

ROMA HEROES IN THE STREETS OF EUROPEAN CITIES



LET'S GO OUT! TAKING ROMA HEROES TO THE STREETS

Outdoor Theater and Non-Formal Education
Methods for Roma Self-Representation

A collection of artistic, non-formal and educational
practices from Hungary, Italy, Spain and Romania
for creating outdoor theater performances and workshops

Created by
Independent Theater Hungary | Rampa Prenestina, Italy
Giuvlipen, Romania | AAIÚN Producciones, Spain

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Who We Are

[Independent Theater Hungary](#) (ITH) (Hungary) has been operating since 2007. The organization's aim is to start a conversation about social issues that touch all of us, this way drawing attention to personal responsibility: what we, as individuals can do to improve the social situation.

[The Independent Theater Hungary](#)'s mission is to help underprivileged Roma and non-Roma people become successful artists, trainers or professionals in whichever field they work but first and foremost, help them become active citizens. The organization wants to contribute to the ability of different groups to understand and accept each other, as well as create values together. They want to reach and facilitate those who don't usually have access to culture and make those people who are already abandoned by society active citizens. They want the youth of the future to find authentic pieces of art about today's society. It's important for them to show how colorful the Roma theater is, how many different topics are covered and what a wide range of genres are combined in it. The legal and financial representation of the ITH is ensured by the Women for the Future Association.

[Rampa Prenestina](#) (Italy) is a Cultural Association for Social Promotion (APS), a social workspace created in 2013 by a collective of artists, art-educators and therapists. Alongside the artistic production they carry forward a work that promotes artistic languages in socio-educational paths aimed at children, youth and young adults from socially disadvantaged groups. They promote the knowledge of music and other forms of art (theater, circus, dance, visual arts, crafts) through playful-educational courses as a method of inclusive pedagogy.

Their mission is inspired by the concepts of the Pedagogy of the Oppressed by Paulo Freire and his work in favor of the young people of

the Brazilian favelas¹, the youth orchestra of Josè Abreu in Venezuela, Montessori and other alternative non-formal educational concepts. They are a small company, they strongly believe in local action (Glocal) and they have been continuously and constantly active in their area on the eastern outskirts of Rome for years.

[Giuvlipen](#) (Romania). Giuvlipen means feminism in Romani language, and it became the name of the first independent Roma feminist theater company in Romania. Their art is challenging, experimental and highly performative. The themes of their performances are diverse but they all have something in common: the artists' collective openly discusses topics that history, mentality and social or political constraints have often silenced. In each show, they seek to reclaim the art, history and cultural identity of the Roma, through stories told by Roma artists. [Giuvlipen](#) was established in 2014 by actresses Mihaela Drăgan and Zita Moldovan.

Then in 2015, **The Roma Actors Association** was set up at the initiative of several Roma actors, artists and cultural experts (including Giuvlipen collective) in order to form a structure of reflection and action in the field of art as a form of combating exclusion. The objectives of the association are to integrate cultural, artistic and cultural innovations in the arts in general, and theater in particular. At national level, the Association of Roma Actors pursues the creation of the first Roma Theatre in Romania, which will also serve as a center of sources and expertise on Roma culture in Romania.

[AAIÚN Producciones](#) (Spain) and the **Asociación Cultural Por La Investigación Y El Desarrollo De Teatro Profesional En Andalucía** were

¹ Poor citizens were pushed away from the city and forced to live in the far suburbs in Brazil. These settlements are called 'favelas' and these slums were historically neglected by the Brazilian government.

established in Seville in 1998. The professional performing arts company was initiated by its director, [Sonia Carmona Tapia](#), who created it after coming back to Spain following a more than five year-long stay in the United States where she had graduated Magna Cum Laude in dramatic art, specializing in acting. During its long journey, the company has realized many different projects that range from producing plays for children (even in different languages) to developing educational projects using theater of life and experience in adult educational settings.

While working in different programs - dealing with theater, storytelling, education and inclusion - they have tried to reach out innovatively and creatively to empower individuals, improve their lives and strengthen communities by developing and delivering creative, participatory art based on interventions that bring about a positive social impact, build self-esteem and promote social inclusion and employability.

The people involved in writing these materials were: Rodrigo Balogh, Jaime E. Vicent Bohórquez, Márton Illés, Sonia Carmona Tapia, Sebastian Spinella, Augustina Vasile



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Before you head on to explore all the information, concepts, stories, methods, instruments and works presented in this Publication you should know that this material is the result of a curation process that brought forth perspectives as well as resources that are as diverse as the organizations involved in the creation of the material. Therefore, the suggested materials cited and proposed for further reading also come from different sources, some of them in their original languages. We believed that it was more important to present valuable content rather than to solely focus on content that is available in English. We therefore encourage you to use the translate function on all websites provided as links. And we welcome you to enjoy this material in Hungarian, Italian, Romanian and Spanish. Last but not least, although all organizations have a vast experience in the field of outdoor theater and education, we do not hold the ultimate methods or truths. We hence invite you to consider this publication the start of a comprehensive list, that we would be happy if you continued expanding with other views and materials.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter was curated by the Independent Theater Hungary

WHY SHOULD WE DO OUTDOOR THEATER AND NON-FORMAL EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

In the last 2 years dominated by the Covid pandemic and the related lockdown, all cultural and educational initiatives had to face challenges and rethink their mainly indoor, offline activities which were many times prohibited by different national regulations. During the time of the greatest epidemiological tightening only online activities were allowed but in less strict periods, outdoor activities were possible and indoor ones were not. As most of the members of the consortium creating this document had already had experience realizing outdoor artistic and educational activities, we were lucky to have methodological bases to build on new initiatives. As we have also made outdoor activities in the pre-covid times, we can declare that

Lockdown is not the only reason why we should go outdoors

We have collected some more reasons why outdoor cultural and educational activities are important, as listed below.

Few people attend any institutions

Students and pupils are obliged to attend schools throughout Europe till the age of 16 or 18, whether they like it or not. But most of the cultural and (non-formal) educational institutions and organizations are visited on a voluntary basis by the citizens. It seems good at first sight but in practice, the members of different disadvantaged groups, those who are not socialized to visit such venues, hardly go to theaters,

museums, cultural centers and any other buildings existing in towns, even if the entry is free. In most cases though, one needs to pay a ticket when participating in a cultural event. Also, one needs to wear elegant clothes when attending an event. So those who lack financial resources, who might not have proper suits, whose parents didn't take them to such venues as a child, and whose friends never invited them to go there either, hardly visit indoor cultural events. They don't think that theaters, museums or cultural centers are for them, and don't even visit events that would be interesting for them. For this reason

Cultural institutions - even unintentionally - contribute to cultural and educational segregation

Since there are hardly any disadvantaged group members of diverse ethnic backgrounds who frequent such institutions, these places don't need to answer the potential demands of these groups, either. The "temples of culture" attended by the middle class become more and more elitist, when they want to serve the demands of their visitors. After decades and centuries of the practice that only middle-class people attend these institutions, their services are already very far away from the reality, needs and interests of the groups whose members are also excluded because of the content, form and language dominating these "temples of culture".

But if we can't reach the wider groups of society in cultural institutions, where else can we do it?

Reach people in the streets because streets are frequented by everyone

If you create any cultural or educational activities in the streets and outdoor places which are frequented by diverse people, and not just

by the ones who consciously go to cultural events, you can also get in contact with people you would never reach in indoor cultural institutions. Of course, some outdoor places are predominantly frequented by different social groups. In some parks you might find only members of the middle class, meanwhile in some streets only disadvantaged group members. So, it's also important to take into consideration who these people are and where you can reach them. However, in each town there are border zones where you can find members of different social groups. If you want to target a diverse audience, you should find these places.

Beside the fact that in some outdoor places you can reach much more diverse groups than in cultural institutions, there are also content-level reasons why it is a good idea to go outdoors.

The topic is lying in the street

If you want to make people aware of the architecture of a town, why stay in a classroom, instead of going out and seeing the sites in question together for real? If you want to show young people different social groups who are in the streets, why not meet them face-to-face? If you teach the history of a town and a community, why not visit the venues where historical acts took place? Beside the topic itself, the ambient you can find outdoors is also very important.

Parks can be the most beautiful and cheapest sceneries for an outdoor performance

We have mentioned some reasons concerning the outreach of our activities, our contents and the scenery of our activities, and some reasons why we should go outdoors. We should also take into consideration some methodological aspects.

In mainstream education and culture, we mainly use static situations, expecting young people to stay quiet and listen, or at best, to interact and tell their opinion regarding some issues - but in most cases, we focus on logical and linguistic intelligence, while the other six types of the Gardner intelligences² are not in focus. So, those who are better in certain intelligences - e.g., spatial or bodily-kinesthetic or naturalistic - can learn in a more efficient way. They can have a much stronger experience when they can see a space and not just hear about it, when they can move during information acquisition, or when they get in connection with nature while having a cultural experience. Outdoor cultural and educational activities can balance the disadvantages experienced by the students who are not the best in logic or languages at school but have other strengths. Outdoor activities can also be attractive for those who don't like sitting down, listening/speaking all the time, or staying in a dark room, when there is sunshine outside. We believe that outdoor educational and cultural initiatives including enough movements and activities can also attract young people who are not attracted by the traditional forms of indoor art and education.

Positive learning and cultural experience also for 'difficult' students

We mentioned numerous reasons why we want to go outdoors, and why we think you - art practitioners and educators - should do that, too. Let's add just a last, very pragmatic point to the list. If you don't have your space of your own for cultural activities, or sufficient resources for renting indoor venues keep in mind that

Outdoor venues are usually free or cheaper than indoor venues.

2 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theory_of_multiple_intelligences

WHY DOES (ROMA) SELF-REPRESENTATION MATTER?

This chapter was curated by the Independent Theater Hungary

In this material we don't just focus on the methods of outdoor theater and non-formal education but also the genuine representation of the Roma communities. The Roma is the biggest ethnic minority in Europe, and the members of the Roma communities more often face poverty, disadvantages in different fields of life (such as education, employment, health and housing) and also discrimination than the members of the majority of different societies in Europe. Besides the objective socioeconomic disadvantages, we must also mention that according to the survey by Eurobarometer³, the Roma are one of the most hated minorities in the EU, too.

The disadvantages of the Roma communities have complex historical, social and political causes we don't want to analyze here, as there are many studies focusing on this topic. However, we must declare that

Poverty and exclusion create a negative spiral

If your parents are poor, you go to a segregated, bad quality school, your housing conditions are not sufficient for studying at home, you might need to get some income already at a young age, thus, you probably won't be successful in education. But even if, despite all these facts, you get a qualification, you probably won't have the social capital to find a quality job, and some of the employers will discriminate against you because of your origin. And if you are one of the very rare successful ones from your community, who also get a good job and

³ Eurobarometer is a collection of cross-country public opinion surveys conducted regularly on behalf of the EU Institutions since 1974.

integrate into society, you will be under pressure: you shouldn't be too open about your origin, meanwhile you will experience a big social distance from your peer community members. You don't belong to them anymore due to your social and economic status or education level.

For the above-mentioned reasons, social mobility is extremely difficult for the disadvantaged Roma people in today's Europe, and those who are able to step out from the negative spiral often (have to) lose or hide their roots and identity.

Beside social facts, narratives rule our life

We are artists and educators so we have no direct influence on changing the life-conditions of people and the legislation that could help their integration. But we all use existing narratives and build new ones. At first sight, the facts seem to be stronger, but we think that what we show, believe and communicate also has an extremely important power.

As laws have been made by the non-Roma, the image of the Roma has also been created by them

If we examine how art has portrayed the various Roma communities for centuries, and how the media and mainstream culture depict them today, we must admit that this is also an important factor that contributes to maintaining the negative spiral.

In European culture the Roma people were usually portrayed as fortune-tellers, dancers, wild, free people - the exoticized image of the Roma was regarded as colorful, funny or romantic by the non-Roma people. However, it didn't show a genuine image of the challenges, responsible attitudes, values, sufferings or successes of the Roma people. After long decades the hardly realistic Roma image was inter-

nalized also by some of the Roma people, who thus thought that their ancestors were all dancers and fortune-tellers and not housebuilders or basket weavers. These narratives didn't focus on forced settlements and assimilation either, which, among others, were important aspects experienced by the Roma communities during the centuries.

Today the media have the greatest power in creating narratives

The mainstream and social media also determine today's public discourse about the Roma. The members of the different communities are often portrayed as criminals, or ignorant, passive people who don't want to improve their life conditions. Sometimes the Roma are portrayed as victims who suffer from the laws and conditions regulated by the decision-makers and the white majority. In the second type of narrative, the Roma are not the 'bad guys' but victims. In both narratives though, they can't make responsible decisions or be considered as active citizens. The first narrative only contributes to the negative Roma-image and intensifies the hatred of the members of the majority society towards the Roma, meanwhile the second narrative is not attractive either, as it doesn't offer positive values and identity young Roma people would like to identify with.

No one wants to be identified as a criminal or a victim but only these identities are ensured by the mainstream when representing the Roma

So, we must declare that the Roma representation of the non-Roma culture, education and media is not genuine. It doesn't inspire either the Roma or the non-Roma to make steps forward towards social inclusion and to have a more positive Roma image or identity.

Beside the negative impacts of the non-Roma cultural and media experts' representation of the Roma, we shouldn't either forget the principle:

Nothing about us without us

All groups and communities have the right to represent themselves. It's not fair that women are only represented by men, or young people by old ones; or that the Roma are represented only by non-Roma people.

There are a lot of perspectives, stories and aspects related to Roma representation, which are hidden for the non-Roma people, too.

For the above-mentioned reasons, and the list could go on, we are convinced that Roma self-representation should gain space in theater and education. We - all the four partners writing this paper - have made numerous theatrical and educational work to show the stories, viewpoints and personal experiences of the Roma people and communities, which are hidden from the wider groups of Roma and non-Roma people and from the mainstream culture and communication, too. We would like to develop the Roma image, identity and point out important social issues that should be handled differently. Our aim is to show the common and diverse human values which don't just connect all the Roma communities all around Europe but also the non-Roma. Roma means human. We believe the Roma stories have universal human values that can enrich all human beings.

Find us in your city and history

We have been part of European society for centuries. There are a lot of important stories of the Roma communities - which also have some

relevance for the non-Roma - in our towns where we live. You might not see the neighboring district, and you might not know anything about its everyday reality...You might walk in the streets every day, where many Roma heroes fought for the freedom of your country... You might not know that there was a massacre in your town some centuries ago...

We will help you - we will show you our common history and presence in the streets of our towns - in Seville, Rome, Bucharest and Budapest. However, when we will do outdoor theater and education - we shouldn't just focus on our stories, but we should also collect and analyze all forms and techniques, good practices and lessons learnt in these fields of art - in order to create something stronger and reach more people by the Roma stories and perspectives which are sometimes different from and sometimes similar to that of the majority.

In this material we've collected what we find useful for our outdoor work, hoping that it will also help your work!

RITUAL THEATER

This chapter was curated by the Aaiún Producciones

When we speak of theater, we speak of something very diverse and, at the same time, broad and connotative. We cannot conceive of theater as a singular, unique and isolated event in time; rather, we must always think of a plural, multiple and variable event. That is, we must imagine an act ... a fact ... **alive** that is in constant change. It thrills and beats with the heart of human beings.

Throughout human history, theater, in its diverse interpretations, has accompanied people in their daily life, at their different life stages and in everything that mattered to the members of the community. Theater has always been part of the family of arts, men and women of the past and present, and it certainly will be part of the communication and proposals of the citizens of tomorrow. Undoubtedly, this statement is not gratuitous and is part of the logical evolution of a chronological coherence that presages obviousness. Since prehistoric times, rite was part of daily life, but it was done in a very marked and special way. Everything that was important was specified over time as a differentiated event and thus, it was interpreted in a specific liturgy. The forms, times and modes of this liturgy ended up being stored in a concrete text and this way we achieved something very similar to what we understand, in a contemporary and generic way, as theater. The text contains the words that reproduce the situations, the dialogues, the given circumstances, the weights, the limits, the annotations and a whole rosary of proposals and constituencies that are arranged in writing for future situations. At the same time, the diverse and varied staging, derived from the **directors'** approaches and interpretations, will mark paths that each of these situations will travel differently. Anyway ... let's not get

entangled in theoretical postulates and let's get to what we propose. What is ritual theater and what does it mean?

Answering these questions categorically, firmly and simply is something that, as the reader can understand, cannot be done by pontificating about it. We must, therefore, understand that whoever reads this reckless threat of an essay, will not find in it more than a compendium of personal opinions deriving from the author's professional experience in the theater during the last thirty years; and, likewise, frivolous and / or brainy readings which have accompanied it her activity. Reservations made, let's proceed to the reckless account.

We were talking about prehistory... which marks the beginning of human consciousness regarding social relationships. Something inherent to coexistence arises from this consciousness: **communication**. Communication is valid in different aspects of primitive societies; above all, in three different aspects: religious rituals; the organizations and provisions for hunting; and, finally, the rituals related to the incipient agriculture and livestock. We are not going to specify the how and why of these types of sacred rituals, since, even today, there is still strong evidence of them in tribal societies in Africa and in the life of remote people of Latin America and Asia. Even in the West and the modern East, if we scratch the surface of our traditions a bit, we can find ourselves face to face with our **ritual, ancestral** and **anthropological** past. That is to say, the origin of the serial repetition of the same events, granting them a sacred character; or what is the same, character of importance or crucial for life; It occurs from the moment in which the consecration of the same is accepted by the group. This validation almost automatically generates the liturgy that represents them. Thus, the **ritual dramatization** of the event in question was born.

We can affirm that we already have a process of ritual representation of reality once we have established the mechanism of sacralization

of facts, milestones, aspects, circumstances, etc. We have established the rite and therefore, its validity. Now the symbol of **the new law is the rite**, that is an expression of the new reality contrasted by and for the entire group. The liturgy deriving from the rite is the **valid representation** of the new and updated reality.

With the knowledge of the new liturgy, we develop a whole series of **codes** that accompany and symbolize the new law, the new reality. These symbols complete **the scenery and costumes** of the new reality. Everything counts. Nothing is accidental. Everything has a meaning in the new liturgy. It is easy to understand if we compare it to a religious liturgy of any ancient or modern confession. Thus, for instance, the post-Vatican II Catholic priest shows himself to his parishioners for the first time head-on, **engaging in a closer and more sincere dialogue** with them. Likewise, the presence of an authentic horse on stage brings us closer to a **natural and atavistic connection** with the viewer. Or the presence of a huge excavator **disproportionate the human factor** compared to the industrial fact.

If we are clear about the **liturgical parallelism** of theatrical representation, we will have an easier understanding of the use of the rite and its consequent symbols in stage work.

From the moment we decide, as spectators, to go to a theatrical performance we are already an inalienable part of a liturgy agreed upon and arranged by all parties. This liturgy obliges or conditions us to dress in a certain way ... to be at a specific time in a specific place or stage space ... it also obliges us to be silent when the performance is about to begin ... or to shout ... or to clap ... or perhaps to remain attentive to the gestures and the words of the actors and follow their instructions... There are so many **conventions and commitments that we intrinsically assume** that they would be impossible to count. As observers, we do not sign a contract, but there are laws assumed by

the viewer. We could call all the professionals who participate in the creation process as performers to collectively identify them. But... in that reality... in that false fiction... how is it possible for a simple spectator to fulfill such complete, enduring and repeated codes of action and, at the same time, for the performers to interpret freely? It is simply not possible.

The commitment of the artists; actors, directors, set designers, illuminators, makeup artists, technicians, etc. is total, absolute and precise; as well as ritual, liturgical and, of course, symbolic. Everything is measured, prepared and orchestrated so that it happens or is improvised in a calibrated way. Each of the actors has a task that has previously been evaluated, assessed and weighed based on a marked intention. This guideline or mark, derived from the collective decisions of the authors and designers of the well-known liturgy, is given by a fundamental tool: the text. The text may or may not have dialogues, but, even when it does not materialize on corporeal paper, or on a digital screen, and it seems blatantly improvised... it exists! It always has and is in the mind of the performers.

The daughter born of the mother-text when she was pregnant by the father-author-designer is **dramaturgy**. Dramaturgy is the ultimate tool that puts text on the scene. It is the real reason for things happening in the theater.

Being clear about the different elements that make up this repeated process throughout the history of humanity, we assimilate theatrical creation by the running parallel that happens in the history of the theater. We can influence and, de facto, we influence as creators all the elements, apparently symbolic or not, that generate the different **theatrical liturgies**. In primitive hunting liturgies, man imitates animals; dances mimetically; archers jump; spearmen run; there are men with horns; deer masks; they copy roars and sounds; etc. From rite,

we now turn to **myth**. From the sorcerer to the actor. Let's turn the process around and look at it in reverse. We will be creating the ritual theater.

If we occupy the stage space, the stage, the scene or all of them at the same time and we propose to the actors the use of codes and specific and **well-known** elements of scenography that we have been using for centuries in different liturgies widely repeated in real and daily life, we can save the viewer all the intellectual process of planning and development that we would need **to put in a dramatic situation**. In other words, with the use of certain symbols, codes or rituals, we move rapidly towards conflict. We will not need to repeat antecedents that we all know. The conflict can take place on stage directly. There are numerous examples.

Greek theater used the ancient religious rituals (komos) to get from rite to myth (mimesis); the word is added, and Tragedy arises. The public ceases to be a participant and becomes an observer. Educational theater is born, transmitting values through catharsis. Mime and farce are born. It incorporates the mask as an easily identifiable element.

Roman theater, influenced by the Greek, but evolved from the Etruscan theater, incorporated actors who danced to the rhythm of musical instruments and later added vocal music. All area codes derived from previously existing rituals; elements already well-known to the new audience members; the difference between circus entertainment and theatrical entertainment, each of them with its distinguishing elements. The makeup is different in each case.

Indian theater comes from sacred books with express mention of mime, vocal singing and ritual dance. The theme usually comes from mythological stories and incorporates well-known characters. The performance is basically devoid of scenery and is essentially just acting, directly connecting person to person.

The Italian commedia dell'arte applies recognizable masks and characters that make up casts already known to a viewer who enters directly into a conflict situation. Commedia dell'arte does not waste time; it recognizes biographies that have already been identified in shows and traditions of the past.

Salvador Távora (Seville 1930-2019) and the La Cuadra Theater in Seville incorporate new elements that are neither traditional nor common to traditional or contemporary theater; but since they are elements **encoded in the street** by the spectator, the spectator himself carries these elements with meaning, power and capacity to make them feel the dramaturgy of the tragedy of contemporary Andalusian peasantry. The day laborer recognizes himself in the theatrical codes of Távora and **understands what he wants to convey. It transcends** communication and, we would say, communes with dramatic representation. The rite and the liturgy are completed with the daily musical work provided by cante jondo⁴ and flamenco. It is pure ritual theater. Codes that are quickly recognized, transcended and **awaken spirituality** in its purest form. Codes that go beyond the stage, communication or culture. Codes that **elevate the collective soul** of people, the Andalusians, through the scenic event that collects **millenary symbols** such as the minotaur, the bull, blood, sacrifice, prayer, crying, complaining, but also **contemporary symbols** of any street from the late twentieth century such as stairs, heavy machinery, concrete mixer, tools, chairs, pigeons, cranes, etc.

Ritual theater is, therefore, **effective and efficient**, theater per se, which is not necessary for the viewer ... What is the point of drama?

4 Jondo singing is the most genuine Andalusian singing that comes from profound feelings. Not all flamenco singing is jondo.

STREET PERFORMANCE - A BRIEF HISTORY

This chapter was curated by the Rampa Prenestina

Street performance, the act of performing in public places, is practiced in every major culture in the world and dates to antiquity. Street theater has very remote origins. It is said that the first jugglers appeared in ancient Egypt and were hired in the markets to draw the attention of passers-by to the pottery stalls by performing juggling and swirls of plates and cups.

Street theater has a long and complex history, it has been present in the streets and squares since ancient Egypt and in the Greco-Roman culture. Historically, the period during which the performances took place in real theater buildings is relatively limited compared to the phases where the stage space was an open space, a market, a fair, a square, a street or a churchyard.

A characteristic figure of the Middle Ages was the Jester, a real performer capable of transforming the body or face according to the stage activity: jugglers, acrobats, dancers, storytellers and jesters were widespread throughout the neo-Latin area. Their figure, later condemned by the Church, must be linked to that of the Roman Mime or Histrion. They were professional actors in all respects, they earned their living by entertaining the people in the squares or cheering up the guests at a banquet or party.

Ancient Troubadours and Singers were a source of information to people when there were no information sources like television, radio etc. They were traveling from place to place to tell important events in the form of music and poetry in public squares, often accompanied by dancers, acrobats and jugglers to delight crowds of people.

Street theater in the Middle Ages became a cultural bulwark, as a re-

sult of the barbaric thrust that was responsible for the destruction of many theater buildings. Street theater is a profane theater, it was born in the square before the church, and in the early Middle Ages it was the only true deuteragonist of the religious rituals.

As the medieval world was characterized by nation-states made up of a confederation of autonomous communities, this structure resulted in a certain discontinuity in the European theatrical world. The ancient Christian authority, in fact, showed open dissent towards theater and condemned it because it was considered a source of obscenities and lies, as evidenced by the pontifical documents disseminated during the Middle Ages, which shows the growing repression in Catholic nations also caused by political and economic factors.

History relates that after the fall of the Roman Empire the theatrical institutions could no longer exist and even the texts were forgotten. The theaters were in a state of neglect and ruin. This is because at the time, the Christian Church had a power that overruled its natural spiritual boundaries and considered the stage action a strong reference to paganism and the debauchery of customs. Theater distracted believers from the Divine Truth, which was intolerable. The profession of the actor was even considered immoral and licentious.

In the Middle Ages therefore, we witnessed a transformation of the so-called "jesters", figures already existing in the classical era. Leaving the courtyards of the palace, they begin to pass on their entertaining art in the small streets and squares of Italian and European city centers. These "vagabonds" of the show are transformed into mimes, acrobats, wrestlers, tightrope walkers and magicians, using outdoor scenic spaces, often with limited equipment.

In the late Middle Ages, they will lose the "circus" characteristics to acquire a greater cultural dimension that will also lead them to become poets and musicians. This will finally entail their reconsideration in the

eyes of the clergy. In the thirteenth century Thomas Aquinas “rehabilitates” the figure of the actor who will indeed be used to spread the Christian faith through sacred dramas.



Photo by DEA / G DAGLI ORTI/De Agostini Editore

Commedia dell'arte

Towards the middle of the sixteenth century, a theater aimed at ordinary people was born in Italy, as a response to the court theater intended for educated and refined spectators. The most important novelty of the phenomenon concerned the way of making theater: the Italian comedians transformed the actor into a true professional who can commercialize his work, thus giving rise to the first form of commercial entertainment.

Another novelty was the absence of the written text: the performances were based on canvases, also called scenarios, where a summary narration of the events that would take place on stage was provided. Improvisation was very important at the time of the *commedia dell'arte*, also called 'comedy all of a sudden' (*Commedia all'improvviso*), due to the presence of unexpected performances with masks, performed by educated amateurs in the context of court parties.

For the first time in history, women appeared on stage, some of whom became famous actresses, the first stars of modern theater, as opposed to the theatrical tradition which until then had also assigned female roles to men. There were various types of itinerant companies: from those with less fortunate actors, who wandered in search of places where they could set up improvised stages to act in front of a popular audience, also allying with the barkers on the market squares, to the prominent troupes who came invited to the courts of the nobles and to the magnificent theaters built in the following centuries.

Romani culture

Street Performing was common in the Romani culture, as fundamental to the nomadic culture. The Roma performed in streets, squares and markets as musicians, dancers, fortune tellers, bear and goat tamers, they were present all over Europe by way of their travels along the Mediterranean coast to Spain and the Atlantic Ocean and then up north to England and the rest of Europe. Romantic mentions of the Romani are found in all forms of song, poetry, prose and lore, paintings and pictures.

Street theater in modern society

In the twentieth century the “theater” leaves the “theater” (intended as its Temple) and returns to the streets, regaining possession of the scenic spaces used by the Commedia dell’Arte and the Jesters, but it does so with the aim to transform the theatrical performance into an openly political action. Many companies are politically motivated and use street theater to combine performance with protest. This has occurred through the guerrilla theater of the San Francisco Mime Troupe, that was, in the spirit of the Che Guevara’s writings from which the term guerrilla is taken, engaged in performances in public places to obtain “revolutionary sociopolitical change”. The Living Theatre, that contributed to the off-Broadway protest theater movement, the carnivalesque parades of Bread and Puppet Theatre, a politically radical puppet theater, the work of Ashesh Malla and the Sarwanam Theatre Group, a pioneer street theater in Nepal, the anthropological theater of the Odin Theater Company and the experimental theater of Jerzy Grotowski in Europe.

In the modern era we are witnessing a rebirth of this form of acting and entertainment starting from the 1960s. Today, in cities full of events, the popular spectacle returns to take on an increasingly important significance, aided by the policies of re-appropriation of historic centers. Not only the streets but also urban spaces lend themselves to become scenic spaces.

The sociological studies of Susie J. Tanenbaum showed that in urban areas where buskers regularly perform, crime rates tended to decrease, and that those with higher education attainment tended to have a more positive view of buskers than did those of lesser educational attainment.

The establishment of ecological days and the creation of pedestrian areas with sophisticated urban furnishings allow today that popular

and street performances fill qualitatively these spaces that they already belonged to in the past. New artistic forms are born that combine theater with plastic arts, circus arts and mime. Popular theater today, therefore, goes back to the people, rediscovering ancient decentralization. All this determines the encounter even with people who do not possess theatrical culture and who perhaps would have no other way to get acquainted with this type of experience live.

Today the performers who a hundred years ago would have made their living working in variety theaters, music halls and in vaudeville, now often perform professionally in the many well-known street performance areas throughout the world.



Photo by Tony D'Urso, Ayacucho, Peru, 1978, ODIN TEATRET ARCHIVES

France is perhaps the leading country of the sector, considering street art as one of the highest dramaturgical forms of the new millennium, and investing enormous economic resources in it. Many of the major events in France and Europe are focused on the various disciplines and languages of Street Theater (Festivals such as Chalon, Aurillac, major events such as the inauguration of Capitals of Culture throughout Europe, etc.) and new, creative spaces continue to be born, dedicated to this “new” sector. Some of these spaces are truly enormous, such as the Cité des Arts de La Rue in Marseille, which has a covered area of 33,000 m², where closed and heated urban spaces are reproduced to allow the creation, rehearsals and testing processes throughout the year, as well as the hosting of huge workshops and laboratories.

Globally, street theater and performing are common and appreciated forms of expression today that have gained a new value also through modern technology and social media. Flash mobs, for instance, including hundreds of people related to artistic or political actions have become a new form of expression. Musicians scattered all over the continents can play together through internet technology. In the 2000s, some performers began “Cyber Busking”: artists post their work or performances on the Internet for the people to download or “stream” them, and if they like it, they donate using electronic payment methods.

Peculiar characteristics of street art

“And if there come the singers and the dancers and the flute players, buy of their gifts also.

For they too are gatherers of fruit and frankincense, and that which they bring, though fashioned of dreams, is raiment and food for your soul.”

(‘The Prophet’, by K. Gibran)

Street performance or busking are the act of performing in public places for gratuities. In many countries the rewards generally come in the form of money but other gratuities such as food, drink or gifts may also be given. Street performance is practiced all over the world and dates back to antiquity. People engaging in this practice are called street performers or buskers in the United Kingdom.

Street theater allows people who might not have ever been to, or been able to afford to go to traditional theater. The audience is made up of anyone and everyone who wants to watch most performances are free.

Performance artists with an interest in social activism may choose to stage their work in the street as a means of directly confronting or engaging the public. Other artists consider a paying, theater-going public to be unrepresentative of the public with whom they are trying to communicate and performing to 'the man in the street' may be considered a more democratic form of dissemination. Some contemporary street theater practitioners have extensively studied pre-existing street and popular theater traditions, such as Carnival, commedia dell'arte etc. and wish to present them in a situation close to their original context. Whatever the reason for choosing the street is, the street is a place with a different set of possibilities than the conventional theater space.

Improvisation

Street theater artists develop an extraordinary capacity for improvisation. Not being hindered by the rigidity of a text or script, they can indulge in jokes, dance or singing, they even perform perform in mimic and acrobatic virtuosity that are different every time, depending on the people watching them. If we want, the essence of popular and street theater lies in this: the actor interacts with the audience to the

point of physically involving them in the show, as if it was a game. And this becomes an integral and irreplaceable part of fun.

There is no real theater if there is no fusion between those who act and those who participate in the experience. The brand of interactivity between actors and spectators finds in this form of cultural expression its maximum celebration.

Street artists must attract the attention of passers-by, they must create sufficient curiosity and expectations to be able to distract them from their occupations.

It is important to “create a circle”, i.e., to create curiosity and expectation in the audience by “tying it” to the representation until the end. All street artists know that a preliminary phase of preparation or rather the “creation of the circle” is indispensable for the proper functioning of a show. It is a preparatory but extremely qualifying moment for the success of the performance.

A street show is based on creating a direct line with the spectators without their being aware of it. The street artist who earns his living from street performing must charm, catch and keep the attention of the audience. Thus, a street show in its pure form is like the making of a hat: the approach indicates the moment of “making a hat”, a moment up to which it is essential that the street artist can keep the audience’s attention.

The street show starts from an “open text” in such a way that it gives space for the insertion of improvisational and inclusion pieces, then arrives at the real repertoire that includes jokes, gags, and techniques. The performance is never improvised, it always has a preordained structure, but the ability to adapt it to the situation generates the impression that improvisation prevails over what is studied, expected.

The street artist is accompanied by typical attributes of the wanderer, the migrant, the urban nomad, thus sharing the risk, the adventure. He con-

stantly travels through metropolises and urban centers presenting creative and entertaining activities. All are united by the street, an element that unites and differentiates, giving rise to a mixture of figures and genres.

The street performer has the gift of communication, and his act can be compared to a liturgy, a sacred ritual of which he is the minister. He's responsible for and aware of any symbol, word, message he intends to deliver to his audience, as his actions can provoke the strongest and most diverse reaction that will remain in the consciousness of the participants. With his performances, the street artist combines local phenomena with the global universe.

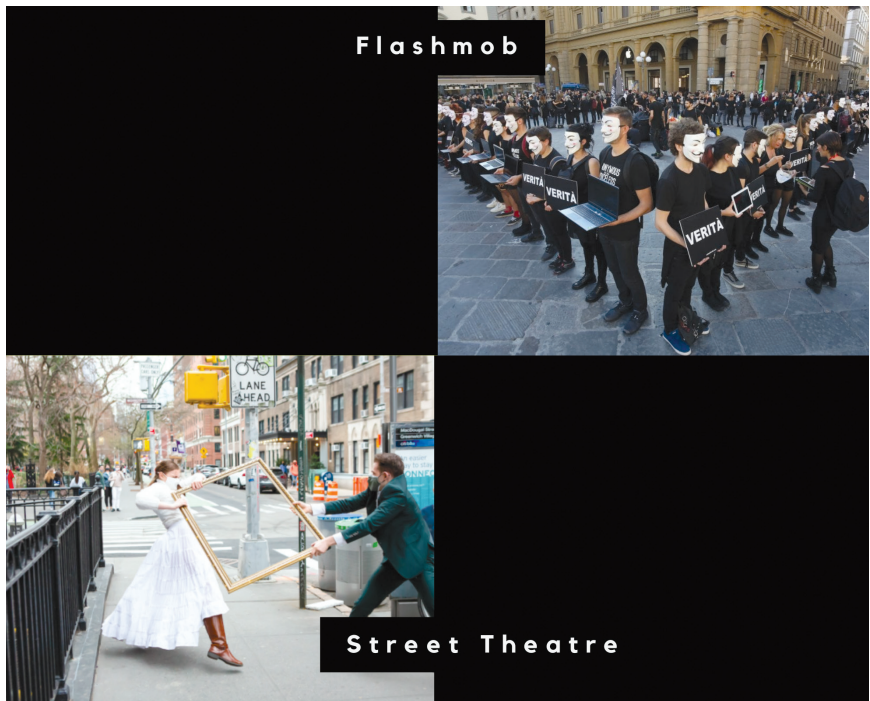


Photo by Enrico Ramerini/Cge (up right); by Dario Li Gioi (down left)

There are several forms of street performance today

Street theater is defined as an artistic event realized in urban open spaces or in any case public or freely accessible spaces, involving theatrical action by at least one human actor. This definition includes plastic arts, performing arts, video art, circus, theater, light design and music. These can be structured and shaped in different ways.

“Circle shows” are shows that tend to gather a crowd around them. They usually have a distinct beginning and end. Usually these are done in conjunction with street theater, puppeteering, magicians, comedians, acrobats, jugglers and sometimes musicians. Circle shows can be the most lucrative. Sometimes the crowd attracted can be very large. A good busker will control the crowd, so the patrons do not obstruct foot traffic.

“Walk-by acts” are typical where the busker performs a musical, living statue or other act that does not have a distinct beginning or end, and the public usually watches the act for a brief time. A walk-by act may turn into a circle show if the act is unusual or very popular.

“Stoplight performers” present their act and get contributions from vehicle occupants on a crosswalk while the traffic lights are red. A variety of disciplines can be used in such a format (juggling, break dancing, even magic tricks). Because of the short period of time available to them, stoplight performers must have a very brief, condensed routine. This form is seen more commonly in Latin America than elsewhere.

“Flash mob” is originally a form of public protest where a group of people assembles suddenly in a public place, performs for a short time, then quickly disperses. Today it is often performed for the purposes of entertainment, satire, and artistic expression. Flash mobs may be organized via telecommunications, social media, or viral emails. It is used as a popular form of protest, also when a protest is not allowed in a country - by the time the police arrive, the flash mob is over, leaving powerful social messages behind.

“Site-specific” is a theater performance planned to use a specific venue or location as scenery. The dramaturgy of the performance is related to the venue in some way, can be historically, aesthetically, poetically, or other.

Logistics

In its basic form, the logistics of doing street theater necessitate simple costumes and props, and often there is little or no amplification of sound, with actors depending on their natural vocal and physical ability. This issue with sound has meant that physical theater, including dance, mime and slapstick, is a very popular genre in an outdoor setting. The performances need to be highly visible, loud and simple to follow in order to attract a crowd.

Street theater should be distinguished from other more formal outdoor theatrical performances, such as performances in a park or garden, where there is a discrete space set aside (or roped off) and a ticketed audience.

Today’s enhanced technological tools have opened new frontiers and possibilities to the creative development of a performance. Mobile electric power stations enable the use of lights, sound, microphones, video projectors and so on. The internet allows the performance to become ‘viral’ and even interact with the audience or between distant performers.

Location

Optimal locations for street performing tend to be public places with large volumes of pedestrian traffic, high visibility, low background noise and as few elements of interference as possible. Good locations may include tourist spots, popular parks, entertainment districts including

many restaurants, cafés, bars and pubs and theaters, subways and bus stops, outside the entrances to large concerts and sporting events, almost any plaza or town square as well as *zócalos*⁵ in Latin America and piazzas in other regions.

Laws and regulations

Legislation for street performances is different in each country and is generally left to the city council's decision. Some cities encourage street performances in particular areas, giving preference to city government-approved buskers or tolerating spontaneous performing, while other cities have no regulation or dismiss, reject and ban street performers from the city center. Italy, despite its artistic background, is among those countries that still have national laws that forbid street performance, while in France, instead, this kind of art form is funded by the government, enabling its professionals to enhance the quality of street theater to top level.

Sources you can use to dive deeper into the topic:

- *Valentina Salvitti, The Social World of the Street Artist. An empirical research;*
- <https://www.teatridibologna.it/category/storia-del-teatro/>
- Paolo Stratta, *Una piccola tribù corsara: Il teatro di strada in Italia*, Editore Ananke, Torino, 2000;
- Neagu Djuvara, *Între Orient și Occident. Țările române la începutul epocii moderne*, Humanitas, Bucharest, 1995;
- Angus M. Fraser, *The Gypsies*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 1995;

5 a public square or plaza, especially in the center of a city or town.

- Gordon, Kelly Carolyn, *Guerrilla theater*, in Gabrielle H. Cody, Evert Sprinchorn (2007) *The Columbia encyclopedia of modern drama*, Volume 1, pp.568-9.
- Susie J. Tanenbaum, *Underground Harmonies: Music and Politics in the Subways of New York*, Cornell University Press, New York, 1995

STORYTELLING AS A METHODOLOGY FOR OUTDOOR PROJECTS FOCUSING ON ROMA REPRESENTATION

This chapter was curated by the Aaiún Producciones

What do we mean by “story”

A story or narrative is a connected series of events told through words (written or spoken), imagery (still and moving), body language, performance, music, or any other form of communication. You can tell a story about anything, and the events described can be real or imaginary covering both fiction and nonfiction and leaving no topic, genre, or style untouched. There are stories about all things and all times; past, present and future. Whenever you're telling somebody about a series of events, you are telling a story, no matter what the subject is or when they occurred. As such, stories are of great value to human culture, and are some of the oldest, most important parts of life.

What do we mean by “telling”

It is the live, person-to-person oral and physical presentation of a story to an audience. “Telling” involves a direct contact between teller and listener.

What do we mean by “oral storytelling”

Oral storytelling is a dynamic oral communication activity in which ideas are shared in a group by a messenger who is able to combine text, voice and movement in order to recreate a story in the imagination of his or her listeners. That's the only place the story exists.⁶

⁶ *'Share to Connect, Storytelling and Visual Language as a Tool for System Intervention'* by Arjen Barel, Amsterdam, November 19, 2019

I recommend this video to watch:

[Why do we tell children stories? Ben Akri](#)

The importance of self-representation and building positive narratives about the Roma community

"In the book "Stolen Children or Stolen Gypsies? Gypsies in Children's Books" [Jean Kommers](#), an anthropologist interested in the process of image formation, especially the construction of images of cultural alterity, studied over four hundred stories that were published in books for young children and teenagers in the small country of Holland between 1825 and 1980. To do so, he employed the discipline of [Imagology](#), which was used to copy good effect in academic circles in Northern and Central Europe to analyze the role of images in the process of national identity formation, but focusing in his study on representations that affected marginalized or dominated social groups.



In this study, Jean Kommers came to some important conclusions that remain valid many years later, among them, that the "innocent" and "trivial" literature of children's stories has played a substantial role in disseminating images that convert Gypsies into the dregs of society, a group that does not deserve to have civic rights. The title of Kommers' book sums up his main conclusion, since it alludes to the "stealing" myth, at the same time as it turns it round. Through the accumulation of negative stereotypes about them, children's literature has robbed Gypsies of the opportunity to be seen as respectable people by successive generations of adolescents. Accusing them of crimes such as child stealing is analyzed in terms of its symbolic value, as marking a dividing line that categorically separates some groups from "others". The attention paid to the structural features

of this type of literature—especially the repeated recourse to binary oppositions (black/white, civilized/barbarian, Christian/pagan)—enables the author to point out the hidden foundations and social effects of expressions of xenophobia that can also arise in the present. In parallel to all of this, Kommers' work suggests that "these 'innocent' books, whose stated intentions were to teach children about the importance of behaving like good Christians in life, were also in fact—more than anything else—books about power, (...) the power of the dominant society over another dominated one. They were about social inequality and played an important part in prolonging it".⁷

As Jean Kommers points out, in the [Spanish edition](#) conducted by professor María Sierra, in his exercise in self-criticism, while we do need to ask about changes in the interpretation of symbols inscribed within very persistent images, it is also worth reflecting on the fact that the representations that most gadjé⁸ have of the Gypsies do not come from direct contact with them, not even in Spain, a country with more than half a million Gypsies and a growing number of self-representation associations in the Roma community. Recent initiatives designed to review and dissolve stereotypes, directed at very diverse segments of official culture, from the mass media to the Royal Academy of Language, still have plenty of work ahead of them.⁹

7 '¿Robo de niños o robo de gitanos? Los gitanos en la literatura infantil' edited by Sierra Alonso, María, Editorial Universidad de Sevilla, 2016.

8 non-Roma

9 Stolen "Gypsies": Analyzing Images of Alterity (*), Paradojas de la ciudadanía, 17/10/2021, <https://paradojas.hypotheses.org/1106>.

Why storytelling

Stories are pre-models of existence.

Stories reveal you.

Stories compel us to face our truths.

The story is a mirror we look into to see our truths.

Stories teach us to look more in depth.

The minute you see, the minute you can do it.

A story helps you see.

Using storytelling in a wise way we can promote an approach to the Roma culture in a conciliatory and attractive way. We can promote cross-cutting objectives, such as the recognition of valuable, intangible heritage that constitutes orality, a support in reading promotion and cultural education and an invitation to look at our society from another perspective. Listening to stories creates a shared experience.

Folk tales, literary sources

There are very few collections of Roma tales that have been compiled by Roma people.



These are the main sources that we know of:

INTERNATIONAL

Diane Tong's [Gypsy Folk Tales](#): a collection of 80 tales gathered by the author from all over the world.

SPAIN

Javier Asensio's ["Cuentos populares de los gitanos españoles"](#)

Mercedes y Sebastian Porrás Soto's [Contes Rromane](#) (two volumes that I know of. Mercedes and Sebastian are of Roma origin.

Teresa Catarella's [El Romancero gitano-andaluz de Juan José Niño](#)

HUNGARY

[Archaic Images in Folk tales](#). *The Tales of István Jakab, Gypsy Tale Teller* [The Phenomenology of the Secret in Gypsy folktales](#). Péter Bálint

Gypsy Folklore Károly Bari

Veronika Görög-Karády:

The World and Tales of Lajos Erdős (Erdős Lajos mesei világa és meséi), L'Harmattan Kiadó, 2009.

Tales of János Berki told in Gypsy and Hungarian. Budapest, MTA Néprajzi Kutatócsoport, 1985.

Retelling Genesis. The Children of Eve and the Origin of Inequality.

In: Veronika Görög-Karády (ed.): *Genres, Forms, Meanings. Essays in African Oral Literature*, Budapest (Ciganisztikai tanulmányok 3.), 1982.

THE UNITED KINGDOM

[Tears for a Tinker. Soojin Berries. Bruar's Rest. The Way of the Wanderers. Jessy's Journey. Tales from the Tent](#), Jess Smith, traveler, Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2009.

Gypsy Folk Tales, by Francis Hindes Groome, [1899], at sacred-texts.com

Duncan Williamson:

Fireside Tales of the Traveller Children, Edinburgh: Canongate, 1983.

The Broonie, Silkie and Fairies: Travellers' Tales, Edinburgh: Canongate, 1985.

Tell Me a Story for Christmas, Edinburgh: Canongate, 1987.

A Thorn in the King's Foot: Folktales of the Scottish Travelling People (with Linda Williamson; New York: Penguin, 1987).

May the Devil Walk Behind Ye! Scottish Traveller Tales, Edinburgh: Canongate, 1989.

Don't Look Back Jack! Scottish Travellers' Tales, Edinburgh: Canongate, 1990.

The Genie and the Fisherman and Other Tales from the Travelling People (with Linda Williamson); Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Tales of the Seal People: Scottish Folk Tales, Edinburgh: Canongate, 1992.

The Horsie Man: Memories of a Traveller 1928-1958, Edinburgh: Canongate, 1994.

Rabbit's Tail, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

The King and the Lamp: Scottish Traveller Tales (with Linda Williamson); Edinburgh: Canongate, 2000.

The Land of the Seal People, Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2010. (Expanded edition of *Tales of the Seal People*, edited by Linda Williamson.)

Jack and the Devil's Purse, Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2011. (Expanded edition of *May the Devil Walk Behind Ye!*, edited by Linda Williamson.)

RUSSIA

[Russian Gypsy Tales By Yefim Druts, Alexei Dressler](#), James Riordan and Alexei Gess, Hodder, 1986.



Personal stories:

We can, for sure, work with folktales or other sources of stories but we should also give a try to work with personal stories. This way we can construct a living library, do story circles or go for story walks. To achieve this, we can also portrait historical facts or attach our special places (monuments, statues, sacred places, etc.) to the stories of those who were the protagonists.

Storytelling circles:

A Story Circle is exactly what it sounds like: a group of people gathering in a circle sharing stories. There is nothing particularly new about

story circles. In fact, the cultural anthropologists studying tribal societies have found story circles to be a fundamental practice of communities all over the world. This activity uses storytelling as a process of empowerment in which the participants' voices and experiences are affirmed and community and solidarity are built. It is also an introduction to listening and documenting skills. This activity enables participants to experience the power of storytelling in amplifying voices and building connections among those who are often unheard. It can be adapted for any group whose stories are distorted, unheard or unvalued. [You can read here](#) more about our experience of using storytelling circles in the previous Erasmus + project that we realized in Spain. As part of our Roma movement building, we need to challenge the kind of stories that are told about us, and we should refuse to be silenced. For instance, in many cases, the Roma's voices and experiences are not heard and visible, and it is very rare to hear the Roma telling their own stories. One way to challenge this is to produce stories that put the Roma's experiences and perspectives front and center. The more Roma stories are told and shared, the more it will become a norm claiming that our stories are important and valuable. For any group that is marginalized and whose stories are not heard or valued, storytelling is an effective way to empower people by sharing their own stories in place of the stories told about them. It also allows us to build community and solidarity in our organizations and movements — as we hear each other's experiences and understand better how we can learn from and relate to one another in the fight for justice. By telling our stories, we affirm the importance of the stories and create more space for others to tell theirs.

Let us suggest some possible ideas on how to start and close story circles. In between the participants are free to share their stories.

Step 1: (in pairs)

Some guiding questions/statements can be:

- What is in my heart right now?
- Who am I today?
- I realized that life was different for me as a Roma when...
- The story I want to share is...
- I used my inner power when... (or if not familiar with terms – what did I do to change the situation?)

Step 2: Reflecting on the experience:

- How did the ones telling their stories feel? Did you feel safe, supported?
- How did the ones who were listening feel? Were you moved? Were you able to resist intervening with your own experiences?
- What did listeners have to do to ensure they were supporting the teller?
- How would we make the space 'safe'?
- What was missing? What else did you want to hear about? Was a sufficient context given to help someone outside of the group understand the story?

For further information check this [guide](#).

Storytelling walks:

We will not only perform outdoors but also, be traveling along a planned trail. We can do this in many ways: for example, we can have a story walk leader who will take along a bunch of people through a proposed route. On this route we can encounter small theatrical representations or even the audience can embody the different scenes proposed. But a story walk can also be proposed by creating an app that people download on their mobile phones, and we can set QR codes along the way and the story we want to tell will appear on the device. We can also arrange meetings with people from the community, this way placing value not only on the landscape but also on the “human landscape”.

Storytelling is a powerful tool to strengthen communication in a community. You can read more about this in the foundation bricks of our previous Erasmus + project [“Roma Heroes”](#) (pages 46-47).

How to facilitate people to tell their stories - group dynamics:

1. Identify the group and choose a theme in relation to the composition of the group
2. Create a suitable framework to carry out the meetings
3. Get to know each person in the group allowing them to make a general presentation of themselves
4. Set limits - establish what stories can and cannot be shared, decide together with the group members by mutual agreement
5. Appeal to role-playing games on topics that were chosen together (characters, stories, etc.)
6. To better understand the group members and to create together,

we need openness, trust and empathy, that is why we will do improvisation games on the topics related to the above-mentioned arguments

7. Together with the members of the group we watch videos that present success stories of the members of the Roma community
8. Each member of the group will tell a story he/she likes (his/her own or someone else's)
9. Each member of the group takes charge of their colleague's story and tries to turn it into a new story through fiction
10. Use the improvisation method on the story - pairs of two will improvise on a fragment of the story and then discuss the process with the other members of the group
11. Someone else's story - each participant has to make a story about a colleague of their choice
12. The participants will choose a character - from a movie, theater or real life - and tell his/her story
13. Each participant writes his/her biography as a story
14. Discussion and conclusion

Extra: We recommend listening to ["A Wrinkle in the Realm"](#) by Ben Okri

THEATER OF THE OPPRESSED. FORUM THEATER. INVISIBLE THEATER.

This chapter was curated by Giuvlipen

The Theater of the Oppressed (TO)

is a concept developed by a Brazilian theater director and Noble Peace Prize nominee called Augusto Boal (1931-2009) who was inspired by the work of Paulo Freire and his principles of critical pedagogy. Freire sees education as a tool to empower students to get involved in their world in a critical and creative way (the current social order). One of his main preoccupations is dialogue. He believed that students could learn how to be empowered rather than just being subjugated through dialog.

[Mandala Center for Change](#) - an international hub for the training and grassroots practice of Theatre of the Oppressed - considers TO to be “a form of popular community-based education that uses theater as a tool for social change. Originally evolved from Boal’s revolutionary work with peasant and worker populations in Latin America, it is now used all over the world for social and political activism, conflict resolution, community building, therapy, and government legislation.”¹⁰

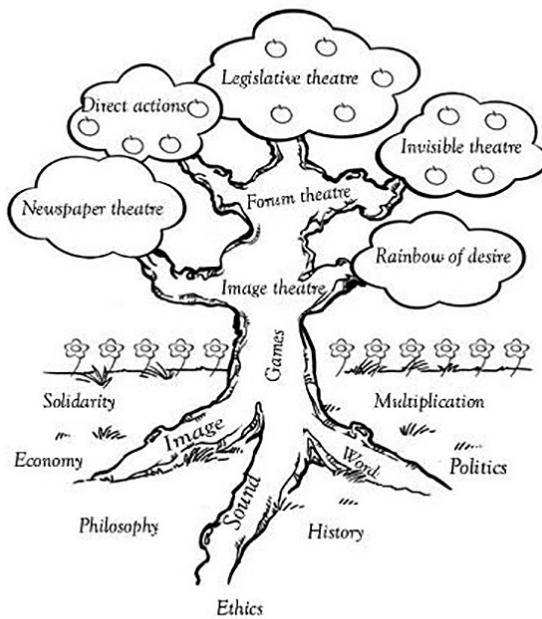
The Theater of the Oppressed is an umbrella of methods. The principal forms of TO are: Forum Theater together with Image Theater, Invisible Theater, Newspaper Theater, the Rainbow of Desire and Legislative Theater (as seen in the image below and explained here). All these branches and their associated methodologies and particularities are described in detail and exemplified richly in the materials created by Art Fusion (mentioned in the Sources section at the end of

10 [Theatre of the Oppressed | Mandala Center for Change \(mandalaforchange.com\)](#)

this chapter). To achieve the objectives of this material, we decided to focus only on two of them, the ones most used by and most relevant to the organizations involved in this project. Forum Theater is the first methodology developed by Boal and thus, became very popular, sometimes even considered to be the exact same thing as TO, while, in fact, it is one of the methods under this bigger umbrella.

Forum Theater

Tree of the Theatre of the Oppressed



Augusto Boal himself said the following about it: “Forum Theater presents a scene or a play that must necessarily show a situation of oppression* that the Protagonist* does not know how to fight against and fails. The spect-actors* are invited to replace this Protagonist and act out – on stage and not from the audience – all possible solutions, ideas,

strategies. The other actors improvise the reactions of their characters facing each new intervention, to allow a sincere analysis of the real possibilities of using those suggestions in real life. All spect-actors have the same right to intervene and play out their ideas. Forum Theatre is a collective rehearsal for reality."

Forum Theater uses theater as a means to empower people, solve societal problems and create change around you. Its interactive character is given by the public and its members' power. With the help of the Joker - a mediator-like character - the people watching become spect-actors and are encouraged to step on stage and get involved in solving an oppressive situation. The play, hence, becomes an instrument for social intervention so that a group of people exchange ideas and opinions and look for solutions and models of action together in order to solve the situation presented on stage.

Since Forum Theater was the first method developed, its popularity caused a worldwide spread and adoption. Therefore, the method is put into practice in slightly different ways. However, there are some important elements that are particular to the method:

***Protagonist** -> characters in the play/scene; it can be (it's preferred) that they are not professional actors (also called non-actors), but the members of the community impacted by the situation of oppression are at the core of the play/scene.

***Spect-actors** -> they are the ones who are watching the play/scene; after watching, they are encouraged to get actively involved in certain moments and propose solutions to change the situation they had been watching. It is recommended that they are familiar with the oppression situation (victim or allies of victims or oppressor, or neutrals that have seen a similar situation); this way in the end, they can take the solutions or suggestions and apply them in similar real-life situations.

***Oppression** -> is often defined as a situation of power abuse.

***Situation of oppression** -> a real-life situation should be depicted, one that all the people involved are minimally familiar with and impacted by; for documenting the play/scene beforehand information should be gathered from people who have experienced the specific oppression situation.

***Joker** -> is a character in the play that moderates the conversation (forum) between the protagonists and the spect-actors.

[Art Fusion](#) - one of the lead organizations in Romania working with the methods of the Theater of the Oppressed - has developed a set of suggestions from their over 15 years of experience of practice:

- Access to Forum Theater should be free of charge.
- There is no director in Forum Theater but there can be a facilitator (trainer, youth worker, teacher, social worker, etc.) who gets involved in the documentation phase and in guiding the protagonists.
- In their practice, they prefer having a negative ending, where the oppressed makes a wrong decision.
- They encourage that only one example of oppression is presented and only one oppressed-oppression relationship is present.
- The play should last between 12 and 15 minutes and should include a maximum of 3-4 scenes.
- In their practice, the play/scene is played twice: first, with no intervention from the behalf of the spect-actors, and then, with solutions suggested by the public.

"Forum Theater is a very powerful tool for empowerment on different levels in a community as it brings attitudinal changes among the public members and also among the team members." (Art Fusion)

Invisible Theater

Invisible Theater is a type of method under the Theater of the Oppressed umbrella that always takes place in public spaces.

According to a study on Interactive and Improvisational Theater ([Burns, Mecca. \(2007\). Theatre of the Oppressed.](#)), “the purpose is to generate spontaneous public dialogue about an issue by literally and figuratively *making a scene*. Passers-by do not know that the startling event they are witnessing has been carefully planned and rehearsed. Actors planted in the crowd as *agent provocateurs* emerge to vehemently take a side, and thus, galvanize onlookers to voice their own opinions on social issues like race or gender. There is dissent among Theatre of the Oppressed practitioners on the ethics of Invisible Theatre, which remains one of Boal’s most electrifying means of transforming the traditional monologue of theater into a dialogue between audience and stage.”

In practice, here are some elements specific to Invisible Theater:

- it is usually based on a planned initial scenario and adapted after the interaction in the public space;
- the action is blended in the public space, so that it seems as natural as possible;
- it addresses oppressive situations that can happen in the street or bigger scale oppression encountered in society;
- some groups decide to inform the public in the end, others don't.

As the name of the method suggests, there is a certain *hidden* side of it. This raises a series of ethical dilemmas that are recommended to be considered and reflected upon by any potential practitioner. Before starting to work with the method, anyone interested in using it needs

to ask themselves what their stance on some of these issues is (detailed in this [Invisible Theatre manual](#)) and they should be sure they are comfortable to be Invisible Theater actors.

"Invisible Theater makes oppression visible." (Augusto Boal)

Some potential benefits of these methods

These methods are used in various contexts for their benefits on multiple levels:

- in youth work: can help spect-actors and protagonists develop socio-emotional skills and adjust their attitude. They can help us as well, bring up complex (even difficult) topics more easily, such as: bullying, poverty, labor and social protection, marginalization, abuse, imprisonment, abandonment, discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender (just to name a few);
- in non-formal education activities: they can also help participants develop or improve documentation skills, teamwork, connection, critical thinking, problem solving;
- in community work: these methods can stimulate surfacing oppression situations, "can liberate the consciousness of those being oppressed, empower them to (re)gain dignity, to speak up their voice, to take attitude, to come together or in a few words, to become actors in their own lives" (Augusto Boal)
- in public space: they can bring attention to examples of oppression that are happening without people (usually) intervening, this way stimulating them to get involved; they can sometimes tackle bigger scale societal oppression to start a debate on it, as well as stimulate formulating solutions.

To the practitioners involved these methods can (at least) offer:

- empowerment for the protagonists who have faced situations of oppression based on their social, political, cultural, religious, economic, sexual, gender choice/background
- encouragement for spect-actors to take attitude, as well as to identify and express their emotions in a safe space
- visibility and clarity on certain power dynamics and abuse/oppression systems to (peer) trainers and facilitators.

Case studies

During the years, Giuvlipen organized workshops and Forum Theater performances in various Roma communities in Romania. The aim of the Forum Theater projects was to empower Roma communities to express themselves through art, against systemic discrimination and against negative attitudes and abuses by local authorities, abuses that directly affect their health conditions and help perpetuate precariousness of the lives of Roma people.



Actor Mihaela Drăgan talking to a community in Mizil, Romania during one of the Forum Theater workshops part of the "Sasto Vesto" project; Photo by Giuvlipen

Sasto Vesto! For Roma Healthcare Through Art was launched at the beginning of 2017 and continued throughout 2018. It consisted of Forum Theater performances that tried to capture real experiences of the Roma people involved and focused on topics such as: power relations within the Roma family, stigma against women in relation to sex, abortion, discussions in the family space about the menstrual cycle, sexuality, methods of protection or unwanted pregnancies. Other central themes of the Forum Theater workshops were the lack of access of the Roma women to the public health system and reproductive rights. Emphasizing both the intimate space of the family and community, and the rendering of the relationship between the Roma patient and the family doctor, and to what extent ethnic stereotypes and social labels can influence their lives.

Jakhalipen is a project developed by Giuvlipen in 2019 and consists of a workshop for journalists about evacuations, and their role in reporting on the issues in the local media. The stereotypes projected in the media in relation to the evicted people maintain a discriminatory discourse against poor people and contribute to the practice of institutionalized racism. We tried to clarify the clichés in the press about the subject of evictions and we criticized the common approaches in journalistic practice, because we witness a journalistic environment that largely lacks the deontological practice when it comes to reporting on this topic.

The Forum Theater method was used as a social intervention instrument in a workshop where both journalists and the communities of evacuated people participated. Following these discussions, Mihaela Drăgan wrote scenes for a short film called 'Deochiu!' ('The Evil Eye') that were presented at a dedicated event. The Forum Theater method was used once again to involve the public - turning them into spectators - and encourage them to intervene and change parts of the scenario. The modified version was used in the making of the short film depicting abusive eviction situations. The workshops were also a starting point for creating the guide 'How Can the Press Depict Evictions in Order to Support the Housing Justice Movement?', which is meant to become a basis for a more deontologically correct position of journalists interested in evictions.

Ending Notes

It is of utmost importance that the practitioners are responsible for the depiction of the topics as well as for the understanding and facilitating interactions within the group they are working with. Oppression is a complex system of power relationships that can easily disturb the

balance of certain groups. They can be very subtle and hence harder to predict and more dangerous to manage, even when involving people who are directly interested and involved. To ensure that the oppressed are not retraumatized and the system of oppression is not reinforced, it is paramount to involve people with experience in holding the space and empowering the voices that need to be heard.

Sources you can use to dive deeper into the topic:

[Video: What is Forum Theatre?](#) (EN subtitles)

[Methods for Social Change – Image and Forum Theatre Guide](#)
(Art Fusion)

[Forum Theatre Guide](#) (National Agency for Community Programs in the Field of Education and Professional Training – ANPCDEFP)

[You are the engine of Change. Invisible Theatre Manual](#)
(ART Fusion)

[Theatre of the Oppressed. Collection of Practices from the Field](#) (Art Fusion)

[Forum Theatre – A Non-Formal Teaching Method in European Context](#)

[Methods-for-Social-Change-Image-and-Forum-Theatre](#)
(Art Fusion)

DOCUMENTARY THEATER. VERBATIM THEATER. THEATER OF EXPERTS

This chapter was curated by Giuvlipen

Documentary theater

In its purest sense, it is understood as a theater whose practitioners, if called to account, could provide interviewed sources for its dialogue.

Theater makers have been using facts and reality as a base for their creations ever since antiquity - back in Ancient Greece the tragic poet Phrynichus created a fact-based drama called "The Capture of Miletus". However, contemporary documentary theater has its roots elsewhere. In the 1920s a similar practice emerged in two different spaces at the same time:

- In Russia the USSR's Department of Agitation and Propaganda employed theater troupes known as the [Blue Blouses](#) (called this way because they wore factory workers' overalls) to stage current events of the time and dramatize news items through song, dance, and acting. Later on it took shape took shape in a standardized form and became what is known today as the *living newspaper* (*zhivaya gazeta*).
- In Germany a theater director called [Erwin Piscator](#) wrote "In Spite of Everything", a piece created entirely based on contemporary political documents and factual materials in an attempt to depict the "absolute truth". This is often considered as the first instance of marking the beginning of the first period of modern documentary drama.

Mariana Starciuc - Moldovan playwright - in an [article about documentary theater](#) in Romania and Moldova notes that "documentary theater is a genre that uses theatrical performances of the social forces, based on pre-existing documentary materials (newspapers, govern-

ment reports, interviews, etc.) as a source for the script. [...] This is an experimental project of the avant-garde theater, which provokes and shocks the audience with performances based on true stories of specific people, exploring the brutal and absurd side of reality.”

Documentary theater is social theater; it amplifies real stories that otherwise would remain invisible and gives a voice to the people who live these stories. In this type of theater there is a direct connection between the social reality on stage and the one lived by the spectators. Authenticity, which is one of its main characteristics, helps the people better understand the world they live in and, sometimes, get in contact with parallel realities they cannot regularly access, thus, they get out of their bubbles.

Documentary theater is the generic name for a wider range of formulas. Some of its defining elements are:

- Presentation of factual material in montage and/or collage.
- The sources are usually interviews, newspaper articles, diaries, documents, testimonials or written accounts of certain situations.
- Due to the types of sources used, there is an important connection between this type of theater and journalism.
- Originally the focus was on depicting facts rather than on trying to express the internal lives of the characters.
- The creative team is involved in the entire process of creation. Even if the director is the coordinator of the team and the process, all the other members take part in choosing the theme and documenting it.
- The theme needs to be of interest for the creative team, and it can be a topic that is important for a community that the team belongs to, or it can be an acute societal issue. It is essential that everyone is interested and somewhat invests in the chosen topic.

- The performers are not always professional actors. The role of the performer in this type of theater is different than in other forms because their relationship with their character is different. They present real life stories that have been experienced by real people and they need to do it as close to the original story as possible.

There are various other manifestations that fall under the umbrella of documentary theater. Two of these are found more often in practice: Verbatim Theater and Theater of Experts.

Verbatim Theater

The name comes from the Latin word *verbatim* which means “word for word”. Hence some specificities of this method are:

- The sources used in creating the script are interviews, declarations, testimonials, confessions offered by real people who are related to the themes approached;
- These materials are then used as they are (or as close to their original form as possible) in the script and in the final play.

Theater of Experts

Theater of Experts is a method, or a type of documentary theater practiced and developed by the German group [Rimini Protokoll](#). In their practice, they do not work with professional actors but with real people who have real stories. They believe themselves to be experts in the specific situations that they have experienced.

Some consider these (and other forms under the umbrella of documentary theater) merely techniques rather than different types of performances. Iulia Popovici - Romanian critic - says that “the verbatim technique [...] in documentary theater is only that and nothing more:

a technique. Not every documentary-text-performance uses the verbatim technique, just like not any theatrical product that uses perfect quoting is documentary theater."¹¹

Notable organizations working with documentary theater methods:

[Teatr.Doc](#) (Russia). Most of the performances of TEATR.DOC are in the genre of documentary theater: based on authentic texts, interviews and the fates of real people. The theater's creative teams create performances based on meetings with real people, and the most relevant and timely topics of the reality.

[DramAcum](#) (Romania) is an NGO active in generating new dramaturgy and the use of innovative dramaturgical techniques. They use dramaturgy as a social action tool.

[Replika Educational Theater Center](#) (Romania) - is an independent cultural space that dedicates its activity to exploring and presenting performative creations to the public. The works are created by activist-artists in close relationship with the community: artists and active citizens give an answer (in Romanian *replcă*) to problems of the community. They aim to be a platform of pedagogical creation and participative art that offers marginalized publics the space for self-representation, so that they can create the art that defines their needs and expectations. It is a fundamental principle that the public can have free access to their performances.

[Giuvlipen](#) (Romania) - is the first independent Roma feminist theater company in Romania. The themes of their performances are diverse

11 *Changing the Paradigm of Reality: From Authorship Theatre to Minimalism and Documentary*, Published in *New Performing Arts Practices in Eastern Europe / Noi practici în artele spectacolului din Europa de Est. Colectia Festivalului Internațional de Teatru din Sibiu. Sibiu International Theatre Festival Book Collection*, Edited by Iulia Popovici, Cartier, 2014.

but they all have one thing in common: they openly discuss topics that history, mentality and social or political constraints have often silenced. In each show, they seek to reclaim the art, history and cultural identity of the Roma, through stories told by Roma artists.

In Romania and Moldova there are a couple of theater-makers who don't identify themselves as documentary theater makers but they use the techniques, the style and the objectives of documentary theater, while abiding, to different extents, to the levels of accuracy and closeness to original texts/documentated sources:

IN ROMANIA:

[Gianina Cărbunariu,](#)

[Mihaela Drăgan,](#)

[Bogdan Georgescu,](#)

[Ioana Păun,](#)

[Mihaela Michailov,](#)

[David Schwartz,](#)

[Carmen Lidia Vidu](#)

IN REPUBLICA MOLDOVA:

[Dumitru Crudu,](#)

[Nicoleta Esinencu,](#)

[Luminița Țâcu](#)

Some examples of their work:

[House M](#) (directed by Luminița Țâcu) - is a documentary performance that puts viewers face to face with a severe social issue in Moldova - domestic violence. For this project the creative team met women from rural areas, from Chișinău and the Rusca prison, who had suffered abuse. The performance included their testimonials, as well as letters sent by their children while they were detained, and nursery rhymes about maternity, family, perceptions, biases, and the role women have in the family and in society in a traditional context.

[Under the Ground Theatre](#) (coordinated by Mihaela Michailov and David Schwartz) was a daily observation project and a critical analysis of the existence of communities affected by the political change in 1989. The project documented the situation, the life and the work of miners in post-socialism. It had multiple outcomes, for instance, it was a performance called "UnderGround" that toured in six mining towns in Romania and was followed by discussions between the team and the public.

[Active Art](#) (a concept developed by Bogdan Georgescu) is an approach that gives birth to scripts that are based on the documentation process in which the community is also involved. In a safe space generated by the theater convention, problems and hard topics are negotiated or brought to light, with the help of the performance. Active Art is generated by the encounter between the members of a community and the artists who come to propose the possibility to the community to represent itself through community actions and artistic products.

The role of documentary theater in Roma representation

Mihaela Drăgan curated a section on the Howlround Theater platform on the topic of [Roma Theater in Europe](#). There she mentioned the

following: “When I founded Gullipen with Lukacs (*namely Mihai Lukács*) and actress Zita Moldovan in 2014, we wanted to respond to these misrepresentations of Romani people and offer an alternative option to the Roma actors from Romania to reclaim our culture. We refused to pigeonhole ourselves in the category of social or activist theater, as we felt the connotation that came with the label placed primary emphasis on Roma as a social problem rather than on the artistic value of the cultural product. We preferred, instead, identifying ourselves as a “contemporary Roma feminist theatre.” Our goal was to develop our own practice and methods — not to create a documentary theater but to create fiction, to develop a type of experimental Roma theater including an intersectional and progressive discourse that tells stories of empowerment of our Roma identity.”

A similar need has been identified by Roma theater practitioners in Hungary, too. The same platform features an article about the representation of Roma on the Hungarian stage that states: “All of the groups working for Roma theater operate at the margin of the main institutional circuit of Hungary. They are eager to talk about issues marginalized by the institutional theatre, including school segregation, discrimination in healthcare settings, and racist killings of Roma. Crucial to their success is ensuring that the people who are most directly affected have a voice, empowering them to share their own experiences and to bear witness to the lives of others. As a result, using documentary theater techniques, these groups manage to amplify voices that often remain inaudible in the literary, text-centered institutional theater.”

Theater for Roma representation exists, and in most cases, it uses the principles and techniques of documentary theater, focusing on Roma representation & self-representation and on issues related to this community. Almost all the plays from the Romanian repertoire

listed below were created using interviews as the basis for storytelling and exist in the broader category of social/political theater. Many of the Roma actors who work in the field have been influenced by the work of director David Schwartz, who calls his artistic practice “political theater”—theater that is positioned from and assumes a leftist perspective.



Actor Mihaela Drăgan and three evicted women from the Rahova-Uranus neighborhood in Bucharest during the performance of “La Hărneală”; Photo by Giuvlipen

Some examples:

[I Declare at My Own Risk](#), a one-woman show with and by [Alina Serban](#) about individual discrimination. The show has a strong autobiographical touch and follows the sinuous and unpredictable path of a Roma Romanian woman who, after a childhood and adolescence spent in a

poor Roma community in Bucharest where she often had to go through traumatic social experiences, manages to be appreciated in some of the most exclusive art schools in the world thanks to her talent.

[You Didn't See Anything!](#) (directed by David Schwartz and [Alexandru Fifea](#)) is a one-man show with Alexandru Fifea about the real story of a young Roma killed by the Romanian police. It brings forth the topic of police abuses against Roma, starting from a true story - Daniel's death that occurred in police custody - is a story that the creative team got interested in after reading about it in a newspaper. The community members read testimonials and participated in hearings for a year. They accompanied the parking guards daily and interviewed Dani's family and friends. The whole play was written based on these voice recordings and notes.

[I Am Roma, Too!/Vi Me Som Rom!](#) (directed by [Andrei Serban](#)) is a performative construct about the Roma identity, the biases that surround it and their consequences. It is based on a series of interviews and personal experiences of the performers and the director, partially fictionalized and intercalated with information. (Watch the performance [here](#).)

[Skin Look](#) (a project developed by DramAcum) was written by Alexandru Berceanu and Ayşıl Akşehirli after conducting interviews with Roma people in Romania and Turkey. Three Roma actors - Alina Şerban, Mihaela Drăgan and Alexandru Fifea - star in a show meant to take the viewers on a family's journey, from hiding their Roma origin to finally embracing it. The play focuses on the relationship between a father who wants to assume this identity and his daughter who refuses to identify with a past she does not know. During the performance, the characters face cultural stereotypes and build their identity to overcome the preconceptions.

No Support (directed by Bogdan Georgescu & Irina Gâdiuță) is a testimony of the moment when the Community Center for Education and Active Art ([laBOMBA](#)) was evicted. The performance is based on testimonials offered by mothers in the Rahova-Uranus neighborhood.

La Harneală / Razing (written and directed by Mihaela Drăgan and Mihai Lukacs) - is a performance focusing on the forced evictions of entire Roma communities. The evicted women of the Rahova-Uranus neighborhood and their children, together with Mihaela Drăgan, are dissecting the process of losing their homes step by step, which is at the same time a profitable business of destroying a community. This work is part of the endeavor of the evicted, trapped in the process of "cleaning" the city centers of the poor and the Roma, who, alongside the activists stay in solidarity and protest permanently for their voices to be heard by those whose duty would be to protect the housing right of each citizen of the country, no matter what their social status or ethnicity are.

Del Duma / Talk About Me! - a one-woman feminist show about early marriages written and performed by [Mihaela Drăgan](#). It is based on the real stories of four Roma women who have to deal with early marriage or have to find an alternative for this social pressure. Sometimes "an alternative" means a tragic escape from marriage. The play talks about serious issues such as racism or gender inequality, via comic mechanisms. It addresses double discrimination as it appears in hate speech, clichéd representations of the Roma and stereotypical perspectives on Roma women.

SEXODROM (by [Giuvlipen](#)) is a project aimed at finding ways to empower Roma women from Bucharest communities to tell their stories about sexuality, gender, abuse and privacy by directly involving them in play writing, production and acting. The project included two main activities: organizing a playwriting workshop led by Bogdan Georgescu and Mihaela Drăgan, and, afterwards, the development of a theater performance that was included in Giuvlipen's repertoire. This proved to be a self-validating experience and empowered the participants by allowing them to tell stories that are difficult to share even amongst the people in their own community.

Sources you can use to dive deeper into the topic:

- [Dramatization and fictionalization of facts](#) (Laura Ivancioiu)
- [The Immersion of the Esthetic in the social - Documentary Theater](#) (Oltița Cîntec)
- [Verbatim, Verbatim: Contemporary Documentary Theatre](#) (Will Hammond, Dan Steward)
- Videos, Talks, Interview & Essays about documentary theater from theater-makers around the World: <https://howlround.com/tags/documentary-theatre>

METHODS AND CASE-STUDIES OF OUTDOOR THEATER INITIATIVES FROM HUNGARY

This chapter was curated by the Independent Theater Hungary

1. Play with the people

In 2012 we started a community art initiative called "[Dreams of Junk](#)". The aim of the initiative was to ensure that the unique phenomenon of „lomtalanítás or lomizás” – which is a district or city-wide clean-up of used objects the residents put on the street – rather than being discontinued, should become joyful community events; where children of different backgrounds can create pieces of art out of garbage and street performances out of nothing together with the guidance of artist trainers. The participants of the events get closer to art and to each other, they can experience building value out of garbage, and can shape their environment. The detailed method and some cases are available here. [>>>](#)

We trained young people how to facilitate flash mobs or small interactive games with people passing by in the streets. For example, they started to play with an invisible ball, and when throwing it to strangers in the street, the passers-by always connected to the game, and threw back the imaginary ball. They also played with an imaginary rope, when they were divided into two groups and started rope pulling and inviting strangers to join the game to make stronger one or the other team. In another game the line of a rope was drawn on the sidewalk, and they tried to walk on it, as if they were rope dancers, and involved the people of the street in this game, too. Many other, easy to reproduce interactive games can be seen in this video [>>>](#)

The main points of these interactive street games are:

- they are short
- they are enjoyable and funny
- they capture the attention of the people of the street
- no language is needed, only movements
- people can get involved easily

2. Complex game with a story and a message

You can also involve people in the street with an attractive interactive game, but if you want to do something more complex and longer, you should keep the people for a longer time. This is always a challenge, as passers-by might not stay too long. In one of our theatrical actions, we invited people from the street in a game in which a can of beer could be won. (Maybe it is not the most elegant way, but it worked.) As part of the game, they received different characters and stood in a line. Then they received some statements (e.g., I was abroad many times in my childhood; my parents had at least 500 books) and if in their opinion the statement was true regarding their character, they stepped one step ahead, otherwise stayed in the same place. Of course, disadvantaged characters couldn't step too much ahead, but stayed behind their peers. So, when we put the can of beer (as a symbol of success) in front of them, and we told them that they could run and grab it, the people further back didn't have the chance to get hold of the beer as fast as their peers playing more privileged characters - who only had to take one step forward to reach the can of success - could. After they'd got involved in the play, they were told that they had 20 minutes for this game/show, thus, we were also able to realize short theatrical scenes beside the game, and a follow-up discussion about different disadvantages.

In another initiative, we also asked for the commitment of passers-by. We informed them that our friends had just got married, and we wanted to make a small surprise for them, as their family was far away, so they were asked to join for just two minutes, for the sake of the surprise. We involved around 5-8 people and when the couple arrived, to everyone's surprise, it was a gay/lesbian couple. Some of the people involved became upset, while others continued the game. Although it was a very short action, we confronted the people with their stereotypes and/or that of others, and the challenges of same-sex couples were revealed.

In all these short scenes, we had to get the attention of people, involve them in a scene which usually seemed real, and create a situation where they had to make a decision, interact and then reflect on the experience. Sometimes we also create aggressive situations in the street and observe if people try to stop it or not.

3. Performances in symbolic spaces

When you do any outdoor performance, the location of the venue can have a symbolic message, too. For example, one of our latest performances, 'Frogtales', was connected to Norbert Oláh's installation of a wall which was built (and later destroyed). The wall was built - and the performance was also performed - in front of the building of the former Roma Parliament (a Roma cultural center) that functioned for many years, and since it was closed, the house is empty now. There are many sites in our cities which are linked to stories that are not in focus anymore. When making a performance in a square, or in front of a building where something important happened, we can revive the memories directly or indirectly with the help of a metaphorical story. In 'Frogtales' we worked with metaphors but in another street theater action which focused on some Roma heroes who participated in

the Hungarian Revolution in 1956 (which was the antecedent of our present initiative), we revived some acts of the revolution which had happened in the same streets. In case of other performances though, - like the walking performances below - we use parks of the city to create the feeling of the countryside. So, when choosing a venue, you can focus on its real nature and history, you can handle it on a metaphoric level, or you can use it to represent a completely different story and location.



Actors Orsolya Balogh and Dávid Varga in 'Frogtales' performance at the entrance of the former Roma Parliament; Photo by Alina Vincze

4. Complex walking performances

Meanwhile with the help of the above-mentioned simple methods we wanted to catch the attention of the passers-by and involve them in some interactions, joyful or sometimes shocking experiences. For a more complex walking theater performance we usually needed to have permanent members of the audience who could stay with us for 1-3 hours. Such time-consuming shows can't be built on passers-by only - although, it has happened many times at our outdoor walking performances that several people who only joined the show accidentally, followed it till the end.

During walking theater performances, the different scenes are played in different outdoor places, and among the different scenes the audience needs to walk. We find it crucial that not only the actors but also the audience should be in action and movement. In the classical *voyeur theater* the audience is sitting in a passive, comfortable position, in the protection of darkness, and can only witness the scenes happening on the stage. The audience doesn't need to act and doesn't need to be aware of the fact either that they are witnessing some morally problematic situations on the stage. Although the theater is the genre of active citizens - since the dramatic characters have to make decisions, take responsibility, be active here and now, and have influence on life - the audience members are totally passive. They don't need to make decisions like from which angle they want to watch a scene, or if they step closer to the characters or stay away from them. Their position and experience are totally ruled by the director.

When we went outdoors with more complex theater performances, we didn't want to copy the traditional theater situation just without the roof. We wanted to

Make the audience move together with the story

When the different scenes take place in different spots, and the audience must walk from one place to the other, you should consider the question of guidance. Who will guide them to the next spot/scene and why? Sometimes it was a character of the previous scene who invited them to join him/her, and sometimes they only followed the highlighted journey of the character in focus. During the scenes it is also important to plan ahead the position of the audience, which is never totally predictable, so the actors should also use the space in a flexible way. As everyone needs to move together from scene to scene, we also pay attention to the fact that some people walk slowly while others quickly. So, sometimes we must wait for others, or ensure some interscene activities so that the members of the audience arriving first do not get bored while waiting for the others. However, interscene activities and interactions can't be crucial to the main story, as not everyone can see them. The traditional *voyeur theater* with fixed audience positions ensures equal chances for the audience members, as they all see the same. From our point of view, it is not a problem if not every audience member has the same experience.

We like the fact that each person has a different experience of the same moments during such performances. Equal opportunity is also an illusion in real life, and we want to do theater that reflects on real life. However, if you rule 100% of what the audience will get/see you ruin their free will of perception. We think it's fine if someone steps closer to the characters, and others only listen to the conversation while having a look at the view, too.

Also, the walk between two scenes can be different for every audience member. Some people like staying quiet and think about the previous scene, others start to interact with the guiding character, meanwhile some audience members start chatting about their everyday life is-

sues. This way walking theater performances have many breaks - just like a TV series. We liked this relaxed dynamic of the plays, but it also made the actors' work more challenging: after each walk, they must capture the attention of the audience again and they can't easily build on the dynamic of the previous scene.

The audience also has a role

When we mentioned that sometimes the audience interacts with or is guided by one of the characters, the question arises: what is the relationship between them? If it is not *voyeur theater*, does the audience also have some role in the story? The answer is positive. During most of our walking theater performances, we place the audience members in some roles. They are usually voyeurs, who should face their role, e.g., they are visitors coming to see a village festivity in the performance ['Village Day'](#), or they are community members in 'Peer Gynt's Children', and they are visitors to see a community work camp in 'Arbeit Macht Frei'. While in the traditional *voyeur theater* the audience members are not aware of their role: that they are passive witnesses of immoral actions happening in the story - we confront them with this fact. In our performances though, we always focus on some social problems, believing that we - as citizens - all have responsibility for these issues. We are responsible to the communities we live in, the village festivities we visit, and if we support them with our donations or entrance fees, we have responsibility to the services and institutions run by our taxes.

In some scenes the characters of the performances are aware of the presence of the audience. They might interact with them directly, or just communicate with each other in a way which is 'comme il faut' for the voyeur audience. However, we also keep some scenes which are played behind 'closed doors'. These are necessary if we want to show the genuine relationship among the characters and the feelings or se-

crets they wouldn't be open about in front of the visitors/community. In these scenes the actors don't communicate to the audience and behave as if others weren't there either. However, it is important to make it clear in the dramaturgy which scenes are hidden from the audience and which ones are planned for interaction with the audience members. When there are only speeches performed frontally to the audience or maybe some rhetorical questions are asked (when the audience members shouldn't answer, and the character just continues his/her speech) then you can use a pre-written play script. When, for instance, in ['Village Day'](#) the mayor speaks several times to the visitors of the village. In other situations - for example during the walks, when a guiding character initiates a discussion with some audience members - there is room for improvisation when, depending on the reactions of the audience members, the play script and acting of the characters can vary.

Of course, there are also quite predictable situations when interacting with the audience. For example, if a character asks for help to climb off a tree, there is always a person who will give him/her a hand. It can also be empowering when the audience members can help the characters or be active in a situation. We can say that this is less likely to occur than situations when the audience has remorse for staying passive when witnessing immoral acts.

Let's eat and drink together

In these performances we don't just offer theatrical experience and a nice walk but many times, a gastronomic experience, too. In ['Village Day'](#) the audience can taste delicious local goat cheese (later it turns out that it's actually not local just bought in the supermarket), drink lemonade with mint (which will be produced in the future, never-to-

be-built factory of the village), or offered with homemade candies by a poor, local woman (these are really homemade candies). People like eating and receiving gifts. So, the gastronomic parts of the performances are popular. Many times, accepting something tasty and nice, we support immoral mechanisms - we are not just passive witnesses but also become enjoyers of the immoral system. The audience needs to confront the fact that their privileged situation has its price. Both at the end of 'Peer Gynt's Children' and 'Village Day' the audience is invited for dinner. In 'Peer Gynt's Children' they know that the soup offered for them was confiscated from an evicted old woman in a previous scene. In 'Village Day' the visitors eat the food during the festivity, and they know that this festivity was realized in a corrupt and immoral way. In 'Arbeit Macht Frei' they have to eat while the community worker characters are standing next to their tables and are not allowed to join them and sit down, even if they've been invited. Do you eat the soup offered by a sinner? Can you eat while an oppressed person has to stand next to you and eating is prohibited for him?

On the other hand, you can accept something from the poor. After the poor lady has given all her candies to the audience, she starts to shout and complain why people don't pay for them. Shall you give money to poor people even if you are attending a performance? A character in 'Village Day' asks the audience members to take a selfie with him on a nice background. When someone takes the selfie, he asks him/her to pay for the photo. Are you considered stupid if you bought the setup and pay the guy or are you evil if you don't pay a poor person even if you could? Although this is just a funny imaginary scene - such questions also emerge in real life.

As outdoor walking theater performances are played in public places, reality can interfere. The external conditions can't be ignored as indoors, in a theater building. Sometimes it can be annoying - e.g. when

there's an airplane or drone making noise around the hill where your performance is taking place, but sometimes it adds 'magic' to the play: when a faraway church bell sounds at a perfect moment; when a homeless person - an outsider - comes and tries to sell his stuff as if he was a character from the play; when at the final countdown between the two users, three motorcyclist arrives to the scene, makes two laps and leave - as if they were also included. Since the circumstances are always different, just like the interaction with the audience, no two performances are the same.



'Village Day' - actors (left to right): Béla Stubnya, Judit Kőszegi, Dávid Csányi, Emília Lovas, Orsolya Balogh, Christopher Pászik; Photo by Alina Vincze

Practical aspects

Is it legal?

The legislation of organizing outdoor events is different in all countries and municipalities. If you want to rent an outdoor theater venue, it usually requires a lot of administration and money. And in case of a walking performance, the outdoor venue can be quite large. But in case you don't bother other people since you use the public place according to its intended use, there's no need to rent. Thus, you can't close the public place or set a public address system - because you would bother others, or you would exclude them from some places. But if you just walk between different spaces with around 30-40 people as if you belonged to a group of tourists or a sports team, there is no need for municipality registration or renting a public venue. Usually, it's also very expensive to create, store and deliver theatrical sceneries, so you can spare some money when you use nature or street views as backgrounds for your performance. They often happen to be much better and more beautiful than any artificial scenery. It's also preferable to avoid the use of sound technique - since you should train the actors to speak in a loud voice outdoors paying attention, for instance, to the direction of the wind and other weather factors. It's better to play during the day: you don't need lightning at all, or you can use some candles or other small light sources if you want to play at sunset or afterwards.

Natural solutions are cheap, nice and real



Actors Franciska Farkas and József Budai in "Peer Gynt's Children"; Photo by Nedda Négyessy

You should also keep in mind what size of audience you can play for. As I've mentioned before, during such walking theater performances we don't like big audiences - just a maximum of 30-40 people. This way they can stay in a group, can see the scenes close to the actors, and fit into smaller places. As you haven't booked an exclusive venue for the performance, probably some passers-by will also join you but they won't create a big crowd. When we organize such a performance, we don't communicate the exact place of the performance, and let only the people who have registered or bought a ticket for the show know about the meeting point where the piece begins. This way you can control how many people will join. A too big crowd or too few

spectators are not good either. If you don't ask people to register or pay for the tickets in advance, the number of the audience can't be estimated. At the beginning, we thought that there might be conflicts between the people who paid for their tickets and the passers-by who just joined for free but it has never happened.

Be prepared for everything

As there can be disturbing outside distractions (or even supporting factors) as mentioned above, it's important to take them into consideration, and prepare for them in advance. Actors should be good at the flexible use of spaces, using their voice according to the changing effects of noise, being ready for improvisation and they have to be able to accept the lack of a dressing room, buffet and toilet - especially if you perform in a park or hill where the bushes are the only facilities for all these needs. You should also take the weather conditions into account: what if it is very hot or raining?

Beside your team members, you should also prepare the members of the audience. They should walk, it might be hot; they should bring a raincoat, sun cream, water or an anti-mosquito spray. It may sound ridiculous to mention such things, when inviting people for a walking theater on a hill because you are not expected to tell such information if you invited people for a hike on the same hill. But in our mindset, theater is very far from any external conditions we should prepare for. Sometimes, despite the information we send in advance to the audience, women arrive in high heels and after half an hour they can barely walk.

Although a walking theater performance is a sports event-like occasion, much more than a traditional theater performance, you still have to take into consideration the comfort of the audience. Standing and walking for 1-2 hours might be tiring, and in the end, attention is easily

lost. For this reason, at some scenes, it does good if they can sit down for a while. Plastic pillows are usually provided, on which the audience members can sit down in the grass or on the sidewalk. It's important that the pillows can be easily cleaned, and if they become wet on one side, remain dry on the other side (when performing during or after a light rain). If it's very hot, it's also good if the audience can receive a glass of water or lemonade at some point of the performance.

It is a challenge but worth trying

We have been doing outdoor walking performances for 8 years. One of our favorite spots is Gellért Hill in Budapest. It's a green hill with parks close to the downtown of Budapest. As you have seen above, there are many aspects you should take into consideration when doing a walking theater performance. You should be brave, flexible, open for surprises and adventure but not insisting on comfort and traditional solutions. After 8 years, there are still no relevant walking theater initiatives in Budapest, maybe because of its challenges. But we are sure that if you face these challenges, and try such an adventure, it will be worth making it.

OUTDOOR EDUCATION: WALKING & EDUCATING

This chapter was curated by the Independent Theater Hungary

In Ancient Athens it was a standard practice that young people were educated while walking in the hall or the park of the Gymnasium. It was also accepted that the educational process took place in the frame of a dialogue. The Lykeion¹² - which was founded by Aristoteles - functioned this way for 600 years but such practices disappeared afterwards. In the traditional European education system though, the students are supposed to sit in one place and listen to their teachers' or professors' speeches. They mostly instruct the youth face-to-face, including little dialogue with them.

As we've mentioned in the introduction, formal education places strong focus on verbal and logical skills and favors those who are good at these competences. However, others who are good at art, physical activities or anything related to nature, have a disadvantage in a system where they should sit indoors, listening to long verbal presentations and logical theories. When we move, we have the opportunity to interact with our professors, studying can be more interesting and motivating. What is more, it is easier for our brain to process and store information if we receive more oxygen and impulse outdoors; especially, if we speak about less abstract subjects related to our society, history, personal stories and artistic topics.

For this reason, it's good to organize walking education initiatives, when the young people can gain information and experience outdoors. And of course, it's even better if the place we are walking around has a

¹² The Lyceum, located outside of Athens's city wall. It is famous for being a center of education, but it was used for numerous other activities including Athenian assembly gatherings, cult practices, and military exercises.

connection to the topic we want to focus on. It's better to see a painting or a building live than in a book; it's better to learn the dialect or customs of a community than just listening to stories about them. And of course, it's almost impossible to change people's attitudes towards the communities they don't know if they can't meet each-other face to face. If we help people gain personal experiences related to the topics we want to concentrate on, it makes a bigger impact on them than when professors just hold endless speeches, share diverse theories and facts about different issues.

In the last decades, experiential learning has gotten an increased emphasis in formal education, too. Thematic walks have appeared in non-formal education and in free time activities. You can walk in the city with a group while obtaining information and experiences related to a given part of the city from one thematic aspect. The walks can focus on art history, gastronomy, history or any other specific aspect of life and culture.

Related to the topic of minority representation, such walks have been realized by diverse non-profit organizations. For example, in Hungary [Zachor Foundation](#) has been organizing thematic walks focusing on the history of the Jewish communities in different Hungarian towns. They have also developed an application for mobile phones - which enriches the walking experience with audio-visual materials related to the local Jewish history and personal stories. IWALK is the interactive educational program of the [Shoah Foundation of the University of Southern-California](#). These walks are led by young volunteers who have been trained before. The application is linked to Google Maps, too, and you can download it by searching for 'IWalk - USC Shoah Foundation'.

Regarding Roma topics, there are also thematic walks organized by the [UCCU Foundation](#). They have Roma-related walks in Budapest and Pécs and some other towns in Hungary, too. The walks are also led by young people who have received training in order to facilitate different games. They are usually of Roma origin, for the sake of self-representation. During their tours digital tools are not used. Instead, the facilitators usually share stories and ask participants questions to involve them in the interaction.

Beside the above mentioned two examples, we think the following aspects important if you want to do a thematic city walk in the realm of a non-formal educational activity:

- Research on important events of history, stories, facts and related places in your city.
- Make a map of the places and fix a route of the walk. Visit important and relevant places without too long walk. (Most of the city walks are not longer than two hours, and there are many stops during the walk.) Try to avoid visiting very remote locations. It's usually advisable to focus on one district of a city, or some streets of it. It's not good though, if a walk is too short and for instance, you move only 50 meters in 1 hour, since you can't call it a walk.
- Find diverse tools to use. If you go to the street but your tools are similar to the ones students use at school - e.g., a person shares information with the participants directly - it won't be a great experience for them. So, it's important to include some questions and topics the participants can discuss. But even if you ask questions, these shouldn't just focus on lexical facts but also on other aspects, too. E.g., Why do you think this street is so wide? What can you see above this gate? Have you seen this symbol somewhere else earlier during our walk? Etc.

- Use audiovisual materials. If you share some photos, videos or sound files (including also personal stories) related to the topic, it will be more touching for most people. As the walks usually take place during the day in noisy streets, it can be problematic how the audience can see and hear your content. They should be available on the participants' mobile phones so that they can see videos or listen to interviews through their headsets. Obviously, if the participants see/listen to such materials one-by-one, the community experience will not be so strong.
- After sunset, if you have a portable projector and sound system, and you find a wall big enough, you can also project your files, this way sharing your content with the whole group at the same time. (On this occasion, however, you should be prepared to expect complaints from the neighbors.) If you place objects on the street, use lights or sound etc., you might need a permission from the municipality.
- Use different types of tasks, building on different competences. As we've mentioned above, it's good to provide opportunities for the participants to interact. Do not only assign tasks which build on verbal and logical competences or lexical facts. For example, you can hide a small object relevant to the topic somewhere high, with the purpose that the participants can only get hold of it if they help each other. This way they need to cooperate with each other, and use their physical competences. Even if you want to focus on social or historical facts, gamification, self-experience and some fictional elements can help support your aims.
- Pay attention to personal interactions. If the participants only meet each other and the one or two tour guides, it might not be a diverse and touching experience for them. Maybe you can organize the tour in a way that they can interact with someone

from the community, too. Of course, it may increase the cost of the walk, as you can't expect someone to stand at the corner without compensation waiting for your groups to arrive. It is a practical solution, for example, when you involve a shopkeeper from the community, someone who is on your direct route anyway. He/she can ask the participants some questions, and also share his/her stories with them. The participants might buy something in the shop, so it is also his interest to welcome your group. When involving community members, some moral questions always arise, for instance: Do you pay them, or ask for a favor from them? Do they share their stories authentically or even color them a bit in exchange for the money? How deep can you and the participants go into his/her sensitive stories and experiences? Beside real community members, you can also work with fictional characters but in this case it's a question if they are genuine, and their stories are fiction or real, and how it will be communicated to the group members.

- Create a frame of the walk. Of course, you can just name the walk as a thematic tour where the participants will get an insight into the history and present life of a given community. Such frames might not be attractive for those whose attitude towards the Roma communities still should be shaped, so most probably they just won't participate. But if you create a narrative and make your social focus indirect, it might also attract young people who would otherwise skip a Roma-related program. They might happily solve a mystery, search for something, find a person, and during their mission, they can get some inputs related to your focus indirectly.
- Fix the group composition and the frames in advance. It's important to fix a meeting point and date when the participants

meet. Here the facilitator can present the introduction and establish the framework together with the participants (e.g., Don't walk away from the group; don't take photos of the local people; if you have any question or comment, you can ask it any time etc.) - to create a safe atmosphere and avoid further problems and misunderstandings. If there is a fictional frame or game-situation of the walk, you should fix it in the beginning, too. In these cases, the guide might take on a role but then it should also be clear when he/she steps out of it. (E.g., It's not the guide as a real person who gets angry at some point but the characters s/he plays.)

- At the end of the walk, ensure a place for discussion and giving feedback. When the tour is over, give the opportunity for the participants to share their feelings, comments, or ask questions - even if during the tour, for some reasons, it wasn't possible. If you had a fictional frame, let the participants step out from their role, and if the guide also had a role, s/he should also step out from it. If you receive any feedback on how you can develop the walk in the future, don't forget it but discuss it with the team members afterwards. After the group members have left, the guides and organizers should also evaluate the walk. This way your work will always be improved and never remain the same.

In this publication we have collected the theoretical and methodological information, tools and examples that will help you to implement outdoor theater and workshop plans and actions. We hope that we managed to provide you with details that you can use in the future.

