being behind is lack of reviews in the media. According to her “the monopoly for the dance belongs to ballet and pop music so contemporary styles such as street dance, they somehow manage to through the pop culture, they gain their visibility” (Kravchenko). This has been confirmed by e.g. Sirotkina (2018, p. 37) and Vasenina (2011, p. 5) in their work. For the organizations and independent professionals of today's time, it is challenging to increase the interest of the public and even create notions for the dance practice among family and friends, she adds. Kozonina struggles with the same situation as to her explaining her work and understanding its value is complicated since contemporary dance is in the margins.

## **6.2. Confrontation and differentiation from others**

A key finding through the interviews was how the question about the community and its relations raised a lot of arguments among the interviewees. They are not directly admitting that there is competition in the field or name their competitors but the topic arises nevertheless and the lack of respect or understanding the others practices are present. As Poisson-de Haro and Menot (2013, p. 25) have pointed out in their work,

the need to differ from competitors is usual, particularly in arts and culture organizations. Although the community members are aware of their advantages compared to others and despite apparent confrontation between them, competition as such appears to be more reflective of individuals and their values than for example points in competitive strategies presented by Varbanova (2013, p. 122).

The Saint Petersburg's contemporary dance community has a wide range of attitudes: some are considered old-fashioned or stuck to certain structures and not open-minded while others are too modern, following trends or their ideas are too conceptual. Most of the interviewees talk about how they do not appreciate the choreographic approaches of others or their way of making performances or their methods to teach. This way the scattered community is even further from the common goal which, however, they all share: more visibility and recognition to the contemporary dance field in Russia.

Different styles of executing the strategies are noticeable through the work the interviewee is describing and it is influenced by the position in which they are at that moment. Gordeeva is aware that the people in the community are not a homogeneous group and they all have different point-of-views and ideas. The role of the Vaganova Academy in the university community and as a government education is meaningful, it being the first Master's level program focused on contemporary dance in Russia. She goes on how their program is connecting people in the less-supported contemporary dance field, who all come from varied backgrounds and adds "it's also important that they have a diploma on choreographic arts, it's not like any other Master or Bachelor program in Russia when you have folk dance or folk arts or theatrical arts in your diploma" (Gordeeva). Pondering this significance, Vdovichenko finds something to criticize as he utters the worry of educational institutions turning inwards with each student group and course at the academy.

Kozonina seems to follow the same idea presented by Vasenina (2011, p. 4) earlier in chapter 2.3. about the crack in the community as a result of the departure of dance professionals. In Kozonina's opinion, this is visible as people come to Saint Petersburg to study or to work for some artistic production and then leave: "SDVIG, for example, speaking about their program they always invite choreographers and teachers from Moscow, it is not growing from here, Saint Petersburg's history" (Kozonina). Confrontation can also be disappointing since they might not be able to build collaboration with the talented choreographers or dancers they value.

For example, Kravchenko and Kozonina both admit they have visited Kannon Dance's Open Look festival earlier to do their exploration on the field and to form their opinions but Kravchenko now tells: "I have to be honest, I'm not anymore the guest of all this situation". Kasparov, then again, does not share a similar approach to education with Gordeeva or with Kozonina's interest to write about conceptual performances: "they believe in this but I don't believe, but at the same time I don't say it is bad, I don't judge". He too is



critical when talking about the Saint Petersburg community. Despite the fact that he does not condemn the approach and method of others, Kasparov declares his company was the first in the markets and there is a gap between the new and old generation of performance spaces: “as I already did so much, nobody can do the same as it was a long time we started from zero, ground level. We start to build it. All this new generation, they are building their businesses on the shoulder of me and my life, it is allegorical” (Kasparov).

The interviewees are busy distinguishing from each other and their targets. There is also a distinction between commercial and non-commercial projects. This conflict does not support the common strategy and the objective of strengthening the sector. Kasparov, for instance, feels like he's being criticized because he is active in building connections with institutions, being in contact with foreign consulates: “sometimes I get upset of the way when people try not to collaborate but to hide you and you work” (Kasparov). Dudina thinks the community is formed around the performance spaces, in arenas where people share the same interests. Referring to a possible competitive position, she states “if we understand that there are no separate enemies, but all of us are a whole community, then we can do a lot” (Dudina).

## 7. CRITICAL CHALLENGES THAT HINDER DEVELOPMENT

In her research, Varbanova (2013, p. 38) has expressed how critical challenges are one part of an organization's strategic issues. The main challenges occurring in the Russian contemporary dance industry are issues with the country's geographical constraints, lack of both infrastructure and satisfaction or even any kind of funding, and conservative direction of thinking. These are slowing down the chances to sustain the future of the field and meet the needs of the professionals. Respondents are aware that the current situation is not possible on a quick schedule, but forward-looking activity occurs among them.

### 7.1. Geographical constraints

To start with geographical constraints, interviewees admit that the main dance community is located entirely in Moscow and other areas stay behind under the shadow of the capital city. Kozonina confirms this as in her opinion contemporary choreographers and dance artists are located in the Russian capital but she adds that the theme goes beyond geographical reasons, it is also about the way of thinking and people's attitude to arts that form the opinions (Kozonina). Dudina declares how the problem of attitude escalates throughout the field of contemporary art:

*In Russia, there are a lot of creatives and interest in developing the industry of contemporary dance. Individuals and groups. The problem is the location of Russian contemporary art, not only dance but whole art is Siberia, Ekaterinburg, Chelyabinsk and so on, quite far from Saint Petersburg and even Moscow. (Dudina)*

Kasparov has started operational planning and is curious about creating a region-based network of dance houses that would ideally receive funding from the surrounding areas. He is enthusiastic about advocacy; community development and lobbying the whole industry on a higher level where his general idea is to communicate throughout the whole of Russia (Kasparov). From this base, the different centers could act as platforms focusing on hosting festivals, showing regional talents and supporting local companies. Nevertheless, Kasparov is skeptical about the possible opportunities and he admits not being sure if this kind of geographical development can ever happen in Russia. Firstly, his idea would require a separate association to run it and in the current situation, there is not yet a great plan, how the situation could be improved. Still, this strategy aiming at markets, as Varbanova (2013, p. 122) describes in her book, is worth noticing and demonstrates Kasparov's extremely skilled strategic reasoning ability.

## 7.2. Lack of infrastructure and funding

Secondly, looking at further the lack of proper infrastructure and funding in contemporary dance, became evident that the questions of these matters are sensitive to the participants. Dudina, as well as the others, acknowledges that Russia lacks a supportive organization for dance: “we don't have such an organization such in Finland, I know Dance Info Finland, it's kind of umbrella organization for dance, we don't have such an organization here. So that's why there is a community but it's kind of divided for several separate points of power” (Dudina). Kasparov agrees with her: “the infrastructure for drama theater and ballet its quite well done but for contemporary dance, nothing like this”. This trouble exists throughout the industry in Saint Petersburg. He adds that step by step at Kannon Dance has created an infrastructure and a position for themselves which gives them a possibility to survive (Kasparov). As explained by Kasparov, this was largely enabled when the dance school started to receive support in 2006 and finally in 2008-2009 renting their current space in the city center.

When talking of the weaknesses in the infrastructure, Kasparov worries about the field and its small professional market as there is just a handful of festivals and therefor a lack of places to perform. Other participants say that the subject reflects a lack of recognition and respect, both professional and personal. SDVIG group apprehend they are living in a “time of surviving”, which means that there is no time to stress or no room for mistakes. A strong commitment to the organization or one's work creates a certain level of vulnerability that easily converts to stress. With conducting a SWOT analysis, an organization finds their direction of activities for the future (Poisson-de Haro and Menot, 2013, p. 67) and a detected weakness can be turned into an opportunity, such as uniting with other actors, festivals and creating new places to perform.

According to Kasparov, even though Kannon Dance a school and performance space now has a satisfactory infrastructure that supports their organization, he admits the overall situation in the country makes it difficult to plan their organization's pursuits, as doing business in Russia is always risky (Kasparov). Still, he is not as anxious as others, and in his words, they have “a chance to survive” (Kasparov). All actors are not as advanced. External threats with deficient infrastructure are related to the rented spaces, which was mentioned in several interviews. Contracts are short, usually, only covering a one year at a time, which means it is challenging to invest in both program and long-term plans with that specific space.

The interviewees have broader general goals rather than concrete ones that would focus on the organization's internal operating environment. The main objectives are usually short-term they wish to be realized soon. Kasparov says how observing the environment provides him solutions: “I try to develop our future and all the time I am thinking, this year this project is important, next year this one and so on. All the time it is depending on what I see around me” (Kasparov). In his opinion, the changing environment in the

field does not offer a possibility for long-term plans (Kasparov). In Kannon Dance, they mostly focus on short one or maximum two-year goals.

Coming from a more steady institution, Dudina talks about implementing the State Conservatory's strategies at the third phase of the general strategic planning model by Tschirhart and Bielefeld (2012, p. 93) when she articulates her exhaustive goal: to form the whole contemporary dance industry in Russia. As described earlier, Dudina has realized the need to change the country's education system in contemporary dance is acute. Having a 5-10 -year objective to change this and by offering a platform for professional companies, she is the only one with a direct long-term plan as according to Byrnes' (2009, p. 125) definition. Although, Gordeeva shares similar plans as she underlines that creating the right kind of environment for contemporary dance practitioners is the main thing at the moment, she is not indicating a specific timeframe for these activities. Since goals should derive from an organization's mission (Byrnes 2009, p. 126) and because none of the interviewees had formulated a precise mission statement, naturally from this follows that their objectives are also vague and do not fully support the strategic activities.

### **7.3. Conservative attitudes**

The prevailing conservative attitudes towards contemporary dance are taking energy away from those working in the field and this appears as weaknesses in organizations' internal analysis. The more traditional direction of thinking is ruling over possibilities e.g. with meaningful development in the infrastructure or education. Gordeeva confirms how "it takes a lot of energy to create a dialogue", as the delivered message is not always mutually understood. Hence, based on Varbanova's (2013, p. 29) road map of strategic management, these situations will increase the need to develop a strategy to change the setting.

Similar challenges as Gordeeva's description are visible in the Saint Petersburg community at many levels. Over 20 years ago Kasparov's attempts to approach institutions with this matter were rejected: "I went to the dance department at the university, I went to the theater academy, to music comedy theater and nobody [...] we don't need it", Kasparov describes the reaction he experienced from the institutions. The interest to include the contemporary dance in the institutions' education palette was nonexistent. It has taken a long time to raise an interest that is built on sustaining the art form and its future.

Through her work Dudina has come across obstacles; the conservative institution is not very flexible or development-friendly and does not always meet her goals. Dudina reveals there is no turnover of conservatory teaching staff and most people hold their position until the very end. Apart from her, the majority of professors are over 65 and even people over 80 years old work there. While these people are

professionally respected and have merit, still, without exception, their values and teaching methods are somewhere in the past in the 1950s or 1960s (Dudina). For the reasons mentioned above, it is difficult to plan the State Conservatory's future by the strategic management phases set by Clarke and Fuller (2011, p. 85) if the direction has been the same for many decades. Nonetheless, with Dudina's hard work, the change she desires is achievable.

## **8. CHANGE-MAKERS AIMING AT NEW ADVOCACY**

Stated earlier in this study, and noted by many scholars (Sirotkina, 2018, p. 37, Vasenina, 2011, p. 5 and Moyzhes, 1998, p. 51), popular and classical genres have over time ruled over contemporary dance. To break the traditions, the Saint Petersburg community must understand which means suit best for do that and how the sector can respond to the challenges strategic means could bring forward. As Varbanova (2013, p. 61) notes, changing the field and acting as a catalyst towards a new shift is one of the key building blocks for a contemporary dance organization's mission. This theme is perceivable from the empirical materials of this study and occurs among all of the interviewees. Gordeeva for example hesitates to talk about the position of ballet but admits that "on a state-level, I think the idea is to fit it into the ballet features and say that you can't dance contemporary dance if you don't have a ballet — in Russia it is too bad to have ballet in your program because it brings different value in what you do" (Gordeeva).

Besides division between classical and modern genres and appreciation, the interviewees recognize the needs for developing cross-sectoral or intercultural collaborations, investing in industry's higher education and creating new programs as well as through language and linguistic expressions to create connections with media, audience, and institutions. Channels that provide a platform for making a change are presented below.

### **8.1. Opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration**

Promoting intercultural dialogue as one of the key points in a mission is shared by many participants. Collaboration with other art fields is seen as an internal strength and related to opening new possibilities, but also as a means to bring contemporary dance to the fore through other art forms. Kozonina uses the strategic management tools defined by Clarke and Fuller (2011, p. 85) and acknowledges the demand for development; she stresses advocacy and understands visual arts professionals as a bridge to wider possibilities to raise the prestige of contemporary dance. Keeping this in mind, she follows the strategy relying on integration and networking presented by Varbanova (2013, p. 122) and the idea of combining aesthetics of dance and visual arts by Isadora Duncan (Magriel, 1997, p. 56).

When talking about interdisciplinary collaboration, Kozonina thinks "they can bring their knowledge to this field and also find some new vocabulary and a new approach to making art and thinking about art from people who are more bodily concentrated". In addition to artistic content's potential, she finds a link at the institutional level as according to her, "theatre is very conservative in Russia, visual arts is not" (Kozonina). She gives an example: "It seems to me that the situation is getting better a little bit because contemporary

dance or experimental dance is getting more and more interesting for visual arts institutions and for theaters who are more open to performative practices, not for drama but more movement for dance performance and so on” (Kozonina).

The interviewees follow the idea presented by Varbanova (2013, p. 61), as interdisciplinary dialogue is a possible part of their yet unwritten mission that is repeated in dialogues. This strength manifests also as an external opportunity in the institution level as in her sphere of activities, as Dudina states that “I think the strength of the conservatory is that its conservatory, it is a music education system so there is a possibility to collaborate with contemporary musicians composers, music designers, sound designers”. Gordeeva agrees with her as she highlights the connections at Vaganova Academy and the chance for dialogue with other study fields.

Kravchenko sees that SDVIG’s activities base is not only on strictly dance, but collaboration as well. She indicates the importance of collaboration: “We have a few visual artists around and musicians, it is essential” (Kravchenko). The SDVIG sees this inter-connecting field and its development important; their strategic direction is well-defined, showing structure just as Clarke and Fuller (2011, p. 86) have discussed. As for Kasparov, he does not mention visual arts or music like the others, but tells that Kannon Dance has a virtual reality project with their dancer and a foreign performer they have invited to Russia who will share his knowledge on the topic.

## **8.2. Higher education providing opportunities**

The interviewees have characterized Saint Petersburg as having an insufficient structure in higher education in contemporary dance. Dudina is skeptical as in her opinion there is no field of contemporary dance in Russia and one reason is the education structure: “we don't have an educational system in contemporary dance, we have 10 educational programs in the whole country”. Compared to other genres such as ballet and folk dance, it is an underdog as these traditional styles are taught in more than 100 programs according to Dudina. Vasenina (2011, p. 5) states how the first faculty of contemporary dance was founded in Ekaterinburg’s University for the Humanities (Arts) only in 2006. In this slowly evolving field, difficulties in the labor market are obvious. The study revealed and interviewees confirmed there are not enough open positions for the graduates in professional companies and a change to this is now being sought for.

The interviewees did not articulate the idea of growth in increasing performances or volume of action, but this strategical premise was noted related to educational issues and visibility in media. The growth strategy by Byrnes (2009, p. 136) is present especially in the endeavors of Dudina and Kasparov, but instead of

increasing the types of events, they try to keep the audience and get new people interested in contemporary dance. Kozonina's activities support this from another angle as she focuses on finding a suitable media outlet for spreading information about the contemporary dance and its theory.

As a respond to the conservative attitudes mentioned above in ch. 7.3., Kasparov has been exceptionally proactive with strategic operations by creating visibility for contemporary dance within the more traditional ballet structures. He mentions how these days Mariinsky theater's repertoire has a balance between the two dance forms but adds that there are still challenges with finding the dancers for more contemporary pieces: "it means, when the choreographers come to do something, he needs to have dancers, who can do his ideas. Then they face the problem, lack of dancers who can do this" (Kasparov).

He continues that a few years ago he was called to Boris Eifman Dance Academy, Secondary Vocational Education institution, to establish a program of contemporary dance together with them.

*He [Eifman] tried to combine classical ballet dance with modern dance and three years he worked, then realized something is wrong. Then he invited me and my wife to work with him, to develop dance education. — We designed a special program, what develop dancers. In a few years, with good knowledge, they go on the market. (Kasparov)*

The difficulty that Kasparov has faced is also a one of Dudina's concerns. Now, despite challenges, Dudina is moving forward with her biggest work, designing a whole new Bachelor's degree program "Art of Contemporary Dance in the State Conservatory". In an obvious need, she has approached the Yakobson ballet theater mentioned earlier in ch. 2.1. In Dudina's words, last years this company has only worked with classical performances such as Swan Lake and Sleeping Beauty. Due to Dudina's activity, this mutually beneficial program's public announcement during the interview was almost ready. She admits that there is no ready-made template for collaboration:

*You cannot just decide and establish a company because you have no umbrella, no governmental support, no grants or scholarships. It is easy to speak with the existing companies but not Mariinsky and Mihailovsky theatre, absolutely, for sure. We decided to speak with Yakobson ballet theater because they're experimental spirit is still there. (Dudina)*

The educational mission presented by Poisson de-Haro and Menot (2013, pp. 125-126) responds to a challenge of a possible decline in interest towards contemporary dance and aims at reaching young people



and generating public awareness through organization's activities. The same can be noted from the activity of many Saint Petersburg dance community members but they all have different approaches. Especially Kasparov's mission is to raise a new generation of young talents. He seems to link publicity to fame and even though he makes a statement that they at Kannon Dance do not care about publicity, they are very visible especially in the field of offering training for young people and through their Open Look festival creating outreach and awareness. This reflects that Kasparov has embraced Vinogradova's (2017, p. 153) understanding of contemporary dance.

Despite all the opportunities, there is an external threat in the field of education which emerged from the materials for this study. Change of targets applies specifically to educational institutions that can shift their focus point with program insights. When talented people with a degree obtained from Russia leave abroad, there are fewer opportunities for the contemporary dance field to flourish. Though in the light of Vasenina's (2011, p. 5) report, some of these professionals return to their home country, it alone is not enough to keep up the structure or to create a functioning community.

### **8.3. Media and communications: connecting with the audience and institutions**

Many of the respondents discuss how contemporary dance has less visibility than other dance forms in Russian media. Kozonina sees that there is a problem with general understanding as in her opinion, recognition of contemporary dance is in connection to institutional support and audience. Interdisciplinary collaboration between other practitioners was presented earlier but she wonders could this be the link to reach institutions and decision-makers (Kozonina). She proposes creating a new language that is channeled through visual arts, and then step by step creating more room for contemporary dance. When talking about interdisciplinary collaboration, Kozonina points out that it would make a difference if the visual art critics would attend dance performances. According to her, Russia does not have proper approaches to writing about contemporary dance because the journalists are very much grounded in the Soviet ballet criticism. Interdisciplinary collaboration would be important as he adds "we have a very good tradition of visual art criticism" (Kozonina).

Mustafaev said that at SDVIG, they do not know how and when contemporary dance as a term would gain a clear definition; he calls their activity a constant experiment. Kravchenko adds that all they do is based on intuition. The position of contemporary dance is not yet evident even for themselves. Noisette (2011, p. 58) has declared that "contemporary dance is not elitist, it is simply little-known". To answer this setting, part of SDVIG's strategy is to invest in and pay attention to communication. Vdovichenko indicates conscious choice behind his actions: "the way we started to write about our events — it gave more access for people to come".

Kravchenko continues that their way of delivering the message does not focus on empty promises nor the “language of yoga schools to boost your energy”, but rather their inner interests. The question of the language as a basis for mutual understanding is also present inside the institutions.

In addition to the general issues with infrastructure, many of the interviewees mention the lack of specialized literature of dance in Russian language. Only recently, Garage Museum has launched a new publication series called “Garage Dance” in which signature works by recognized international contemporary dance choreographers and world-renowned dancers have been translated into Russian (Garage, 2020). Additionally, according to Kozonina, the curators of the Garage’s performance art program are searching for new suitable publications and this way “make [contemporary dance] more accessible for Russian audience”. Gordeeva believes that it is indeed challenging to find information online nowadays as there are not many books and most of the publications are academic dissertations. She still expresses this published material is also important especially to the students at Vaganova Academy: “actually, they are all dancers, as soon they stop [studying], they have to stop [learning] such theory. We hope that this, getting closer to theory, changes the way they articulate practices but basically we can't force them” (Gordeeva).

At SDVIG they have understood how dance works as a service for other art forms in terms of collaboration. Their way of thinking and mode of operation reflects establishing a new way of dance. Kravchenko demonstrates that it is important to ask how they can present a language of dance to others: “How we can invite filmmakers, visual artists, musician, science artist into our world and propose them our way of thinking”. This philosophy portrays the theme of language as a connector. Kozonina is delighted with recent development as now each edition of Moscow Art Magazine has included an article from a choreographer, a dance scholar or a researcher. In her opinion all media outlets have special strategies, different audiences and diverse group readers, whether targeted to the general audience, more to the academic community or the ones with a special interest in arts and culture. She explains her work enables to reach out to the wider professional community, people in the field of science as well as artists and producers (Kozonina).

Gordeeva says there are two extremities in the academy’s thinking between classical ballet training and contemporary dance: “The most challenging thing is to talk about contemporary art with people from my choreography department”. Dudina in turn, is using discourse as the core of her mission. She reveals the struggles she is facing with the outdated terminology which is hindering the audience’s comprehension. Although she is a part of a big institution, she is not going along with Varbanova’s (2013, p. 37) idea of doing business “as usual” and relying on regular audience. Her main goal in making a change manifests itself within conservatory’s annual scientific ballet history conference. With the past edition, Dudina suggested a variation to its name to meet the actual program and discussion, which was actually more focused on contemporary dance. She explains: “I tried to change it to ‘dance theory and questions of contemporary art conference’.

But for now, I did not have permission to change the name” (Dudina). Within the steps for creating a new platform and making a change which such events, it is crucial to maintain comprehensible discussion and have clear vocabulary to reach new audiences.

From the perspective of media and as a journalist, Kozonina sees a challenge in finding the right section for contemporary dance articles. She believes her work is to promote access to arts and is already experienced in it with different publications. Still, her aim has not fully succeeded as for example, Kozonina tried to offer a report of Open Look festival to a big urban media newspaper that did not accept it. Now, her column in another magazine is labeled under visual art theme mainly “because the theater editor does not recognize the dance I'm writing about, as dance” (Kozonina). Here too, the conservative attitude discussed earlier in ch. 7.3. is shown. From this experience, creating visibility and increasing participation in contemporary dance is not stress-free and even though Kozonina has a clear plan of action and strategy to lean on, the mission is not easy to accomplish. Most of the interviewees behave as Kotler and Scheff’s (1997, p. 189) describe, as the actors are viewing their activities in contemporary dance being built on experiences and the audience and delivering the message correctly is right at the core. Following Varbanova’s (2013, p. 61) themes, with this their mission includes creating a platform and using dialogue, but it has not fully been turned into reality yet.

#### **8.4. International dimensions and professional networking**

On a mission to link the Russian and international perspective in dance, developing professional networking is essential. The need for international connections became evident from the SWOT analysis of Saint Petersburg’s contemporary dance community (Table 2) since according to the interviews, one of the actors’ internal weakness is lack of professional markets in Russia, and on-the-spot international relations are seen as one solution. It is both providing access and presenting the field to foreigners, and supporting professional networking outside the country. This remark on partnerships indicates that the Saint Petersburg community is using Varbanova’s (2013, p. 122) strategy for collaboration and networking and being aware of its meaning for the organization’s activities.

Gordeeva mentions that attempts to connect the European discourse and Vaganova Academy’s interests is challenging. She points out that their research is different because people in the program do not come from one field, such as choreography, but they have diverse backgrounds (Gordeeva). Her thoughts represent a more scientific take on her mission; developing the theory-based knowledge and its importance to the field. She states that this creates visibility:

*We take part in conferences and I and students write articles. In terms of making contemporary dance visible we had to create critical discourse for it. This program is one of the main sources in Russia. People who graduate all over Russia have to write their works and we try to be in this way to be more connected to Europe in terms of what's going on and put a focus on it. This is one of the main resources to be more visible. (Gordeeva)*

Vdovichenko confirms SDVIG too has a future strategy to expand to international connections and mentions MTD in Stockholm, which is a venue for contemporary choreography and performance, as one of the most interesting possible collaborators: “if we try to think not about the names but about the size or scale the organizations that we are acting in the same field or the same force” (Vdovichenko). Kravchenko from her part adds communities in France where she has studied and describes their spirit “of being local but doing progressive art for the local communities” (Kravchenko). Mustafaev continues increasing the interest working with music festivals and expanding the understanding of their practice in new performance conditions; to different spaces and audiences (Mustafaev). These activities have features of both Varbanova’s (2013, p. 122) set of strategies for integration, collaboration, and networking, and Byrnes’ (2009, p. 136) growth strategy.

Kozonina acknowledges that it is challenging to make connections in the international arena for a variety of reasons. She thinks the international audience and professionals have a one-sided understanding of Russian contemporary dance by only attending the most visible festival:

*I think the problem for example when I meet people from different European communities, they always tell me: oh we went to Saint Petersburg and went to Open Look dance festival and now we understand what Russian dance is, and it is like in the 80's but no, if you've been to the biggest festival which has its kind of perspective and its very, uhmm, it is not all the Russian dance and it is not the most interesting one I think. (Kozonina)*

Kozonina has reached out to international media and relates that “I'm very interested in writing about Russian dance in English and sharing this knowledge from our perspective to the international audience and that's why I'm very happy that I had the chance to establish relations with Springback magazine and with Aerowaves” (Kozonina). Kasparov is also fond of collaboration and international partnerships and declares “when you talk about local and international, we're supporting international activity because we are developing local people. Without international communication, the locals could never develop”. He also brings attention to the importance of mutual exchange in international projects. It can be concluded that

international connections and networks help the whole community of Saint Petersburg to further recognize their uniqueness and important position in the Russian art world.

## 9. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

This thesis aimed to identify strategies and planning processes that are being used among the Saint Petersburg contemporary dance organizations and individual professionals in the field. This included exploring the road map of the organization's strategic management, its current status, and future ambitions for the organizations. The study also provided an understanding of organizations' comprehensive plans; what strategic tools they use, their goals, SWOT analyses and the bases of their missions. Overall, this work provided answers to what can and what must be done to find the right course of action. In addition to this, this thesis looked back on history and the background of contemporary dance: how the revolutionary contemporary dance came to Russia and how it positioned itself during repressive times and after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The study also examined, how the contemporary dance has gained its position and existed alongside traditional dance genres such as classical ballet and folk dance as well as what is the core of the contemporary dance community of today in Saint Petersburg.

The research question of this thesis was 'How do actors in Saint Petersburg contemporary dance industry understand their mission and what kind of strategies do they have in their use to pursue this?' This challenging position was studied from the perspective of five cases and through interviews seven individuals who all work in the industry. These actors form a community in Saint Petersburg with many other professionals. I set out to do this research on the premise that the burden of history still weighs on the industry today.

Key findings were that the community is not united, and it is struggling to exist. However, the reasons lie as much in today's structures as in history. The lack of common advocacy in the performing arts field was evident. There is no single organization that would support contemporary dance as an umbrella organization, such as labor union or other professional organization. People who have operated in the field for a long time, had not verbalized their mission statement or written down their strategy in any conventional way, their level of strategic leadership was weaker than I expected. Still, the research revealed that all the actors have faced same questions about the sustainability of their profession, them being recognized experts in their community and the eyes of the public, institutions and decision-makers

Arguably, the fragmented field needs mission statements or strategic operations now more than ever. Out of 12 key ideas based on Varbanova's (2013, p. 61) mission themes, the Saint Petersburg actors shared and recognized eight, out of which four were given priority. Their shared primary themes for a mission were: developing professional networking in the arts; exchanging experiences and generating ideas; facilitating a platform for debates and dialogue; promoting intercultural dialogue, communication, and collaboration. It has to be noted that these were the wishes of the actors. At the time of the interviews, two of the first

mentioned themes were realized clearly, facilitating a platform for debates and dialogue a little less and the last theme, exchanging experiences and generating ideas, did not seem to exist at all among the participants. This brings up a discussion about how to bring the mission themes into use – can actors take responsibility and start to act on their own. It is a question of actors' identity and their willingness to understand others; the actors should make sure that confrontation does not sabotage achieving the common target.

As mentioned earlier, the field's development is hampered by geographical constraints, conservative thinking and a lack of adequate infrastructure and funding. This research presented that these affect the chances to sustain the future of the field and meet the needs of the professionals. The study also indicated that the main community is located in Moscow and other areas are overshadowed by it. Even though there are contemporary dance professionals all over Russia, the capital is often geographically too far away. The financial structure of the cultural sector is vulnerable and does not recognize contemporary dance. On this basis, the organizations' survival is at stake and they are struggling to create concrete goals for the future. Additionally, conservative attitudes slow down development and chances to survive without a proper strategy.

The study disclosed that all the interviewees had an understanding of networks. The idea of interdisciplinary collaboration brought them a new consensus that will encourage the actors to develop collaborative strategies further, whether in terms of educational institutions, journalism or choreographic work. More specifically, to use these networks, a road map of strategic management (Varbanova, 2013, p. 29) is needed to create a timeline and to help support strategic decisions. Based on this empirical research, they are not only paying attention to communications and dialogue but also willing to understand the audience's needs which are not to be forgotten.

To create an understanding of the dance industry's funding, policies and capacities, the significance of each area and factors should be defined and analyzed carefully and at the moment there is no such organization that would have the opportunity to do so. The research results show that Saint Petersburg actors' common values are not created by themselves. The changing dynamics destabilize their respective positions, making it difficult to consider others. Their understanding of the power of mission statement is fragile. Some of the interviewees found it easy to define priorities, while others felt the task uncomfortable. This reflects that consistent strategic work is new for them. However, the study proved that everyone I interviewed had a mission and goals for the future, which are more closely studied in the analysis chapters.

Without a doubt, the research confirms that higher education in contemporary dance in Russia changes. On one hand, forming a new program is not trouble-free and takes a lot of persistence, time and energy when it is the responsibility of a single institution. On the other hand, when strong intentions lead the way and the

new degree of the State Conservatory is successfully realized, it will significantly serve the whole contemporary dance industry of the country.

Similarities between the organizations were easiest to find with SWOT analysis. All the findings presented earlier in the analysis chapter were combined, followed by a joint analysis (Table 2). According to the strategic diagnosis (Poisson-de Haro and Menot 2013, p. 67), strengths and weaknesses indicate the internal analysis of an organization, the strategic capabilities that can be done. The external analysis then again equals the opportunities and threats, the key success factors that an organization must do to get to the right course of action for their operations.

**Table 2: A SWOT analysis of Saint Petersburg’s contemporary dance community**

Strengths	Weaknesses
Artistic skills Persistence and strong intentions Collaboration with other art fields Ability to adapt and accommodate	Lack of financial support Not enough dialogue with authorities No professional market in Russia Stress and vulnerability
Opportunities	Threats
Connection with institutions Lobbying External funding Opening the field to others	Short rent contracts Change of targets People leaving abroad Feeling lack of community



Strengths play an important role. Saint Petersburg's contemporary dance practitioners are proud of their artistic skills and also show a strong commitment to their work which is reflected as persistence. The most discussed weakness among the participants was the lack of funding, which directly affects the infrastructure of the field in Russia. As lobbying was mentioned and the willingness to open the field to others, the actors are demonstrating their interest for a change. But due to the threat of not feeling like they belong to a community, a common tone must be found before starting to build the future. The field's opportunities for influencing are limited because of the rigid structures, where contemporary dance is incorporated under theater or it is a completely separate entity for which there is no single advocate or organization responsible for its presentation and support in Russian society. It is a risk if the actors in the industry fail to organize themselves but with the help of strategic management tools, it is possible.

After conducting my research, I can say that it provides a comprehensive picture of the activities of organizations, especially in Saint Petersburg, and is reportedly the first study on the subject of their strategy. Based on the empirical findings of this thesis and previous research, I argue that the base for the values and mission statements of Saint Petersburg actors is diverse but by finding a shared set of values, it can be generalized to the use of the whole contemporary dance field in Russia. I argue that despite the community member's internal contradictions, they have prioritized reaching their goals and sustaining their profession high but the planning process of the case organizations were sometimes very short-term due to the general policies and uncertain situations. They are on the route to secure the future of contemporary dance in Russia. If a change is desired, strategies are needed for visibility and to gain a strong position. This thesis does not tell how the change can be made but it helps to create the strategies to advance the position of contemporary dance.

As the study did not focus on comparing actors from other countries with Russians, it therefore relies heavily on the theoretical data and interview materials. All interviewees shared their own interpretations of the situation and the field in Russia. It cannot be assumed that the arts and culture fields function the same way all over the world; the whole business culture and circumstances in Russia differs from the modes of action in Europe and the US. Since this research focused on the strategies of the Russian actors, there is no need for comparison, although the arts and cultural organizations around the world operate differently.

For future action, the dance industry in both Saint Petersburg and the whole Russia could benefit from the model of the Union of Creative Clusters of creative industries (Soyuz kreativnykh klasterov, 2019), which have formed and expressed goals for the future and wanted to take a stand on issues that concern them. The dance industry too should take into consideration forming a power alliance. Not only because of strengthening the community but also in the eyes of various decision-makers. It can provide an opportunity

to show the wider public a desire to protect their community and provide it with a strong starting point for the upcoming opportunities.

One major development and a leap forward to lobbying the field is the upcoming Congress of contemporary dance in October 2020 (New Space of Theatre of Nations, 2020) where this research and its results could be discussed and, indeed I have been invited to present the research in Moscow. The Congress is the first forum for contemporary dance in Russia and its focus is on the survival strategies, development of the community and the position of contemporary dance today. As stated in their web site, it is a “forum that gathers under one roof acting choreographers, artists, dancers, theorists, practitioners, curators, producers, amateurs and just spectators around the phenomenon of contemporary dance as an artistic, cultural and social movement” (New Space of Theatre of Nations, 2020). This event can provide the basis for the foundation of a common union, which is a useful note for actors to consider all around Russia.

Based on the results of this study, I can say that if and when a union or other institution is set up, a common strategic basis will be useful, as long as the actors are ready to accept the changes and the need for a new strategic direction. This reflects the importance of the forthcoming debate of the prospects. If a solution cannot be found in the immediate circle of networks, the Saint Petersburg practitioners must be willing to explore workable models from the outside of the field and embrace for example foreign examples and research in the strategic management in the arts and culture sectors. As the research shows, these topics have not yet been discussed enough. This thesis demonstrates in practice, what are the hidden strategies of these professional communities. As for their mission, they have to revalorize their activities and give new value to the matter. At the best, this research brings topics into discussion and helps the community with this task.

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# LIST OF APPENDICES

## Appendix 1: Template of interview questions

1. In Your opinion, what is the current status/position of contemporary dance in Russia?
2. What is Your idea of the contemporary dance community in Saint Petersburg?
  - How do You see yourself as a contributor and a part of it?
3. In the field of contemporary dance (locally/internationally), who would be interesting partners for You to collaborate with and why?
  - Which one You prefer more, collaboration with local or international partners?
  - Is cross-border collaboration between the arts part of your work? If yes, how?
4. What kind of challenges (related to the position of contemporary dance) You have faced during Your work experience in this field? Please name the primary ones.
  - What was done in order to change the solve the challenging situations?
5. What was the main need for You to start your work in the field of dance?
6. What are the main activities of Yours, that add appreciation and visibility for the contemporary dance field in Russia?
7. What are the key strategies that You use to advance the position of contemporary dance in Russia?
8. What are the short- and long-term goals of Your work. Please list the most important ones.
  - Have these been the same since the beginning when You started working with dance or have they changed during the years?
9. What do You consider as Your work's strengths and weaknesses? Opportunities/threats (potential problems)?
10. What is Your mission statement?
11. These expressions are some of the main themes that an arts organization's mission could include. They are outlined by Varbanova in the book 'Strategic Management in the Arts' from 2013. Please choose three (3) of the most important out of these.
  - *Facilitating a platform for debates and dialogue*
  - *Promoting access to arts and participation in the arts*
  - *Developing professional networking in the arts*
  - *Engaging lobbying and advocacy*
  - *Supporting the identity and diversity of an art form*
  - *Exchanging experiences and generating ideas*
  - *Improving effectiveness at work*
  - *Conserving and protecting cultural goods*
  - *Building strategic partnership alliances*
  - *Acting as a catalyst for a change*
  - *Promoting intercultural dialogue, communication and collaboration*
  - *Operating considering sustainability requirements and promoting sustainability*