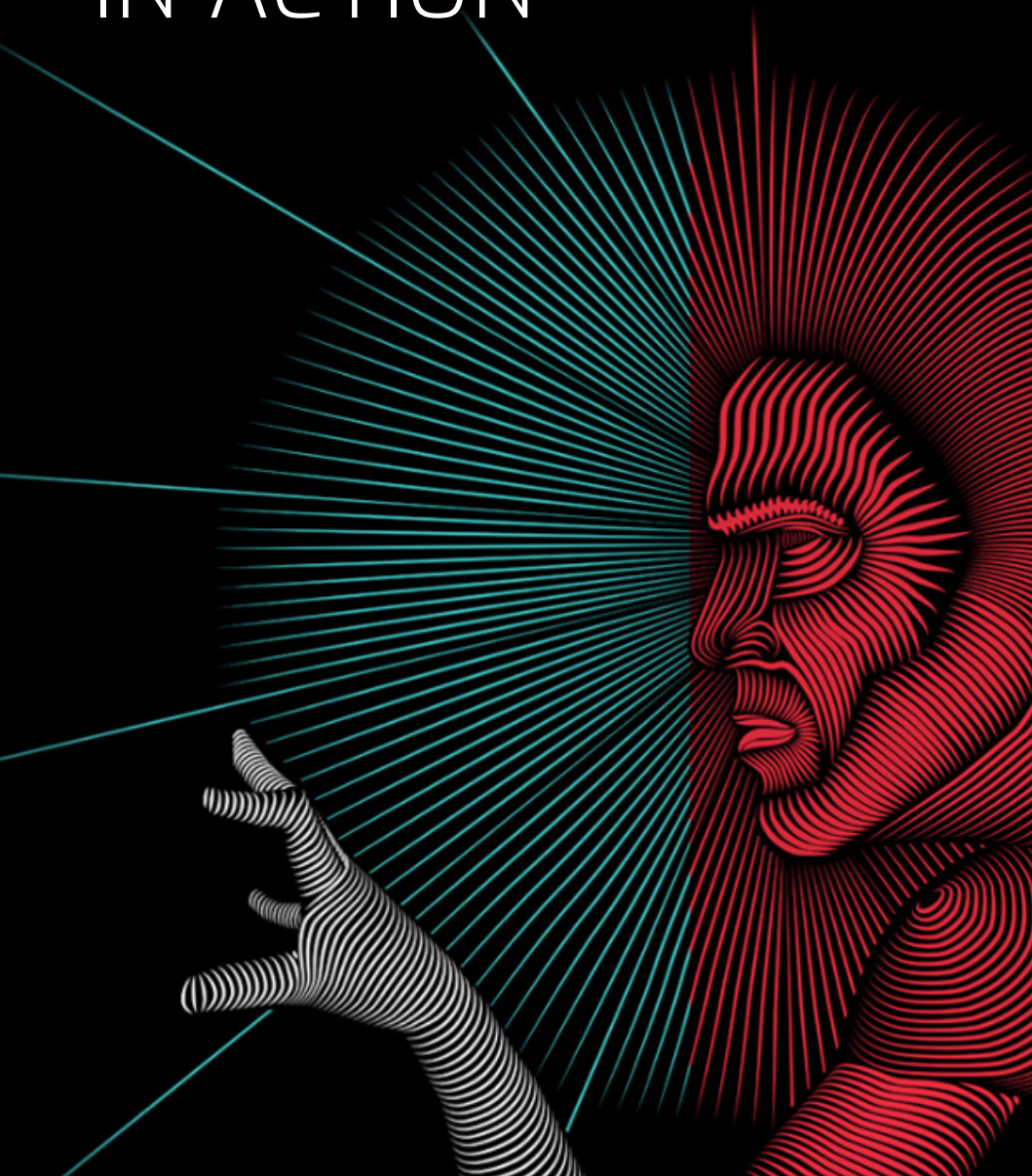


SZEGEDI TAMÁS ANDRÁS

ROMA HEROES IN ACTION



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Case study and methodology review on the peer trainers' training related to the 2019/2020 Roma Heroes workshops by the Independent Theatre Hungary

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of the present case study is to present the peer trainers' training related of *Roma Heroes Educational Program* and to provide a professional methodological overview to those NGOs and experts working in the field of non-formal education who would like to build their professional knowledge or are simply interested in the work of the Independent Theatre Hungary and are eager to learn more about our organisation.

Our theatre places special emphasis on common values and common social issues as part of our cultural work. We reflect on these topics by raising questions through our artistic and educational activities.

The primary goal of training is to help the youngsters to become trainers while providing opportunities for them to learn from each other. This goal was implemented in four European countries (Hungary, Romania, Italy and Spain) under the framework of one project.

This case study primarily presents the Hungarian training, its conditions and methodological elements. Learnings are put forward as well as challenges and obstacles. We prepared as far as possible for everything in advance, though there remained that for which we could not prepare and had to simply cope with. This is an account of a period full of experiences and learnings which serves both as a professional and methodological summary of the training and initiates a discussion with those experts who aim to work towards youth activation, map and develop their knowledge and raise their awareness.

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BACKGROUND

We started our nonformal educational programmes based on theatre plays in 2012. Back then, a 1.5-hour-long workshop methodology was developed for our play Feather Picking, aimed at high school students. The first step was to shoot a film based on the play in order to take the performance to the groups without any limitation in time or space. It was also important to make a movie version of the play because the child actors in the performance started growing up, thus “outgrowing” their roles. The play was based on cases of hate crime and discrimination which were committed against children in Hungary from the 1980s to the 2010s, with a special focus on the series of murdered Roma children.

During the workshops, the students got to know personal stories of Roma and non-Roma youngsters: the characters’ life stories, their experiences with and ideas on education, healthcare, employment and housing all showed the participants the common values and basic human traits of Roma and non-Roma people, and helped the youngsters understand discrimination at the same time.

Prejudice is judgement preceding knowledge. This was a recurring topic in the workshops as the trainers approached the youngsters with an open mind so that they would feel free to share their own or their families’ prejudices against Roma people, LGBT people or other minorities. Respecting each other’s opinion was the most important common ground during the sessions, and helped us to create a safe space where the participants could be honest.

Due to this open-minded approach the Feather Picking workshop was able to raise awareness. For a teenager, it is surprising and liberating at the same time to talk honestly about topics that in other settings seem to be taboos. The workshop broke this silence.

When the participants, just before the end of the session, learnt that the five characters were attacked and four out of the five were killed, many of

them spoke up and said that something must be done so that this would not happen again. We were very happy with this reaction because we felt that the workshop experience had led the young participants to active citizenship. We wanted to measure the impact that the session had on the participants, so we conducted research using two high school groups. The research showed that the workshop had significant impact on the young participants; however this impact is just short-term as the intervention is likewise short and a once-off.

Next steps

The play commemorated the Roma murder victims; however, the narrative and the fact of presenting victims made us wonder. The story touched the participants and evoked an eagerness to act in them, but it could not inspire the youngsters to implement civic actions. The story did not depict inspiring success or positive outcomes, and thus most young people felt that the situation is hopeless and they could not improve it. For this reason, we decided to approach the world from a more positive perspective, presenting inspiring success stories which would prove to the youngsters that activity can often result in changes in this world and it is worth it to try and act so as to have an impact on their own environment. We know that our identity is primarily formed by our stories. What kind of a Roma identity can someone have who has almost always seen Roma characters on the television, theatre, literature as negative figures? We recognised our responsibility – the Independent Theatre, where Roma and non-Roma people work together successfully, must create the opportunity to present positive narratives about Roma people both in drama and on stage. We were aware that this is incredibly important both for Roma and non-Roma youngsters because they are the generation of the future, so it is crucial that they would be happy to cooperate regardless of the colour of their skin.

We came to the conclusion that we need Roma heroes. Especially flesh and blood Roma heroes whose life stories can serve as an example for many. We were looking for plays in which Roma people have to make decisions, where they respond to challenges by taking responsibility in an active way and thus bring some change to their smaller or larger environment.

Search And You Will Find

“It would be so much easier to say the negative things that came into my mind... For some reason it is more difficult to notice positive things.” (A participant’s comment from the Roma Heroes workshop.)

We are well aware of this. Our aim was to start thinking about Roma people and questions which concern them as well as the social majority along positive life stories. After having known Roma heroes it is just one step further to find who I consider to be a hero in my own life or when I myself was able to face my challenges, or made a decision to change the situation and acted upon it.

This approach drew a much more positive picture of the communities who we met in the framework of the workshops, thus the workshops themselves also had a much more forward-looking message which inspired the participants to act.

Based on anonymous feedback, most participants felt more able to have an impact on their own life and their environment after the workshop than before it.

How did we get the stories?

The artists and plays were mapped in 2015 when the experts of the Independent Theatre was invited to participate in the creation of a European Roma archive. During this work, we came across many Hun-

garian and European Roma theatres and theatre artists. It turned out that most Roma companies lack well documented performances so in most cases we asked for the playscript. We would like to provide space for Roma self-representation so we looked for works written by Roma playwrights or created by companies in which artists with clear Roma origin had a significant role. That is how we met, for example, Giuvlipen, the Roma feminist theatre company from Romania, the British storyteller Richard O'Neill, the Serbian actress living in Italy, Diana Pavlovic, and the Romanian actress, Alina Serban, who all presented their plays at the 1st International Roma Heroes Storytelling Festival at Studio K Theatre, Budapest in the summer of 2017.

Professionally and operationally, the festival was organised by the Independent Theatre. This was the first festival that provided an opportunity for self-representation in international Roma theatre. This is a unique initiative in Europe even today. The plays presented here were recorded and the artists gave video interviews. On the one hand, these recordings served for documentation and cultural conservation, and on the other, short samples from these videos were shown to the Roma Heroes workshop's participants as the new educational methodology was based on these videos. The stories of the participants are equally important at the workshops as presenting the plays. Every time, the youngsters share the stories of their own heroes and their own heroic acts with each other (and with us, too) and they adapt these stories through creative methods. *Chameleon Girl*, one of the Hungarian plays at the 2nd International Roma Heroes Storytelling Festival, was based on these stories and was presented in Studio K Theatre in 2018. That year, a total of eight plays were presented to the audience. From Spain, the play *With Profound Dignity* by Sonia Carmoña Tapia was presented. The Irish Traveller actor, Michael Collins' play *It's a cultural thing. Or is it?*, Sebastian Spinella's *Children of the Wind* as well as *Letter to Brad Pitt* by Franciska Farkas were all inspired by the

life stories of the writers and performers. From Romania, *You didn't see anything* by Alex Fifea and David Schwartz and from Bulgaria, *Gypsy Wheels* by Natalia Chekova made it into the festival's programme, as well as *Today's Lesson*, the new play by Richard O'Neill which he wrote for this occasion. The process was the same as the year before: in-depth interviews were conducted with the artists and all eight performances were recorded.

As a result, we had a selection of 12 plays/monodramas from which to select the four which we considered most fitting for the given group of the Roma Heroes workshop. In 2019, the 3rd Roma Heroes Theatre Festival hosted chamber theatre plays in RS9 Theatre and Eötvös 10 in Budapest. The Independent Theatre presented an own play, *Shoddies*, with the participation of Roma and non-Roma youngsters. Romano Svato company's German-Austrian co-production staged an own performance, *Forever Holiday*, where teenagers played together with professional actors. The spectators of the festival also attended *Who killed Somna Granca?* by the Romanian Giuvlipen company and the play *Pindral* by the Czech Ara Art. Together with these four plays, we had 16 works at our disposal for use in the workshops. This resulted in an agony of choice and we felt that this selection was too wide, we had to narrow it down. This will be discussed in more detail below, when presenting the trainers' training.

As we can see, 16 Roma theatre plays were presented in three years, and this year we are preparing for the fourth festival where we would like to host further chamber theatre plays. Our initial presumption proved to be true: search and you will find. We searched for heroes and we found heroes: both in the plays and in real life, during the workshops. One reason why Roma Heroes workshops are so successful is that they presents heroes and urge the participants to share the stories of their own heroes. As if you were to type "heroes" into Google and happily browse among the countless results. The only difference

is that here we did not work with a virtual database but with the most authentic source, with personal experiences.

When people ask me what I do, this is my answer: I present plays to Roma and non-Roma youngsters in which the protagonists are Roma people. This is uplifting in itself, but afterwards the participants tell their own stories which are sometimes heart-warming, sometimes grievous, and often funny and surprising. After hearing this many already envy me but then I add that I also provide opportunities for others to do what I do. I hope this clearly shows the connection between the Roma Heroes Festivals and the educational programme built upon it. The young people running the *Feather Picking* workshops had attended a trainer's training prior to doing so. The same thing happened with the trainers of the Roma Heroes workshops. This training, its methodology and experiences will be presented in the following pages.

One trainers' training after the other – or how do the trainees become trainers?

In order to see the process clearly, let us have a look at the trainers who run the Feather Picking workshops: Vivien Balogh, Edina Dömök, Judit Macher, Tamás Boros and Tamás Szegedi. They were trained by Rodrigó Balogh, Márton Illés and Angéla Szabó in 2012. One year later, the workshop syllabus was developed and Angéla Szabó also joined the group of trainers.

In the next four to five years, the trainers not only ran the workshops but also became familiar with more and more new methods related to the work of the Independent Theatre Hungary. They did not only acquire these methods but also passed them on to other young people of the same age group. At these occasions, the evaluation and feedback showed that the youngsters are more eager to accept the new

knowledge and perspectives from their peers; they are happier to try new methods with other youngsters. We had to conclude that “professionals” with several years of experience may be able to run successful workshops using their tools, however a peer trainer can do the same by belonging to the same age group and having similar interests and using different tools. Moreover, it is also important to consider that Roma youngsters, our target group, has not had much (if any) positive experience with situations where a professional trainer lead them to learn from each other about themselves and their own values. At the same time, groupwork facilitated by their peers could make them more open and more cooperative.

From the initial team, Judit Macher and Angéla Szabó proceeded to become professional trainers, so the number of active peer trainers decreased and as years went by the trainers became older than the target group.

In 2017, we launched the Roma Heroes workshops for the students of Roma special colleges and universities in Hungary. It remained our goal to inspire the youngsters to undertake social actions in their own community after the workshops, so in 2017 we ran a five-day action planning training for those youngsters who were interested and applied to this opportunity after having attended the workshop. Here the former peer trainers became master trainers. As a result, we came to the conclusion that next year we would post a call for application for new peer trainers and the old peer trainers would participate in their training.

After the next festival, in the summer of 2018, we decided it was time to recruit new colleagues and train them as peer trainers who support the work of the trainers at the workshops and would, step by step, take over the position and tasks of the trainers. We compiled an intense training programme. The aspirants received training along the following thematic structure in 40 hours over five days:

- Introduction into being a trainer

- Techniques for leading a group and posing questions
- Basics of communication
- 12 plays and related background materials

To conclude the training and as a practical exam, on day six, the training participants ran a test workshop preceded by a theory test. Eight youngsters took part in this trainers' training and most of them also helped to run workshops in the coming months. However, over eight months seven of them dropped out of the team, and no longer run workshops with us. Only one young man has persevered from that group of peer trainers: Dávid Zélity who has had previous experience in running workshops. He became an equal member of the team after a year.

We did not foresee but later we had to realise that this was not the best way to organise the training. These five days proved to be too intense and even though we planned to develop the methodology together with the new peer trainers, they did not feel ownership of the Roma Heroes workshops. It was clear from the beginning that this five-day period cannot mean the end of the training, so we helped them to become trainers through mentoring. Four "senior" colleagues each mentored two peer trainers, that is they helped them to prepare for the workshops and provided personal coaching sessions according to their needs. Most peer trainers fulfilled what they undertook in the scholarship contract and ran two workshops; however, they did not continue running workshops and slowly dropped out of our team. Another reason for this, apart from the abovementioned, may be that the mentoring process was too long – the youngsters could not become equal members of the trainers' team. A third reason is that the students could not undertake to run workshops in the long run because of their numerous activities: we had not done an adequate assessment of the compatibility of schedules at the beginning.

We were well aware that the training had to be redesigned so that we do not commit the same mistakes again. To this end, we had a brainstorming session, discussed what was positive about the intense training and what we should do differently in order to decrease the dropout rate and help the youngsters to become good peer trainers and equal members of the team.

We managed to come up with very many aspects during this brainstorming. I here list a few of them:

- Long term training (over several weeks so that we learn who are the ones that want to be involved in long term cooperation)
- More careful selection (CV, cover letter, personal interview – these have been part of the process; plus an assessment centre to also see the applicants in group situations, to assess how active they are, how much initiative they take, how open they are and how much they cooperate)
- More emphasis on personal involvement (it is important that the youngsters meet each other outside of the work or training, informal gatherings shall be organised where they can get to know each other in a more relaxed atmosphere)
- Contract with those young people with whom we have worked together before (previously, we signed a contract in the first few days which bound both us and the youngsters. While preparing, implementing and evaluating the first workshop together makes it clear who are those who like to work in this team and who are those – if any – whose competencies and other circumstances do not make them fit for leading a group)
- Learning about the plays and their background more gradually (during the intense 5-day training the participants got to know eight plays in one and a half days and in two days they were tested on their knew knowledge, whereas the peer trainers' training in 2019 lasted from November 2019 until March 2020)

- Becoming an equal member of the team over a foreseeable period or after one or two successful workshops

RECRUITING AND SELECTING PEER TRAINERS

Superheroes In Action – 2019 is “the year of changes”

2019 really was a year of changes, and our organisation also experienced several changes. Concerning the workshops, the biggest change was our new educational programme manager. Rodrigó Balogh, artistic director and previous educational programme manager, handed over this role to Tamás Szegedi. The tasks of the educational programme manager include organising the workshops, assigning trainers and supporting their preparation, evaluation and feedback, mentoring, recruiting new trainers and training them. To prepare the peer trainers’ training, the four trainers (Vivien Balogh, Edina Dömök, Dávid Zélity and Tamás Szegedi) shared their opinion on the previous trainers’ training and pointed out areas for improvement; a few instances of which have been discussed above.

Moreover, we aimed to implement other changes too, which concerned the workshop implementation directly. In August 2019, a professional meeting and training took place involving four partner organisations, in Bucharest, Romania. The aim of this training was to provide common grounds to the peer trainers’ training and Roma Heroes workshops that would be implemented in four countries, and at the same time the organisations should be free to plan the structure of the training or develop the workshop themes. We agreed that the partners would not use all 12 plays for the workshops, rather, they chose the ones that are either linguistically or thematically the most fit for their target audience. One common ground was to use some creative method at the workshops to present the plays to the participants; they should share them with the group in creative ways, too. (Originally, the plays were introduced to the participants with short video scenes and written pieces, and later presented verbally, but at this stage there was no creative adaptation

involved in the process.) Another change was to rethink the short, intense trainers' training syllabus and return to the structure of the early years' training method, which was more focused on a longer process. The duration of the training is crucial both to our and the peer trainer candidates' roles. On our part, because it conveys the message that we train and invest time and energy in young people who we would like to work with in the long run, we count on them and would like to create common intellectual grounds with them. On the candidates' part, because it shows who is able to perform with a sustained quality at the weekly or fortnightly sessions and whose performance fluctuates Who is able to cope with the external influences or tensions either in their private lives or their studies and other work? Who is able to keep deadlines? Who can be trusted to communicate regularly?

Based on the previous experiences, we designed the professional materials and schedule of the peer trainers' training, broken down into weekends.

It is a good practice of the Independent Theatre Hungary to launch an open call when recruiting new interns and future colleagues, just as for any other programmes. We did the same in this case, too. We aimed to reach a wide selection of young people between the age of 18–24 via social media and direct emails. We contacted the participants of previous workshops as well as university and high school teachers. During the recruitment period, the trainers also advertised this opportunity to the participants at the end of the workshops. This method was outstandingly successful; we have received several applications this way and one of the eight youngsters we selected to become a peer trainer was once a workshop participant.

We received a total of 22 applications between 1–30 October 2019.

The call for application is available through the following link:

<http://fuggetlenszinhas.blogspot.com/2019/09/szuperhosok-bevetesen-trenereket.html>

The selection of the future peer trainers occurred in three stages: The call requested a cover letter, followed by a personal interview. Applicants from the countryside were interviewed via telephone. During the discussion we were primarily interested in the candidates' previous experiences, their social awareness and their dedication to this topic. We shared the schedule of the training with a special focus on the international meeting's dates (6–10 February 2020) and then proceeded with those candidates who could undertake to participate at every training session.

The next stage was a group meeting where the candidates had the opportunity to display their cooperation skills, flexibility and persistence in the context of a personal introduction, ice-breakers with the whole group and creative theatrical tasks in smaller groups. (The syllabus of this meeting, with a short description of the tasks, is to be found in the appendix, Getting to know the applicants in groups.) The third stage of the selection process took place on 14 November 2019, in the RS9 Theatre. Out of the 13 candidates who showed up, eight were selected. During the selection process, we tried to keep a more or less equal gender and race ratio, to have the same number of male and female, Roma and non-Roma future peer trainers.

Our concerns related to the training

It is a must to discuss the concerns when embarking on a journey like this. Our biggest concern was the dropout rate, based on our experience of the previous peer trainers' training. Most preparatory steps aimed to address this issue. That is why the selection process consisted of three rounds and for this reason there was an initial phase at the beginning of the training when we started the work without any commitment (contract). We planned and implemented together. At this phase the group is subject to changes, new members may join,

and some may bid farewell to the training if any unknown factor that would hinder their participation in the training emerges.

The other big concern was related to the applications. What if there are not enough applicants? What if there are not enough Roma applicants?

Outline of the peer trainers' training

The next section describes the training process. The training's structure breaks down to four main units.

- I. Getting to know each other: November – December 2019
- II. Learning the basics of the profession: January – February 2020
- III. Developing a syllabus: February – March 2020
- IV. Gaining practical experience and mentoring: March – September 2020

Getting to know each other

This involves getting to know the Independent Theatre Hungary's previous and current projects, its future goals and of course the theatre's colleagues. At the same time, the youngsters got to know each other, as one of the recurring tasks of the training weekends was to present a "self-performance". This meant that for four sessions, two peer trainers introduced a game or any other creative performance which helped us to get to know them better. These were often not only personal but also professional introductions. Some performed a poem and some presented the main milestones of their lives to the group in the form of a drama play.

Moreover, we got to know each other as future colleagues. In this phase we planned and implemented an action theatre performance which provided a great opportunity for the peer trainers to prove

themselves in a real-world situation. This applied to planning, preparing for and implementing the action. They learnt how difficult it is to speak to strangers and invite them to play. Moreover, this was a good way to practice the most important tool of a trainer, the ability to give precise instructions. The best setting for this action is the street or a public space where many programmes compete for the attention of the people. We wanted to fill this common work experience with content that foreshadows trainer skills which are a must for every trainer. That is why action theatre entered into this phase of the training. The task of the youngsters was to plan and implement a session in the street. The aim was to invite as many people to play as possible. As an introduction, they go to know the previous action theatre sessions and performances of the Independent Theatre. They preferred our programme called "School of Senses" so they redesigned it to evoke a Christmas spirit in the passers-by. That is how the session "Little Street of Christmas Senses" was born and implemented at Corvin Passage in Budapest. In this way we aimed to support the Christmas preparations and bring up Christmas memories. "School of Senses" is an invented name. It is one of the most popular sessions of the Independent Theatre, which brings people closer together through building on mutual trust. The participants are lead through several stations blindfolded, and at every station the trainers try to appeal to different senses: smell, touch, sound, scent, taste. A seeing guide helps the participants to get from one station to another, where another trainer takes them over and appeals to one of the senses of the blindfolded participants with pleasant stimuli. This session was adapted by the peer trainer team so that the blindfolded people smelled Christmas scents at the stations, listened to Christmas music or the poem Christmas by Endre Ady, drew something blindfolded, and invoked the atmosphere of the most beautiful Christmas with a story between stations.

Before planning the action, we brainstormed and put into words what makes an event like this powerful:

- It is easy to relate to
- The topic is relevant for everyone
- It has an impact on the “audience” – whoever sees it will join
- It has an impact on the issue it represents; achieves a result
- It has a message which the recipient brings home
- It is improvised (no script just a structural draft)
- There is a twist, a turn
- It is unusual, surprising
- It initiates thinking and being active. (In our case it is also important that it is not a tool of any ideology. This is not always necessary for action theatre, as an event like this can serve political purposes; however, for us it is important that everyone can relate to our programmes without regard to ideologies or political affiliation)
- The players accept the audience’s reaction and consider it valid
- It takes place at a central location in order to reach as many people as possible
- It reflects on how society works – mirrors it and gives insight
- Both planned and laid-back
- It has humour (grotesque)

After planning the action, we started to implement it. We set the space that is necessary for the interactive session at Corvin Passage and started to recruit participants by speaking to passersby and inviting them to play with us. It is important to prepare the young trainers: 90% do not even pay any attention to them and less than half of the remaining 10% will actually join them to play. If we go through the possible challenges before the time and gather our strengths, we consider all the chances and hazards and we think over how we may react to the various risk factors, then we not only prepare for the session in great detail but we also assess the values of the team and the are-

as for development. The action took place in mid-December 2019. It was a reinforcing and successful experience for the aspiring trainers to plan and implement this action together.

Drop-out

Besides the success, we must mention the drop-out, too, which also took place in this phase. Eight youngsters were chosen; however, three of them decided that they cannot remain with us until the end of the process, all three due to their other commitments. Two of the three (a non-Roma man and a non-Roma woman) are university students and could not actively participate in the training while studying and completing their internship. The third, a young Roma man in his last year of high school, got a great opportunity in his music career which meant that he had to travel abroad for a longer period of time. He also decided to say goodbye to the team. It is relatively lucky that all this happened in the initial phase, just as we expected when planning the training.

Action theatre was a great way to get to know each other but it was not the only thing we had to do in this phase, as getting to know the plays was an equally important goal. As opposed to the previous trainers' training, this time we had four weeks to get to know the 16 plays. The participants were given homework to do this. Everyone chose two of the plays presented at the festival and developed a creative method to work with them. They could not only choose from the 12 plays presented at the 2017 and 2018 festival but also from the four plays of the 2019 chamber theatre festival, thus got to know 16 plays in total. The plan was that eight young participants draft a creative adaptation method for two plays each; however, as three decided not to continue/start the peer trainers' training – as mentioned above – at the end not all plays had a draft of how to process them.

The deadline for this written homework was 5 January 2020, all five youngsters who were “still in the game” sent their drafts by the deadline. The participants got to know these tasks on the first weekend of January in theory and on the second weekend in practice.

When this the initial phase of getting to know each other ended, we not only saw the participants in person and got to know how they act in real situations, but also their theoretical/written creativity and trainer practice.

We proceeded to the basics of the profession with five trainers in January 2020.

PEER TRAINERS' TRAINING

Learning the basics of the profession

This phase consisted of four training weekends, including the international meeting which we organised in Budapest in February 2020. The first training weekend took place on 10–11 January 2020. Besides presenting their homework, the youngsters learnt about the basics of being a trainer/leading groups.

Presenting their homework meant to shortly present the creative method they drafted in writing to process the chosen play. With this, we realised a two-way knowledge transfer at the very beginning of the training, that is, the young people participating in the training not only acquired new knowledge but they also contributed to each other's education with new methods of learning. This "relationship" had a very positive effect and set the tone for the whole professional training, as they were more than mere recipients: they played a formative role in their own training. These presentations were very useful and interesting, as everyone brought a new creative method to process the plays. Presenting these drafts provided a great opportunity to talk about the trainer's communication in general, how to address people, how to pose questions. In this way, this phase of the trainers' training could also take place in a practical form instead of a lecture. Just think of how much easier it is to model the correct way a trainer talks and reflect on it than to discuss the trainer's communication in theory! However, it is also key to summarise the knowledge acquired during the tasks and reflections. The new information is best processed if the experiences of the practical situations are understood and phrased in a general, brief and simple manner, also providing this with context. It is optimal to gather the information and aspects together which may be in focus repeatedly during the tasks. Repetition always enhances imprinting.

Thus the participants were able to learn new, creative methods from each other and acquired information about the basics of being a trainer. This was also supported by communication training. We discussed the trainer's communication, focusing on assertive communication. This was important for the trainers to be well prepared and thus confident enough to face any situation in the student groups. Besides aggression-free communication, we also discussed what a trainer should consider in case of a conflict to decide whether intervention is necessary, and if so, how to do it.

The following aspects are worth considering in case of any problem and possible intervention:

- Does it concern the whole group or just one or two people? – In the latter case it is not necessary to discuss and find a solution in front of the whole group. One of the trainers can talk to those concerned either during the break or while the other trainer continues to work with the rest of the group.
- Am I competent to addressing this issue? – There might be situations that result from the existing conflicts between participants and it is no aim of the workshop to solve these problems; or there might be a debate related to any topic for which the trainer is not prepared, does not have adequate information or skills.
- Do I have to intervene or will it be sorted out by itself? – There might be cases when the group or the concerned parties can solve the conflicts on their own without any intervention or by referring to the common rules and grounds discussed at the beginning of the session.
- Do I need to intervene immediately or can we come back to it later (during the break, after the session or at a more adequate part of the session)? – In this case the trainer needs to note the problem and get back to it later when a more appropriate time to address the issue presents itself.

- Is it related to the workshop's topic? – Does it bring the group closer to the workshop's topic if we spend time discussing this or is this problem completely unrelated to our focus so we are not meant to deal with it?

Second Training Weekend: The “exam” – when the truth comes out

It is also important for both the participants and the senior trainers to make sure that the knowledge was successfully transferred. To this end, a practical and theoretical exam took place on the second training weekend in January after which the parties formally signed their contracts. The theoretical test focused on the plays and the trainers' communication, the practical exam consisted of moderating a discussion related to a chosen play. (At the workshop, moderated discussion happens after getting to know the plays in smaller groups, so that everyone learns about the protagonist, why can s/he be considered a hero, what are the difficulties s/he has to face in the play and to start a conversation on the dilemmas that the play raises.)

This weekend differed from the rest as Rodrigo Balogh, artistic director of the theatre, and Márton Illés, programme manager, also attended the exams. The future trainers received feedback after the discussion which they moderated. We pointed out their strengths and also areas for improvement when necessary. All five participants passed both the written and the practical exam. We learnt that their understanding of the plays is clear and factual, they are well aware of a trainer's role and the basics of trainers' communication. We could regard them as our scholarship students, as signing their contracts and receiving their scholarships also started with this event.

Creative methods to work with the plays

The next day, we worked with creative methods to process the plays.

This was necessary because one of the goals of peer trainers' training was to develop the existing methodology together with the future trainers. As stated above, the basic trajectory of the development was set in 2019 in Bucharest, together with the partner organisations, where we claimed that more participatory, creative methods should be used for getting to know the plays. This is especially important if the participants' reading and writing skills are problematic, in which case these methods can support understanding. (Besides university groups, we bring the workshop to disadvantaged youngsters for whom it is hard to understand the plays not only because they have difficulties with reading and understanding texts but also because they have never analysed dramas at school before.)

At this training session we discussed what the aim of the creative approach is and which methods we are familiar with. Which are the ones that everyone is able to do and are comfortable working with?

The participants shared their feedback and ideas after each presentation, we discussed the content and the realisation of the seen/experienced exercises. This task is worth doing in an environment which is safe enough for the participants to be honest. At this point, the young people had been working together for a month so they were very happy to point out aspects to work on related to the exercises and they were also able to take criticism fairly well. They were both able to phrase and accept feedback. I would like to share one example. Everyone liked the first such exercise a lot; however, many said that they need to be more "brave" for it as it required the trainer to take on a role which is not part of a trainer's basic repertoire. At the same time, as this was a theatre workshop, basic acting techniques were also available for the youngsters. Here I again think of the practical experience that they acquired while implementing the street action before Christmas. Let us see what this exercise was specifically about. Michael Collins, an Irish Traveller actor, wrote a play titled *It's a cultural*

thing. Or is it? I briefly summarise the story to make it more understandable. In this autobiographical play the writer has a discussion with his daughter who says to her father that she wants to quit school and would prefer to get married and have a family like her cousins have. As a response to this the father tells the stories of the discrimination he had to suffer as a child. He gives a few examples of school segregation and discrimination in very many fields of life. One of them is when the city organises a soccer championship and a Traveller team also participates. They play well and the team is ranked third. The trophies are given to the winners at a local bar but as usual, the Traveller youngsters are not allowed into the pub to get their awards.

That is the situation where the creative exercise starts. The trainer recreates this scene and says that s/he is the innkeeper and the participants are other young people celebrating at the bar, from teams other than the Travellers team. From background information we know that they also appreciated the talent of the Traveller players. Our task as participants is to convince the innkeeper to let in the team waiting outside.

In the first round, the trainer introduced and explained the task briefly and precisely, and all participants gave positive feedback on that. However, she did not manage to get us really involved and active. She felt that too, but she did not know how she could get us to speak up and argue, to be really involved in our role.

As feedback, the participants said it was not enough to claim "I am the innkeeper and you are the players celebrating in my pub", one had to act as an innkeeper and address us as an innkeeper. After this feedback, the same trainer did the whole exercise once more but a bit differently this time. After having presented the background and the situation (Who are we? Where are we? What happened earlier? Who is she herself and what is our role?) she walked up to us holding two imaginary pints in her hands and gave them to us. She also asked others

what she can do for them. One of us was a bit tired at the beginning of the day so she said "You are well tipsy I can see, would you like another round or would you rather switch to Coke?" and while having a cheerful chat with us the "innkeeper" casually mentioned that she would never let those Traveller kids in, for sure. This upset the jolly and by that time (from the imaginary drinks) a bit boozy company, that is us. She got lots of questions and at first simple, then stronger and stronger arguments to convince her to let the guy in as they play well, they are cool, they got third place in the championship and this is where they can get their trophies. The innkeeper could not be convinced – just as in the story – so the company decided to leave the bar immediately and go somewhere where they could celebrate together with those who were not let in.

I hope this example shows the central concept of this trainers' training, that we learn from each other in a safe environment where any failed attempt and any mistake can provide great learning opportunities. This is the exceptional approach which I have experienced as a colleague of the Independent Theatre Hungary, and I trust that the present case study helps to set this as an example to those who work with youngsters in any form of non-formal education.

Apart from the above described example, we got to know four more creative approaches that day, of which I would like to highlight one more, as this also played an important role in developing the syllabus later.

This exercise was related to the play *Chameleon Girl*. We were all familiar with the play, and the peer trainer asked us to think about how the protagonist's life goes on after the end of the play.

To sum up the story: the main character is an average high school girl who happens to be Roma, somewhere in Hungary. Soon we learn that she has superpowers: she is *Chameleon Girl* who is able to immerse herself in other people's lives, she can completely empathise

with their situation and can see not only into the “heart and soul” of people but also into the background of their decisions. As she tells her story we get to know the people in her environment that she is close to: her city sister who went to university and builds her career and her country sister who chose to remain in the countryside, get married and take care of her children, and her aging mother. Chameleon Girl is able to relate to both alternatives; however, one of her most important statements is that she wants to choose her own path and not to follow anyone’s example. The frame of this play is the protagonist talking to the educational advisor at school, she tells him the main events of her life, shares her dilemmas and her worldview. At the end of the story we get to know her own decision: she will quit school one year before the final exam because she is expecting a baby. Of course the play has an open ending, the writer, Márton Illés, leaves it up to the reader/spectator to work it out. (It is important to know about the play that it is written with a mosaic technique based on real life personal stories of the Roma Heroes workshops’ participants after the first Roma Heroes Storytelling Festival.)

The creative exercise related to this play starts with the following sentence:

“What happened with Chameleon Girl and her child? Imagine how they live five years later!”

We had to work on this in smaller groups and then present the future we imagined for her as short scenes to the whole group.

This method was very popular with the participants as well as the senior trainers. We pointed out possible directions for improvement in this case also; however, these – as opposed to the previous example – were mostly content-related, which required significantly more time, a whole day. Finally, the participants decided to bring a developed version of this exercise to the upcoming international meeting.

At the end of the day we summarised what we had discussed, focusing on the following questions:

- **What is good instruction like?** – It is clear and easily understandable for everyone; the trainer may give instructions while playing a role, thus inviting the participants to play with him/her. However, it is important that the trainer and the role are clearly separated. His/her opinion and behaviour while acting can never be considered to be his/her personal opinion and behaviour as a trainer as this misunderstanding would result in losing balance irreversibly.
- **What shall we keep in mind while facilitating an exercise?** – This might vary if the trainer is playing a role, in which case s/he also has to make sure that the participants play their roles as well. What the trainer has to keep in mind no matter if s/he plays a role or not includes: Did everyone understand the task? Is everyone equally involved in the activity? How much time is left? Does the group need further information, support or feedback from the trainer to fulfil the task?
- **Is the form or the content of the exercise related to the play?** – Both above described examples were related to the content of the two plays but it is also possible to address the participants through the theatrical language of the play. For example, in case of a puppet theatre performance where objects are animated, the creative exercise might reflect on this form by even using animated objects unrelated to the topic. After a hero story, telling a hero story with any content can be related to the monodrama.
- **What happens before? What happens after?** – This exercise focuses on the key question of the session and needs some introduction as well as a summary of what happened after the module. When defining the exercises it is important to consider what information and which experiences were in the spotlight before and what will follow after. How does this fit into the whole of the session? How many/few

tasks have previously been carried out individually/in small groups/ with the whole group? How many tasks required movement, verbal or other skills? It is important to consider these aspects both for content and methodology so that the workshop's syllabus is well balanced and the exercises build on each other, there are no unrelated tasks or series of exercises which focus on one form or skill while disregarding others completely.

Third weekend – preparing for the international meeting

The international meeting hosted the trainees and trainers of the partner organisations. Youngsters from Italy, Spain, Romania and Hungary were present.

As I mentioned before, I aim to get back to the play *Chameleon Girl* and the related creative exercises. The Hungarian team worked on this exercise for the international meeting. This was an ideal choice because this play was translated into the national language of all four countries and all groups used it in their workshop syllabus. (Only the Hungarian team had to familiarise themselves with all 16 plays, but during the training we also limited the scope of the plays to work with and chose 12 plays out of the 16 to retain in the syllabus. Each team could make their own decision on this aspect, so it was a bit different for each country.)

Our peer trainers decided to develop a 1-hour session on *Chameleon Girl*. As the programme of the meeting included attending the play we did not have to retell the story, especially as everyone was well aware of the storyline.

Choosing this play also set the key question of the session. "How does Chameleon Girl's life go on after the story ends?" At the end of the play the protagonist decides to become a mother and keep her baby. The child's father, her love, is a refugee boy who was deported from

the country not long after the child's conception. The girl gives mature and determined answers to the educational advisor's questions and tells him that the fact that she keeps the child does not necessarily have to seal her fate. After the child is born she can go back to school and study. She does not have to give up her dreams and plans just because she becomes a mother. That is where the story ends and the peer trainers, as an introduction to the related session, asked the group the following question:

"How do you see our world in 10 years?"

This short brainstorming aimed to get the participants involved. Before we focus on *Chameleon Girl's* story, let us think about the future from our own perspective. We imagined 10 years into the future with closed eyes, in a relaxed position, and shared our ideas with the group afterwards. Thinking 10 years ahead in time made it easier to relate to Chameleon Girl's future. At this point the trainers asked what Chameleon Girl's and her child's life would be like in 10 years. After brainstorming together about how their life would go on (Does she raise the child alone? Or with one of her sisters? Does she have more children? What happened with the father? Did they meet again? Do they live together? etc.), the participants could choose a possible version and present it to the rest of the group in the form of a short scene.

Having presented these scenes, the participants could shortly reflect on each other's work, including the implementation and the content of the story.

What has not been discussed thus far but is also worth mentioning is how the young people prepared for this session. When they decided what they would bring to the international meeting, they organised a meeting for themselves to prepare outside of the frames of the training. As they planned the session over the training weekend, the goal of this special meeting was to hold a test session.

They found a venue and recruited participants from their friends and

acquaintances with whom they could try their ideas. I also attended this test session but only as a participant, I did not do any organising or preparing. It was heart-warming to see that this group of people with whom I had been working together for 2.5 months, these youngsters who had not known each other before, became a team which is able to self-organise and implement their plans in high quality.

INTERNATIONAL TRAINING

The meeting which was organised in the framework of an Erasmus-project took place between 6–10 February 2020.

The opening session was hosted in the RS9 Theatre and every partner attended – including leaders and peer trainers. After the short introductions, we collected common frames for the whole training and all participants accepted them, whereafter we played various games to introduce ourselves and get to know the others for about an hour. Finally, we closed the first day by having dinner together.

Common framework:

- Free, relaxed, creative atmosphere
- Safe space
- Do not hurt each other
- Flexibility
- Taking responsibility
- Pay attention to time/keep timeframes
- Active attention
- Photos can be taken
- Be happy and respect your peers!
- Be good, feel good!
- Be open (to new methods)

7 February – First day

This day started with an ice-breaker. The goal was to show the importance of cooperation, the complexity of teamwork and learn what is necessary for proper communication.

The first game: Zombie

There are just as many chairs in the room as people. Everyone sits on a chair except for one trainer who will be the first zombie. The players have to prevent the zombie from taking the free chair. The zombie can only move in a slow, steady pace. The players can move fast and can change their position. If someone gets off the chair, s/he cannot sit back down in the same chair, s/he must take another chair. The zombie wants to take the closest free chair. The round finishes as soon as the zombie is able to sit down on the free chair. Before each round, the players might work out a strategy for the next round and they can also communicate with each other during the game.

The game reached its goal to energise the participants but the players did not manage to develop and implement a strategy against the zombie attack, which was mainly due to the language barriers – despite the fact that there was enough time for translation, direct communication was not really smooth during the game. Despite the language barriers, the game created a relaxed atmosphere and energised the participants both physically and mentally.

The second game: Mute conductor

The players stand around and someone leaves the room while the rest decide who will be the “mute conductor”. The task of the mute conductor is to show movements which the rest have to copy. The other players must pay attention to the mute conductor so that they do not give away who initiates the movements. The player who left the room has to find out who the conductor is.

The mute conductor game worked fairly well as the participants did not have to act verbally but only to pay attention. At the same time, they also had the opportunity to discuss a strategy for the group and

the mute conductor before every round.

After this, we collected important ideas for facilitating games. We discussed the followings during the brainstorming:

- How shall the instructions be phrased?
- What is the trainer's task during the game?
- What happens right after the game?
- How shall we choose the right game for a specific group?

Instructions:

- Articulate and loud enough
- Eye contact
- Clear and simple instruction
- Asking if everything is clear
- Does everyone know what s/he has to do?
- Show an example just to make sure
- Creating a friendly atmosphere
- Any tools shall be prepared before giving the instructions
 - Giving the tools to the group after the instructions have been given

During the game:

Make sure that:

- Everyone plays according to the rules
- Everyone is involved, but do not push it, do not make it mandatory
- Everyone has a good time
- Keep an eye on the time
- Give feedback, positive affirmation
- Pay attention to all participants, not just a few
- Build in the suggestions, maintaining the structure and goals
- How to involve passive participants? – Ask them to help you!

- Supervise work in smaller groups (be as present as the group needs us to be – do not bother them but do not disappear)

After the game:

- Simply move on if there is no need for reflection (energising function)
- Ask about feelings
- Ask for feedback about the game, e.g.: How did it work? – Self-reflection
- If the game can be related to any other aspects of life you can also ask about that and start a topical discussion based on the game's experience
- Positive feedback
- Avoid being personal and do not look for “good answers”
- Do not spend too much time on reflection, keep energy levels high

Which game to choose?

- Is it a sensitive issue for the group?
- Does it fit the group's maturity level and competences?
- Previous information from the group leader – how old are they, which grade, are there any in-group conflicts, previous experience with similar topics, personal problems, taboos?
- Ensuring partnership during the game
- Competition may be dangerous but this is also a way of improvement
- What is the goal?
- Timeframe (How much time do we have? How often do we have to take breaks?)
- How challenging is the planned game for the given group?
- Always have a plan B – in case this specific game does not work with the group
- Share the goal of the game with the participants (unless you have a good reason not to do so)

Statement game – main aspects:

During the statement game or line of opinion exercise, the trainer makes various statements; the participants who agree with each stand on one side of the room and those who disagree on the other side of the room. Those who partly agree or partly disagree stand in the middle. This way everyone expresses his/her opinion – even if they do not speak up, and they also have to leave their passive sitting position as they have to stand up. After this, the trainer listens to the reasons of the participants on both side of the room to see why they do or do not agree with the given statement. The trainer summarises the various viewpoints and the participants may change their position in space based on what they have heard. It is important that the trainer do not qualify either opinions, if most of the group tends to be of one opinion, s/he shall support the few or even only one person who stood up for their opinion against the majority of the group – no matter if the trainer shares their views or not. It is worth finding statements for this game which will likely divide the group and which are important to discuss for the workshop's topic. At the trainers' training we collected statements related to the Roma Heroes workshops.

Shall the trainers share their own (hero) stories?

Cons:

- Narrows down the narratives

Pros:

- Creates safety – for the participants to share their own stories
- It is important for the trainers to share to set a two-way relationship
- Reinforces and inspires the participants to recognise their own heroic deeds

The following questions and statements were also mentioned:

- What if someone makes very racist comments – you do not have to agree with him/her but you have to respect the fact that s/he shared his/her opinion and you can start a discussion on it. Why does s/he think so? Has s/he ever had a similar experience with a non-Roma person? What do the other participants think about this?
- Roma heroes show how we should live – what they do is exemplary but it must be understood in context, not everyone has to act the way they do, making our own decisions is more important. Everyone has different values and different heroes.
- Roma and non-Roma people are very similar – yes and no; every human being is different but there are common human values which apply to everyone irrespective to their skin colour. When raising the differences between Roma and non-Roma people it is important to consider the following:
 - Is this a personal or a group trait? (Can it apply to both Roma and non-Roma?)
 - Is it a cultural or social trait? (Roma groups are culturally very diverse; however, many characteristics may not be linked to culture but to social status or even the discrimination the group is exposed to.)

After this, we proceeded to the next important step of Roma Heroes workshops: sharing hero stories in pairs and small groups.

Sharing my hero and my heroic act in small groups (before the circling game to form the groups) and choosing the stories – after lunch break the small groups devise scenes and presents them, the whole group gives reflections.

Outcomes and experiences:

- We used different forms for the creative work

- We formed mixed groups, all group members were active
- Sharing stories in pairs – personal attention is important

8 February – Second day

This day, the participants got to choose between two programs both in the morning and in the afternoon section. The workshops dealt with storytelling from different perspectives.

Morning workshops:

Sonia Carmona Tapia: Using storytelling in communities

First, the workshop participants got to know each other with the help of playful exercises (e.g.: introduction with your name and an attribute, repeat each other's names and attributes, moving in the room, forming random pairs). The participants shared a memory with each other related to one object which their partner retold to the whole group. For most participants, it was a reinforcing experience to hear their own stories repeated by someone else. Sonia also pointed out the importance of recognising the basic human similarities to make the group members open to each other. Openness is fundamental to any further activities.

Ursula Mainardi: The Power of imagination – Storytelling without words

This session was dedicated to fantasy, creating an imaginary world and evoking life situations and showing related feelings in this fantasy world. First the participants used one gesture or facial expression which later evolved into a silent film like sequence telling their story. Afternoon workshops:

Sebastiano Spinella: Music and creating atmosphere in storytelling

Music and rhythm can help a lot if one has difficulty speaking in front of people. It also has a reinforcing power if a character, event or atmosphere can be supported with musical effects. The best is to use rhythm instruments, rattles, drums which do not require musical training. This way the group becomes more than a simple audience, it can participate actively in the session. This is especially important in groups where it is difficult to keep the attention of the members. If the participants get a task in telling the story, the storyteller can keep their attention for longer and makes them more involved in the story.

Csenge Zalka: Storytelling on stage then and now

This workshop provided theoretical background on how storytelling has changed over time, starting with the traditional, classic form until today's well-organised storytelling festivals.

On classic storytelling and how it relates to Roma people

Classic storytelling:

- Visualising stories based on words and music
- The storyteller must pay attention to details
- Storytellers do not learn the text, they learn the story
- Interaction with the audience
- Stories may change
- Storytelling was part of the community's life
- Storytellers travelled a lot
- Stories played a big role in forming identity
- Values were in the focus
- Stories were told in central venues
- Adults told stories to adults

Contemporary storytelling:

- Tickets sold
- Planned, thematic events
- Telling stories as previously planned, on one topic
- Keeping timeframes
- Telling personal stories, too
- Representative stories
- Shows cultural differences

9 February – Third day

The peer trainers from every country presented their own methods. Each team's presentation was followed by reflections. It was important to give feedback and reinforce the methods that all participants liked, at the same time, it provided an opportunity to point out parts which needed further development.

The first session was the creative workshop of the Hungarian team related to the play *Chameleon Girl*. After this, the Italian youngsters presented a section of games. In the afternoon, the Romanian team shared their session of mostly movement-focused exercises. The Spanish team's workshop took place the next day.

10 February – Fourth and last day

The fourth day was about planning. The peer trainers from every country developed the draft plan of their own workshop methodology, taking into consideration and using their experiences and the new methods they learnt during the meeting. The Hungarian team had not have developed the syllabus yet so this task was especially useful for them. All in all, we agreed that we would like to use storytelling as a form in our existing methodology to present the plays and we would also like to use creative methods to work with the plays.

DEVELOPING A SYLLABUS

After the international meeting we summarised what we learnt and developed the syllabus. For the latter, Judit Macher and Angéla Szabó joined me, they had previously worked as trainers and mentors in our educational programmes. The three of us prepared a training weekend to develop the syllabus and decided to help the development of the peer trainers after the training with mentoring and supervision.

What we learned from the international meeting:

- Storytelling as a genre is perfect for presenting the plays in a group with reading difficulties
- Associative exercises (Ursula Mainardi's workshop at the international meeting) boost creativity and help self expression
- Telling personal hero stories is the biggest success factor of the workshop, this must be preserved

Developing a syllabus – 15 February 2020

As this team had not have met Judit before, we started our day with an introduction. The peer trainers introduced themselves in a few sentences and shortly summed up what happened so far at the training. What was the new information that they learnt and what experiences they got at the international meeting?

After this, the peer trainers had to think about and answer the following questions on the one-hour-long workshop that they held at the international meeting:

- Why did you want to run the workshop? (setting a motivation, goal)
- What was the best part of it? (reinforcing the accomplishment)
- What was the most difficult? (it could be a task, a situation, an emotion – not methodological issue)

The aim of these questions was to help to recall positive memories

associated with running the workshop and to map areas for improvement which need further work.

Fixed framework and the outline of the workshop:

It was important to decide for the session we were developing how much time we have and what modules will the workshop consist of.

- 1. part: opening round, introduction, play, break, analysis – reflection, closing round (flipchart)
- 2. part: opening round, storytelling, listening to stories, break, creative adaptation of and presenting the stories, reflection and closing round
- Fixed times dedicated to each element of the workshop
- Fixed goals dedicated to each element of the workshop
- Fixed methods dedicated to each element of the workshop
- Developing the workshop's structure – what must be included in the new syllabus and what shall be left out.

We voted on the controversial issues after listening to each other's arguments. That is how the new syllabus was born. Only the first half of it changed as compared to the previous version. The detailed description of the new syllabus is to be found in the appendix.

Next weekend, the focus was on conflict management and general techniques for asking questions, the latter led by Angéla Szabó who merged questioning technique with her own supervision methodology. One participant brings in a difficult conflict from any field of his/her life and the rest try to help to bring him/her closer to a solution by asking questions. They can only ask questions. It is important to note that sometimes it is not possible to reach a solution; however, the fact that the participant with this issue can have a look at the situation from several perspectives and learn about more aspects eases the inner tension.

The questions were sorted into three groups:

- Clarifying question – to learn more about the situation
- Analysing question – to ask about the given person's view
- Suggestive question – to offer a possible solution, e.g.: Don't you think that you should talk to her about this?

How to deal with failure:

After the questioning techniques, we moved on to failures and how to deal with them. This is an important tool to prepare for situations at the workshops which we are afraid of and we would like to handle them as well as possible. The goal was to help the future trainers to become enduring members of the team who did not lose their spirit if a workshop did not turn out as planned.

The next day was the last day of the training where all peer trainers could try the new syllabus step by step, module by module. This way we could make sure that they understood the structure and the goal of the workshop.

According to the original plans this would have been the end of the trainers' training's theoretical part, after which we would have proceeded to the practice to try the new syllabus in real life with a test group and later with actual student groups, each peer trainer accompanied by a senior trainer. However, we had to wait a bit more for that. Due to the pandemic, not all workshops could be implemented in spring by the peer trainers but most of them were run by September.

TEST WORKSHOPS AND FEEDBACK

Getting towards the end of the trainers' training – and the present case study – I would like to discuss the peer trainers' feedback, their experiences at the test workshop and their future plans. The syllabus of the test workshops featured just some of the new methods and tools developed by the peer trainers as the new situation with the pandemic made it difficult to find enough time and opportunity to practice and test the new modules. At the same time, each peer trainer was able to run at least one, some of them even two or three workshops by autumn 2020. Originally, we planned to target university groups with the workshops; however, tertiary education only allowed for online workshops and the peer trainers preferred offline workshops to online ones – more about this later – so finally, we run the workshops for different target groups.

Besides helping them becoming trainers, it was also an important goal for us to be able to count on their presence and work in the medium- and long-term future. The 2020 pandemic stopped the implementation of the trainers' training' practical phase for almost six months. The Independent Theatre ran three online workshops during this period (as personal meetings were hindered by the pandemic) but these sessions were held by senior trainers. When we came up with the idea to hold online workshops we offered this opportunity to the peer trainers too, but all of them said that they would prefer to run the test sessions in real life. I agreed with them on this as personal encounters result in real life situations which make up the mental challenges of running workshops. The first session took place on 13 March 2020 (this was the last day before lockdown in Hungary, the last day before schools were shut down) and after this it took almost half year to return to the student groups. Thus everyone but one peer trainer held the first test workshop months after the training. After each session, the trainers

wrote a report. I will cite these reports later on and I will also present the results of the questionnaire which the participants filled out related to the trainers' training. In this, we aimed to assess how happy they were with the training, what their suggestions are to improve the training and we also wanted to see how well integrated they are in the theatre to see if we succeeded to reach our goal of keeping these youngsters as our colleagues after the training.

What the peer trainers learnt from the test workshops:

F. M. – 13 March 2020 – high school, Budapest

When preparing for the workshop, she was confident enough to choose a module which requires intense attention, constant summary and feedback. After the initial shyness, she became energetic when she had to speak. However, when she was not the one leading the exercise she stepped back a bit. This test workshop took place first. As a conclusion, we agreed that she needs to be a bit more active and present. She could also show her talent as a director during the small group exercise and motivated the already enthusiastic team to realise their vision. The most important result of this session was that one of the participants handed in an application to our theatre. Now she works as the assistant director of our play Village Day. In her trainer's report, F. M. said the following:

"I had a great time but I also felt that I was not able to carry out every module perfectly."

It is also interesting that the third time when she run a workshop, she wrote the following:

"I enjoyed the workshop tremendously, I had very many successes. The biggest one was probably that I finally managed to lead a "good" heroes brainstorming. I was very happy for I managed to create an atmosphere where the participants could open up."

So after running two workshop she became an experienced trainer, just as we planned, and was able to hold the third one suitable for becoming an equal member of the senior trainers' team.

T.P. – 10 June 2020 – vocational school, Budapest

She was in an especially difficult situation as the group turned out to be much bigger than we expected. (Most probably because after lockdown ended, at the end of the term, the students were very interested in interactive offline programs.) Due to the bigger and very mixed group (young people from different classes and of different ages), it was more difficult to keep the participants' attention and also to discipline, that is, to maintain their willingness to cooperate. She was rather firm at the beginning and she managed to participate actively in most modules. The most difficult part for her was disciplining because she wanted to stay in the role of the "kind trainer". However, after the workshop, she claimed to learn a lot from watching the previously discussed assertive communication methods and "I" statements being implemented by her trainer partner when conflicts occurred. She wrote about her success at the workshop in the trainer's report as follows:

"I managed to give clear instructions and despite the discipline problems with the group the message of the workshop was delivered successfully."

L.L. – 14 August 2020 – day camp, Alföld

She run a workshop for the participants of a summer day camp, an informal group of disadvantaged youngsters. This situation was much more challenging than a school setting with well-structured routines. The participants had problems reading and understanding texts which required outstanding communication skills on the trainers' part; however, the feedback showed that she managed to deal with it exceptionally well. This situation needed great flexibility and improvisation skills

as the trainers had to read out the plays' scenes to the children, who still had difficulties understanding the information correctly so they also had to summarise what they had just heard. This was the most obvious solution to this situation. As a result, the group got very close to the trainer and they formed a strong, cooperative bond.

"We managed to carry out every task just as we had planned. During the creative exercise in small groups, the youngsters paid great attention, they wanted me to join them, they took me in and wanted to involve me in the creative process."

A. M. – 12 September 2020 – special school, Northern Hungary

The special school's colleagues and the children took part in the workshop together. The session was run according to the previous plans but they started a bit late because the local television interviewed the trainers. The most challenging aspects were time management and flexibility but he found a great balance with his trainer partner and together they could overcome the initial challenges. When there is a mixed group of adults and children, it is often the adults who need to be reminded of the previously agreed framework, for example time-frames. This is what happened here but it caused no major problem.

"For me, the biggest success was that I managed to run the test workshop without any issues. And second, that after the initial difficulties the participants got a pleasant experience. I am happy that we were able to adapt to the situation and we could adjust the methodology. And it is great news that the Independent Theatre was featured in the television."

K. S. – 17 September 2020 – high school, Southern Hungary

This session was very successful. Despite the initial insecurity and hesitation, the group stayed active which boosted the energy level of the peer trainer for the rest of the workshop. The students were exceptionally eager to take part in the work. This was partly due to

the fact that the students of this institution are disadvantaged youngsters from various parts of the country but thanks to the high level education and the sensitive teachers we met very open-minded and interested youngsters who were happy to cooperate. Many of them were interested in the work of our theatre and were looking for ways to join us. The school management decided to book the workshop for further groups in the future, as soon as they have the financial means and they do not have to adjust to the restrictions due to the pandemic. *“The closing round was very moving, it felt honest, the students said very nice things. After the session, I told them that this was my first workshop and I thanked them. They said that this was not evident at all and they were very happy that we came. It was an awesome experience!”*

Peer trainers' feedback questionnaire

I asked the peer trainers to fill out a questionnaire after the test workshops in order to assess how useful they found the training and to get feedback on what should be improved in case of a future training. The questionnaire was filled anonymously. Based on the answers, I concluded the following things:

All five respondents were completely happy with the training's professional content, the methodology used and the new information about Roma dramas.

Everyone in the team claimed that they became more confident as a result of the training and improved their communication skills. 60% (three participants) felt that they would definitely like to continue the work with the Independent Theatre, one person marked five out of six for this question and one marked four out of six, which is still more than medium commitment. This means that they did not only become more confident but also more committed to the theatre. They all said that the training was very informative, according to their answers they

had learnt a lot about Roma plays, Roma theatre and the Roma community as well as social issues and creative methods.

"...during the training I found it difficult to phrase an instruction or topic clearly. At the workshop it was super easy!"

All participants considered their test workshop a success. Two said exceptionally successful, two marked very successful and just one person marked it as moderately successful. Many pointed out very similar areas for improvement. They suggested to organise more personal meetings and extracurricular programs together; however, the most interesting one had also occurred to me during the training. It will take time to work on this suggestion but we definitely aim to do so.

"We have developed a group and an individual syllabus which got lost somehow in the process and had not been implemented at all. I am sorry that nothing came of all that hard work. But this might be because of the big time gap and this whole Covid situation."

For me, this training will be completed when the peer trainers teach the syllabus they developed on the related new plays to the more experienced trainers and the senior trainers help them to implement this session. This is how the two-way knowledge transfer can take place and that is when all trainers will have equally high status. If this works out the way we hope it does there will be no more difference between trainer and trainer. They will all be equal. A prerequisite of this is for the five youngsters to be able to run all possible modules of the Roma Heroes workshop so that if it is necessary and the number of participants allow for it they are able to run a workshop alone.

The peer trainers' training created value for the new trainers, for the Independent Theatre, for the workshop participants and for all other initiatives who adopt the methodology or are inspired by these experiences.

GETTING TO KNOW THE PARTICIPANTS IN GROUPS (120 MINUTES)

Introduction (5 min.)

- What will happen today? (short introduction into what the goal of the meeting is, how long it will be, etc.)
- Information on the Independent Theatre
- Frames – We collect key points which make the given programme as efficient as possible and ensure that each student feels comfortable taking part in it; this confirms the group members that their opinion matters, we are curious about them, and they also feel that the trainers have control. Main points that shall be highlighted at most workshops, preferably by the participants:
 - Being active: you can benefit as much as you contribute
 - There is no good or bad opinion
 - Taking photos, making videos
 - Break – you shall get back in time
 - Respect each other's opinion, do not judge each other
 - Keep the timeframes
 - The trainers do not tell the good answer, we are interested in your opinion

Ice-breakers (10 min.)

- Name round – name + gesture; the trainer starts the round, everyone says their name and adds a gesture which expresses their current mental/ physical state; the group immediately repeats the name and the gesture too. This exercise can be amended by a next round where everyone has to repeat the others' name and gesture and then add their own ones. What is this good for? Learning names, supporting self-expression, boosting concentration, paying attention to each other, energising the group, easing tension, ice-breaker.

- Map – Position yourself on an imaginary map! Where do you live now? Description: Draw an imaginary map of Hungary in the space, agreeing on where Budapest is. Everyone shall take a position on this map so that it shows the city or town where they currently live. After everyone has found a place, we discuss where they are standing and which town that signifies. In the next round they shall find the place where they were born or spent most of their childhood. This task brings the participants closer to each other physically depending on how big is the dedicated space, and they establish direct verbal and physical contact while finding their place. (This task is fit for groups where the participants live or come from different parts of the country.)
- Standing in line – the participants shall stand in line based on their last name's first letter in one minute; then they shall stand in line based on their birthdate in one minute (this is a variation of the map game to help physical and verbal contact and learn new information about each other)

Introduction in pairs (20 minutes)

Speed interviews in two minutes, introducing your partner in one minute. The task is to share as much information as possible about yourself in two minutes. After this, the pairs present each other to the group as if they were talking about themselves. Getting to know and passing on each other's story brings the participants closer and also adds to the common information of the group. (This task is recommended for groups where the participants do not or hardly know each other.)

Amoeba (5 min)

This task helps to form small groups.

- Everyone is walking in the room. The trainer counts down after clap-

ping, the participants form groups of four. The group forms a picture with the title: WE ARE CLOWNS.

- Everyone is walking in the room. The trainer counts down after clapping, the participants form groups of three. The group forms a picture with the title: OPPOSITES ATTRACT.
- Everyone is walking in the room. The trainer counts down after clapping, the participants form groups of five. The group forms a picture with the title: I STAND UP FOR MYSELF.
- Stay in these groups of five.

DISTRIBUTING SCENES OF THE PLAYS (4 PLAYS) TO THE GROUPS (25 min.)

“Read the scenes that you got and discuss who it is about, who the protagonist is, what challenges s/he has to face, what decision s/he makes. Give a short (max. 2 minutes) presentation to share the story with the rest of the group. The goal is to make them want to read the play.

+ Come up with a question to start a discussion (about a topic which is relevant for the play)

You have 25 minutes in total for this.”

GIVING THE PRESENTATIONS (15 min.)

REFLECTIONS (10 min.) – How did you like working together? How could you solve the task? What made your group successful? What skills did you need for cooperation for example?

TELLING ABOUT THE TRAINING (15 min.)

QUESTIONS + CLOSING ROUND (15 min.)

The participants can ask questions to each other and the trainer and of course the trainer can ask questions too – this is the last chance to “beat the grass to startle the snakes”, that is, to let the participants

come up with questions or comments which would otherwise bother either the ones asking them or those hearing them; by the end of the workshop this is no longer a problem. As we aim to work with the youngsters in the future, we cannot leave with unanswered questions after the first workshop session.

Possible questions:

- What is it that you liked today? Why?
- Is there anything you missed today?
- Do you have any questions about the theatre, this workshop or the training?

About the workshop's structure:

As stated before, the session started with a general introduction. This is important not only to give information to the group but also it helps the participants to feel safe and comfortable if one (or more) person talks to them at the beginning. Here a smile, a kind but energetic voice and an open posture are musts. This way, the group leader also sets an example of how the trainer should start a session. Moreover, as the saying goes, a workshop starts when every participant has spoken. For this, a round of introduction provides great opportunity but if we would like to learn as much as possible about the participants, a name + gesture round is the perfect choice. Gestures are usually automatic reflexes; however, if the trainer says that this is the task, some will think about it and plan their gestures to introduce themselves. It is easy to tell if a gesture is planned or spontaneous. Of course this might have several motivating factors but if we want to draw conclusion based on this one game, we can see who prefers to get immersed in the session and who pays more attention to the effect of his/her gesture has on the group. One is not better than the other, the goal is not to judge but to get to know each other.

After everyone has spoken up, it is time to learn more about each other. We often think that it is important where we came from, where we grew up. This is not the only thing we learn about each other while finding our place on the imaginary map. This closeness provokes different reactions from the group members. Some of the following can be very telling:

- embarrassed semi-smile
- happy, open smile
- downcast eyes
- lifted eyes
- whispering, voice gets lost in the space
- firm voice, dominating the space
- touch (e.g.: touching the shoulder or waist of those who you would like to address but are facing away from you)
- looking into the eyes of the conversation partner
- not looking into anyone's eyes

The next exercise, amoeba is especially fit for tests as the participants shall create something together with random people in small groups without any planning or preparation. For this game, it is useful to have the smart phones in hand as statues are very telling. One's position in the statue's composition shows clearly if one played a leading or an implementing role. As these pictures are created spontaneously in a short period of time (while counting to 10 which is 20-30 seconds), the exercise supports fast communication, decision-making and cooperation. The participants are dependent on each other, they have to cooperate. Moreover, the closeness and the joy of creation results in euphoria and together with the movements this starts to produce endorphin and carries oxygen to the brain. Last but not least, amoeba exercise is perfect for forming smaller groups. The small groups of the last round keep working together.

Presenting the scenes of the plays and working with them in a creative

way is a more complex task. A lot depends on the approach of the participants. It is worth circling around the groups and see how active or passive the participants are during the group work. Who leads the work? Does s/he try to involve the more passive ones?

Moreover, the dynamics of the group work is also important. In some cases most of the time is spent on coming up with an idea, planning, “quarreling” and the implementation will be ad-hoc. These improvisations can also result in high quality presentations (scenes, in our case). The other extreme is when after very short planning and discussion, the participants move on to the implementation and spend most of the time with rehearsing a scene. Usually they finish the work a bit earlier than the rest of the group.

Both cases can have great or less successful outcomes. The trainer shall not decide on which approach to use, s/he shall let the group dynamics evolve. It is important for the trainers to spend two or rather three times one minute with each small group. When the trainer asks the participants how the work is going, they often want to prove themselves and say: “We are ready, we have discussed everything, everyone knows everything, we have even rehearsed the scene.” This sounds to be a reassuring answer but the trainer shall not be contented with it. If we only respond: “Great, you are awesome. I can’t wait to see your presentation”, the group is happy that they did a good job and their motivation decreases by the time they get to present their work. It is useful to ask questions like these: What will the scene be? What is the story about? What is the turn? How does that lead to the end? What is the ending? These questions may highlight if they missed some aspects or they let these important elements slide in the heated debate. (These questions are relevant for making theatre scenes/presentations. If the group work uses different creative methods, different questions are needed. The goal is for the trainer to see if the participants understood the task correctly and the group presentation will

be successful.) It is also possible that a group cannot make a decision, cannot choose from the various ideas. The trainer might help them by suggesting to combine the ideas or encourage them to pick one as time is running out. It is often enough that the trainer listens to the ideas and confirms that they are good, it is worth working with them and getting to the implementation.

Presenting the result is when the participants can share their own work, ideas and creativity to the whole group. It is especially important that the trainer handles this with sensitivity. S/he has to ensure ideal circumstances for the presentation to the small group by asking the following questions:

- Do you have every tool you need? Are they easy to access?
- Where would you like to play? Where should the audience be?

The rest of the group, the “spectators” are usually curious and pay attention to the presentation. However, if there is any chance that the other participants disrupt the presentation, the trainer can warn them that they will also be in the same situation so they should respect each other’s work by paying attention to them. If the trainer uses a similar sentence s/he will not be cool, s/he will be considered strict. If the trainer wants to keep his/her positive image, s/he can increase their active attention by giving them a task, e.g.:

- Watch the scene and pay attention! What is the story about? Who are the characters?
- Watch the scene and find out who it is about! Which story did this group work with?

If we give a task to the spectators, they are more eager to pay attention and focus resulting in a flood of questions and comments after the presentation.

These are the trainer’s tasks after the small group’ presentation:

- Reward to group by applauding each small group.
- Thank the group for the presentation but do not comment on it be-

cause it may endanger the balance of the group if the trainer expresses an opinion.

- After every small group have presented their work, provide an opportunity to each group to summarise shortly what it was like to work together, how they could solve the problems and which part they enjoyed the most.
- Provide an opportunity to the small groups to reflect on each other's work, e.g.: Does anyone have a comment, idea, question related to this presentation?

NEW TOPICS – ROMA HEROES WORKSHOP 2.0

The most important change in the new syllabus that we developed during the trainers' training is to focus on one play. Further developments make this methodology fit for analysing the rest of the plays too, its structure makes it applicable to most dramas. It also works in communities where reading and comprehension skills do not allow for working with written scenes.

Goal: Help the participants to form an own opinion and boost reflexive thinking while discussing the chosen play's (in this case Chameleon Girl's) story and main message.

Key question: What successes and challenges mark the life that our main decisions set for us?

Duration: 180 minutes with one break

Ideal group size: 15-20 participants

1. Opening round (15 min.)

- The trainers introduce themselves and the Independent Theatre. What will happen during the workshop?
- The group collects the frames to set the foundations of successful cooperation and a safe environment.

2. Heroes Brainstorming (20 min.)

What makes a hero a hero?" – the participants share their ideas on the concept of a hero. (It is important to summarise the ideas according to the main narratives: The "hero" faces some difficulty, responds to the challenges by being active, makes an own decision and brings on change.)

3. Game to get in tune – statement game / opinion line (15 min.)

(Statements to be developed in line with the group's characteristics)

- Motherhood or career (which one is more important to you?)
- It is important to go to school.
- Role models are important.
- Roma children should go to a separate school.
- Women should stay at home with the children.
- It is important to meet the expectations of our environment.
- I shall do what others expect me to do.
- I rather learn from my mistakes than that of others.
- It is impossible to compensate for the lack of education.
- Having children is my private matter.

4. Storytelling (30 min.)

The trainers tell the story of *Chameleon Girl* live. (The participants may be involved in the storytelling, they can be addressed and involved in the dramatic situations – this draws them in the story and sensitises them indirectly.)

5. Moderated discussion (10 min.)

The group sums up the story, analyses the dilemmas and decisions that were mentioned, the participants point out diverse values and form opposing opinions, the group reflects on the exercise.

6. Break (15 min.)

7. Warm up – the trainers decide on which ice-breaker games to use when preparing the session.

8. Introduction of the creative work and forming groups (15 min.)

The participants circle in the space and form groups of 3-4-5 based on the given instructions. These groups present the main milestones of the story that they just listened to.

- This task introduces the performative form of the next exercise.

9. Creative work in small groups (20 min.)

The small groups imagine the life of Chameleon Girl and her child in ten years. How do they live? What happened with her education? What are their challenges? How can they sort them out? What decisions do they have to make? This is presented in a short scene.

10. Presenting the creative works (30 min.)

The participants share their experiences on working together and reflect on the scenes and their messages.

11. Closing round (10 min.)

What experiences do you take home with you?



This material was written by Tamás András Szegedi, with the support of Márton Illés as his supervisor.

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