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## Be SpectACTive! Challenging Participation in Performing Arts

Lluís Bonet Agustí, Giada Calvano, Luisella Carnelli, Félix Dupin-Meynard,  
Emmanuel Négrier

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# Be SpectACTive!

## Challenging Participation in Performing Arts

edited by

Lluís Bonet, Giada Calvano, Luisella Carnelli,

Félix Dupin-Meynard, Emmanuel Négrier

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## INTRODUCTION

## **Introduction**

**Emmanuel  
Négrier**  
(University of  
Montpellier)

This book traces a collective adventure, that of Be SpectACTive!, a European project that has set itself the challenge of experimenting, in the performing arts sector, the active participation of spectators in artistic choices and in creation processes. In another book entitled *Breaking the Fourth Wall* (Bonet and Négrier, 2018a), we presented various theories on the participation issues. They concern different aspects of the theme, such as: the reasons why today a “participatory turn” is being witnessed; the debates it provokes within the cultural and artistic circles, and within the academic world; the different forms that participation can take in the cultural sector. In this brief introduction, we will first recall the lessons we have learned along this debate. Then we’ll specify why we chose, within the Be SpectACTive! project, to implement an action-research approach, and what it consisted of.

### **A participatory turn?**

The first question arising when we talk about participation in the cultural field, is that of power. The one that some actors would be afraid to lose. The one that others would seek to conquer. These two perceptions rest on the assumption that power relation is a zero sum game. This is not necessarily the case. According to a formula of wider political exchange, power can be passed on to other people without ceasing to belong to the one who passes it on. This is most often the case, as in a learning relationship where power is handed over (e.g. the control of a know-how, a procedure) without being lost for the person who hands it over. Nevertheless, the question of participation always provokes the idea of power loss, particularly in an artistic field where a long tradition has entrusted the decision to a limited number of hands.

But if participation was only a problem of power and decision making, then the participative turn could be explained by a

dramatic and convergent change of mind on the part of those who exercise the leadership of cultural organizations. Such an event would be very surprising! In reality, the causes of the participative turn – and also some of the criticisms it provokes – lie outside the individual will of the leaders.

To understand this turning point, one has to point out first the variety of participatory approaches existing in the cultural field. Indeed, we can find very different phenomena. That's why, thanks to Jaroslava Tomanova and Luisella Carnelli, we have annexed in appendix a glossary, including detailed comments on the definition of the main terms used to discuss participation. Alan Brown, Jennifer Novak-Leonard and Shelly Gilbride (2011) established five participation modalities, which they considered in order of increasing intensity. The first is what they call "Spectating", where participation is essentially a reception of works already conceived before, without any commitment – the spectator, except its interpretative commitment. The second ("Enhanced Engagement") implies a further stimulation of the creative mind, but without letting it have a real influence on the creative process. The third modality ("Crowd sourcing") gives the audience a role in creation, through upstream documentation of the shows, or through participation in the artistic choices themselves. In *Be SpectACTive!*, we have experimented that modality, and we will present the results in the first part of the book. In the fourth ("Co-creation"), spectators are involved in the experience of artistic creation, under the direction of a professional. This is the case for some creative residencies, for example. In this book, we will have the opportunity to return to it in the second part. Finally, the culmination, for Brown, Novak-Leonard and Gilbride, is the fifth modality, where the audience is considered the artist as such, without the hierarchical intervention of any artistic supervision.

Those different modalities are not just operationally different.

They also correspond to paradigms of cultural policy that are themselves distinct, if not opposed from each other (Bonet & Négrier, 2018b). Some fall under a classic conception of artistic excellence (Spectating), others are closer to cultural democratisation (Enhanced Engagement, and perhaps Crowd Sourcing). Still others correspond to notions of democracy or cultural rights, such as the last two and sometimes Crowd Sourcing. The whole point of empirical analysis is to see how the tools for participation and the participatory culture in each territory and artistic venues are combined in the field. That's what *Be SpectACTive!* is.

In order to examine the causes of the participative turn, as already said above, we must first take a little distance (going back) with the emotional and voluntary dimension of participation, showing that this turn is due to broader causes. The first explanation, which we will have the opportunity to discuss in this book, as we have done throughout the *Be SpectACTive!* project, is technological change. The second is a sociological transformation of the relationship with culture. The third is finally a political mutation, which goes beyond the cultural sector alone.

### *Technologies*

By technological change we mean the possibility of access to a considerable number of new tools that make participation easier, more direct, and more individual. In the research team, Luisella Carnelli (Fondazione Fitzcarraldo) has deepened that question, addressed in the third part of this book. Speaking of spectator participation in a project like *Be SpectACTive!* indicates the interpersonal dimension associated with those new forms. The expressiveness that passes through the tools corresponds to two very distinct dimensions. On the one hand, new technologies (analysis of social networks, algorithms, web marketing, etc.) allow cultural institutions to know more and more accurately the

expectations – real or potential – of their audiences. The use of these means of expression is socially unequal, according to age, social backgrounds and educational levels (Négrier, 2015). But they are changing according to the way in which cultural institutions interact with their audience, with the risk that they may lead to new forms of aesthetic conformism, underestimating the diversity of opinions’ or tastes’ expression (Hindman, 2008). On the other hand, new technologies contribute to the aesthetics of cultural projects. This is the case of interactive performances via digital tools (Lindinger et al., 2013). Admittedly, interactive art precedes the development of the digitisation of society (Popper, 2005). But it is also undeniable that its development has led to new creative forms, around virtual and/or augmented realities, as well as to new perspectives of participation (Van Dijck, 2013).

### *Societies*

By sociological change, we mean the gradual transformation of the human relationship with culture, which is gradually emerging from a very hierarchical, vertical vision, and... inspired by the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu. The sociological dimension of the participatory turn in culture corresponds to two trends. The first concerns audience, linked to Bourdieu’s model of structural homology between hierarchy of cultural tastes and hierarchy of social groups (Coulangeon & Duval, 2013; Glévaec, 2013). The orientation of tastes is more a function of horizontal relationships, as in the case of peers or friends. They are less hierarchical, even though they can be sociologically criticised (Pasquier, 2008). Cultural participation gains in singularity – since everyone has a wide range of possible influences – what it loses in collective determination. Autonomy does not mean the end of sociological influences due to “hard variables” (age, social category, gender, housing, etc.). In fact, the discussion of

Bourdieu’s model simply says that cultural participation challenges elitist fatality.

The other social dimension of the participatory turn concerns artistic production. It questions the artistic offer and its adaptation to the challenges of contemporary societies. That critical assessment regards the tendency towards self-legitimizing art in today’s world (Heinich, 2005), and its effect of detaching artistic production from the society to which it belongs. Its political project deals with inventing a new social use of art, by offering to citizens the possibility to express social problems or even by commissioning artists to give an answer to such problems. It constitutes a radical break with the model of the socio-aesthetic closing in of art upon itself. Many initiatives are emerging today in the form of spectator collectives, citizen commissions for works, and co-creation through artistic and participatory residencies, to give art a new social vocation.

### *Politics*

If social and technological changes, therefore, have a major impact on how participation is today at the core of the cultural agenda, it does not mean that they have automatic impact on cultural organisations. That’s the third point, the political one, that reintroduces stakeholders’ influence on participatory design. The extent to which participation is implemented in cultural policies largely depends on the representations and strategies held by cultural leaders. The political dimension is not necessarily linked to the presence of professional political actors. It becomes political when the question of power and influence is linked to a goal of legitimacy and collective action. Political issues arise within an organisation, and between the latter and its neighborhood or its territorial context. Another political dimension lends changes that affect the political world, at both policy and politics levels. At policy level, participation appears as a goal in the debate between



competing paradigms (excellence, democratisation, creative economy, cultural democracy). At another level oriented toward politics, it deals with the evolution of relationships between citizens and local political leaders in the field of culture. In a classic model still in use in many contexts, local (but not only) political leaders have an elitist relationship with artists. That singular couple assumed an overhanging relationship with the population. That vision has strongly evolved, and the initial Prince/Artist relationship mutually legitimated is no longer the only way to either play politics with culture, or make culture with politics. Politics counts, as it counts local political culture to explain the extent to which citizens can claim power and capacities in participative projects, and it can be agreed for that.

In the framework of this book, we will see that the cases studied, which are located in very different political contexts (from Hungary to Italy, United Kingdom or Romania), do not have the same political history, and thus not produce the same representation of cultural policies, nor their cultural leaders share the same initial visions of citizens participation in artistic affairs. We will also learn that those visions are not fixed. They evolve through the implementation processes. The development of participatory projects can therefore reveal interesting surprises in appropriating, learning, imitating new policy tools.

### **An Action-Research Approach<sup>1</sup>**

Why did we adopt an action-research approach? Let's start by defining such a widely discussed approach (Reason and Bradbury, 2001). Action research aims to “contribute both to the practical concerns of people in problematic situations and to the development of the social sciences through collaboration that links them according to a mutually acceptable ethical framework” (Rapoport, 1973, p. 113). Action research was justified for

three main reasons. The first is the extreme diversity, assumed by the project, of appropriation and perception of what participation meant in live performance. The second is the mutual benefit that actors and researchers have derived from their interactions. The third, in all modesty, is the result we reached and made available to academic communities, to the cultural sector, and to all those for whom it may be of interest.

### *Interesting diversities*

In the field of participation – a subject on which actors, as well as researchers, have very different points of view – it was first of all interesting to multiply the experiences of knowledge. On the one hand, the group of researchers was formed by a variety of social sciences specialists (in sociology, cultural economics, and cultural policy management). Each one of them had his/her own experience of participation in the field of culture, or more generally in democratic practices. To this first diversity corresponded, on the side of the actors, a variety at least equivalent in terms of experience gained on the participation of citizens, and of spectators in particular. Some venues or festivals were already specifically expert in that field – that is notably the case of the two English partners and the Italian one – while some others had never experienced it. In those conditions, we know that the implementation of the action is, in its detailed evolution, extremely rich in discoveries. It is useful and important for both research and action not to miss those different steps. For example, the case of Prague and its place for dance, Tanec, was analyzed during several research visits which, each time, showed how we were raising the level of the participation and changing our way of managing the Be SpectACTive! device. A conventional approach, with a presentation of initial objectives, an intermediate mid-term meeting, and an evaluative inquiry at the end, would have been irrelevant. It would not have been useful to

follow those different stages, the uncertainties that marked them, the dilemmas they gave rise to.

### *Mutual benefits*

Criticising the action-research approach, some people said that it was neither research nor action. Why? Because the researcher would lack a position of axiological neutrality, being engaged in action. And because the actor would also lack the full mobilisation on his own strategy, knowing he/she was being watched. That critique of action research is perfectly acceptable, though it is totally wrong in our case. On the one hand, in social sciences, the acting (human) objects reflect on their own practices as part of the action itself. Their reflexivity is stimulated by the proximity of a researcher, and by the interactions that connect them to each other. The researcher stimulates the development of actors' thought in action, more than distorting his/her behaviour. This is all the more true as we are in the cultural sector, an area where the managers of venues and festivals are already acclimated to the levels of abstraction and intellectualisation of practices, often by their own university background. That reflexivity has been stimulated on two different scales.

First, interindividual exchanges. The researcher witnesses the errors, difficulties and conflicts that arise from the different elements of the project. From his/her external point of view, he/she can play the role of interlocutor, even giving advice on what is observing. These informal exchanges don't have necessarily to be diffused within the whole group of action research. Second, collective exchanges, during the many meetings of Be SpectACTive!. They are an opportunity for researchers to present intermediate results, to testify to their observations, but also to share, with the actors, experiences of other projects or contexts. Those interim findings informed the

next step in the process and helped to steer our questioning, enabling us to dig deeper and find out more about some of the approaches to engaging new audiences, being highlighted along the way. These exchanges also allow the actors to situate themselves in relation to each other, in the continuity of the action. They also make it possible to create among them a small community, which becomes, for researchers, an object of study *per se*.

Close, regular, individual and collective contacts with actors are a source of empirical enrichment for researchers. Participatory projects that develop in the arts and culture field cannot be subject to an evaluation or critic outside the context, as the context is part of the artistic creation process. That is the whole problem of art critic concerning works of sociological or ethnological nature. It assumes an investment of critic beyond the observation of the "final product". It must look at a process that led to an end (a show, the opening of an exhibition, the production of a book, etc.). The diversity of actors, their initial trajectories in terms of participation, but also their diversity in terms of political cultures, more generally, are also sources of scientific wealth. These differences can be considered as initial stages (of action and research) of which one can discuss the causes, linking common objects situated in different contexts. But these contexts are evolving, and it is also interesting to see how cultural and political configurations that are fairly comparable at the beginning, can evolve in very different ways during the implementation of the project, and in contact with others. At the end of our project, we can say that researchers have become a little more active than before, without ceasing to be researchers. For their part, the actors became a little more researchers than before, without ceasing a minute to be actors. For all, the level of engagement has risen.

*Extended dialogues*

Be SpectACTive! has generated a significant number of performing arts works. With contrasting results that will be exposed in this book, on the side of residencies, participatory programming as the implementation of digital tools. In the field of research, productions of four different natures were created. On the one hand, there was the internal production that accompanied the project throughout the years of its development, based on slides, provisional diagrams, texts supporting discussion. Then there were the local conferences, organized with or without actors, which evoked in the originality and first results of the investigation in progress. Third, there were the international conferences (Sansepolcro, Brussels, Barcelona, York) that punctuated the scientific valorisation of Be SpectACTive!. Both books produced under the auspices of Be SpectACTive! witness this: *Breaking the Fourth Wall*, and *Be SpectACTive! Challenging Participation in Performing Arts* have extended the dialogue on participation far beyond the circle of actors and researchers directly involved. Finally, our experience gave researchers and actors the opportunity to refer to a common product in order to discuss the merits, but also the limits of participation in live performance in particular, and in the cultural sector in general. Basically, our action-research approach can be defined as simply as: making science with culture while making culture with science.

*Book Presentation*

This book upholds that formula through four parts, after the more specific presentation of Be SpectACTive! by its two coordinators, Giuliana Ciancio and Luca Ricci. They tell us the story of the project, from the first attempt, the initial check, the reformulation, to the implementation and last moments of this

first project, funded by Creative Europe Programme, as presented by Karel Bartak in his preface.

The first part, coordinated by Lluís Bonet, proposes an analysis of the different stakes of participatory programming, according to which spectators are associated with the choice of artistic proposals by a venue or a festival. In that part, several cases are studied: Tanec in Prague (Pavel Brom, Yvona Kreuzmannová and Michaela Přikopová), Kilowatt Festival in Sansepolcro (Luca Ricci), Sibiu Festival (Vicentiu Rahau), Lift festival in London (Mark Ball, Beki Bateson, Kris Nelson and Bonnie Smith), and Take Over festival in York (Damian Cruden, Juliet Forster and John Tomlinson). The final analysis shows the lessons that can be drawn for action and research from those experiences.

The second part is devoted to the experience of creative and participative residencies. It is Félix Dupin-Meynard who presents the stakes of these participative processes, while the cases studied concern Bakelit in Budapest (Dorottya Albert and Luca Kövécs), Domino in Zagreb (Zvonimir Dobrović), the Royal Theatre in York and Kilowatt Festival in Sansepolcro. In that part, it was important to give the floor to the artists, to tell how they perceived these participatory processes. Two artists, whose works were created within Be SpectACTive!, have agreed to play this game: Bridget Fiske, for the project “Yes Move. No Move. (Moved?)” and Zdenka Brungot Svítoková and Barbora Látalová for the project “Different?”. Several participants also agreed to share their impressions and reflections. As for the first part, here the lessons are finally drawn by Félix.

The third part is under the responsibility of Luisella Carnelli. It analyses the issue presenting both most expectations and sometimes most disappointment: the use of digital technologies to bring the viewers and citizens closer to the act of art creating while in progress. It shows the perspectives and limits, giving the floor to

audiences and artists. The European Spectator Day, analysed by Maria Gabriella Mansi and Gianluca Cheli, is part of the new range of tools available to “SpectACTers”. The lessons that Luisella draws from these experiences are to be meditated.

The fourth part, coordinated by Giada Calvano, explores different viewpoints on audience development from around Europe. The section opens with the contribution of Niels Righolt, who illustrates how participation is implemented in the Nordic countries performing arts context. Anne Torreggiani shares with us, on the same subject, the experience of her organisation, The Audience Agency, a structure that supports the cultural sector in strategies oriented to audience development. In the third chapter, Lluís Bonet, Tino Carreño, Jaume Colomer, Yvan Godard and I have realised an original survey of participatory practices in four neighbouring European regions: Occitanie (France), Catalonia, Valencian Community, Balearic Islands (Spain). What is the state of the art of those practices? How do the actors perceive them? What are the most commonly used instruments? Here are some of the questions we faced about that European macro-region. Finally, Luisella Carnelli examines the diffusion of the Visionari participative model created in San Sepolcro, that expanded through Italy and inspired other projects abroad.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note that the same approach, in French, is defined as a “Recherche/Action”, where research is leading, whereas in English one talks about “Action Research”, putting the emphasis on the Action as the (not only alphabetical) leader. In Spanish (Investigación-Acción) and in Italian (Ricerca-Azione) Research is leading, like in French.



Be SpectACTive! project meeting  
(University of Montpellier, France, 2017) ©Gianluca Cheli

## **The long path from an idea to the real project**

**Giuliana  
Ciancio**

**Luca  
Ricci**

**(Be SpectACTive!  
project managers)**



Giuliana Ciancio and Luca Ricci (Brussels, 2016) © Fred Guerdin

## **The beginning**

As most cultural projects, Be SpectACTive! starts at first from the encounter of two people (the two of us), with different backgrounds but sharing the same values and interest in the arts.

We met in a conference, we started discussing about theatre and dance, about the challenges of working in an international context, and we decided to try and connect our different approaches and visions. On the one hand, Luca shared his experience as the Artistic Director of Kilowatt Festival in Sansepolcro, his way to design his artistic programme, and the special project called “Visionari,” where a group of citizens (or spectators) are involved in fundamental decisions concerning the same festival artistic programme. On the other hand, Giuliana, with her background as a curator and cultural manager of international projects, very often focused on the notion of internationalisation and geographical connections, either in her free-lance work and in more institutional contexts (i.e. the International Napoli Teatro Festival).

In 2012, we organised a meeting in Sansepolcro, Italy, called “Be SpectACTive!”. The aim was to browse around some of the most important European experiences of “active spectatorship” in the performing arts, where spectators had played active roles as “decision makers.” After a three-day meeting, we decided to gather some of those experiences in one common project to be submitted to the European Commission for financing. Our perception was that that topic would have been essential in our future cultural life and it might have been a central theme in the European cultural policies for the next few years. Starting with the people invited to that first meeting and including some new ones, we worked to build an international, production-oriented and sustainable network, involving innovative European organisations already committed to the active involvement of spectators. Among them there were European festivals, theatres

and research centres. Soon, we started perceiving that we were exploring a new arena of discussion and practice, and we felt the need for an active scientific research to be part of the project, for observing and evaluating the impact of our activities.

Therefore, we tried to present an innovative approach in terms of trans-local collaboration. Our aim was to deepen the engagement among artists, cultural organisations and audience, thanks to a methodology that would give audiences real agency and a sense of personal investment in the development of the cultural activities within their context. We fostered the collaboration across European organisations through a system of partnerships and co-productions. It was based on a residency program aimed to support the artists and their producers, while nourishing their artistic processes thanks to the interaction with local communities.

In 2013, our first application for the Culture Programme 2007-2013 (last call) was unsuccessful. However, some indications received from the EU gave us the feeling that a greater interest in the process of cultural democracy was arising, and that the need of paying more attention to audiences, either of citizens or spectators, was becoming clear. The confirmation came from the new EU program, Creative Europe, launched in 2014: there, “audience development” had become the new and strategic priority of the EU cultural policies. In August 2014, our new application succeeded, and Be SpectACTive! was approved as a large-scale cooperation project in the framework of the new Creative Europe Programme.

### **The genesis of Be SpectACTive!**

Our successful application was conceived according to a clearer definition of goals and theoretical inspirations. For us, in Be SpecACTive!, the notion of “active spectatorship” had always been important: that was used to describe any process leading an

audience (namely spectators or citizens) to take on the role of *decision makers*, while being directly involved in carrying out a festival, a theatre or a dance programme. Our basic assumption was that people participation – and therefore spectators participation – increases when they are accountable, when value is given to their ideas, when their points of view are taken into consideration. If a person feels involved and responsible within a communal process, he/she will feel part of it and will commit to becoming an active agent, able to encourage others to be involved as well.

Starting from that assumption, the Be SpecACTive! project aimed to give audience a decision-making role, providing people with individual responsibilities, within a common space of creation. In our vision, we intended to create a context where the active participation of spectators would be emboldened, and the artists’ creative work would be given potentially useful input.

In our view, the concept of active participation in culture was also linked to the notion of citizenship, both locally and trans-nationally. Dragan Klaić (2012) argued in his final book “Resetting the Stage” (2012): “What is needed in Europe [...] is a redefinition of public interest in culture and the articulation of instruments, criteria, procedures and resources that will implement these interests [...] This redefinition cannot be just a matter of national policy but needs strong regional and local anchoring” (p. 171)”. Starting from his assumption, in our proposal we fostered a *glocal* approach where the local contexts represented by the theatres, festivals and cultural institutions partner of the project acted as fundamental cultural links.

The Be SpectACTive! project was based on four main activities, such as:

- 1) creating (or implementing) active spectators’ groups, in order to select over 100 shows to be programmed in the theatres and festivals part of the project network;



2) producing 21 contemporary theatre and dance shows, thanks to a program of 56 creative residencies, all based on the interaction among artists and groups of local audience, specifically targeted on to the topics of the shows to be produced;

3) developing an interactive web system shared by spectators and artists, allowing the former ones to follow the artists' creative processes;

4) creating a research project aimed to accompany all the previous activities, in order to evaluate the different effects deriving from the key actions, and to stimulate artists and spectators to exploit their in-depth interaction and its potential benefits.

Starting from these activities as the basis of the project, a few concrete exchanges among all the partners went on.

### **Changing context and contents**

After 2014, many events took place in the international scenario: the impact of the 2008 global crisis and its consequences in terms of austerity measures introduced by the EU; the huge emergency of migration; terrorism and the new forms of territories' defence introduced globally; Brexit; the rise of populist political forces worldwide.

In the international conference that we organized in 2016 as a satellite event of the European Culture Forum in Brussels, we shared with our colleagues running other EU projects at that time, the need to be aware of the general social and political scenario, and the role of culture in it. It was discussed the urgency – now more than ever – of fostering “the movement and the circulation of people and ideas”, overcoming the general tendency to “suspicion” among people, that was introduced globally following the first terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels.

In the framework of the conference, the debate revolved again on the notions of “trans-locality” and “active spectatorship,” both crucial in the development of our project and in the artistic processes activated within the Be SpectACTive! network.

Two EU priorities, Audience Development (AD) and Audience Engagement (AE), were discussed in that framework as ways for increasing the number of spectators or for diversifying the audience. Also, we defined our strategies of AD and AE as ways to establish close relations between cities and local communities; as collaboration processes, based on qualitative relations among artists, art organisations and citizens, and developed through creative residencies, new art productions and performances nourished by diffused bottom-up cultural actions; as ways for overcoming the notion of “borders” by means of European art co-creation processes.

Throughout the Be SpectACTive! four-year project, theatres and festivals have been relating communities, citizens and artists across countries, becoming *hubs* where people and ideas have been meeting. In our strategies, the creation of an active spectators' group in each city involved in the project was central. Those groups were in charge for selecting a few shows, to be presented in the theatre festivals or venues managed by Be SpectACTive!'s partners. Several partners made a national call for recruiting proposals, to be examined by the local active spectators' groups. Through many local meetings and lively discussions, the spectators selected a list of shows and artists to be part of the programs. More specifically, activating local groups of spectators was the key to secure their loyalty towards the activities of the theatres and festivals involved in Be SpectACTive!. It also created a first community reference for all the subsequent involvement actions planned by the network, in first place for the productions, created through a system of multiple residencies.

Most of the topics explored by the artistic works produced by the Be SpectACTive! network concerned with general social changes. In each of the 21 co-produced shows, we tried to create a connection between artists and local communities hosting them during their creative residencies (2 residencies each for the 9 small-scale projects, 3 residencies each for the 12 large-scale projects). For instance, as Ahilan Ratnamohan (AU-BE), in his work, compared the billionaires' football and the passion of amateur players, during his residencies he met the players of the local team in Sansepolcro, Prague and London, brought amateur players in theatre to share his training, fed on their stories, followed a few matches of their local league.

Choreographers, dramaturges, directors, performers, actors explored the stories of citizens from different cities, their way of dancing and delivering their own heritage throughout movements, as it was the case for Michael Zahora (CZ), Bruno Isakovic (HR), Dan Canham (UK), Davide Valrosso (IT), Anna Reti (HU); the role played by the whistle-blowers in our societies, as it was the case of the performance directed by Gianina Carbuariu (RO); the notion of migration, as it was the case of the performances by Bridget Fiske (UK) and Michael De Cock (BE), and so on.

The memory and the future of social coexistence in Europe were the great themes of our productive action: Marco D'Agostin and Chiara Bersani (IT) took as the central theme of their work the concept of "Olympic truce", focusing on the cooperation capacity among individuals; Radu Nica (RO) investigated religion as a battleground for ideologies, but also as an opportunity for human beings to reach a higher spirit dimension; CK Teatro (IT) worked with the elderly, investigating their memories of the moon landing in 1969, to reconnect the wires with an era of great collective hopes.

Each and every residency was not just a rehearsal room where the artists were closed to carry out their research. It was also an opportunity to open their own creative process to a specific target of local citizens, who could contribute to nourish the artist's creative process.

As Pierre Bourdieu (1984) argued, culture can act as an "interminable circuit of inter-legitimation" (p. 53). We believe that spectators' point of view can contribute to widening the artists' gaze, and therefore to enrich their visions during the creation process. Obviously, artists will always choose what to retain and what to leave, nevertheless, in our opinion, art should be produced and created while keeping a dialogue with individuals and with their own time. Be SpectACTive! has been working to broaden that dialogue, involving as many people as possible, especially those coming from worlds far from the performing arts.

### **What we learnt**

In our new application for the second edition of the project we mentioned that at the beginning, in the trans-national framework of Be SpectACTive!, the starting point and the main challenge was connecting partners with different backgrounds, scales and practices, in order to experimenting forms and models of active engagement, through offline and online strategies. It is interesting to note how each artistic organisation is still implementing audience-centric practices, giving its own response to the participatory approach, in the light of the specific cultural context where it is acting.

In the framework of the project, both the participatory programming activities and the creative residencies' programme generated a few changes in the governance of some of the artistic organisations. For example, in some cases the cultural leaders



expressed the need for overcoming a top-down perspective and the opportunity for them to explore new needs; the creation of new links with local social groups and institutions introducing innovative actions and democratic transformations (bottom-up approach).

In other cases, changes were observed in the importance given to the adoption of an organisation-wide commitment and in the mind-set to develop successful Audience Engagement (AE) approaches. What we learnt is that AE should not be confined to one specific department or function only. In fact, one of the great challenges for some of the organisations involved in the project was also to create horizontal and flexible teams, who contributed effectively, at the early stages of a specific project, approaching the target from different perspectives, as it was observed by the project research team. For that reason, in many venues we discussed about the role of a *community manager* who could play a crucial role in terms of building up relations with specific target groups of audiences, and respond to the artists' needs and challenges, in respect of the organisation's vision. Therefore, the community manager or Audience Developer is someone who is active in the involvement of the communities of the project and, at the same time, acts as an important link/hub for developing art processes at local level.

According to the analysis of the project's research team, Be SpectACTive! generated a positive impact and a change of perspective in the art processes among our partners. The artists had the opportunity to experiment new forms of artistic creation, working with different audiences and communities and to test a different perception of their own social needs and environments, having a more complex dialogue with them.

What we learnt all together is that art organizations, artists and citizens need longer working periods; they need to see the results of a long production journey across Europe, where the

project activities can be embedded in the ordinary activity of the art organisations.

At the same time, we explored and failed in the use of the online interaction between citizens and artists. We learnt that while fostering a dialogue between communities in different local contexts by means of online tools, it is necessary to support the local communities in presenting themselves in the offline sphere.

We learnt that a really strong online strategy might be planned, if the communities are able to share their values also in the offline contexts. In the framework of the project, the best performance of the social media networks in terms of audiences reached was probably visible when all the partners were directly involved in producing and sharing contents. It was the case of the European Spectators Day (ESD), a good format to foster the encounter between communities spread in different European cities through the use of online tools.

In the framework of the ESD, each year, we faced questions concerning the reason why someone became a spectator of the performing arts, and why, or how, performing arts could be important in our society. All those queries were shared and discussed within the active spectators' local groups in the different EU cities involved in our project, and, at the same time, online in a larger event across cities (the event will be described in detail further on in this book). Anyway, the result was both a local and translocal discussion, which brought very different groups of people together, also involving people from outside the project, from other European networks and from other sectors. The main goal was generating an online and offline interaction, where all people would have been able to contribute with their own point of view, thanks to a Facebook event.

## A few final considerations

In our perspectives, Be SpectACTive! demonstrated that a strong attention to AD/AE and to participative approaches could re-frame a role for culture in a rapidly changing social and political context. We are firmly convinced that a vision altered by cultural operators, policy makers and artists according to citizens/visitors perspective can trigger the change, either in the organisation, in the community, and in the entire social structure. In our view, Europe needs culture to increase participation, while cultural organisations need to be equipped to tackle the challenge.

The Hungarian psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (2015) defined creativity as an event that is at the same time cultural, social and psychological. He writes: “Creativity is not the product of single individuals, but of social systems” (idem, p. 102). For us, it is essential to create a safe environment where a new type of creativity – strongly relational – can be explicit.

In our four-year journey, the project highlighted examples of both successful initiatives and constructive failures. On the one hand, that underlined how arts and culture organisations turned to the art of encounter, the two-way street that a cultural experience implies. On the other hand, the activities done highlighted that culture is partly a testing ground for social development. Behind every fruitful audience relationship, there is a river of failed messages, mistaken identities and hopes lost in translation.

Emmanuel Négrier, from Université de Montpellier, in one of his presentations on Be SpectACTive!, stated: “This project is not based on the idea of asking people to do what they want. It is based on a more political and radical question: it is about using culture for inviting people to leave a passive attitude and enter in an intellectual adventure. It is about intellectual emancipation”.

## The Creative Europe programme, a conversation with Mr. Karel Bartak

Giuliana  
Ciancio

(Be SpectACTive!  
project manager)

*Mr. Karel Bartak has been at the head of the Creative Europe Culture Unit at the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) since 2016. Before, he was in charge of the Creative Europe Coordination Unit within the Directorate-General for Education and Culture at the European Commission. We met him in his office in Brussels, in March 2018, while he was evaluating the 2018 Creative Europe call for cooperation projects.*

**G.C.:** What impact did you expect when the Audience Development (AD) priority was activated? Was that the result of a need coming from a close observation of the cultural sector, or was it a way to tackle the constant decrease of cultural participation? How comes the notion of AD and participation in culture?

**K.B.:** I think that the starting point were the statistics on cultural participation in Europe we were getting, showing that public participation in culture was dropping. The general growth of living standards in Europe was not reflecting on the way culture was being perceived and consumed by the public. That was one point of departure.

Another one was the observation of the projects co-financed by the Creative Europe programme. We were aware that some of them were rather abstract, artificial, concentrating preferably on theoretical discussion, brainstorming, exchange of experiences, and had a limited impact on the public. Our intention was to support projects aimed to give artists the opportunity to find new audiences, to go beyond what they usually did at the national level. We were following the idea that thanks to EU contribution the artists could enhance their careers by attracting new audiences. That is why AD became a kind of overarching priority of the Creative Europe programme, in reaction to the past when we were more concentrating on the exchanges among cultural professionals, without necessarily considering their impact on the public.

The importance of the programme, which amounts to just 1.5 billion euros for 7 years for 28 countries, in the context of the overall cultural landscape in Europe can be compared to a drop in the ocean. It is just about 0.15% of the whole EU budget. We should not believe that we are changing the world with the Creative Europe programme, it is and will be complementary to national funding, which will always be much more valuable. Rather, the specificity of the projects funded by Creative Europe is their European added value, which you will not normally find in nationally financed schemes.

**G.C.:** Do you think that promoting the idea of AD is also a way to push organisations to think about themselves in a more sustainable way? In Europe we are presently living an incredible huge crisis, especially in the cultural sector. The local funding is lower than 5-7 years ago. In your opinion, might that also be a way of giving a silent indication to organisations to re-think themselves under an economical perspective?

**K.B.:** Due to the financial crisis in Europe, we have seen cultural budgets dropping across the board. There are a couple of exceptions, but most countries reduced their budgets. In that context it was a success to see the Creative Europe programme growing by 9% compared to the previous period, before 2014. If you take into consideration the needs of the new financial guarantee instrument launched in 2016, we have basically the same amount of money as in the period from 2007 to 2013. Our low budget is the main reason why most of the actions in the Culture part of the programme had a very modest success. We select for funding only about 15% of the applications we get. For every call, we know that at least 20/30 projects would really be worth funding, but... there is no budget. That is creating some frustration.

Coming back to the question about participation, yes, the idea is that through the projects we fund, with AD as a priority, we are

basically asking all the project coordinators to come up with ideas that respond to that. So, already at the preparatory stage, we are pushing them to reflect on how their project can be sustainable and can address audiences, having an impact on the hearts and minds of people. I think that through this programme, the notions of sustainability and AD have become more important than they were before.

**G.C.:** Can we say that beside the AD priority there is also a special attention to new business models? Is the European Commission through those priorities pushing organisations to place themselves in the market, or to find a way to be financed beside the institutional support? What is your opinion?

**K.B.:** Yes, you need to look at the context in which the programme was born, and that is reflected in the legal basis of the programme itself. We were in the middle of the financial crisis in Europe at the time when the new multiannual financial framework was conceived. The mantra was “*growth and jobs*”, and rightly so, as it was crucial to react to the economic slump.

That priority also found its way into the new Creative Europe programme. The preceding Culture programme (not the Media programme) had been focused on public organisations and on more traditional branches of cultural activities. Now, we started paying more attention to the fact that culture is also produced by creative industries. A lot is happening in the private sector, many micro companies, as well as small and medium enterprises are involved. That was taken on board by this programme, and was also reflected in the priority called *capacity building*. We do not necessarily ask ‘La Scala’ to do *capacity building*. But we want to see the start-ups and the small companies thinking about development, how they can become more important in the market, or how they can support the artists. That was the idea behind the notion of capacity building, and that is why it is not an overarching priority, like AD, but just one of the priorities. If

you follow it, you follow it, if you don't, you don't. You are not penalised for not choosing capacity building as a priority in your project.

Now Europe is in better economic conditions, but we are facing new challenges, like migration or the strengthening of populist and demagogu tendencies. The intercultural dialogue has become critical again, which is being reflected in our yearly work programmes, without changing the legal base of the programme.

**G.C.:** The word *trans-locality* is emerging in debates across Europe. Most of the cultural operators are working with local communities trying to link them through social media, artistic productions, art residencies, or through mobility programs, as we also do in the framework of Be SpectActive!. Basically, we are connecting cities, not nation-states, as they represent a new arena of discussion for most of us. As EU Commission, are you supporting the idea of *trans-locality*? Or do you look at the nation-state as a first interlocutor?

**K.B.:** We are basically working with cultural operators. In some countries we might be having interlocutors at a national level, in others at a regional level, or at a more local level in still others. Europe is a culturally fragmented space, also language-wise. We do not know what is happening a couple of kilometres away, across the nearest border. We are all flooded by a certain mainstream culture, which comes through the social media or from the new IT tools, but, at the end of the day, we are very much unaware of what is really happening on the ground in other countries. This little programme aims to overcome that barrier, go beyond what you normally get to in your everyday life, provide knowledge and experience of what is going on elsewhere and put creators in contact to do things together.

Most of the projects we are running are based on a simple financial impetus, enabling creators to be mobile, to share residencies, to work together (that's why they are called cooperation projects). In other cases, we are paying to reduce the risk of showcasing works – performances, exhibitions – which would normally be considered as economically unviable. In this way, we help the artists and, above of all, the emerging artists to start their international carriers earlier, to attract new audiences outside their own countries. That is the added value we are bringing. We are not competing with projects run by the Member States, what we do is complementary to their work, and I am sure that most of our projects would not be able to secure national funding.

**G.C.:** From your observatory, did you ever see cases where participatory actions were used for generating forms of political consensus in specific arenas? Or, on the contrary, was participation more an opportunity for the cultural policy to generating awareness among citizens and at cultural level?

**K.B.:** We are evaluating, selecting, managing projects at a European level; these projects are co-financed with European money, meaning money of the European taxpayers. The rules of the game exclude any kind of propaganda or political agenda. On the other hand, it is quite possible that a European project can be considered a way to convince people about the merits of the European integration. That's fair. In the same vein, a project that is contrary to the values we are defending, would not be selected for funding. We are always selecting on the merit of relevance, of quality and never any political consideration is being permitted in this selection.

**G.C.:** ...did you ever had cases in which you felt that participatory tools were being used for different aims than the EU priorities of the programme?

**K.B.:** Participation is one of the ways of bringing Europeans together. To overcome current populist tendencies it is necessary that people travel and see how other people live in other countries, broadening their horizons and perspectives. That is one of the reasons why programs like this – Erasmus, Creative Europe, Europe for Citizens – exist and will be continued and even broadened and made more important. You can observe, in Europe, that the perception of European integration varies according to the different age groups, but also to those who have been given more opportunities and experiences in other countries.

**G.C.:** Do you have already, after having been managing the Creative Europe programme for four years, emerging new tools for cultural policy or other tools you would use for new upcoming programs? Are you already evaluating your failures and successes?

**K.B.:** We are drawing lessons from the projects we have funded, which will be used in the next programme. I cannot tell you now what the new programme will look like, the Commission is only preparing its first draft for the Member States and the European Parliament. It seems obvious that the participatory dimension, the emphasis on mobility and cooperation are going to stay. We think that the culture sector needs more of those and we want to continue with projects, which have the strongest leverage effect. The money we are investing should be very well spent.

At the same time, we aim at simplifying procedures and applications in order to enable all cultural operators to participate. We are aware that with rather low EU contributions we are asking a lot from the beneficiaries. The new financial regulation should make participation easier, even for small entities. We would like to have an open dialogue with the creators

and the artists and not with too many intermediaries. We would like them feel that this program is doing something for them and that this added value is bringing new possibilities, new opportunities for their creation, for their creative life.

**G.C.:** In your opinion, which are the main weak points of the programme?

**K.B.:** Well, as I've already said, the main weakness is the very limited budget and the huge difference between offer and demand. Not only are the rejected applicants disappointed, but also from the point of view of this Agency, it is not really rewarding to evaluate hundreds of projects, which will never be funded.

We train and control the independent experts in charge of the first evaluations, watch over their consensus and recommendations. Then the evaluation committee composed of colleagues from the Commission and the Agency takes the final decision after long deliberation. Re-submitted and controversial projects get a special attention.

A project takes days and days to be evaluated. At the end you have a huge list of projects, then you draw the red line and check all those under the line, which take weeks to be evaluated, but they are lost. It's frustrating for us and, of course, it's frustrating for those who are rejected, because they have put a lot of effort into it. It's frustrating even for those who are selected, because they have to wait so long before the decision is taken, while they would like to start and get the pre-financing, obviously.

In order to measure the performance of the programme, we have introduced e-reports, which will enable us to have better statistics and also compare better the aim of the project at the beginning and its outcome. That is important, as we are

improving our knowledge and communicating with all cultural sectors, monitoring how the programme is really performing, measuring the impact we are having and what needs to be fine-tuned in the future legal base.

**G.C.:** A lively debate is taking place around the *legacy* that the programme can generate at local level, especially if you work on actions of social cohesion or creating processes of participation that need a long-term perspective. For having an impact, you need time. Some projects start having results after 4 years and then they apply again because a trans-national cooperation needs to be supported by specific funding. Unfortunately, in the case of Creative Europe, they are in the same pot of many other applications that may be applying for the first time. That is a problem for both: the new projects and the second applications. Very often, there is a discrepancy between the two because of the practices presented, the experiences or simply the needs of the two categories.

Coming back to the evaluation process and the programme efficacy, is that a procedure that is also linked to the availability of economic resources, as you have already mentioned? Or is it also a kind of neo-liberal tendency, in which the observation is more on the numbers and then quantities that each project has to bring, and less on the values and the long terms processes that are requested according to the priorities?

**K.B.:** There is no special treatment for some projects, no specific criteria. Everyone competes against everyone, from all sectors and disciplines and from all participating countries. Why is that? Because the programme is so small, we are only able to select a couple of dozens of projects per year. Once you start ring-fencing a certain amount here and there, then you end up with nothing. If the programme would be more important – from the financial point of view – I can very well imagine that we

might reserve a part of it for specific activities. But this is not the case at the moment.

**G.C.:** ...and about the neo-liberalism and the need of quantity, how do you see that aspect?

**K.B.:** We are evaluating the projects on the basis of their merits exclusively. The political orientation is given by the Member States who have mandated the Commission to implement the programme. The yearly work programme is endorsed by the Council, and we report to the Member States about its implementation. In cooperation projects, for instance, the prevailing attitude is in favour of smaller organisations to get involved. There is a concern also in the European Parliament that the small organisations get limited opportunities for funding. We are therefore dealing with the request to select more small cooperation projects at the detriment of the large cooperation category. The legacy of the small ones is less obvious than in the case of the large ones, which have 10-15 or even more partners somehow, having a structuring effect on the sector. That being said, you may have very competitive and very innovative small cooperation projects, yet, they are limited in scope and output, by their very nature.

**G.C.:** Do you think that may be the result of a neo-liberal approach, or is that the tendency that some of the Member States are displaying?

**K.B.:** It is more that some NGOs have access to their Ministers and keep complaining that they are discriminated; some countries are sensitive to that. I have already mentioned the slightly economic nature of the legal basis of the programme from 2013. But, as I have said, nowadays, everything that concerns values, rights and dialogue is being taken on board, because the programme is sufficiently flexible.



**G.C.:** Going to the final question, do you have the feeling of the programme impact at the regional level? Looking at the statistics on your website there are some countries that are participating a lot, while others are not very active. Why? Is it a consequence of their national funding policy or what?

**K.B.:** The main reason, I think, is the lack of experience in certain countries, above all the newcomers. It's both the lack of skills to present such a project, and also the lack of their co-financing capacity. We are asking for 40-50% co-financing for cooperation projects, which for cultural operators in some countries is a red line they cannot cross. That's why we are trying to encourage cultural operators, in particular those from South-Eastern Europe, to get engaged as often as possible as partners in projects, in order to learn how to coordinate and reap as much profit from the programme as possible, despite their handicap.

The second aspect is the traditional cultural life of the country and the appetite to go international. There are more traditionally closed countries, which feel good in their comfort zone. There are other countries that have had this openness all along. They have always been very receptive to inputs from the outside world. You have also countries having important minorities to deal with, so that, I think, there is more openness and there is more appetite to cooperate internationally.

The third aspect is more organisational. Because, as you know, in all countries we have our offices (the Creative Europe Desks), in charge of helping operators to prepare their applications. The number and quality of projects depend to a certain extent on the activity and the approach of the desks. A very good office in a certain country can make a difference at European level – Slovenia is a good example.

**G.C.:** Mr. Bartak, thank you very much for your time.

## PARTICIPATORY PROGRAMMING



Barbora Látalová (CZ) – *Different?*  
(Bakelit Multi Art Center, Budapest, 2016) ©Vojtěch Brtnický

## Introduction **Participatory programming: incentives, shadows and opportunities**

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Participatory programming is one of the central goals and schemes built up by the Be SpectACTive! project. The background experience developed during over ten years by the Kilo-watt Festival in Sansepolcro, a small Italian countryside town, has highlighted and engaged similar experiments inside and outside this project founded by the Creative Europe programme.

Participatory programming implies a deliberative process. It specifically consists in selecting a number of performances, that will be presented to the regular audience of specific venues or festivals, by a group of audience members. In some cases, it could be a complete section of a festival or theatre season; in other cases, only a smaller selection of shows and performances. It is not the only participatory mechanism or practice close to the prosumer phenomenon existing in the field of live entertainment, nor in the case of the Be SpectACTive! project. But it is a pioneering strategy of a wage of new ways of bottom-up initiatives that is changing the traditional relationship between performing arts projects and their audiences. In any case, can we ask ourselves if it is a passing fad or a background movement representing the start of breaking of the fourth wall?

In the field of performing arts, it represents a considerable challenge, because prestige is costly to obtain, and trust could be easily lost! And this responsibility is assumed mainly by the artistic direction of a theatre or festival facing powerful stakeholders (government, sponsors, audience, media, etc.). But, to a lesser extent, it also represents a certain risk for the group of committed citizens involved in the project, since any choice taken collectively (a result of negotiations among different points of view) implies mistakes or deception that are not easy to justify to friends that trust you. And all this is done without training or professional experience, with fragmented information (not being



possible, in most cases, to see the show in advance, but just to guess it through published reviews or visualisation of videos and trailers). Yet, this is precisely the value of this experience. Putting in the hands of a group of willing, heterogeneous and less conditioned people, the decision concerning the possible interest of the whole community. The first beneficiary is the group itself, because through this process those people go much deeper into the product and the artistic experience. Then, the selected artists also benefit from the process: being chosen provides additional legitimacy, and the dialogue with this group after their representation provides a vision of what the audience values, without filters or mediations.

There are many different models of sharing responsibilities in participatory programming, depending on the goals and challenges assumed by each theatre or festival. A traditional and simple way to get audience participation at a low cost is to organise an audience award enabling people to vote the winner. It is a quite safe and cheap way to share, apparently, some power decision with the audience. A similar experience, quite frequent nowadays in many festivals, consists in giving the public the opportunity to choose an artistic group to be programmed in the following season or festival edition. This type of strategies does not require any deep deliberative process on how a show can contribute to the program of a center or event, or how it can help to evolve or enlarge audiences. In these cases, public's options respond mostly to identity, popularity or emotional impact criteria: people vote motivated by their love, friendliness or direct passionate reaction.

This is not the case of participatory programming in the Be SpectACTive! project or in other similar experiences. Active citizens (committed to select a set of performances for the next edition or season) take decisions after analysing and comparing a good number of alternative options, its pros and cons for the

audience and for the artistic project. There is reflection and contrast of opinions and arguments among the committee members. And, in many cases, long processes of debate, negotiation between opposing views, and joint deliberation.

However, to fully understand each of the existing participatory programming experiences, it is important to take into account their particular circumstances. A first factor to be considered is who had the initiative and why. In all the Be SpectACTive! cases (and in many others) it is a decision of the theatre or festival management, in search of a greater connection and involvement of the local community. In other, much more exceptional cases, such as the collective El Galliner of the Kursaal Municipal Theatre in Manresa (Catalonia), it was born from the civic movement set up to save a theatre. The original team (with some new people co-opted in the process) is currently programming this theatre without any specific intrusion from the management. The power relations in both cases are clearly different, as whoever takes the initiative establishes the guidelines, thus controls the process.

A second key factor is linked to the sociodemographic, political and cultural values of the project's regional or national context. Thus, it is easier to find participatory initiatives in those societies most open to innovation and to bottom-up initiatives. And, in opposite direction, the more hierarchical the institutional structures of a country is, the more unlikely it is that they have experimented with this type of process. In the European context, there is a gradation from the north-western countries towards the east of the continent.

A third factor to take into account is the position and image of the theatre or festival in the regional artistic panorama: preeminent, marginal or climbing up. The more competitive a system is, the more important it is to stand out. This fact can explain why certain places or events launch themselves to

experiment new strategies, more or less fashionable, even when these generate reasonable doubts.

Finally, a fourth factor is the willingness and personal ability of risk-taking by the project management. Many of the existing projects are not understood without this personal component, linked to the ideology and desire to experiment of their top managers.

Based on this combination of factors, there are different degrees of autonomy granted to participants in participatory programming. In some cases, in particular in countries with hierarchic artistic systems, it could be an implicit restriction of both participant freedom and autonomy presenting the argument that amateur people cannot fully guarantee the minimum level of quality that the project requires for its own survival. A quality that only well-prepared and educated professionals can offer, people aware of stakeholders' and audiences' reaction. The most frequent ways to reduce the risks related to quality, and at the same time the freedom of choice are: a) to allow only the selection of a relative small number of performances out of the total programming offered by the theatre, and b) the preselection by the artistic director of a reduced list of potential shows, enabling the programming committee to select only among them. Another subterfuge used as an argument to reduce participatory programming freedom is: "we cannot demand too much otherwise the volunteers will leave".

In any case, the best way to guarantee a coherent and a high quality proposal consists in the correct design of the process, and in the good accompaniment by professional staff. Often, this implies having to hire new personnel specialised in social mediation and artistic animation. Staff able to support participatory programming by taking care of inevitable internal disputes among people with different tastes or expectations, and ensuring a good and friendly environment. At the same time, the role of

the artistic director consists in giving them some guidelines and advice, without imposing his/her own professional aesthetic view and options. By doing so, you not only give real autonomy and freedom to a team of people that accepted to invest time and energy selecting a set of shows, but you also achieve a coherent performing arts program.

In all the artistic projects that set out to start participatory programming processes, the question of the profile of the participants is raised. While some theaters co-opt among their acquaintances the first participants (they try to reduce the fear of losing control over the programming policy), others disseminate public offers to maximise the number of applicants and the diversity of profiles. In any case, social and aesthetic elitism is a potential issue in most participatory programming exercises, because most people interested *a priori* in taking part in this task are individuals with higher than average education, own criteria and taste. In order to fit different social and generational approaches, it could be good to mix people from different ages, neighbourhoods, education, and cultural or ethnic background. A good way to get heterogeneous groups consists in presenting the project to associations and schools of non-intellectual or upper-middle class districts, as it is the case of the Royal Theatre of York, to set up the board of the TakeOver festival. Group heterogeneity could create larger debates and make it more difficult to achieve consensus, but the result will better reflect societal diversity, intercultural understanding and enrichment.

One crucial aspect for the success of these experiences is to take into account the different levels of responsibility and commitment assumed by the participants. Many people are not aware of the commitment assumed: preparation time (reading and watching videos), number of meetings, volume of works to choose from the initial offer, concentration and selection effort, audience analysis (to be aware not only of their own personal

taste but also of general audience taste), etc. So, it is normal that some people leave after a first or second meeting, due to the gap between expectations and reality; or simply, they do not see themselves playing that role. In most cases, after a few editions, most participants decide to quit. They have obtained a good part of what they were looking for, and the extra experience does not compensate the additional effort to make. At the other extreme, some love so much the experience (and social visibility), that there is no way for them to leave a space for new people. The optimal situation consists in attracting new participants every year to renew ideas, and to replace tired people – who invest less and less time because they have already learned from the experience – maintaining in any case the key characters (personalities that bring affection, interesting points of view and good understanding).

In some cases, a prolonged permanence of the key members of a programming committee could be seen by the artistic direction as a problem. The more they take responsibility, the greater is the power of these groups of people in front of the institutions. Something similar happens with the relationship between the direction and the board of friend's associations. Particularly, when there is a change of the artistic direction. In these cases, there may well be a strengthening of the strategy, a new director proposing new ideas and procedures; or, on the contrary, the end of the experience.

Another aspect to take into account is the ideal number of people who must form a selection committee. Also, the distribution of tasks among participants to reduce the total time invested by each person. Both aspects depend on the number of performances to be chosen, the volume of proposals received, and the time needed for selection. In any case, this task is only for a minority of people. But this small team of people allows a theatre or a festival to enlarge its connection with different audience communities, approaches and tastes.

Finally, the personality of the artistic director and his or her team is also important, because along with very empathetic and respectful personalities, we also find interested, self-centred and histrionic behaviours.

### **Participatory programming experiences**

The number of venues and festivals engaged in this kind of participatory programming experiences is growing in many European countries. Citizen participation is perceived as a positive value in many contexts, from education to politics; and the performing arts are not an exception. Nevertheless, there are many different ways to organise and to develop these experiences over the European continent. The experiences organised under the umbrella of the Be SpectACTive! project are a good example of this diversity. Each particular development, format and context explain most differences.

First of all, the situation and dynamics are not the same in the case of a festival, concentrated over a very short period of time, or a theatre with a permanent season. For instance, it is more difficult to commit volunteer people all over a year than for a short and quite visible event.

In the following pages, their protagonists will show their initial expectations, experiments and results. In some cases, they are quite new to participatory programming; in other cases, they arrive with a long experience in their backpack, an experience to be shared with the other institutions that take part in the project. We will see many convergence processes, but as well some divergent streams.



Dan Canham (UK) – *SESSION* (LIFT, London, 2018) ©Paul Blakemore

## **London International Festival of Theatre**

**Mark  
Ball**

**Beki  
Bateson**

**Kris  
Nelson**

**Bonnie  
Smith**

**(LIFT,  
London)**

## **Introduction**

Throughout its history, LIFT has been committed to developing long-term participatory projects with non-professional performers that deliver a depth of process and impact for participants as well as high quality artistic outcomes and audience development and engagement. It has always been our belief that these participatory projects should not sit separately from our main festival programme and that there is no distinction in terms of artistic rigour, audiences and the language we use to speak about the work.

Historically, our participatory projects had been delivered on a project by project basis in various locations across London, for example in 2014 we worked with the Brazilian Director Renato Rocha and a cast of young people – some of whom had experienced homelessness in London, while others had been street children in Tanzania, the Philippines and Brazil, to create *Turfed*. Taking inspiration from the double meaning of the title (the turf of a football pitch, and what it is to be turfed out of home) the show explored the global issue of youth homelessness. While the show was a huge success in terms of developing participatory practice and creating genuine impact in terms of audience and participant engagement, it was not possible to measure the medium to longer term impact on the participants or on LIFT itself.

The *Turfed* experience became a transformative one for LIFT, and a catalyst for the creation of a new form of collaborative activity for LIFT, centred in one locality. As we decided that in order to understand the long-term impact of our participatory arts events, we needed to create real longevity and legacy around participatory activity. The idea to focus longitudinally on a specific geographical location (Tottenham, North London) over a prolonged time period was born. The idea was radical, and uncommon among our festival colleagues around the world, and similarly unparalleled in the UK.

Over the next few years, our approach to participatory practice changed and gradually filtered into all aspects of LIFT's working methodology. We have increasingly found ourselves questioning and setting new definitions of this activity. Nearly all of LIFT projects involve participation of some kind (non-professional performers, community consultation, audience participation etc.) and therefore we believe that the principles of participation have a broader impact across nearly all our work. In broad terms, this longitudinal practice is a response to the changing world around us, where digital technologies have enabled us all to take a more active, participative role in shaping society and contemporary culture.

In practical terms, it's altered the organisation's makeup and ethos. Increasingly, Tottenham and the people and organisations we work with there now shape LIFT's activities across the festival. There's a saying in our organisation that "all roads lead to Tottenham" and this means we draw upon our connections and influences from working in the area from everything like nominating artists for residencies to voice and tone of our public relations and social media to the structure of our organisation and its advisory boards.

### **LIFT and Be SpectACTive!**

These thoughts and practices coincided with the start of the Be SpectACTive! project and we welcomed the opportunity to explore them further, with a network of European organisations. Our Be SpectACTive! related activity (UpLIFTers, Tottenham Board and the Tottenham Artist Hangout) has been successful in bringing a wider group of younger, diverse voices into the heart of the organisation. We feel that there have been long-term benefits to the participants and to LIFT as an organisation.

The network has also provided some challenges. Our participatory work, framed as LIFT Tottenham, is hyper-local and responds to the interests, preoccupations and impulses related to the Tottenham locality. Establishing co-productions across an international network has therefore been frustrated by a lack of commonality; both aesthetic and socio-geographic. By its very nature participatory work is wedded directly to a specific locality and community and therefore developing a project in three different locations as set out by the networks was challenging, often hindering or diminishing the project and the care and attention partners were able to give participants and artists. Although it has enabled artists to travel and share and learn new practices, the framework in LIFT's view, did not overcome the inherent problems related to simultaneously working hyper-local in multiple international locations.

Overall, our participation in Be SpectACTive! has underlined that the strength in LIFT Tottenham and our participatory activity is that the more local our work is, the stronger it is. The impact is now felt beyond LIFT as our work in Tottenham is seen as an exemplar of good practice nationally – for example our work is being used by a significant UK-based foundation as a case study for their inquiry into the civic role of the arts.

The goals within our Be SpectACTive! activity were aligned with the strategic priorities of LIFT Tottenham: achieving social mobility and cultural democracy through a diverse programme of cultural activity across a five-year period, much of it focused on improving skills and employability in an area with high levels of youth unemployment. This has been a long-term, collaborative process that has seen us working with and influencing the approach and activity of local and international partners, local government bodies and our participants and artists. Many of these people and organisations have become our "active spectators", having developed the agency to contribute to and shape our organisation and its activities through various platforms



including UpLIFTers workshops, Tottenham Artist Hangouts, artistic projects and through the development of the LIFT Tottenham Board.

Our participatory programming has taken on a different shape to our partners within the Be SpectACTive! project as the authorship of our projects and programmes has been developed with both strong artistic guidance and leadership from LIFT, but has also been informed by Tottenham context and the views and opinions of a wider variety of local stakeholders and artists. This allowed the young participants to fully engage with the breadth of LIFT's international programme but also enabled LIFT to become more porous as an arts organisation; the way we do things has been influenced by the participants involved with us.

Importantly the programme has directly impacted LIFT itself, bringing more diverse and youthful representation into our governance, staffing and artistic programming. As a small organisation we are always evolving, growing and developing and because of the work taking place in Tottenham and its impact on us, we are becoming a stronger and more inclusive, localised and grass-roots connected organisation.

Our first Be SpectACTive! residency with the choreographer Dan Canham in 2015 coincided with the start of LIFT's programme in Tottenham, together with our Tottenham Producer at the time he established networks and connections in the area that have directly impacted across many areas of LIFT. As part of his residency in which he met with various grassroots cultural organisations and collectives in the area, from across dance and music, Dan met Empire Sounds – an afrobeats producing collective based at one of Tottenham's largest arts hubs, Bernie Grant Arts Centre. After working with them during the residency, LIFT invited him back to collaborate with them and another local dance group called Steppaz to create a brand-new LIFT Tottenham commission for the LIFT 2018 festival, *Session*, the show which features local young people dancing

alongside internationally acclaimed artists will also tour in summer 2018. It was also through Dan Canham's initial connection with Empire Sounds that LIFT met Mekel Edwards, one of the producers of the collective who at the time also worked as a Technical Manager at Bernie Grant Arts Centre, we have since appointed him as LIFT's Production Manager. This is a prime example of how our involvement in Be SpectACTive! has positively impacted on our artistic programme and its relevance to a local audience, the infrastructure of the organisation itself and the role LIFT plays within the Tottenham cultural landscape.

Our approach to participatory programming has been a little different to the other organisations involved, as a biennial festival that programmes an average of 20 shows we were unable to allocate a portion of that programme to be curated by our active spectators, instead we established various groups of Tottenham-based communities to advise, support and input on our programme as well a feature as part of it. These include the Tottenham UpLIFTers, a group of 30 young people who attend two schools in Tottenham who we're working with over the course of their Secondary School life. During 2016's festival they attend shows across the programme as part of The Children's Choice Awards, rating the shows on their own merits before staging their own Awards Ceremony, they've since taken part in various workshops, residencies and programmes where they attend other cultural events across London – not only do these experiences widen their access to high quality, international art experiences but they also educate the arts organisations and artists coming into contact with them along the way. LIFT's recent co-commission with the award-winning and globally notorious immersive theatre company Punchdrunk was directly inspired by the thoughts and dreams of the UpLIFTers following a six-week workshop process at their 'research village' in Tottenham. The work, born in Tottenham, will tour nationally. It

is this in-depth, longer term methodology that instigates genuine, long lasting change and impact in terms of cultural democracy that LIFT continues to do.

## Learnings

The aspect of participatory practice that is most important to LIFT is longevity. Throughout our 6-year longitudinal involvement in Tottenham, North London, LIFT has gained the following understandings:

### ◆ Long term community engagement is more ethical, more sustainable and yields better creative results.

Short-term community engagement has limited benefits. Organisations have a responsibility to the communities that they engage with to maintain a connection and keep them involved in an ongoing journey of artistic output. Our involvement with participants, artists, audiences and organisations has involved both grassroots interactions and formal agreements, affiliations and associations with structures, funders and firms. It has meant our projects have reached people where they work and where they live and that there is broad and multi-faceted engagement and investment in LIFT participatory projects among our collaborators in Tottenham. We also learnt very quickly that, in an area with the social and economic challenges of Tottenham, the real value of participatory arts projects is in developing skills that develop people's potential for employment. It's jobs, not arts workshops, that enable social mobility.

### ◆ Communicating our intent has been key.

Throughout LIFT's involvement in Tottenham and the delivery of a wide variety of projects, we have declared our intent and the timeframe of our involvement. We have been transparent about our desire to engage Tottenham organisations and

residents in contemporary art projects performed at the festival. We have clearly stated our involvement will last the period of time it will last. We have attempted to identify and communicate what aspects of the collaboration benefit LIFT and what the benefits for participants and artists may be. For instance, at LIFT Tottenham Artist Hangouts, which serve as part meet-and-greet networking event for artists and part-open space where attendees can discuss pressing issues and interests or seek partners for collaboration. We've also realised the role of these young people as catalysts for their wider networks – their peers, their families and the school itself and we're exploring ways to bring these groups together to share, inform and celebrate the work that they're involved in.

### ◆ Involving local allies into the organisation itself has been radical.

Our local allies have gone beyond advocacy and become involved in organisational direction. These advocates and allies have guided our process and been engaged in what we do. While our initial activity in Tottenham involved meeting local champions to support LIFT's activities and introduce us to other partners or participants to serve LIFT's programming, this has evolved to becoming a much deeper interaction where Tottenham residents involved in LIFT have agency over the organisation itself. We are now engaged in deep and long-lasting relationships where our Tottenham collaborators have direct agency and influence over our activity. As well as being about good intentions, this ethos has become structural, LIFT's governance model has adapted due to our engagement in Tottenham with the formation of the Tottenham board in 2016 and the addition of a Tottenham Board Member on our LIFT Board of Trustees in 2017.



Audience Jury (Tanec Praha, Prague, 2016) ©Václava Parkánová

## **Tanec Praha Introduction: redefined challenges**

**Pavel  
Brom**

**Yvona  
Kreuzmannová**

**Michaela  
Příkopova**

**(Tanec Praha,  
Praha)**

Overall, before joining Be SpectACTive! project, our organisation already had some experience and knew, to a certain extent, what to expect from a project of this magnitude. We wanted to be involved in sharing practices between different partners and we were interested specifically in the area of challenging artists to engage and even involve public in different creative ways. In addition, we had no real experience with active spectatorship, except some occasional after-show debates or open rehearsals and various programmes aimed towards young generation (we held interactive performances and activities for children). We saw the project as an opportunity to educate our team more in these areas as well as to create new opportunities for artists within our influence. Looking back, we are quite pleasantly surprised by the outcome of Be SpectACTive! as it surpassed our expectations in a good way. It is still hard to evaluate intuitively, because it involves many processes and many people in many places, but in the next pages, we present a slight insight into our experience.

As the project went on, our team got more and more involved in discussions concerning work with audience, its development or engagement. Thus, the project helped us redefine what we actively do or not do about these topics or and what strategy is best for our own organisational mission. We imagined it would bring us more cooperation with new partners, already active in the field of work with audience. We already knew how priceless production in cooperation is. It brings many hurdles, yet since many ways of work in theatres or festival productions are very specific to each team, there is always something new to learn, even when the way somebody is working might be related to the venues circumstances. Therefore, as a benefit, we were very excited to work with diverse international partners. You might say that working within different contexts, trying unusual ways of working with audience, different ways of making decisions and



ways of thinking in general is positive as is. But when there are new partners from different fields (theatre, multimedia, music, etc.) there will be more of let's call it useful diversity. We defined several goals to achieve, especially in new areas of our work: besides our usual role of co-producer/supporter of artists, the main was deeper interaction with audience on qualitative and quantitative level. This project focused much more on audience engagement activities and research than any other we entered before. For instance, we had an opportunity to start with Audience Jury programme, which gave us much deeper insight of the general audience thinking, and furthermore we could see their development of critical thinking in a field of contemporary dance.

If we dig a little deeper in our audience meetings, as an organisation we did not actively meet with spectators before the project on such a basis, nor let them make any interventions in programming before the project. There was a possibility to meet artists after premiere, sometimes in open rehearsal and there were moderated discussions after some performances, but never in a process with rules or feedback. We needed to broaden the relationship with our audience. Very strong reasoning behind that is the fact that as the organisation grew its active relation with audience did not. We were worried, that the relationship with audience became distant and passive. At the same time, we saw other similar and new organisations engage in active relations with audience, and we thought that we have to gain better understanding of what audience perception is like. E.g. The obvious ways to build that kind of relationships nowadays are active interactions via social networks, but we do not manage as well as we would like to in these areas. We found that even though we had already activities that tried to interact with audience, we did not actively work with individuals nor held a process with longer strategy. We were only reaching the top of the communication and we wanted to build a closer relationship with our audience in order to get to know them more and understand

their expectations and what they actually think about dance. All in order to give them the best we can. Therefore, the Be SpectACTive! project really made us dive into these activities with specific ideas about how to proceed and what to aim in these and what to expect. We swore by the approach to make culture more accessible to general public and we tried to develop spectators with active approach, yet we did feel it could always be more actively achieved in that area.

We managed to smuggle in and then engage in some new concepts into our organisation from the research members of the project, which is not always easy with team members with long standing experience in the field. We managed to form a steady and very enthusiastic group of active spectators every year who are involved as the “shadow jury” of the Czech Dance Platform (annual festival presenting a selection of Czech contemporary dance to international guests in the professional field). These people were going to venues, watching performances live and met once a month to talk about pieces they saw. After several months of doing this quite demanding job, they met for the last time to discuss and vote for their top three performances, which were presented as Audience Jury choice at the festival. This way we managed to organise not just a gathering of spectators, but also an active and driven group of individuals who would invest lot of their own free time to watch numerous performances or videos and managed to express quite profound thoughts about them. They went through the whole process of selecting performances for the festival. That means differentiating between what they like and what may be an important move for the dance field in Czech context (even not their cup of tea), defending their value conceptions and making decisions when thinking of the dramaturgical concept as well, etc.

Those were quite positive outcomes in participatory programming, yet for our organisation as a whole, successful residencies overshadowed them. We already had some positive experience in

exposing artists to new environment, so we were excited to see what will Be SpectACTive! project bring. We were more than delighted, that our proposed artists were chosen by partners for co-produced residencies and even more pleased with their work resulting from the project. The pressure-free environment throughout the residencies and additional activities and support via the project yielded many unexpected results and sometimes even arguable ones. Artists who had a chance to work within residencies abroad were coming back with very positive feedback, rich and diverse experience and strong progress in their artistic development. Some results were successful also internationally (especially DEVOID and Refuge). As of quality and originality, the artworks proved usability of the concept developed by the project. We focus on producing and support Czech artists, hence the project has yielded a very rewarding outcome.

### **Respecting artistic leadership as well as public engagement**

#### *Aim for artistic quality over popularity*

In our work and context, artistic leadership means that the work of a programmer/curator is in first place and creates the image of the NGO, its reputation and uniqueness. Therefore, we care about the balance between aiming towards what is popular and what we acknowledge as quality content. We believe that it is a crucial balance for every cultural professional. Aiming towards content that is more popular does not mean sudden decrease in quality, of course. Nevertheless, in the long term, we try to present content leaning towards the experimental side on the axis between experimental and popular. We stress this aim when it comes to production and co-production in our organisation. Aiming for experimental performances is a more uncertain path and no sure result can be expected (instead of going for the easy

choice of something popular) but only in this risk, something good and new can happen. We promote development of contemporary dance and any development cannot arise from what is mediocre, usual and mainstream. This idea is and was our long-term mission, and the project is thankfully aimed in a way that supports this dramaturgic thinking. Goals of the project are sometimes within experiments with uncertain result, where learning and research comes first.

To put it in example instead of abstract concept, there was an on-going discussion about our participatory programming engagement with audience. The discussion was not just among us, rather between us and other partners in the project and the topic was about the level of influence we were letting our audience have on programming. Some partners have good experience in letting their audience make decisions in their venue or festival program. That is something we decided we do not want to be a part of in full extent. It is far from our fundamental principles of work. Instead we took a “conservative” approach. We do not want our audience to be choosing what we will present in our theatre. Yet there is reasoning behind that decision – our organisational mission is a limit to that kind of experiment.

To help clear that up, in case of participatory programming, we had and still have many questions, especially: how far do we give responsibility to our audience? What is the role of the artistic leader, curator and dramaturge? How do we define the personalities, which develops the artistic vision of a venue or a festival? Our answers to these questions had to lay within the boundaries of our mission. In addition, there is a strong debate also on academic level about the need of educated and well-oriented professionals for artistic programming as far as some cultural departments of cities and communities are appointing “only” managers as directors of cultural institutions without appreciating and understanding the role of artistic curators. From this point of view, the participatory programming can create some

tension and criticism in a way, which can be summarised in the words of our director: “Aren’t you sure enough of your artistic vision that you need to discuss it with a general public? How far is participative programming from populism?”.

Our artistic leaders (Yvona Kreuzmannová and Markéta Perroud) are fully respected in terms of dramaturgy therefore we decided for our own approach to participatory programming where the choice of audience is parallel to that of the organisation, hence the Audience Jury mentioned earlier. In this process, we are leading discussions in a way of giving a lot of space to the spectators, but also sharing a lot of information with them. The Audience Jury is kind of a “shadow jury” to the expert’s one responsible for the programming of the Czech Dance Platform. We also invite all of the professionals individually for our meetings with that audience group. That is an exciting dialogue for both sides, which can enrich them both deeply.

This balancing of “popular” approach with professional curation (in other words what we know is popular versus what we believe is of tangible quality) is something we have successfully applied in e.g. discussions with public. Any discussion is only working as a discussion if it is actively moderated (or it can become an avalanche of opinions without backing, or even attacks like in any internet article “discussion”). The role of moderator is not to express his point of view, but create space for different points of view from every participant. Therefore, we found out that the best discussions were the ones when the topic was open until there was a topic that needed some guidance, depth or insight from e.g. artistic director or anyone respected enough. Moderation of the debate also helped many times with discussion with specific spectators – many times, when the topic is art, the moderator actively tried to give space from some strongly vocal personalities to some shy participants to even out the whole balance, so everyone could have a chance to express him/herself.

*The process is important, not only the outcome*

In addition, for our organisation, the question of active spectatorship was and still is about how to make it not as something forced for the participants and the organiser. The gist and mind-set was that since there are spectators who want to be involved in some way with artists or members of our organisation, we try to set up pleasant and enjoyable conditions – such as a theatre club/bar in which spectators can meet with them. It might not be enough and at first, it is not an activity per se (and definitely not an active programming), but it is the starting point. This may result in a relationship with the groups that feels (and is) in the long term, more honest and does not feel like anything artificial or staged (in opposition to any meticulously defined activity).

Perhaps it is good to point out that any activity of cultural origin organised from the top (and not springing from natural conditions bottom-up) could be generally considered a thing of the past era of communist government. In that era, when any cultural activity was not officially managed and people met in a natural manner, that kind of situation was considered in opposition to the cultural activities organised from the standpoint of some cultural organisation (which was forced to obey and follow government policies). That is one of the standpoints (or cultural context specific to some countries) that should be considered within many others when deciding about active involvement of spectators in any cultural activity. However, this is only something that is slowly losing importance in this century and it might be only of importance in post-soviet geopolitical areas.

The general gist was to create conditions where participants could thrive and interact, instead of walking them through every step of the way; hence, the resulting experience was more familiar and solid. As an example, one of our last edition participant’s comment can illustrate the point:

“Be SpectACTive! became for me a real introduction into the Czech performing arts and contemporary dance scene. I appreciate the range of performances, which were chosen for the programme, the variety of genres and venues was a great benefit of the programme. Of course, discussions during the meetings were interesting from the side of sharing the views”.

“All in all, I am very grateful for the opportunity to participate in such programs which bring social benefit, develop the audiences’ taste and understanding of the content. I will highly recommend for people who are interested in contemporary dance and theatre to have such experience”.

(Nadezda Nazarová, Audience Jury participant in 2017)

The idea that the process is important and not just the outcome is, by the way, what helped in other parts of the project: in residencies and co-producing. For some artists, the freedom to make a research without pressure on the result during or in the ending of residencies is exceptional. In such a case, they feel it as an extraordinary opportunity and accept even some difficult conditions – especially daily sharing by video –, which they discover later as an obstacle. Time and conditions for deeper research seems to be above standard in today’s consumer society oriented to product. Moreover, it brings a special value to the creation process and from this point of view, it would be worthwhile to keep this option. But in any case, without obligatory daily video recording, as far as the project can be documented in any other way during the residency and shared online after its creative time is over. The fact we do not ask for immediate result – work – does not mean that artist will not do it; it is just about the time for research and time for creation itself. Therefore, it is something that Be SpectACTive! project uses to obtain a great outcome, and we would like also to push it more at the level of participatory programming or any activity with audience.

### *Relation categorisation*

There is one more thing from the general point of view that needs to be reiterated, because from our point of view it helps in organising active spectatorship. It seems out of place trying to define the relationship between spectators and the theatre, yet we found that useful in our behaviour as a venue or organisation towards our audience.

Categorising different types of relations is important to highlight the difference between them and in the case of a relationship between organisations, there can only successfully work a partnership, but in case of audience participants – persons, there can be a “friendship”. We simplified the differentiation between the two cases as follows: in a partnership, you agreed to terms and you owe something to one another. In a friendship relation, you do not agree to anything and nothing is owed to one another. Our idea of even active spectatorship is that it should at least feel like a relation on a friendship-like level, informal as much as possible and not in terms of duties and goals but in terms of good experience on not predefined terms and goals. As an organisation aimed at co-production, we tend to treat every work-related interaction predominantly as a partnership, however this attitude does not help in case of participatory programming. Therefore, we would like to share the differentiation as something that helped us in the Be SpectACTive! project when working with participants in Audience Jury.

The fact that we give to the group of spectators the right to vote for three shows, which they should not miss on the festival’s programme, is not the main objective of our regular discussions. We care much more about long-term dialogue and we are happy this group brings new ideas and suggestions to our daily work. In addition, we wish to keep relations with these people in the future.

Our participatory programming activities were open for a general audience, any person who would be interested. We are

glad to have a mix of older and younger generations in our discussions. We did not need to limit the selection in any way. Every person who joined was informed on what the cooperation demands from them and since they were interested in discussing with professionals, they tried to cooperate as much as possible. In cases where the individual character was too energetic, the moderator politely adjusted the discussions as to give space for opinions of others. Mainly thanks to a Facebook campaign, we could reach more people interested in contemporary dance and culture in general. Artists chosen for creative residencies were asking for specific target groups and some of them are extremely interesting for us. Dan Canham helped us to develop deeper cooperation with the Roman community and Barbora Látalová engaged later one of the young Roman dancers in her project. Last season, he became an external team member helping to welcome visitors (usher, attendant). Some of the active participants in Be SpectACTive! are playing the role of “bridge” between our venue and larger public. Therefore, we could say, the approach with all these people in this kind of relation really helped us to improve our communication with audience and therefore our mission as an organisation.

## **Two case studies: experiences of active spectatorship**

### *First case study: audience workshops*

As a first case study, we would like to present our experience with the very first participatory programming during the first year of Be SpectACTive! project. Our previous experience comes from different sources. We were used to play an active role in different networks on a national and international level, many times sharing responsibility for artistic decision, artist’s support, interdisciplinary cooperation etc. (Aerowaves, IETM, M4m – M for mobility, EDN, etc.). We also share programming with numerous regional partners in Czech Republic for TANEC

PRAHA Festival. Our venue, PONEC theatre, aims at collaborations with NGOs in the neighbourhood. We also cooperate closely with partners (other venues and organisations in the field) to enlarge audiences and connect some marketing strategies. Many of our activities focus on children and schools. E.g., project Dance to Schools (since 2008) is carried out in close cooperation with the creative team around the artist Barbora Látalová. Through interactive shows for children (participation of children in performances as well as artists coming to their schools), we offer a different view to performing arts from the one that children are used to.

Therefore, we could say, we felt bold and we expected that we could make one new activity – audience development via participatory programming – happen without any problems. “We have strong community around us already, it should be easy to develop it and find active spectators, right?”. One of the concepts of the first experiment for participatory programming was having moderated discussions/workshops with screening of Aerowaves TOP20 artists and their work. Workshops were open for a general public, students, seniors, and amateurs as well as professionals. We sent out newsletters and invitations to our contacts – audience and people already connected to the venue – and we posted a public call spreading the information around the town. However, this call had not yielded as much persons as we thought it would. About eight people applied and nearly half of them were professionals (dance journalists and dancers). Nevertheless, we soon found out that group this size and this mixture of professionals and non-professionals is, in fact, good and brings some nice exchange of opinions.

Unfortunately, during the 3 months when the workshops were on, we slowly lost most of the participants, and there was only one person left at the end of the season, even though the feedback from all participants was good. That result made us thinking about the reasons why it did not work out the way we



expected. We came up with some practical motivations like timing and frequency. Workshops started at 4:30 p.m. which was apparently too early for regular working people, they lasted 2 hours and were held twice a month, which was too frequent.

Another reason was that workshops were based on viewing video recordings – Aerowaves TOP20 emerging artists. What was interesting for the spectators seemed not enough satisfying for participants as a live production is. Discussions were inspiring, interesting and revelatory but there was something missing – the pure, personal and emotional experience. Video recording can hardly be as attractive as a live performance.

Even with our experience, we felt that this was not a success and that we really need to rethink the process and focus on possible ways to make this participatory activity work. Lesson learned, we needed to give more to our spectators and demand maybe a little less from them. Therefore, evaluation of the first year's experience – in a strong brainstorming with the team – led us to the second case study below.

#### *The second case study: Audience Jury of the Czech Dance Platform*

The second case study we would like to present is the experience we had in participatory programming for our festival Czech Dance Platform. We decided to try a different model with the “Audience Jury” within the Czech Dance Platform festival. This time the participants of the Audience Jury had been working in parallel following the same process as the professional Dramaturgical Jury, choosing from the newest creations of the Czech contemporary dance scene of the previous year. They were not choosing from the video versions of the show as before, but they had the possibility to see almost all the performances live during the autumn season, which made the process more enjoyable and in particular engaged. The additional value was

also the fact that participants get to know each other, and they could talk and discuss their opinions when they met at some venue. The possibility to share the pure emotion right after the performance with a person who went there for the same reason as you is something you gain from the cultural experience only. This led to more intense and deep discussions afterwards, during the meetings, and to a closer relationship with our team as well.

We held four meetings during the autumn season, only once a month, and we changed the time of meetings to 6:00 p.m.. Thus, we could connect the meetings with some performances as well, which turned out to be a great idea – more effective and time saving for participants. Once they came to the venue for the meeting they could stay a little longer enjoying the informal conversation between each other and after go watch the performance. We also focused on adding more after-performance debates with artists, as well as opportunities to discuss works in progress. All these activities together meant that the spectators felt more involved and special, and therefore motivated to participate even more, not only during the meetings but in general.

Concerning the number of people involved in participatory programming, every season about 20% of the people went lost after the first meeting. This loss was mainly caused by the demanding amount of time they needed to reach the goal – to see many performances. Most of the 20% gave up during the season because they felt they could not fulfil their own expectations and spend enough time with preparation. They must invest their time to see about 30 performances and it is really demanding, so they can feel too much pressure. Nevertheless, participants who made it until the end were bringing well-balanced judgment. Sometimes they chose only a certain view of all possible perspectives on presented work, which was only slowly eroded during the discussions. Discussions are enriching both for the public and the experts.

Unlike in the beginning, when we did not ask too much from our participants, this time, the turnout was satisfying. Even if there was much more to do for participants, we achieved a solid number of persons and managed to involve some of them even for next season. The number varies from case to case, but recently it is about 8-9 persons per regular meeting, which is perfectly reasonable to accommodate their opinions, to keep discussion up to 2-hour length, which makes the meeting a good compromise between enjoyment (to keep them coming back next time) and quality of discussion.

This season, the introduction meeting with spectators yielded a good response from participants. They reacted very positively not only to our presentation of Tanec Praha organisation and plan for participants, but also to a very thorough introduction to history of contemporary dance as an art form and as a problem in terms of keeping it active or even existing in Prague theatre context. That was an unexpected effect created out of concrete questions by participants.

What could be learned from this case is, that, unlike in the first year, we planned carefully so to make sure that meetings were held before a performance in a suitable venue, the admission to performances were lowered for members and the participants achieved a certain goal – to act as a jury. They got a chance to meet some influential persons from the area of contemporary dance in the country and were treated in accordance to the “three points” described few pages earlier. We made them a part of something and they felt that the work produced a rewarding result.



*Visionari* meeting (Kilowatt Festival, Sansepolcro, 2017) ©Elisa Nocentini

**The *Visionari*  
strategy by  
Kilowatt  
Festival**

**Luca  
Ricci**

**(Capotrave | Kilowatt,  
Sansepolcro)**

Kilowatt Festival, and its CapoTrave founder company, decided to create an innovative project about active spectatorship. This was the first initiative in Italy (and among the first ones in Europe) to put participatory programming clearly at the centre of the creative thinking of a performing art festival. From 2006 CapoTrave/Kilowatt has been launching a local call to recruit people who want to join a group of active spectators, with the task of selecting a part of the next year's festival program (9 shows each year, selected through videos among more than 300 proposals received through a public call for emerging artists). This group of spectators – called *Visionari* – had to be made up by non-professional people only; they had to be simply supporting or passionate about theatre and dance, better yet if not interested in both, trying to kindle and to increase their interest through this project.

The first year we gathered 10 people, and those were the nucleus from which our *Visionari* project began. Year after year, the project grew up and now every year at least 35 people participate. In 12 years, more than 160 citizens from Sansepolcro (a town of only 16.000 inhabitants) and the surrounding area have been completing the experience of being *Visionari* for at least one year – but some of them have been *Visionari* for many years: everyone who wants to join us is welcome!

The dialogue between artists and *Visionari* begins before the performances: after watching each show on video, the *Visionari* compile one “form of vision” for each one of the over 300 show proposals of the yearly selection. These over 300 forms featuring non-professional points of view about the shows are sent to all the artists (each artist receives a form) and this already causes a series of reactions from the artists side. Frequently the artists thank *Visionari* for their attention, because they are accustomed to programmers who do not even answer them. Sometimes the artists articulate a dialogue with the *Visionari*, often asking them



to better explain their points of view, rarely even disagreeing with what they wrote.

The companies of the 9 shows invited each year to the festival by the *Visionari* usually have a meeting with them in the morning, the day after their performance. Every day about 35 *Visionari* meet up with 3 companies for a total of 3-hour meetings each day. Meetings are public, and many professionals invited at the festival can join them, as well as the citizens of Sansepolcro and anyone who wants to be part of it.

These meetings between *Visionari* and artists can be very different, depending on the impressions that the show has inspired in the *Visionari*: sometimes the meetings are a loving talk in which the *Visionari* publicly express their interest in the performance seen the night before, other times *Visionari* are divided into opposing groups with many different opinions. Usually there is not a total hostility, because some of the *Visionari* chose to invite that particular show and therefore, even though somebody is disappointed (note that they select through video, which is not the same as seeing a live performance), those who selected the performance feel obliged to highlight the positive aspects of the show.

The reaction of the artists is differentiated: some of them are very closed to any kind of criticism, others try to better understand what is being said to them. In all cases, what every observer underlines is the good level of art-works analysis to which *Visionari* have come, both individually and collectively.

## The effects of being *Visionari*

Sansepolcro is located in an inner area of Central Italy, on the Apennine Mountains; it is a village of only 16.000 inhabitants, from where many talented young people go away to seek employment opportunities in more central areas and in metropolitan cities. In Sansepolcro one of the greatest painters of the European Renaissance, Piero della Francesca, was born and many of his works are preserved in the local civic museum: from those precious memories the village has developed a very strong identity, linked to historical re-enactments and to the Fifteenth century.

In this context it has never been so easy to present contemporary performative languages, or experimental dance and theatre. At the beginning, people looked at the festival as something far away from a high view of culture, and even today a part of the town continues to be distrustful of our proposal. So, the *Visionari* have been, are and will be our breakthrough project to hook up new people and make them part of our project.

Around the *Visionari*, a first community nucleus begun to perceive the festival as its own, something that belongs to them, something that they themselves have to spread because it is creating a new and further identity of the town, which is neither more nor less important than the Renaissance period, but for its innovative taste it needs ambassadors for being introduced. This project has made our spectators more partisan, lined up on the side of the innovation and on the side of the theatrical and choreographic research.

Many of them have also grown up in personal knowledge: some of them did not know the difference between set-design and choreography (in Italian the two words are similar: “coreografia” and “scenografia”), or many say: “I do not want to see dance video, because I do not understand anything about dance”. Our strategy has never been giving them a lesson, rather,

we explain them technical terms or our aesthetic vision and we leave them alone and together, as a group: for us this is much more formative than many lessons.

We always point out that *Visionari* is a training project, but certainly not an educational one, where someone is supposed to teach someone else what to think and to like. We believe that this approach determines a real growth for people and a true personal pleasure in discovering the new languages of the scene.

The main achievement with *Visionari* is to create a sense of belonging to the project. When *Visionari* enter our theatre, they feel truly at home, they feel part of a team. In everyday life, they are teachers, factory workers, bank executives, supermarket salesmen, architects, but when they arrive at the Teatro alla Misericordia, they are part of an organisation that works professionally on the contemporary scene.

Each year, during the winter months, we host from 15 to 18 creative residencies, even beyond Be SpectACTIVE!; at the end of each of them we organise an open rehearsal. After the performance, we usually make a brief discussion between the artists and the audience: almost always the artists tell us that they rarely found such an attentive, reactive, respectful audience of people, able to put themselves in the perspective of the artist for trying to help him/her on the path of creation. Not all the open rehearsals' spectators are *Visionari*, but every time at least a dozen of them attend the evening show: we believe that their presence make the whole audience stay and is able to give a special tone to the dialogue with the artists.

Another success of the *Visionari* work is their habit to organise themselves to go and see other shows in theatres of neighbouring areas, or even farther, to Rome or Milan: some of them have become real theatre and dance fans, when they were not at all before. Now, many of them know by name or in person some of the most innovative artists of the contemporary scene.

### The future perspectives of the *Visionari* project

The *Visionari* work is really quite hard, long and complex. It is not easy to engage in this type of action people who have no cultural interest. This type of project provides opportunities to convoke elites. Perhaps we may involve people who were not interested in theatre and dance, and thanks to the project these may become their interest, but it is difficult to involve someone who does not have any previous cultural interest at all. This means that there is a tremendous prospective for involving new potential and refractory segments of audience and that we must aim to involve them. A lot of work can be done around the themes of active involvement of new audience groups: every different goal requires a different project.

For us, the common denominator of each project must always be listening. We can hope to have good results only if we give people the idea that we are really interested in what they think. If a person feels involved and responsible within a communal process, he/she will feel part of it and will commit to becoming an active ambassador, also able to encourage others to be involved. Our goals continue to be political, and are linked with people emancipation, with the development of their skills and knowledge. We are not pleasing people, or just finding a cute expedient to involve them, here it is to imagine, through art, a new way of being active citizens.

### From the *Visionari* experiment to Be SpectACTIVE!

In 2012, we decided to find out if in Europe there was any other experience similar to ours, or at least if there were organisations willing to experience our format. So, CapoTrave/Kilowatt's artistic director Luca Ricci engaged the cultural manager Giuliana Ciancio in organising a conference entitled "Be Spect- ACTIVE!" which was held in Sansepolcro, during Kilowatt festival 2012.

Later, we wrote a first co-operation project to apply for funding from the European Commission. Our first application in 2013 was unsuccessful. Instead, the project was selected in the first call of Creative Europe, in 2014.

At the beginning, our main goals were the following:

- 1) getting in contact with some European project particularly experienced in giving an active role to spectators;
- 2) spreading our *Visionari*'s format across Europe so that it could be experienced by other organisations concerned with the subject;
- 3) creating evaluation indicators and paradigms to compare the experiences, with respect to the results achieved by each one of us;
- 4) being inspired by new possible variations of our active spectatorship model;
- 5) becoming part of a European debate on this topic, where we could bring our experience and be inspired by other organisations;
- 6) sharing international co-production processes that, before Be SpectACTive!, were excluded from our organisations for economic reasons;
- 7) implementing the program of creative residencies we had just started with the management of a new theatre venue, by giving it immediately an international dimension;
- 8) experimenting the possibilities of social media to connect people in co-creative processes.

At the end of our project, we can say that most of these results have been achieved. Only point 8 was a failure, not because of a lack of time, but because we realised that people like to share through social media basic and funny contents, while they are not interested in using these platforms for in-depth analyses such as those required by artistic creation.

## How Be SpectACTive! made our organisation evolve

The experience of participatory programming made our organisation evolve in terms of national and international visibility. At the international level, the project allowed us to take part in many conferences in Sweden, Belgium, Estonia, Spain, Portugal, Hungary, Croatia, UK, to share our experience. At the national level, our activity was already well known in Italy, but the launch of Be SpectACTive! stimulated some Italian organisations to ask us to apply the same *Visionari* format in their territories. Since 2015 an Italian network called “L'Italia dei Visionari” was set up, linking 10 festivals and theatres that are now managing one *Visionari* group each. We consider this as an indirect result, due to the further visibility that Be SpectACTive! has been giving us.

CapoTrave/Kilowatt is a small organisation with only 4 full-time employees and 20 part-time employees (mostly during the summer period). Before Be SpectACTive!, full-time employees were 3 and part-time ones were 10, so the project brought growth in numbers. The goal of broadening, diversifying and deepening the knowledge of our audience has always been a priority for us, at least since 2006, when we started the *Visionari* project. We imagine ourselves as an artistically led, yet audience-centric organisation. Certainly, Be SpectACTive! has further motivated us in defining this perspective. During the 4-year project, there has been no change in our organisational structure, because it was already very clear for us the centrality of our work with the audience, but, no doubt, with Be SpectACTive! we were able to collect more resources than before, so we could get better results: sometimes the goal is clear, but you do not have the resources to achieve it, that was our condition before Be SpectACTive!.

## The unexpected

The unexpected of this project are 14 groups of Visionaries born spontaneously in Portugal, thanks to the work of Artemrede (that was not our partner, but met us through Be SpectACTive!). The unexpected is the fact that our York partners started a Visionary group when they were already managing a beautiful active-engagement project for young spectators called TakeOver, and also that the same York partners, thanks to Be SpectACTive!, changed their mission that had been defined some decades ago. The unexpected is a big group of potential new exciting partners (from Brut Wien to Buda Kortrijk, from Café de las Artes in Santander to Dublin Theatre Festival, from Nitra Festival to Goteborg Dans o Teater Festival) that are sharing with us a second edition of the project: this means that we have been able to define a clear identity of our project and to communicate the work done so far. The unexpected is the success of the European Spectators Days that has been actively involving – before and during the event – many different groups of spectators who responded to the same questions at the same time: in this way they are creating a bridge between each other. It makes tangible the attempt of building a European identity and it is a concrete effort to deepen together some interesting topics related to active spectatorship.



Radu-Alexandru Nica (RO) – 10  
(Radu Stanca National Theatre of Sibiu, 2018) ©Dragoş Dumitru

**Sibiu  
International  
Theatre  
Festival**

**Vicentiu  
Rahau**

**(Radu Stanca  
National Theatre,  
Sibiu)**

**Introduction**

Sibiu International Theatre Festival (FITS), the main annual performing arts festival in Romania and one of the most important in Europe in terms of magnitude and relevance, offers a programme that gathers in town participants from over 72 countries, presents over 500 events which take place in 70 different venues, and expects over 67.000 spectators daily. Leading performing arts companies, Romanian and foreign directors, critics, local and regional cultural tourism operators, foreign cultural operators, 650.000 spectators from the local, regional and international community meet in Sibiu to celebrate, over the course of ten days, artistic creation and creativity in an event aimed at promoting internationally recognized cultural values.

Sibiu has always been a place for the spectacular; as recognition of its cultural excellence, the city was granted the title of European Capital of Culture 2007. The Festival offers the audiences representative productions of the major Romanian and foreign companies, outdoor performances in the old city, the citadels and the medieval fortifications around Sibiu. The festival integrates: Theatre Performances – Dance Performances – Contemporary Circus – Street Performances – Music concerts – Opera – Heritage – Film – Performances in Churches and Non-conventional Spaces – Organ Concerts in Transylvania’s Fortified Churches – Play-reading Performances and Radio Theatre – Drama and Arts Management Universities Convention – Music of the World – Contemporary Art – Specialised Workshops – Sibiu Performing Arts Market – Book Launches – Meetings of Cultural Networks – Platform for outstanding doctoral research in the fields of Performing Arts and Cultural Management – Walk of Fame. Every year, the festival publishes a considerable number of books, including an anthology of texts outlining the theme of the festival and an anthology of contemporary plays, which are presented in the reading performances section.

### **Radu Stanca National Theatre (1788)**

The Radu Stanca National Theatre, organiser of the Sibiu International Theatre Festival, is a repertoire theatre (121 performances), with both a Romanian and a German Department. In 2016, the theatre presented 360 performances in Sibiu and went on 52 regional, national and worldwide combined tours. In Sibiu, it presents performances in 6 venues (“Radu Stanca” National Theatre – main stage and studio, CAVAS Studio and 3 venues at the Fabrica de Cultura – an old factory transformed into a cultural centre).

### **Sibiu Performing Arts Market (1997)**

Moreover, the festival continues the development of a performing arts market and creative dialogue by supporting independent theatre, networks between theatre schools and academies, new dramaturgy publishing and creative experiments. Additionally, the Sibiu Performing Arts Market offers all Romanian and international professionals the opportunity of developing the language of the free market, in a world with an ever-growing need for dialogue.

### **Department of Drama and Theatre Studies – Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu (1997 and 2000)**

Founded in 1997 with six students, the Department of Drama and Theatre Studies has seen over 500 graduated students during its 20 years of existence. Alongside the BA degrees in Acting and Drama Studies and Cultural Management, starting from 2017 the school also offers a BA programme in Choreography; together with the students in the MA programmes (in Acting and Cultural institutions and projects management), the department

counts now with 90 students. Having a close partnership with the school, the Radu Stanca National Theatre involves the students in many of its activities (performances and management), both during the theatre season and in FITS and the Sibiu Performing Arts Market.

### **Volunteer Programme (2007)**

FITS has always involved enthusiastic volunteers, but a structured format for volunteering was only established in 2007 (in the framework of Sibiu European Capital of Culture). In last year’s edition (2017), 735 volunteers received a non-formal education, during 6 months, which included learning about FITS, Sibiu and its surrounding regions and Romania. The majority of FITS volunteers (80%) are from Sibiu and its surrounding region, and each year, 75% of them are new volunteers.

### **Education**

All these structures, either through collaboration or by themselves, cover the three types of education: formal, non-formal and informal. The Department of Drama and Theatre Studies at the University offers formal education at an academic level, and in collaboration with the Radu Stanca National Theatre, the students also receive an informal education through a very practical-driven approach; they are offered opportunities throughout the year to participate in a professional environment, applying their specific knowledge in performing arts and cultural management during the theatres’ year-round artistic projects, the Sibiu International Theatre Festival and the Sibiu Performing Arts Market. The Radu Stanca National Theatre, through the Volunteering Programme, also caters to the community at large,



offering non-formal learning programmes that not only include specific knowledge about the Festival and the Market, but also about Sibiu and Romania. The non-formal education is consolidated by the practical application during the Festival and the Market, but also, for those volunteers passionate and willing, participation continues in the cultural events of the theatre.

### **Building a New Audience**

The management of Radu Stanca National Theatre has long since realised that a structured approach to building new audiences is needed in order to support sustainable community and cultural development. By researching community needs, international trends and good practices, it was established that outdoor performance can reach the highest number of audience, as they are easily accessible to all members of a community. With a strong presence during the Sibiu International Theatre Festival, outdoor performances have provided a high level of entertainment for the city, but have also introduced many audience members to the indoor performances that are sometimes perceived as having a lower level of accessibility. The management of the festival always carefully selects its outdoor performances so that they may offer the greatest benefits to the audience, and through a strategic marketing plan, continues to create new audiences every year for its indoor performances.

An equally strong medium for creating new audience is the Volunteer Programme; every year young people come into contact with the programme, learn about Sibiu, its performing arts scene, local and national culture and the get to meet and work with nationally and internationally acclaimed artists. Moreover, they are given the opportunity to see award-winning performances, participate in conferences with international artistic professionals and get to experience a variety of artistic events

in a structured environment. For most of these volunteers, their experience in the programme is an introduction into the world of culture and performing arts; as such, they have the opportunity to be exposed to the latest international performances as well as to broaden their horizon by having the unique experience of helping to organise these events. Most of the young people participating in the Volunteer Programme continue to be active consumers of culture and arts, not only for the theatre's performances, but also for other cultural organisation's events. Moreover, some of the Volunteer Programme's participants not only return for more editions of the festival, but also volunteer for other cultural events in Sibiu.

### **Participatory Programming**

The Radu Stanca National Theatre's management decided to start the Participatory Programming during the preparation of the 23rd edition of the festival; it began with performance proposals from a group of students enrolled in the Theatre Studies and Cultural Management programme, given that in Romania there are few precedents of audience members offering proposals to a festival. 25 people came at the first meeting, only 5 returned for the second one, but that was to be expected as it was a new programme for both the Radu Stanca National Theatre and its audience. As it's largely accepted that during the first year of a new programme's implementation the process is greater than the result, the organisers decided to work with a group of students. Given that they are both professionals in training and also representative of the young generation, they are equipped to identify the current needs of Romanian audiences, particularly regarding the performances to be presented at the Sibiu International Theatre Festival. For these reasons, they were asked to focus their research and proposals on new and internationally acclaimed performances and artists. As a result, in December

2015 and 2016 the group decided on two international companies and in February 2016 and 2017, on two Romanian companies; the selected companies presented their performances during the 23rd and 24th edition of the Sibiu International Theatre Festival respectively.

During the first two years, the Participatory Programme was comprised of students only, but in October 2017 the group was opened to adult volunteers of the Sibiu International Theatre Festival. Early on, the group decided to function in a small format (no more than 20 people), so as to have the possibility of in depth discussions regarding the proposals: each participant had the option to express his/her opinion, compare the performance with other performances selected by the festival artistic board in the official programme, understand all the implications of a company participation in a festival (fees, per diems, technical rider, accommodation, transportation, marketing), while also evaluating if or how the proposed performance was compatible with the festival style and audience.

Members of the Participatory Programme had viewings of performances (proposed by the artistic director or by themselves), which they followed-up with discussions regarding the artistic aspects and the needs of the Romanian audiences. After 5 sessions the group selected one performance that would be presented during the Sibiu International Theatre Festival. The group viewed different types of performances (one-man-shows, contemporary dance, circus, theatre), all the while focusing on offering new types of performances to the festival. Attention to detail and openness to one another's opinions helped the group make appropriate decisions and propose performances that cater to the diverse and complex needs of the festival audiences. Different resources were used to find new artists and performances for the festival; as such, the group developed the sessions by viewing performances on DVDs, web links and, whenever possible, live performance. To further enhance their horizons,

members participated in the meetings, workshops and conferences held during the 22nd, 23rd and 24th edition of the Sibiu International Theatre Festivals, creating new contacts, and discovering new artists and companies.

### **Education and culture through artistic quality**

Since the beginning of the Be SpectACTive! project, a debate has been carried on among the partners about the quality of artistic productions versus the importance of process in artistic productions. There are many interpretations today on what quality means in the performing arts field. For Radu Stanca National Theatre and its general manager, Constantin Chiriac, artistic quality always means a unique artistic proposal, which must equal at least the level of the previous productions, if not even be higher. The process can be easily understood if there is a high-level artistic result.

Gianina Cărbunariu's proposal, *Common People*, and Radu-Alexandru Nica's proposal, *10*, were considered unique works from the beginning, considering the importance of the whistleblowing, corruption and religion issues at the European level, especially in Eastern Europe. Gianina started her project by interviewing whistleblowers in Italy, Romania and England and after that she wrote a completely new theatre play. Radu-Alexandru and his team had long discussions with atheists, believers and specialists (in Croatia and Romania) regarding the position of Religion in contemporary society. After that, Csaba Székely wrote a completely new play inspired by the discussions and by the Ten Commandments in the Old Testament. "The play shows the characters in usual, but also exceptional life situations; each moral decision made at some point by one of the characters has a decisive effect on the life of the next one" (Csaba Székely).

In both theatre projects, actors from Radu Stanca National Theatre are performing according to the quality of interpretation required by Romanian spectators. After each residency, three in total, both projects were presented to spectators in order to receive a feedback from them and also to open the fourth wall for the actors, according to today's needs, problems and solutions of spectators. If there is no high quality in a performance and in the actor's interpretation, spectators will be only interested in the approached social subject or in the process of exchanging ideas with artists. But, the role of the performing arts is to level up the expectations of the spectators through text, interpretation, lights, scenography etc. and to rise up more and new questions about different aspects of their own life.

Also, the question of making artistic productions, both professionals and amateurs, has been examined throughout the four-year Be SpectACTive! project. We all know Augusto Boal's theatre, but today, we consider that a high-level artistic approach is needed, through the interpretation of professional actors, in order to assure high quality for each performance. An amateur actor can be a genius in one or more representations, but only a professional artist can assure the same high-level interpretation required for all the performances, bringing more value for the spectators and determining their growing interest in living a continuous non-formal education through culture.

Education through culture has been a driving force through which the International Theatre Festival in Sibiu has managed to build an identity since its first edition, together with the Sibiu Performing Arts Market, the Radu Stanca National Theatre and the Volunteering Programme. Their work is now an example of success. When a cultural product proposed to a certain audience has a real meaning, it is economically and culturally valuable and its benefit is perceived not only by the individuals but also by the local, national and European community.



Displace Yourself Theatre (UK) – *Food for thought*  
(Kilowatt Festival, Sansepolcro, 2017) ©Luca Del Pia

## **TakeOver Festival**

**Damian  
Cruden**

**Juliet  
Forster**

**John  
Tomlinson**

**(York Citizens  
Theatre, York)**

## **Introduction**

York Theatre Royal (YTR) is nationally recognised as a leader in the field of community engagement, our purpose in this area is to provide the opportunities for our community to have a lifelong engagement with theatre and to achieve their potential through the creative arts. Our participation work has a particular emphasis on children and young people, (preschool, within school and out of hours), so that theatre becomes a natural part of their culture and enriches their lives, but we also ensure that some points of engagement continue to be available as they grow and move through life. As an organisation we have been on a journey over the last ten years that has seen us move from simply being “experts” in theatre, to becoming “enablers” for others to create art and have a voice in what we put on our stages. Our groundbreaking TakeOver project had a big impact on this move, as had our large-scale, artistically ambitious, site-specific community productions, engaging hundreds of local people in all areas of theatre making.

We were therefore delighted to become involved in Be SpectACTive! as the focus of the project felt so much in line with the ethos of our organisation. We felt that the project offered us the following key opportunities:

- ◆ Further questioning how audiences can be more engaged in the process of theatre
- ◆ Sharing with other theatres across Europe what we had learnt through TakeOver over the years, learning at the same time from other theatres’ models
- ◆ Invigorating our TakeOver project with new ideas and by connecting the participants with like-minded audiences in other countries
- ◆ Exploring the possibility of involving older members of our community in a programming project

- ◆ Bringing European artists to York, and explore new processes for our community to influence and shape new work

The last point was the most compelling reason for our involvement, as there are limited opportunities to bring international work to our theatre, and we were very excited by the possibilities offered by a project that opened up ways of audience members impacting on a piece of work in progress, and genuinely contributing to its development.

### **Community Participation**

Before joining Be SpectACTive!, we already had an established annual festival in York where decisions were taken by active spectators. TakeOver Festival is an arts festival organised and run entirely by 12-26-year olds at York Theatre Royal since 2009. With responsibility for programming, producing and marketing a diverse and ambitious programme, which spans the arts, TakeOver has become a leading festival and celebration of contemporary culture.

Our involvement in this four-year programme inspired us to develop this strand of work and to enable a wider cross-section of our community to get involved. We learnt specifically about the work of Kilowatt Festival and their *Visionari* group – we challenged ourselves to see if there would be interest in something similar in York.

We reached out to the public and selected a group of 22 *Visionari* who are now developing an understanding for the theatre we make and present, in our ambitions, challenges and artistic plans for the coming years. They are a group with very different backgrounds, from across the region. They were selected through application and had to write a composition on how the opportunity would benefit them and why they thought they were best

placed to make an impact on our programming. They will discuss, debate and select projects that we will present in our studio theatre across a whole week in November 2018. The process will be completely fair and democratic, which will ensure that the festival will reflect the people of our city. From 6 to 8 shows, for different demographic audience, will be selected through four key areas – diversity, artistic quality, audience experience and suitability – to be presented during the week. The project is possible by understanding the success of Kilowatt Festival and using key values to embed it into our working strategies with our community.

### **Collaborating across Europe**

The project enables and supports artistic residencies from Europe to the UK and vice versa, which is critical for the development of artists, their work and cultural understanding. It also means that the partners, venues and festivals, must work together to produce these works – which has been challenging. Whilst a key part of the project is the artistic residency, based on the process and not on the product, the results do not get shared or toured across the network. For a venue the costs and logistics to programme a project are challenging. Some of the positive work done with a community is therefore lost, as there is no legacy for the project, and very few full productions are made as part of this programme. Working alongside partners and venues of different sizes is a positive value to understanding the wider spectrum of arts and culture across Europe, but it implies that some things are not feasible/appropriate.

The key to a successful residency was very clearly demonstrated to lie in the selection of the artist or company who genuinely have community engagement at the heart of its creative process combined with a commissioning theatre that shared those values. Then, the venues would work with the artists ahead of the residencies to ensure they were considering how to work with participants

and how to integrate it into their process. York Theatre Royal only put forward proposals for the project that had come through a call-out for artists who had a specialist interest/skill in that area. We interviewed potentially interesting companies and selected from those, to ensure that we were only presenting proposals for commissioning that stood a good chance of furthering the research purpose of the project around active spectatorship, and that we were actually fulfilling the residency brief. This approach was not universally adopted across all participating theatres, so that the project resulted in a number of residencies that were artistically interesting, but were not really contributing to the key research question. For us as an organisation, that still had a very positive effect, as it brought us in contact with some very interesting UK companies, who we are continuing to work with, but ultimately it did not fulfil one of the main reasons for us joining the project in the first place.

### **Progression of TakeOver Festival throughout this period**

In 2014, the TakeOver Board was responsible for programming the entire festival without the hierarchy of a Senior Management Team. The Board focused on work that would excite new and existing audiences. They wanted to include in the programme something for everybody in the community to tick the box. Including “pay as you feel” performances and free Front of House programming throughout the week; live music and family activity. It was a rich diverse week with sell out shows and a vibrant atmosphere. The Board was very proud of what they had achieved in ticket sales and had clearly displayed an understanding of the audiences demographic and the sort of programming that would make everyone smile, but also bring work unlike anything usually programmed at YTR. They thought about risk and balanced that with intelligent choices. It was a

successful and very busy festival. This year also for the first time, TakeOver developed a widening participation project called Access All Areas, an outreach project designed to reach out and include young people who are vulnerable, marginalised or disadvantaged in some way. That will be developed over the next 3 years.

2015 – This was an exceptional year. With YTR undergoing a capital refurbishment project, TakeOver was to happen offsite at The National Railway Museum. This presented huge challenges and equally huge opportunities but after the successes of the previous year, the Board felt ready for a new challenge and was excited to furtherly innovate TakeOver Festival and felt that this year they would recruit the help of a Senior Management Team. This became a true collaboration between Arts and Heritage. The team worked alongside the National Railway Museum to meet a brief drawn up asking the team to find new ways of audiences engaging with and experiencing the Museums vast collections. The team needed to consider the difference between the museum visitors and theatre audiences as well as a wider and more diverse demographic. A lot of the programming was commissioned and site specific. With the Artistic Director making the most of every space and collection and the opportunity it offered. The team wanted to represent every art form, there was theatre, music, dance, clowning, film installation, immersive film screening, orchestras, performance poetry, shadow puppet making and more. The team also recognising the large number of family visitors created an ambitious and meaningful education programme that involved several offers to families, from creative encounters in the space to interactive craft stations, day long workshops and lots of family oriented artistic programming that impressed the National Railway Museum and its visitors. The team learned more than they ever though possible from this festival and created something really special that not only reached more audiences than any TakeOver before it, but taught



the National Railway Museum some very important lessons about how to engage creatively with their visitors and audiences, about the possibilities open to them. But, most importantly, the TakeOver team changed perceptions about what a team of young people could achieve. They recruited a large team of volunteers and backstage crew to help support the delivery of the festival, including young people from the Access All Areas project who gained so much from being part of this peer led project – confidence, new skills and insight, raised aspirations, peer to peer mentorship etc. At the end of the festival 3 members of the Access All Areas project joined the TakeOver Board and would continue to be active members for the next 3 years.

2016 – Following the epic nature of the National Railway Museum residency the team had the opportunity to bring all of that learning and experience back into the brand newly refurbished YTR building for its homecoming. They wanted to push every opportunity for programming interesting and diverse work that would not usually be programmed at YTR. Using every space to their advantage. The festival felt like a celebration of everything they had learned and achieved by programming the heritage site and they were working like professionals. Another fantastic festival. The team also won a York Culture Award for Best Festival, which was received by members of the Board and Access All Areas who attended the awards ceremony.

2017 – This year the Board recruited a new Senior Management Team to lead the programming for TakeOver Festival 2017. This was a festival that walls all about breaking down walls. The team wanted to look at programming work that was challenging and political and spoke to their own generation. They wanted to programme work that would appeal but this was not their priority. They wanted to give opportunities to artists who had something important to say, to developing companies and artists and to new work. In order to get audiences to see this

new work they developed a programme of ‘lead-in’ events that would engage with new audiences in different ways so that they could talk about the festival, deliver marketing and build relationships with the community in a more diverse way before the festival week itself. These events included, Hip Hop Block party, Vintage Fair and Postcard Performance Tail around York’s City Walls. All these events were free and had wide reach into the community. Again, Access All Areas were fully involved in the delivery of the festival and programming and decision making but now with much more confident voices.

The Board acquired so much knowledge and understanding about the implication of programming a Festival, not only at York Theatre Royal but also on a large scale in a Heritage site. Each year they had different ideas about how and in what way to engage with audiences, and had good clear reasons for doing so taking advantage of all of the learning along the way. They wanted to challenge perceptions, challenge ideas and take risks, they wanted to excite new audiences and delight the audiences that do return to the festival year after year. They wanted to widen participation and include in the festival more young people who had less access to opportunities. But they also want to grow as individuals, as artists and professionals and prove that they developed a rich understanding of the arts landscape in York and beyond. They have reached a point where they are ready for the next evolution of TakeOver to happen so that they can again acquire new knowledge, experience and grow. It is through TakeOver and the insight and creativity of these young participants that YTR is able to acquire, knowledge, experience and grow alongside them. It is this dialogue and mutual learning that makes TakeOver Festival at York Theatre Royal such a valuable and meaningful project.

**Final  
considerations:  
the legacy of  
participatory  
programming  
experiences**

**Lluís  
Bonet**  
**(University of  
Barcelona)**

Participatory programming won't probably be a majoritarian option for theatres and festivals, anyway, it has been slowly growing up during the last decade, following some general social and political trends. These explain why an increasing number of audience participants are looking for more engaged experiences, and at the same time cultural institutions are required to be closer to citizen's motivations and values, and more socially engaged.

Contrary to what many people may think, participatory experiences don't mean more amateurism, but more professionalism. This type of strategy does not imply a loss of professional work, or the replacement of professionals by amateur volunteer staff, instead it requires new jobs and new skills. The artistic director, with a traditional role of priest, connecting the world of gods (the artists) with ordinary people, is substituted by a mediator: a professional able to speak and understand both the artistic and the audience languages, and to propose different ways to engage creativity and participation. Staff with mediation capacity and networking experience brings professionals together, able to connect organisations and groups from different communities, to engage people of heterogeneous background, to animate open debates outside hierarchical value systems.

Thus, their task begins by disseminating the programme and promoting a configuration of people that meets the needs and expectations of the artistic project. From here on, the staff accompanies, trains, clarifies doubts, helps establish objectives and clear criteria, and encourages participants in the tensest or conflicting moments. Once the process of selecting the programming is finished, it is important to follow the results (positive or disappointing) of the expectations generated at the time of programming. It is also important to refine and transmit the collective experience obtained, without conditioning the decisions of each new group, as well as the resulting legacy.

During the process, there could be difficult moments. Some interesting people are more difficult to manage because beyond their brilliant contributions, their form of relationship with others generates incomprehension, or even tension. In any case, it is important to take into account the particular needs and incentives of each participant: social, aesthetic, experimental, or even integration into the professional environment.

Choosing a set of performances to show to your neighbours, relatives and friends is a great challenge. One of the most interesting debates taking place when a new participatory programming experience begins, or is renewed, is the discussion on the procedures and the selection criteria. Sometimes more controversy is generated in this key phase, fundamental for the whole process, than in the very discussion about the final list of shows to be programmed.

Participatory programming is at the same time a goal, a challenge and a threat. It is an opportunity to reflect on the mission of the institution, on the different possible ways to achieve its goals, to connect with audiences and with artistic proposals. It is also a way to place the project in the middle of the regional artistic system, and among stakeholders. It is a process that takes place over time and an opportunity.

## CREATIVE RESIDENCIES

## INTRODUCTION

**Félix  
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Among the tools developed by Be SpectACTive!, creative residencies – also called “participatory residencies” – are a central pillar of the project, next to participatory programming (Chapter 1) and digital participation (Chapter 3). While participatory programming groups intervene in processes of decisions regarding a part of the institution’s choices, creative residencies propose forms of participation that are supposed to impact on artistic creation itself, inviting artists to create in a direct relation with citizens.

In four years, Be SpectACTive! produced twenty-one new theatre and dance shows thanks to fifty-four local creative residencies, through various forms of participation. Beside nine “small scale” residencies mobilising digital participation, twelve “large scale” residencies took place: each one of these projects included three creative residencies in three different countries, allowing the artistic teams to get in contact with different local contexts and communities. After that four-year experience, it is now time to take a step back on the projects and to question their goals, their methods, and their impacts on the various actors involved: what changes do participatory residencies generate in each one of them, and in their relations? What are their achievements and limits, according to the different criteria that could be used to judge them? This is what this chapter intends to do, giving voice to different points of view: theatres and festivals partners of the project, selected artistic teams, and participants in the residencies.

### What is a participatory residency?

Usually, an artistic residency is a programme conceived to invite artists away from their usual environment and obligations for a certain period, providing them a time to reflect, research, and eventually present and/or produce their work. They are



Barbora Látalová (CZ) – *Different?*  
(Bakelit Multi Art Center, Budapest, 2016) ©Félix Dupin-Meynard

supposed to allow an artistic team to explore their practices within another community or context, meeting new people and new atmospheres, using unfamiliar materials, experiencing life and creation in a new space. The relationship between the resident and the host is often an important aspect of a residency programme. Sometimes residents are quite secluded, with long time to focus and investigate their own practice. At other times, they become involved in a community – giving presentations, workshops, or collaborating with local artists, audience of the hosting place, groups of citizens. In this case, we talk about “participative residencies”, even if the so-called “participation” may concern very different people, whether in number or diversity, and take different forms of inclusion and power-sharing along the creation process.

Participative residencies are not a new practice in the performing arts field. For a long time, many artists have involved participants (amateurs, audience, citizens, specific communities) in their creative process, under various denominations: “participatory art”, “socially-engaged art”, “community-based art” and so on. While some of these forms attempt to include non-professionals in the production of a show or a piece, considering participation as the very foundation of an artistic practice, some other would use participation as a simple tool to “make better shows” thanks to new inspirations and relations.

### **Be SpectACTive! framework**

In the frame of Be SpectACTive!, artistic residencies followed the audience-focused model and required the artist to engage with audience members, or more globally, with non-professional artists whom they chose to work with. Artists were expected to include groups of local people in their working process, but they were free to choose their own methods. The participants engaged

in the residencies reflected the particular interests of the artists and the subject of their projects. Each hosting organisation was responsible for creating a connection when artists chose to engage with specific social groups of participants. At the end of each residency, artistic teams were expected to present their work in an open rehearsal and engage the audience members in an open dialogue.

What did the particular framework of Be SpectACTive! specifically imply, regarding participative residencies? From the project’s initial definition, only few elements came to define and frame the shape of residencies, regardless of the trans-local scale of the network. The artistic teams involved were proposed by the artistic directors of the theatres and festivals partners of the project, often chosen in their own countries, and selected during the network meetings through a common assessment process. Once they were selected, artists had to implement their residencies in three venues, located in different countries. They benefited from a budget of 20.000 euros, which they could use as they pleased, forming the team of their choice. These residencies were co-produced by three different partners – each one having its own habits, audience, relationships with the local context, and its own perception of that type of projects – that usually impacted the implementation of the project at different stages.

Concerning the participatory methods, the types of artists and the kind of project, no other specific constraints were put, but money, time and space. That led to many different types of residencies, either in terms of assigned goals, subjects of the project, participatory methods, artistic skills and aesthetics, local contexts, types of external partners involved, social characteristic of the participants, and, finally, interactions that may have occurred within these unique frameworks.

## Contexts and practices

In the framework of Be SpectACTive!, all the projects were carried out by very different teams (e.g. in terms of number of professional performers, integration of other skills such as community work, DJ, sound or light creation, video), giving greater or smaller roles to professionals in the participatory process. The topics treated were very diverse too: diversity, migrations, dreams, football, food habits, conflicts, whistle-blowers, bodies, Ten Commandments, etc. For certain subjects, particular groups could be sought by the artists (old people, women, people who experienced migrations, footballers, etc.), for others there was no specific target, as the proposal generated more or less palatability, depending on how it resonated with the potential participants. The groups' composition, from 5 to 15 people per residency, was very variable, especially in terms of cultural capital: in some cases participants were already spectators, with refined and strong appetites for the world of performing arts; in others, the new recruits had never been in a theatre before, and were discovering artistic practices totally new to them.

In each country, participatory practices are not developed or perceived in the same way. Sometimes they represent innovation, some other times they are commonly practiced in many artistic institutions. More generally, language, social representations, the weight of history, the shape of cultural policies and the contemporary art scene offer a framework that shines from one country to another. In Be SpectACTive!, hosting venues, their relationships with their audiences, neighbourhood and local partners also influenced the shape of the residencies and the social composition of participants.

## Participation as co-creation?

Someone considers that the current period constitutes a participatory turn in cultural policies, and that artistic activities have undergone a deep shift from production *to* or *for* audiences to creation *with* them (Leadbeater, 2009). But, “making art with”, is it necessarily co-creating? And if that is “co-creation”, what is the sharing of creative power?

Without a precise definition of the methods, participatory residencies within the Be SpectACTive! experience allowed many types of participation: feedback or debate sessions after open rehearsals, collection of interviews to inspire creation, co-writing the script based on individual or collective narratives, dance or theatre improvisation during creative workshops, one play interpreted by amateurs, co-directing with participants, etc. Thereby, participation can describe different degrees and forms of participant's involvement in the creative process, and influence on the show production.

Some attempts to define a scale of participation, based on participant's influence, could help us to clarify different degrees of participation. For instance, we could consider the scale of participation proposed by Brown et al. (2011), based on participant's levels of creative control, which could be “curatorial”, “interpretive” or “inventive”. A more precise attempt of defining roles scale on the same model was proposed by Be SpectACTive! research team, and can be summarised as follows:

- 1) audience (watching is participating)
- 2) active audience (i.e. open rehearsal, debate, feedback, online contribution, etc.)
- 3) inspirer (i.e. collection of interviews, suggestions, talks, etc.)
- 4) experimenter (i.e. workshops, improvisations, etc.)
- 5) “co-researcher (i.e. creating together from a collective research)



- 6) performer (i.e. influence on the act, but not on the writing)
- 7) co-scenarist (i.e. co-writing from a participant's proposal)
- 8) co-director (i.e. influence on staging, directing, etc.)
- 9) director (i.e. artists being directed by participants)

Of course, these participation profiles depend on the initial frameworks defined by the artist, and on the interaction between artists and participants within those frameworks (participants' behaviour may modify it, according to its degree of flexibility). Participants could take distinct or concomitant roles during the same residency. This scale is just an interim proposal, useful for thinking about the different types of participation in terms of power sharing.

Nevertheless, we should not forget that some asymmetry always exists between artists and participants. Their positions are different: artists are still the masters of the rules, while participants have to follow the rules (even when the rule is to invent a new rule); some are paid, others are – most of the time – volunteers; some have a professional status, while others are called amateurs; their legitimacy is not the same, neither their power. Claiming that participatory residencies could be a means to give “power to the people” may not be incorrect, but it does not question deeply the usual distribution of power within the creative process. However, thanks to the multiple effects they can produce, participatory residencies represent an opportunity to transform the relations between audiences, organisations and artists, as to change the way these actors see their respective roles.

### **Which goals for participative residencies?**

As claimed in the initial project of the network, Be SpectACTive! wished to produce theatre and dance shows which will come to life through a relationship with the audience. Those creative residencies were defined as crucial for the relation among

local audiences and for the artists to get in contact with different cultural contexts. Therefore, officially, their goal was still firstly to produce shows, while their focus was on the process, which had to include a kind of relationship with the audiences. But how and why the relationship with the audience would be interesting and useful for participants, artists, venues and shows? Was participation a simple tool to produce better shows, or might it have had its own aims and virtues? As we will see in this chapter presenting several experiences, the goals assigned to participatory residencies were changing according to the artists' point of view. From their own perspective, artists were looking for different outcomes from the participants – and those outcomes could even be contradictory, driving to misunderstandings about what could be defined as success or failure.

Through the action-research, two ideal types of goals appeared in the discourses of artists, participants and venues, which could be summarised as follows: “participation as a means/creation as an end”, and conversely, “participation as an end/creation as a means”. In other words, the question is: were we mainly focusing on the process or on the product?

On the one hand, someone sees participatory residencies as a redefinition of artistic creation through participation: in that perception, the main goals are to produce better, innovative shows, with the help of participation – the finality being the product. Artists explain, for instance, that working with amateurs may bring more fragility and more authenticity to the performance; that the opportunity to collect feedbacks during the creation process is a way to improve the shows according to the reactions; that collecting some discourses, movements, ideas from the participants can give new inspirations; or that experimentation in different cultural contexts might offer new ideas emerging from the encounter. Thus, in this case, the goal is primarily oriented towards the artistic creation and those responsible for it – artists

and producers – taking the risk of relegating the participants to the background. As we will see further on, stressing on artistic quality can alter the conditions of participation and reduce the participatory ambition – during the construction of the project or during its implementation.

On the other hand, participatory residencies can be seen as a mean to reach other goals than merely creation, such as: opening the doors of the artistic process to audiences; spreading artistic resources and transmitting the will to create to amateurs; helping people express themselves; renewing a venue's or an artist's audience; democratising the cultural institutions or empowering audiences, the finality being often the process itself. In this case, insisting on participation can alter the conditions of artistic creation, at least as it is classically perceived through the judgement on its artistic quality or professional dimension, but it can also argue for a new definition of artistic quality, depending on other values.

Of course, those different goals constitute a continuum rather than a division between two poles, as they are often mixed up and co-existing. That concomitance may involve too ambitious goals for a short-term residency. However, several professionals are more inclined to one side than another, which leads to different consequences for the implementation of residencies. Particularly when the goals of hosting venues, artists and participants contradict each other within the same project. Those contradictions appear within the selection of experiences presented further on in this chapter, according to the point of view of the stakeholders.

### Three types of stakeholders, how many points of view?

Be SpectACTive! creative residencies involved three main types of stakeholders (namely: organisations, artists and participants), who do not have the same positions, the same interests or the same goals, neither the same subjective experiences. In fact, the residencies offered a meeting point for these stakeholders – each one having the opportunity to displace from its usual position. Beyond the description of those residencies as case studies, the interest of this chapter is to confront their points of view and to question their divergences or convergences – from subjective feelings as well as from more critical and analytical explorations, allowing to point out the limits of each residency. Is everyone identifying the same kind of positive and negative effects? How to invent forms of residencies in which each stakeholder can find its place?

Four among the theatres and festivals that hosted Be SpectACTive! creative residencies present their experience: Bakelit in Budapest, Domino in Zagreb, York Theatre Royal in York and Kilowatt Festival in Sansepolcro. They mostly consider creative residencies as linked to the other activities of their artistic institution, and to the tools developed within the whole Be SpectACTive! project. Through the reading, many questions will arise, concerning organisational and material stakes, participatory methods, relations between artists and participants, or long-term reflections about their own organisation.

Two artistic teams (Bridget Fiske and Catherine Simons for *Yès Move, No Move – Moved?* and Zden Brungot Svítěková and Barbara Latalova for *Different?*) will then present their specific projects from an artistic point of view. They evoke their methods and wills, their feelings during and after the residency processes, the difficulties they faced, and what these experiences have brought to their artistic projects and careers.

Finally, three participants (Kinga Szemessy for *Different?*; Urvi Vora and Nikita Khella for *Rise*) will bring up their personal considerations and feelings about the residencies in which they were involved, detailing their role as a participant, what they liked or regretted, and pointing out the limits of these experiences or, more generally, some aspect of the Be SpectACTIVE! project and methods.

In the chapter conclusions, we will establish and analyse the mutual impacts of those residencies and their limits, trying to summarise their conditions of success, in order to draw some lessons for future experiences.



Denf Collective (HR) – *Choreo Denf*  
(Bakelit Multi Art Center, Budapest, 2018) ©Imre Kővágó Nagy

**Move together,  
think together.  
Be SpectACTive!  
residencies from  
bottom to top.  
Reaching  
the citizens  
of Budapest**

**Dorottya  
Albert**

**Luca  
Kövéc**

**(Bakelit Multi Art  
Center, Budapest)**

Managing a theatre and dance venue, which also hosts long-term artistic residencies, it was from the beginning very important for us to make a connection between artists and audience members. Usually we organise artist talks after the shows, work-in-progress demonstrations or presentations at the end of a residency, so that artists and audience members have the opportunity to reflect on each other's work, thoughts and impressions, though not in a fixed frame as a mandatory part of their activity. The participatory activity initiated by Be SpectACTive! helped us to reach a wider perspective on how to involve the audience and realise interchanges among artists, audience and cultural institution. First of all, thanks to the creative residencies involving local citizens, we received a significant input to organise other types of meetings and active programmes, such as open rehearsals with well-known Hungarian choreographers and international companies, dance workshops, and activities based on theatrical games. The group of active spectators became a community, whose members were always welcome to any of our cultural activity. As the profile of each Be SpectACTive! creative residency is different, we contacted new people with the aim to broaden the group of active spectators. We kept relying on the informal gathering and co-working of artists and spectators.

In Hungarian theatres, participatory activities are more and more becoming a focus of audience development projects and educational approach. However, in Bakelit, audience engagement and active spectatorship never reached pedagogical or didactic character. Our aim was to create platforms for meeting and sharing in a friendly, cosy atmosphere. We believe we succeeded, according to the participants' feedbacks: "Even the very first moments with the three smiling leaders of this project after we just had a discussion, were very exciting: we laughed, we talked, and we were open to discover new perspectives for our ideas on life and art. And variances also arose when we shared our point of view regarding the meaning of wildness. The first

day we met the whole group of participants, it was incredible: the playful method of getting acquainted with each other was similar to a thrilling and joyful game full of secrets and surprises. We had a delicious and varied supper at the end of the meeting. The people I met there were great, the special guests, the dancers and the actors were very kind-hearted. We spent a great time together in Bakelit” says a participant of the project *Different?*

### **ACTive – namely?**

When Bakelit got involved in this international project, audience engagement became one of the most essential parts of our profile, and we endeavoured to strengthen and develop it continuously. The creative work in the frame of Be SpectACTive! showed another level of participation, in which the classical boundary between artist and audience started to fade away. Thanks to the possibilities opened by co-working, co-creating and networking, an open platform was realised within the Be SpectACTive! residencies.

Audience development had been a challenge in Bakelit’s life before Be SpectACTive!, though it was hard to build an audience base, because of our program structure, the selection and the wide variety of the presented shows, and additionally due to the fact that Bakelit is a bit on the outskirts of the city centre. The approach and the idea of a deeper connection and involvement with a (small or a slowly growing) group of spectators – the lucky few – sounded like an idea that should not be as hard to develop as a mass following the organisation’s activities. In fact, it seemed a new starting point on which public relations and audience building could be based. The first step forward to build an active community was made, and by the end of the second year a small improvement was visible, thanks to a creative residency in the frame of Be SpectACTive! (*Different?*), which basically grounded

a strong team of active spectators. The results consisted as much in the number of participants, as in our improvements, such as regularly organising meetings with the participants, and opening to new members who would join us. Due to that initiation, an active, participative audience base started to exist and slowly grow, affecting audience development in a positive, desired way – meaning that those spectators who were open to this kind of sharing, participation, audience involvement, active spectatorship, got to know about Bakelit as a creative dance and workshop institution, and they got curious about the Be SpectACTive! project itself, beyond the actual residency they took part in. Additionally, we acknowledged that it was just a first step towards a long-term goal, that has to improve continuously. For the future, we intend to keep alive what we started in the frame of active spectatorship, and we hope that this kind of co-working will remain one of our keystones.

The creative residency *Different?* was an instructive example of how citizens/participants/applicants worked together with a group of dancers to create a piece together in a little more than one week. In Be SpectACTive!, Bakelit’s active spectators were playing a double role: firstly, they were co-partners of the artists in the creative processes and secondly, they were always ready to share their ideas and help the Be SpectACTive! productions evolve by giving constructive critics and ideas. After each session and creative residency, we hold talks where everyone could share his/her concerns, questions and impressions freely. “After the workshop entitled *Different?* I asked myself a few questions concerning the relationship between audience and performers” – a participant said. “Have a look at my wonderings, for which I have no answers so far: What are the limits of an audience-based workshop and performance? What kind of material can be used in such a project? For instance, simple moves with body, head or arms? Maybe sound material? In what way may the audience interact with the performers? What is the role and position of

the audience in that relationship? Are they merely followers in that structure? I suppose that the performers were much more autonomous than us, the local guest performers, that they had their own structure in moving. Was it possible for them, in those circumstances, to react, to give feedbacks to the audience? It would have been helpful to add a new topic/key word: courage in order to support the audience if they have difficulties getting involved. What is the difference between interactive theatre, thus involving the audience, and having a workshop with them?”.

Something similar happened during the creative residency of Displace Yourself Theatre as well. The active spectators showed them patterns, topics, themes starting from their personal experiences, and declared their sincere opinions about the realisation of the project *Food for Thought*. One of the main questions regarding Be SpectACTive! creative residencies is the measure and frame of engagement and involvement. After a week-long work in progress how might the active spectators still be part of the project? How can they follow the next steps and phases of it? How can the interchange between artists and locals reach balanced benefits from both sides? Are the active spectators merely a fresh material, inspirational source in a research process, or have the creative residencies the strength to change a planned structure? These questions are up to the project, group of artists and participants at the same time. While in some cases the collaboration failed, in others it flourished, and resulted in great, everlasting experiences – mostly everyone enriched him/herself through personal and individual ones.

## When it's good to adapt

Co-working went on not only during the residencies, but active spectators played an essential role in Bakelit's everyday life as well. For instance, we selected together (via voting) the international and Hungarian performances to be presented in Bakelit starting from the 2017 spring, as a way of co-curating the program. To sum up, at the beginning we had to find a way for realising and defining “our Be SpectACTive!”, to find our tools and those aspects that might be a good source for us, generally speaking, to shape the concept of Be SpectACTive! making it as compatible as possible with Bakelit's “facilities” and profile. I believe we succeeded and the result is dynamically improving, having an essential affect not only during the residencies.

The biggest change that had to be made was a structural one, regarding the programming, which had to adapt and, at the same time, also shift the focus of Bakelit, making it a more flexible and innovative institution. During the last 3-4 years, the most important change was to reduce the number of hosted/invited shows during the year while putting more emphasis on programmes dealing with social involvement and active participation. That is to say that, now, Bakelit prefers to host creative residencies, where active spectators are welcome to join the work in progress. Less is more, shifting the focus onto more international and progressive programmes, hosting residencies instead of numerous local performances that just use the organisation's infrastructure. That change in our profile originates firstly from the fact that Bakelit is situated in an industrial area in the periphery of the city. It has both advantages and disadvantages: the silent environment might function as a perfect place for longer creative processes to take place as Bakelit offers all-inclusive accommodation to its guests, but at the same time, it is quite hard to bring audience here, as Budapest has a lot of cultural venues in the centre. With international performances



Bakelit fills the cultural gaps of the city, and with the residencies it offers a rare opportunity for artists to create in a peaceful atmosphere. Furthermore, hosting creative work-in-progress projects will certainly help us in audience engagement, as long as our active spectators will be invited to join the residencies in different forms. For instance, they will be invited to open rehearsals held by the artists in residence, open sharing and small meetups where thoughts, ideas, and impressions exchange will be in focus.

It seems difficult to keep the same group of active spectators for a longer period, because as the residencies, the projects, the artistic work change, the group members change as well. Someone is more likely to be on the stage and dance, someone wants to help the company by showing them the city and introducing them to local citizens, someone is interested in cultural management and wants to join the process of performance selection, and someone just wants to meet the artists and see their show. Activity and participation can differ a lot, and active spectators have the right to choose the kind of programme they are interested in and the level of involvement they want to reach. Above that, when a venue is not hosting Be SpectACTive! residencies for a long period, and the participatory programme is not continuous, difficulties in communication might arise, and, what is worst, active members might go lost.

Our active spectator group, for instance, changed from one residency to the other. Only a few participants (up to 5) were interested in more projects, while usually they had their preferences and we had to accept it, not forcing them to join the creative processes each time. We had to be flexible, not necessarily they. However, what made it possible to connect all our former and present participants, is the so-called “active spectator programming”, namely, the selection of the performances to be invited to Bakelit for the upcoming season. This (online/offline) event functions as the only central and fixed part of Be SpectACTive!, to which

anyone can easily link with. And that is not surprising: they have the chance and the right to choose among twenty performances the four that they would really like to see. It is a challenge and an interesting adventure, and the process of voting does not really require any extra energies.

### **In search of a common language**

A universal language, like dance, was working better during our creative residencies. In fact, dance and movement-based projects can most probably provide a better approach or starting point for a smoother communication and project development, as physical theatre – as well as any movement based and multi-disciplinary project (for instance Renato Rocha’s *I Have a Dream* project) –, use a universal language to which anyone can connect to, depending on his/her openness. Apart from movement-based project, experimental performances could be selected/represented at a higher level. By the term experimental we refer to those creative processes, that do not follow a fixed script, are ready for changes, and, what is most important, are able to involve new people during the process of creation. It is always a challenge to find a method to involve new members in an artistic project, but probably if they rely on the environment and the people surrounding it, the question is not so hard to answer anymore. Experimental and/or site-sensitive, or mixed media plus dance and movement performances would be more than welcome in the case of Bakelit. Our former and present active spectators lead us to that conclusion, as we observed: those workshops draw the attention of people based in Budapest, which rely on social, personal, environmental topics and are still open to experimental, new, interdisciplinary approaches and dynamical changes.

Bakelit’s group of active spectators is open for any ages, the only criteria is affection to performing arts. This means that we welcome everyone who is enthusiastic to participate at different

levels. Our group of active spectators' age differ from 17 to 36, and audience restrictions appear only as the company criteria. As every project focuses on different topics, and genres, they acquire different participants with different qualities, interests and skills. For instance, in April 2018 Denf Collective was looking for the applications of professional or semi-professional dancers for their *High Spirits* workshop while Renato Rocha welcomed anyone working in artistic or social fields to his multidisciplinary workshop.

Audience involvement always depended on the actual creative residency (its topic, the concept of the project or their “frames” of participation). According to that, the most successful projects from the perspective of being active and participative, were those demanding a continuative communication and work (co-work) with the active spectators, and focusing on an actual, interesting and wide enough topic, to gave some space to everyone's imagination and self-motivated issues.

### **Natural or maybe bizarre?**

First of all, the selection of Be SpectACTive! projects should follow certain criteria, based on the most essential assumptions that the companies need to be open-minded and will co-work with active spectators. Our experience is that those companies, arriving with an already written script and superficial ideas on the way to interact with the spectators, fail. On the other hand, those creative residencies showing real interest in audience involvement end up with great experiences on both sides (artists and participants). One thing is for sure: during the time spent together, both artists and audience members learn a lot about themselves, about the working methods they were part in, about different types of creativity, about working together with unknown people and realizing a performative presentation in a very short time. A successfully realised project does not necessarily

ended up with a perfect and finished performance. Success in those projects is related to the accomplishment of something together, is about co-working, including right and wrong decisions, bad and good moments at the same time, it concerns the process itself.

As an example, a participant shared with us and with the company her impressions on a creative residency. Her main concerns were about the methods and possibilities of participation in a movement-based project: “It has been a unique opportunity to follow the traces of the evolution of the project *Different?* by taking part in it in Budapest, and also seeing the other two phases of it in Ljubljana and Prague. I feel lucky being involved in this initiative, because it helped me a lot to narrow my personal (and artistic) goals by re-investigating the notion of ‘participation’ and/or ‘being active’.” Besides that, she also mentioned a few questions emerged during this workshop: “Does ‘active spectatorship’ inevitably mean ‘to participate’? It was a paradoxical experience: to sense the freedom and obey a series of instructions at the same time. Couldn't there be any modality to provide freedom within those strict rules? In what circumstances and situations may freedom be equivalent with frustration, discomfort and vulnerability? How can joy, happiness, and sense of freedom be generated instead? Would it be more effective, if the workshop had an inverse structure – thus, starting from the position of being ordinary spectators and then breaking down that experience, and the expectations related to it? What is my role (as a sole spectator) in comparison with the dancers during the show? Why should I join them? Am I there to copy or to embody the moves we were taught? Why should I accept the dancers' invitation to this quasi-hierarchical activity? Isn't it a gentle order? Have I ever seen a good example for active spectatorship? What made the audience join the experience?”

In some particular applied theatre forms (i.e. forum theatre) the spectators can participate by verbalising what happened during the

performance, and that leads them to form their own statements and beliefs. Dancing is not (anymore) among our ordinary activities unlike using words and phrases. “Dance” or “express” your feelings/opinion by moving sounds scary and hardly decodable to most spectators. Maybe dance should be re-defined for them before asking them to perform it.

From another angle: how can artists tackle with the diverse expectations of the workshop participants, the audience members (with new-born eyes) and the curators? What is the overall conception of “active spectatorship” that is supposed to be investigated? Are these directions clearly articulated? Isn’t it a top-bottom structure then? Should the artists give illustration for an already made decision, or is their role to answer for a vague question? In what extent can we get insight to the endeavours of the whole network and not only of one of the projects involved?”.

### **Simulated or real co-work?**

Those residencies effectively deeply involved the participatory group in the artistic creation process and, beside that, their participatory strategy was clever and attractive. A good example was Barbora Latolova’s (CZ) project entitled *Different?*, which put the emphasis on the participants, their bodily sensations and their personalities. For almost one week they worked together, the meetings were friendly, there was no tension during the practices, and each session was followed by discussions where each participant could tell his/her impressions about the project and its development. When the project arrived to its final phase in Prague, Bakelit organised a trip for all Hungarian participants to go and see the presentation there, and give a second feedback on the whole project. Participants really enjoyed this work, which unfortunately was followed by less creative and less audience-centred artistic residencies in Bakelit. For instance, the Italian CK

Teatro – with their work *Walking on the moon* – could not (and probably not even aimed to) involve the audience, as they arrived with an already written dramatic text, and did not use any of the interviews they had made with 65+ aged people about the first moonwalk.

The artistic concept and quality is also a very important factor. For example, the British Displace Yourself Theatre chose a very interesting topic concerning food (eating habits), and our spectators showed them their best restaurants and breweries; the artists made a few interviews, and made a workshop for anyone interested in that topic. At their work in progress presentation, we ran into questions such as: are they professional physical actors or not? We found a few parts of their work superficial, including a lot of stereotypical interpretations and being based on an unclear artistic concept. They caused quite a big disappointment in every participant, but their feedback must have helped them to improve their show. It is hard to find a way to involve others in a project, but probably if someone involves another group of people (actually asking) for their help, then they should try to get some use out of it. A clear concept, creative participatory strategy, and a certain artistic quality are needed for a project to succeed in Be SpectACTive!.

**Evaluating  
and exploring  
new models of  
participatory  
artistic projects**

**Zvonimir  
Dobrović**

**(Domino Project,  
Zagreb)**



Bruno Isakovic (HR) – *Denuded*  
(Kilowatt Festival, Sansepolcro, 2015) ©Luca Del Pia

Domino is a small non-governmental organisation, having been active in Croatia since 2003. At the time, it was created on a wave of art projects liberalisation and Domino was a result of that wave in terms of opening the space to more independent projects. In fact, in those years many other big and small festivals were started, that are still running nowadays. Along with our Queer Zagreb festival, others to be mentioned are Zagreb World Theatre Festival, Zagreb Film Festival, Urban festival, Festival of New Circus, Touch Me festival among other initiatives and events. That implied that in a short period of time a number of new subjects appeared, focused on initiating new collaborations, international cooperation, artistic research and challenges, and often connecting artistic with activist (civil empowerment) methods and work logics. At the time, Queer Zagreb was perhaps the most controversial one, as it has been always dedicated to questioning traditional social norms in Croatia (burdened by patriarchy, tradition and religion), receiving an enormous amount of press and media coverage, as well as attention from the artistic community and from general audience. That also allowed our organisation Domino to position itself strongly within the new cohort of organisations and projects started in that timeframe.

Because of the very nature of the Queer Zagreb project and because one of its main objectives was community empowerment, we have been involved in a diverse range of participatory activities, with the aim to involve the community and build a new one as well. As Queer Zagreb was such a controversial event in Croatian context – because of the public attitude towards homosexuality and any non-heterosexual group –, many factors were to be accounted for, including even basic issues of safety for our artists and audience, let alone potential partners and participants in projects coming from the community or from the population in general. Those factors marked the way in which Domino was introduced and thought about participation in those early years

of our organisation's existence. Luckily, due to longevity and stamina of our efforts and organisation, we were able to evolve from that experience and surroundings into more traditional and classical understanding of participation, which does not necessarily need to be accounting for such a basic condition as the very safety of participation.

Domino has since grown to be one of the largest organisations in the local Croatian context dedicated to artists and projects driven by experimentation of content and form in its work, and has become one of the leading driving forces in the local and regional space. That was due to the mere fact that the number of our programs and projects have grown exponentially since our establishment, allowing an extensive concentration of knowledge, contacts, connections and, if we may say that, power within one organisation. Domino became somewhat unavoidable, its growth has been faster at times than our own capacity to absorb it, and also the pressure of responsibility that has come along with it. Basically, that meant that we also needed to shift our own role within the public space we were working on: it was not merely a matter of building and empowering communities and even securing the space (and the right to a space) to work in, we had to re-think our role and take our organisation artistically to a higher level, serving artistic needs and providing a different kind of service than the conditioned one existing when Domino started operating.

Our own programs expanded to accommodate that role: we developed the Perforations and Sounded bodies festivals, together with a strong inclination towards international promotion of local and regional Croatian artists worldwide (North and South Americas, Asia and Australia as well as around Europe), while our initial Queer Zagreb festival has overgrown its own festival format to be transformed into a year-round programming of a Queer Zagreb Season.

Domino shifted to be more oriented to artistic practice and development, and we have been attempting to use the participation formats that would fall into the usual categories: residencies, research and study opportunities for artists and curators, community-based and community-focused documentation. Those projects enabled the organisation to expand even further the scope and attraction, as well as the impact within the local community. They have also provided us with more opportunities to partner with others and form a diverse network of collaborators, giving special attention to cross-sector cooperation, in order to connect artistic projects with public and private organisations working in commercial, human rights, scientific and social sciences sectors and fields. That method proved to be a fundamental tool for artists and a very resourceful way of strengthening the local artistic community. We often felt intuitively the needs we were trying to meet – for example we reached an understanding that residency have become the norm and that the expectation from artists has become very burdensome, as they always have to produce new work, implying travelling and taking part in numerous residencies, in order to keep up with the rhythm that is expected from them in relation to the output they are to deliver. In response to that, we created the “stay at home residencies” project, providing local artists the support they usually get when they are offered a residency somewhere – except we did not expect or require them to relocate, disrupting their schedules and work. That was a positive experience either for our organisation and the artists participating in this programme, as it opened a new way of thinking about artists' position and role, and allowed them to think of deeper and longer-term connections for the potential participants of their projects. In fact, they were working within their home space with no timeframe and schedule obligations, being only required to leave that place after doing their research in the community. All that was made possible by moving just one element out of the classical residency philosophy: travelling. We found that type of support is potentially much impactful for many



artists, as it gives them the chance to do their work and research at their own pace and based on their own needs, not only for satisfying the “project” and needs of the organisation needing to execute a certain cooperation programme.

### **Beyond familiarity**

Having said that, we also encountered another main issue, linked to the fact that the artistic community in Croatia is rather small: artists influence each other so much that the influence might end up being resemblance. This issue is affecting the work processes and is particularly limiting; that was one of the main reasons for Domino to join the Be SpectACTive! network. In fact, Domino has always been producing numerous works (theatre, dance, live art, visual art) every year, and we have been in close contact during those productions and development stages, proving that many artists share not only their audience, but also their professional collaborators and the co-producing partners. As a result, the work created may look similar in aesthetic, easy to blend into the general level of work being presented, and finally incestuous, because everyone is working with everyone else at some point, within a short period of time or in a range of a few years. The “outside eye” – often an important aspect of work development, for testing ideas and concepts in the widest sense – is a great tool, except when the “outside eye” is the same eye for everyone. Then, the feedback is the same and after a while there is no more visible growth, evolution, expansion of ideas. The community becomes closed in itself.

That is where Be SpectACTive! seemed a good answer to that issue, as, in principle, it offered to the artists the traditional residency format, but it conditioned them to benefit from the local community, taking notes from them and their feedback as part of the working process while developing their artistic projects. That made the travelling aspect of residencies again meaningful and

important for artists. And for Croatian artists in particular, it meant a possibility to break out from the closed circles of collaborators and partners. The impact cannot be expected immediately, as the scope of the project has a limited capacity in terms of artists' number hosted in the exchanges. The impact we expect to be tangible, though, as artists would be more open to step out of their own safe creative zones, and will not feel the need to adjust to whatever expectations they assume their audience might have.

In this respect, we were most interested in providing artists within the network the opportunity to explore and test their work outside of their usual habitat, we were further more engaged, especially with those artists that understood that opportunity and requested our support, when coming to Croatia, in expanding the groups of people they wished to work with – i.e. sports people, people of specific ages, with a certain range of physical abilities, etc.

### ***Denuded* – a visual and physical tension**

At the very beginning of the project, our artistic contribution was a group production led by Bruno Isaković and Studio for Contemporary Dance in Zagreb of their work *Denuded*. That was, we believe, the first residency part of the network and it was a challenging project, due to logistics and budget constraints and requiring compromises from the artists in relation with travel and hospitality arrangements. Those experiences have resulted in shifts within the network, in order to create a more uniformed offer than that expected by the artists. As a result, the artistic and production energy could be directed more towards creativity on the stage, rather than behind it. However, the residency process benefited the artists in their production, and helped the performers to discuss with new audiences while processing the images and the messages picked up from that non-verbal and



highly abstract work. In that respect, it was a welcome addition to their usual work process. Later on, that performance toured and was performed over 25 times, though not within the scope of our network. That is something to be also strengthened in the future, both for the benefit of the artists and of the network, even if it has to come at the expense of launching fewer productions, in our opinion. Logic would suggest that as long as a network produces work and invests time and resources, it should be mindful to offer or guarantee several performances among its members and countries.

In 2017, Domino participated in the production of Romanian artist Radu Nica. At the residency held in October, we hosted an author from Romania and its collaborators on the project *10*. In the focus of the project, ordinary people were faced with contemporary dilemmas – they were trying to deal with them independently, but each ethical decision of one of the ten characters drastically affected others' life. During their staying in Zagreb the artists talked with other artists, theorists, sociologists and activists about secularism and today social context of religion in Romania and Croatia.

In our opinion, the creative residency went quite well because the artists could work in a country that had close connections between the state and the church, just like in their own country, but at the same time they got an insight about different approaches to the specifics shared. That shows that collaborations between different cultural contexts can work rather well – providing that there is a critical mass of cultural general shared places, which enables the dialogue between local community and visiting artists. A benefiting circumstance was also the fact that the artists were already at a certain stage of the project development, and had clear ideas about the questions they intended to ask the local community members, as well as of the type of communities they would profit of.

As questioning secularism was a common place for both countries, it also contributed to the motivation of the local community to participate. On the contrary, as we noticed in some other cases, when visiting artists were not helping the local participants to identify with the project, their own role in the project seemed not enough clear and the final result was a lack of dedication towards the artistic process. Therefore, finding common interests and points between visiting artists and local communities in a wider spectrum of social, economic, political or other spheres should lead to more successful and fruitful participatory processes.

At the same time, the artists did not so much work in a theatre space, as it differs from the place of the premiere and their work would not contribute to the development of the project. That might be due to the fact that the project was narrative-based, which might not be the case of other creative residencies hosted during Be SpectACTive! and based more on nonverbal theatre or dance. Again, the positive result of the residency was more on the artistic concept than on concrete artistic practices, as authors during the development of their concept do not so much rely on concrete working environment (i.e. venues) as actors and dancers.

### **Thinking about the future**

We are able to contribute to the ongoing evaluation of participatory projects with three main points of discussion: cross-sector cooperation, expectations from participants, artistic processes' needs.

#### *Cross-sector cooperation*

From an organisational point of view, that is where we can expect a high level of interest for an arts organisation, as it offers a natural and pointed exit from our own natural habitat and

usual cooperation partners. When a project requires that type of strategy, it might have a potential for a long-term strengthening capacity with respect to the arts community, for the mere fact that usually the arts scene is the “weaker” or more “unstable” partner, due to the general marginalisation of the arts which reflects on budgets, staff, spaces, long-term planning capabilities, etc. At least, that is the reality of arts organisations in Croatia – whenever we work with any other sector, we are dealing with bigger, stronger, financially and logistically more stable organisations – be it commercial, scientific, hospitality, sports or literally any other. Indirectly, that teaches us to adjust to working within a different system and perhaps take some of the good practices and incorporate them into our own. Also, this type of participatory project can expand the artistic scope of interest and open new opportunities for artists to rethink their practices – whether current or future. Be SpectACTive! is a network that uses its resources to facilitate that kind of support to artists and organisations within the project.

#### *Expectations from participants*

That is part of an ongoing discussion and represents a shift of perspective to move away from organisations or artists based on audience/participants point of interest, or even to take audience/participants time and effort to be part of these kind of processes. What can we offer to participants and how can we avoid “using” them in one way or another? What is the gain for them, considering the amount of time that they are often asked to invest without remuneration? Different levels of participation should be established, because that would grant a wider potential pool of participants – including those who are just marginally interested but who can also provide valuable insights and information.

The input by the participants/audience that are part of the development and artistic process should be made more visible

and acknowledged appropriately by organisations and artists. It is a responsibility of the network and the artists that we work with, to keep developing new models of participation and creating “active spectators” adding one more layer of innovative thinking about participatory working methods. We would like to work on exploring these options and making sure that audience and participants feel that they get something more tangible, or have access to some unique or particular experiences provided by the creative process.

#### *Artistic processes’ needs*

In our view, in this type of discussion, it is important to avoid a single formula of artistic projects and that the needs are not tailored according to the expectations of those providing financial or logistical support to artists. It is sometimes convenient to think about projects that in the funder’s desire involve participants, minorities, certain type of people. That choice is then presented to the artists, who may face a lower motivation to be supported by arts organisations, if they do not meet those expectations, conditioned by artistic and sometimes purely organisational issues.

We are aiming to find new ways of connecting artists to audiences, by means of creating opportunities for them to be in communication for an extended period of time compared to the usual short audience – artists interaction during a performance presented as a finished work. That is certainly a chance to foster a deeper understanding of artistic processes and, hopefully, to attract a stronger interest for the arts by a wide range of audiences. However, we should be aware that not all artists are inclined to participatory projects and that creating work is also a legitimate approach – even if the artist does not work directly with audience and participants besides showing them the performance. Sometimes it seems that arts have taken on other roles (which might even fall in social services, like integration,

education, socialisation, etc.) and that at some point artistic work might be in danger to be judged more on those grounds rather than for its own artistic excellence.

The overall conclusion might therefore be that the choice of the place hosting a collaborative residency should depend on the residency itself. That is to say, on the aim of the time spent in the location, as precisely defined by and oriented to an exchange between participants and artists. There, participants can envision a positive result of the process for themselves, impossible to achieve while participating to an artistic process in a situation where they most probably would never see the final result or the fruit of their contribution to a particular project.

## **Participatory residencies in York**

**John  
Tomlinson**

**(York Citizens  
Theatre, York)**

Collaborating with non-professionals, whether they are artists or spectators, requires openness on the part of the professional. The learning curve is to overcome the notion that an artist is somehow separate from a community. That their role is to comment and reflect on is a given. However, listening and revising is in many ways far more complicate. If the community sees the world differently, how does the artist revise the underlying narrative? The tension existing between creative people, their audience and the subjects they are dealing with is in many ways part of the art. It can be controversial, it can fuel the event. However, it may also create a sense of the artist as being removed and aloof. Without a meaningful engagement, the latter is most likely.

Our residencies were a mixture of projects all with different approaches to working with and in a community. The more successful were those that truly engaged with our community and in the outcome displayed that engagement. The residency by Gianina Carbuariu (for *Common People*) in York signalled two key differences between British and Romanian theatre making. Firstly, the operation of the director as an auteur – a visionary, luxuriant role not widely common in the UK today – was seen as a given in the company process. Whilst this empowered Gianina’s vision brilliantly, it gave rise to a number of misunderstanding, such as: how she wanted to craft the project, her personality as an artist, how much she would rely on the host venue to undertake her dramaturgy. York Theatre Royal is, by nature, built upon a spirit of creative collaboration and to place a director as the beholden nucleus of a project felt somewhat opposite to the communal heart of Be SpectACTive!. Secondly, and most importantly, our notions of community and audience engagement appeared to be dissimilar.

York Theatre Royal is very open to investigating ways of involving the audiences in various areas, and that was one of the reasons for being involved in the project. However, *Common People*

seemed to solely use spectator engagement for conception (research through interviews with whistle-blowers from our National Health Service) and reception (to open public discussions with the audiences participating in the resultant sharing). There appeared to have little desire to involve their audience in active creation. That was perhaps emphasised by the fact that the verbatim accounts were later fictionalised and, of course, it was done in part to protect participants. Anyway, there is a question surrounding whether or not personal involvement would have increased the sincerity of the work. Allowing spectators in solely to top and tail a project felt like an antiquated notion of creative engagement.

The residency by Marco D'Agostin with Chiara Bersani was more successful in developing links between the community, both as active spectators and as audiences. They were very clear about the people they wanted to meet before they arrived in York, which meant we were able use the network, links and resources at York Theatre Royal to apply the right approach and invite the right people.

The workshop run by the company with young people was particularly good, and their approach was very different from what the young people were used to: there was music playing as they entered the space, very gradually, in over about 20 minutes, with no words spoken, the artists transformed a circle of awkward, uncomfortable teenagers, into a liberated, celebratory group of dancers. The workshop continued exploring themes of sporting triumphs and physical prowess, and appeared to open up as the company was aiming to translate the content into the piece they were creating. Those young people were invited to create their own personal opening ceremony to the Olympic Games, contributing ideas and motifs that the artists integrated into their process of making the final piece.

Throughout their time in York, the whole company were very active in their pursuit of understanding the local community – our audiences, staff, local artists and youth theatre. Each day, alongside filmmaker Ed Sunman, they distributed video content about the work, inviting questions, conversations and debates about their process and the narrative, as it begun to take shape.

The company shared the piece with a host group, welcoming a challenging debate and a feedback session afterwards. It was a really well cured conversation managed by the company, and there was a genuine openness to get inspiration from the group. As a result, is that the artists can leave a residency with questions, with ideas to ponder and with a connection to the people from a new place. For the audience and the theatre staff is that you look forward to welcoming them back and seeing how the story progresses and ends.

## Participatory residencies in Sansepolcro

Luca Ricci

(Capotrave | Kilowatt, Sansepolcro)



Ahilan Ratnamohan (UK) – *Merci mercenary, the Qatar project*  
(Kilowatt Festival, Sansepolcro, 2018) ©Elisa Nocentini

In 2014, when Be SpectACTive! was born, we had just started organising creative residencies: we clearly knew the value that those activities could bring and the need to link the presence of artists in the city with a process of relationship with certain segments of citizens. For us, Be SpectACTive! represented the occasion to better focus that model of creative residency as a promoter of shared relational practices. The presence in Sansepolcro of eight foreign theatre/dance groups (2 each from Croatia and Belgium, 1 each from Hungary, Czech Republic, UK and Romania), as well as of four Italian companies co-produced by Be SpectACTive!, also hosted in a creative residency in Sansepolcro, gave to our internal structure and to our audience an opportunity to open up to the international dimension.

Within Be SpectACTive!, the presence of 12 international artists in Sansepolcro allowed us to reach new audiences: thanks to Michael Zahora, 15 people willing to share a letter of their lovers joined our activities, with Gianina Cărbunariu we met 3 local whistleblowers, with Displace Yourself Theater we hosted 6 craft workshops related to bread and cakes production, with Anna Reti we involved 4 families from Sansepolcro who had just become parents, with Ahilan Ratnamohan we were in touch with the local football team, and so on. For each creative residency a specific target of people was involved, people we did not know before, and started relating with our organisation. During those residency periods, our goal was to create relationships among artists and specific audience targets, identified by each artist according to the themes of his/her show.

The Romanian artists Gianina Cărbunariu was collecting whistleblowers stories, so we focused on those people, in our context, who expose any kind of information or activity that is deemed illegal, unethical, or incorrect within either private or public organisations. There were some touching meetings among Gianina and the Italian whistleblowers, their stories were included

in the script and some of them were then invited to Romania for the international debut of the show.

The Hungarian artist Anna Reti, according to her request to investigate the way in which the birth of a child changes the relationship in a family, was put in contact with 4 local families, which had had a child in the past 3 years. The UK artists Displace Yourself Theatre, that were working on the true cost of our fast food culture, met many local farmers and producers engaged in production of bread, pasta, cakes and bakery (that was their specific request, when in Sansepolcro). The Belgian artists Ahilan Ratnamohan, working on football as the allegory of the commercial exploitation of people and things, asked us to put him in contact with the local football team. For his show about immigration set in a true lorry, Michael De Cock met the local community of migrants from many different African countries, and the meeting also became an occasion to create a dialogue between the new councillor for social issues and the local associations working with migrants.

### **A successful interaction between artists and audience**

The keys for a successful interaction between artists and audience during creative residencies are two: on the one hand, it is necessary an artist who is really convinced that meeting with people outside his/her working group can bring a nourishment to his/her creative process; on the other hand, it is necessary that the organisation taking care of the relationship between artists and audience, knows how to stimulate the audience to be actively involved in creative processes while in progress. It is needed a mutual trust between the parties, it is important to create a safe environment, authenticity is requested as well as the capacity to build a playful context.

Any type of artistic content can be suitable for that interactional process: a play where text and dramaturgy are central, a more visual and performative artwork, or a show that provides in itself an interaction with the audience. However, it would be wrong to assume that only the latter would engage in an active relationship with audience, during the creational phase. Spectators can nurture any artistic process, if they face the artist with respect and desire to listen to his/her vision. On the other hand, each artist can be nourished from the spectators' point of view if he/she does not consider him/herself as an absolute and isolated genius, but intends his/her own creative work as the result of a social system, and if he/she is convinced that the sense of his/her performances can be elaborated collectively, in relationship with others.

### **Our failures**

The online active audience is the target that the project has failed to reach. Which does not mean that the project did not have a lively activity on the social media: in fact, it had it! But the many and geographically well-distributed Facebook fans, Twitter followers, and YouTube and Vimeo video viewers are very different from an active audience interacting with the artists during the creative processes: we have been trying to reach them in many different ways, we have been having dozens of experiments, but we were not able to activate a large number of people online.

With specific regard to Sansepolcro, everything about live projects worked at the best: with the project of Teresa Hradilkova-Klara Aleková-Einat Ganz we engaged a target of local women with very different backgrounds, Denf Collective asked us to work with teenagers, Bruno Isakovic allowed us to work with a group of disabled people, with Michael De Cock's



project we involved a target of migrants and refugees otherwise difficult to engage. Afterwards, these guys have been the core of a new project (*MigrArti*) that we got financed the following year by the Italian Ministry of Culture.

The live projects hosted in creative residency in Sansepolcro had full success, though it does not imply that we have always been able to cultivate relationships and contacts after the end of the projects, and to take care of the legacy of these achievements. Anyway, in some cases it happened, and thanks to Be SpectAC-Tive! we were able to open new relationships with the city. Of course, once the specific project is over, the issue of maintaining these relationships is very important. We do not have to create a sense of betrayal in the audience involved.



Bridget Fiske (UK) – *YES Move. NO Move. (Moved?)*  
(Tanec Praha, Praha, 2016) ©Vojtěch Brtnický

**YES Move.  
NO Move.  
(Moved?)  
Still... moved...**

**Bridget  
Fiske**

**Catherine  
Simmonds**

**(Artists of  
Be SpectACTive!  
co-productions)**

A written choreographic and somatic reflection by Bridget Fiske with contributions from Catherine Simmonds, on the 2015 Be SpectACTive! commissioned project *YES Move. NO Move. (Moved?)*.

*This writing is dedicated to all of those who shared and participated in the 'YES Move. NO Move. (Moved?)' project in 2015. 'YES Move. NO Move. (Moved?)' occurred at a time when an enormous number of people were seeking asylum in Europe. As this writing occurs, it is 2018 and people are still standing for their freedom, as they flee persecution and seek security across the world. This is never forgotten. Keep meeting each other and together realise the freedoms and securities we all have the right to.*

THIS EXISTS

Thank you for sharing.

Locating place.  
Meeting you.

An unknowing process of becoming,  
until the body was full. But what is the compromise?

Circles traced.  
Oscillate.

Your experience. Your experience. Your emotion. Your experience. Your emotion. Your food. Your experience. My emotion. Your food. Your dreams. Your experience. Your emotion. Shared food. Your dreams.

*breathe*

Your questions. My experience. Your emotion. Our food. My dreams. My questions.

*breathe*

YOUR SONG.

We all dream, we all move. The reaching of fingers spiralling through the air. The questions with answers needing change. Who is listening? Who is moving?

*breathe*

Your song. The reaching of fingers spiralling through the air. We sing. The reaching of fingers spiralling through the air. The shimmy of the shoulders. The reaching of fingers spiralling through the air. The shimmy of the shoulders. The joy. My head and my hair still swing. The rocking of feet. The reaching of fingers spiralling through the air.  
The shimmy of the shoulders.  
The rocking of feet.  
Chest opening to the space above.  
Your joy.  
Circles traced.  
Oscillate.

*breathe*

TRACE.

And I was able to shake your hand.  
You welcomed me as much as I welcomed you.

YOUR HOME.

GONE.

SECURITY. GONE.

YOU WERE ERASED.

Your said that to see someone screaming feels like the best way to tell the story. I try to find this feeling. From my feet on the ground, through me, so that my mouth opens wide, so that my fingers press the empty space.

SILENT.

Sometimes my fingers still trace names imprinting space. Sometimes I ask others to trace their names. Imprinting space. Every time I am still dancing Ljubljana. Hours past. Your bones and heart and blood and sweat. For their bones and heart and blood and sweat.

More steps accumulate.

*breathe*

*to just lay and listen*

Will you take me to the picnic also? An invitation to enjoy, But it is complex:  
before, before, before, before.

It felt like this for me, 1.1.2.1.2.3.3.4.1.2.3.4.5.6.7.4.5.6.7.8.8.8.8.9, leading me,  
leading me to 37.2 trillion.

For you it was 100. 100 was the most important thing for us to know. You wanted everyone to know it had been 100.

DETAINED.

Your Song. The reaching of fingers spiralling through the air. We Sing. The reaching of the fingers spiralling through the air. We Play.

run run run run run run run run run run run run run run run run  
run run run run run run run run run run run run run run run run  
run run run run run run run run run run run run run run run run

Sometimes my fingers still trace names imprinting the space. Sometimes I ask others to trace their names.

Imprinting the space.

Every time I am still dancing Prague.

Circles traced.  
Oscillate.

Drawing lines. This time it was 100 years.  
The body is dense. The language divides. Repeat.

Experience. Emotion. Food. Dreams. Questions. Song. Speak.  
Speak. Speak. Speak. The body is dense. The language divides.  
Repeat.

Can't you see the difference?

What if I just stood still, could you tell?

There are 37.2 trillion cells to locate.

Every time I am still dancing Sibiu.  
Circles traced.  
Oscillate.

Can't you see the difference?

What if I just stood still...

could you tell?

*"Today, dancing with you is the first day I feel happy since I left my country".*

'YES Move. NO Move. (Moved?)' community participant.

## About

*YES Move. NO Move. (Moved?)* aimed to bring forward lived experiences of borders: political, geographical, social and cultural. The project asked the question: what is at stake, what do we risk to lose, if we fail to see ourselves in the other and the other in ourselves? Encompassed within this was an interest in exploring

issues around empathy, scarcity and difference. In doing this, the project engaged and collaborated with diverse individuals and communities who were: seeking asylum, 'erased' during the independence of Slovenia, from Roma communities (artists and youth), migrant workers, activist and youth navigating current social tensions. Our aim was to create an inspiring contemporary performance work grounded in the relationships with the people we met. Each residency partner supported meetings that connected us, the artistic team, to people and groups who were abundantly generous and supportive. We engaged and collaborated with community members through conversation as well as the sharing of song, dance, play and story. This process produced movement, image, word and song through which scenes were composed. The outcomes were performed by community participants and ourselves and were shared with an audience at the end of each residency.

As a project that itself moved between cities, the process accumulated material and generated content that continued to bring forward the voices of participants from each previous residency. The script of the previous residency became the template, the repository for the next. Each residency period revealed new stories to tell, dances to dance and relationships to honour. The dramaturgy and artistic exploration kept participating community at the heart of our choices. Bound by the immediacy to connect, engage, facilitate and render the voice of collaborating community, there was little time to reflect upon and distil our own reflections. This became one of the greatest challenges of the project: time to navigate and honour the needs of participants, ourselves as the artistic team, partners and the ambitious scope of the project. Building transparent relationships that support meaningful exchanges was our priority and the parameters of residency time, generally two weeks in each city, meant the challenge sat between time with community who bought the project to life and the creation of developed and performed artistic content.

As artists passing through, our performances were a temporal destination to the stories, recordings and presence of the people we met. Like a feather and a punch, with an ear, a breath, a gesture, a tear, a laugh and an embrace we worked to embody the resistance and resilience of people who continue to struggle bureaucracies that erase identity, make workers invisible, take fingerprints and decide destinies. In the passing act of creating and performing “what’s art got to do with it”? On one hand it wasn’t about us, but in the mirror of all we encountered did we reveal ourselves, did we put ourselves on the line? In stark contrast to many we met, especially our asylum seeker friends we were confronted by our ability to choose, our ability to move.

What the process did very clearly and meaningfully reveal is an understanding of what *YES Move. NO Move. (Moved?)* really is. Through the nature of the Be SpectACTive! residency model *YES Move. No Move. (Moved?)* has been able to be defined as an accumulative project. A project that accumulates voices, text, ideas, action and images. The aim is that in each new working place, new meetings with individuals and communities occur. The movement, words, songs and desires of the people in that place are interwoven with content from previous residencies, and in time new artistic content. In doing this the project will continue to bring forward the voices of previous participants and share content that is in conversation with the complexities of the work’s subjects.

### Credits

*YES Move. NO Move. (Moved?)*

Bridget Fiske in collaboration with Catherine Simmonds, Melita Jurisic, Joseph Lau, Andrew Crofts, Miguel Marin and Community. Realised in the framework of Be SpectACTive!

2015 Research was also: Supported using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England; Supported by Dance Manchester, York Theatre Royal, Sustained Theatre Up North and University of Salford.

### *Different?* A dance that you can do

Zdenka Brungot  
Svíteková

Barbora  
Látalová

(Artists of  
Be SpectACTive!  
co-productions)

*Different?* is not a duality, neither separation or delimitation. *Different?* is a take on how to accommodate a plurality of opinions and reactions. It’s about sharing a space. It’s about curiosity, listening, making decisions and taking actions. *Different?* is a time where the stage and the auditorium meet is one space. The borders are permeable and flexible, they depend only on how and where You set them. *Different?* a performance that also the audience can dance.

The piece has been triggered by the question “how to be together with all our differences?”. Building on the principles of mimicry, emotional and cognitive empathy, embodiment and sharing of mind, the piece investigates the question of participation, plurality of opinions, perspective taking, decision making and flexibility of personal boundaries.

### Sliding scale of activity and listening

For us as choreographers, and I believe the same applies to dancers/performers, to participants as well as to audiences, the project has been practicing listening while moving on a sliding scale of activity level from simple witnessing what was happening (around in the outside environment as well as inside of each of the participants in the project) to performing a solo in front of everyone (or sometimes also in spite of every one – that also happened). Witnessing alone already meant to be an active audience, which is taking part in the piece. Already in this way, by its presence, attitudes or behaviours, the audience was an active element transforming the details and the final experience of the work and the action. That was happening in the format of the performance itself and it has also been a tool for the creation and rehearsing period, thanks to the 3 different residencies and 3 different groups of participants (45 people from 3 different countries in total) who were helping us to create that piece.

The moment of active witnessing had been present in the creative process since its beginning. Witnessing as a tool for dancers to be learned, witnessing as a tool for personal interviews, conducted with each participant and performer, and, which later served as a source material for the soundtrack of the piece. And last but not least, witnessing as one of the tools for sharing the final form of the work with participants, being an active audience.

Saying audience, we all, in a way, have been audience to each other. And at the same time we all bore the potential to become performers. The possibility of the sliding scale applies to the dancers/performers as well as to the audience itself. The sliding scale worked in two opposite directions: for the performers it required the capacity to “be less”, to scale down their performance and to become a pure witness merging with the “real” audience. On the other hand, for the audience it meant the possibility to turn up the volume of their presence in the space, of their degree of participation, all the way up to the possibility to become a soloist for the whole audience.

### **Open and Closed. Scores, knowing, courage**

It has been discovering how to navigate within a system that is open and closed at the same time. Open in the way that it offers the possibility or invites everyone to take part in the action, closed because the time frame for these invitations is limited, pre-determined by the sound score and handled live by the performers. Same as the rules of the game (movement scores) have been pre-defined beforehand. How much can they be altered during the performance itself? Sometimes the audience brings in ideas such as singing or new movement ideas within a particular score. How to accommodate the audience’s partaking in a pre-set score has been and will remain one of our questions and goals as creators. This ability is the most difficult skill required from the performers

and the piece. In order to establish and develop such skill, it is necessary to have the possibility to work and perform as a group, with the same performers. It is a must for the future, sustainability and growth of this type of work. Post-premiere absence of a solid support from the executive producer and lack of engagement for a longer-term accompaniment of the work, was a big disappointment we faced. The network and the producer facilitated the making of the piece. Based on our experience, there is a missing link between the production and the sustainability of the production. Once the piece has been produced, a two year follow up supporting the touring of the work seems to be an immense need and a lacking element in the functioning of the network.

It has been navigating on a sliding scale of knowing and not knowing where we were going and what form it could take and finding possible answers together. With the performers, with the participants, as well as with the audience. For part of the creative process we called the work “the thing”. It was a place where audience could come back and each time be a bit braver in taking part in the performance, becoming more active. We had audience members who either literally came regularly and were more and more brave (or familiar with the work?) to move more, to participate more rather than remaining on the “witnessing” edge of the scale and others who stated to dance more or even to take a solo during the next performance.

### **Challenging identity**

It has been a piece difficult for the producers and programmers to identify, defend and bring to audiences. It is a piece challenging the audience’s conventions and, in the same yet different way, it does challenge the producer’s conventions and take on how a piece of this kind can coexist and be sold side to side to “conventional” dance pieces. Here we speak from the context of Czech dance scene. Unfortunately, we have no other experience



so far. The challenge seems to be the format of the piece. It is neither a traditional set up for a performance nor a workshop. It does challenge the concept of “virtuosity” of a performer in terms of pure technical excellence in movement, which the performers of this piece do posse and display, and at the same time the piece highlights the virtuosity of a pedestrian presence and softened skills in performers and by that in the society.

### Sustainability and success

It was a project, which raised the question of sustainability of such endeavour. What is the afterlife or viability of such production from the moment of the official world premiere onwards? There was a radio piece created based on the work, there were 6 reprises and further selling seems to be a question mark. What could help a kick off? Is it a too large project for today’s art market, with 8 people travelling when on tour? Is it a too large project for where we, creators, are in terms of career, market placement, network and notoriety? And if so, how to bridge that gap? Who is there to facilitate that? What should the PR strategies for marketing such kind of piece be? A different text?

How to measure the success of such a huge project in which a lot of energy and finances have been put into work? Is it the number of performances? Is it the next creations of the authors and performers and how the authors developed thanks to such experience? Is it the connections created during the process? Is it the increased number of audience members coming to theatres that supported the work? Is it changes in the lives of participants who have taken part in the project? And how can we know and demonstrate what could have potentially changed in people who came as partakers to one of the shows?

We can say the success criteria could be the following achievements:

- ◆ experience gained in the process of creation and next works the creators were able to develop
- ◆ new works and ideas stimulated by the creation of the project
- ◆ community created around the project whose sustainability is gradually deteriorating, today being almost non-existent. This due to the fact the project got no new support to develop and support the existence of the community around it, in spite of the efforts made from our side and limited by our capacities as well
- ◆ later interactions between the people who took part in the project, such as information sharing, support in difficult life situations, friendships created. Human network(ing)
- ◆ participants themselves becoming more active in the live performing art (as audience coming more often to the theatres to see various works or even becoming performers)
- ◆ opening new possibilities in life for participants we worked with (one of the persons who worked with us says that *Different?* really made a difference in her life allowing her to look for new horizons and ways of living)
- ◆ the dance and art scene in Czech Republic discovering the benefits of coaching, facilitation of processes, communication and feedback skills. Bush Hartshorn, who was the coach for us as choreographers, gave a successful workshop and will be invited again. The workshop is/will be open to professionals from the field of performing arts. A possibility to open such events for large audiences is also in the process of discussion.

It has been a demanding process and attempt for a horizontal structure in a collaborative process. It has been a learning process how to manage a production. It allowed us to conduct a production in professional conditions (including the regular production cycle with a due date known one and a half year beforehand) supported by partnering institutions. During the production phase. Not after. There has been no discussion explaining the reason

either. Neither a true evaluation of the partnering sides took place. Nevertheless, we still have good and open communication with the executive producer of the piece.

The project allowed us to explore possibilities, strategies related with participatory performances and test the possible proposals, which later nourished our respective practices and also gave impulse to a new creation that is now under construction. The current production is aimed at the whole family (the notice says: “Bring your children, parents, family members and relatives. Designed for anyone from 6 to 120 years old.”), with the ambition to create a whole theatrical experience on the spot, based on the input and participation of the audience present. The supporting and framing elements are the score, starting from closed to open, the skills of the performers and the spatiotemporal frame. This project, initially supported by the same co-producer, is nowadays again facing difficulties and a lack of support. What is the message? Does it mean there is no need for this kind of art projects? Is there something missing? What, where? Would producers see the necessity and believe in the meaningfulness of such projects and support them? Are we addressing the wrong co-producer or the wrong platform?

### Current issues

Working on and with the production *Different?* we realised the type of proposal that has taken form can only be developed with the audiences and, in order to develop and mature, it needs to be performed. It is impossible to rehearse without the presence of the audience. Without them a huge part of the work remains in the zone of guess and supposition. Only the presence of a real audience can teach us how certain propositions will work. In the past we created a participatory piece for children and it took many performances to fine-tune the structure, timings, rules as well as (and maybe most of all?) the skills and experience of the

performers to be ready to react on the spot to unexpected situations and turns the performance can take due to the energy and behaviour of the audience on board. I believe the same and probably even more in depth applies to *Different?* since the format is much more open when it comes to the freedom of the audience. And it would very probably take many performances to fine-tune, also due to the fact that the work is addressed to adult audience and with that it comes judgement and very different ways of responding to such work.

At the moment we are facing the difficulty of production accompaniment and strategies to create new opportunities for this work to exist, develop and reach further audiences. The ideas for strategies are emerging as well as it already exists a proposal for a small-scale project harvesting the potential of the piece, while the difficulty appears to be lack of production power from our side as well as the lack of support from the original producer, potential producers or institutions – whether they are venues or funding bodies.

### Yet another question mark

In the context of Czech dance scene approaches developed in the piece, a big question seems to raise about how to communicate such form, how to present it to audiences, what is the genre or the format of this piece. How does this piece inscribe itself in the context of the international artistic creation and what its place in the context of contemporary dance productions on the Czech dance scene is? Do we need programs or networks to support artists or do we also need programs and networks for programmers’ and cultural agents’ development? Do we need more work in the theatres or more outreach programs developing the audience’s courage, interest or freedom to be an active agent in the theatrical space? Is it a question of time? Or a question of socio-cultural and historical context?

## Credits

*Different?* was:

2 choreographers

6 performers

and 3 dozens of participants with whom we have interacted.

Premiered April 19, 2016 | Ponoc Theatre Prague

July 12, 2018 – Post scriptum

In the present context of events we would also like to partly dedicate this writing in memoriam to Petr Kavúr, one of the volunteers who eventually joined the stable cast: a young man, aged 23, who had great joy in participating in the project and was hoping and looking forward to work with the piece again. He passed away a couple of days ago, after half a year of severe illness and heavy surgical interventions. The cast and one of the volunteers have been not only *Spect* – but also – *ACTive!* as much as we managed, dealing with questions related to social network, social support, education, information access, racial issues, equity of chances, financial and health security. This also has been *DIFFERENT?*.

## *SESSION*

**A conversation  
with  
Dan  
Canham**

**(Artist of  
Be SpectACTive!  
co-productions)**

As part of LIFT 2018 Dan Canham under the frame of his company Stillhouse, Empire Sounds and local dance academy Steppaz presented their collaborative performance *SESSION* over 6 nights to audiences of over 1000. *SESSION* was born out of a Be SpectACTive! residency in 2015, in which Dan spent two weeks in North London, meeting with local artists and getting under the skin of the local cultural scene. We spoke to Dan Canham and some of the artists he met from Empire Sounds, who then became his future collaborators, about this entire process.

*As far as I'm concerned LIFT is one of my favourite festivals and if I had to pick a context in which to create work it would be right up there. This whole project started three years ago at the invitation of LIFT for me to come to Tottenham. When I got here, my first instinct was that what I wanted to do was celebrate people who are doing remarkable things. I met all sorts of people, younger people, older people, people from all over the world that call Tottenham their home and I guess, yeah, the one that I got most excited by was music producers, Empire Sounds. When I was in there they were talking to me about their lives and about the area and about what they're up to and there was a young kid who was about thirteen and he got up and started dancing in the studio and immediately all sorts of lights started going off in my head.*

## **R&D I & II // June/July 2015**

*I've been here 2 weeks and I guess I still feel like I'm getting to know the place, I still feel like an outsider, I couldn't presume to know the total depth of experience of Tottenham in just that short period of time, but I guess if I had to summarise my experience of this place, someone I spoke to said it really well actually, they said 'a lot of what happens in Tottenham is about survival, and is about people wanting to make their lives better, and wanting to make the lives of people around them better, it still feels like anything could happen at any time on any street corner.' It's that kind of place, it still feels like a place of extremes. I felt it on my first day I was here, walking around Tottenham on a Bank Holiday which would normally be quieter, I had a*

*massive church gathering that I saw, there was an impromptu Turkish political rally with people beeping their horns in the street, and I saw a guy get mugged, so you know, it still feels like that kind of place to me.*

*There's been a gap of a few weeks since I was here last, what's been nice is to develop relationships, so first time round I would just meet people, spend an hour or so with them and make these portraits about their lives. This time round I've met those same people again developing the relationship, getting to know them and the area a little better. Some of the people who I filmed and made their portraits have now seen them already. So, the one that's literally just gone up, I made of a young dancer called Tashan and it's been really nice for me to, I guess, to give that offering back to him – that short video which is a little reflection of a moment in time for him. I've been thinking of myself as just someone who's trying to embed himself within the culture. So, with Empire Sounds a lot of my time has just been spent in the evening sitting, watching, talking, having conversations and just trying to embed myself within that scene so it's not too tokenistic, it's not just me dropping in thinking I understand it and leaving. Then I've started to open up a dialogue about what they might want in a project, and again so it's not just me coming with my pre-formed ideas and imposing them on something that's here, but also inviting people to my world, inviting people down to Bristol where I live. We're performing my existing show here in Tottenham in October and discussions are already underway as to whether Empire Sounds might provide a post-show entertainment like an after-party, little connections like that, that have only come from being here for a while and talking to people. Those little instances of communication and meetings with all people from different worlds, whether it be me meeting someone or making connections between people that are here already that didn't know about each other's work and so on, I think have been incredibly rewarding for me as an artist. It's kind of shaken up my practice as an artist in the way of bursting the bubble of the kind of people who I engage with; meeting with Tashan and him sharing some of his life story with me about coming out as a young black gay man or with Alina and talking about the relative nature of poverty because she grew up in a Bucharest slum and for her Tottenham is nowhere near that in terms of the level of poverty. At Empire Sounds when young Calem jumped up and*

*just started dancing, was a magic moment, so many instances – with Mina, the first interview I ever did. Mina who just gave me two to three hours and who after having spoken with me and danced with me said 'OK, now you dance for me', and took the camera and filmed me dancing on a hot day, sweating – you know all of these moments, even if they're very small and fragmentary, they are moments of what could be considered to be some kind of authentic connections, some kind of human to human talking and engaging with each other, that's just really inspiring for me and hopefully some of that comes out in the videos that I've been making.*

Josh Donkor, Empire Sounds : *The process was slow to start with, we met up once every six months during R&D sessions, but the past two months have been quite intense with rehearsals trying to get ready for the show. The connection with Dan was pretty immediate, he's a cool guy, proper.*

### Credits

SESSION was co-commissioned by LIFT, Attenborough Centre for Creative Arts, Bristol Old Vic Ferment & Pavillion Dance South West. Produced by MAYK and LIFT. Presented by LIFT and Bernie Grant Arts Centre. Supported by Arts Council England. SESSION is a LIFT Tottenham Original, made in collaboration with artists and communities from Tottenham, London, UK.

**Participants’  
testimonies:  
who does write  
from where?**

**Félix  
Dupin-Meynard**

**(University of  
Montpellier)**

The participants’ point of view is indispensable for analysing participative residencies. Their expectations, their subjective experiences, their disappointments and their satisfactions enlighten us to better evaluate the impacts of each residency. Many of their testimonies were collected during action research, the synthesis of which appears at the conclusion of this chapter. Anyway, we also wished to offer them the opportunity to write their own texts, alongside producers and artistic teams. These texts emanate only from participants having the capacity and/or the will to express themselves in writing – their abilities depending largely on their social position. Consequently, those paragraphs represent specific experiences, and have to be read as such.

The social characteristics of the participants were different according to the residencies’ type. In the residencies targeted at specific audiences who are not merely spectators (migrants, footballers, Roma community, etc.), participants were usually not very endowed with cultural capital – for the most part, they had never entered a theatre, and had not practiced any theatrical form before. In residencies that did not target a specific audience, the participants were spectators of the venue hosting the residency – for the most part, they were more endowed with cultural capital: they practiced or studied dance or theatre, knew the codes and vocabularies, had sought for some time to become professional artists.

Effects of residencies are, of course, differentiated according to the social and cultural position of individuals, and more particularly their “starting point” in terms of cultural capital and artistic practices. For those who did not have artistic practices or had never been to theatre, the residency could constitute a gigantic gain and lead to many discoveries, while for those who were already semi-professional and dance or theatre lovers, those impacts were more limited, as they had less to learn and more to expect. As a result, the residencies generated more frustration in

the latter. They volunteered to participate and took the promise of co-creation seriously, and when it ended up limited or unfulfilled, their judgment could be legitimately severe.

The following texts, thus, mostly emanate from critical participants, and do not represent them all. In addition, they relate to residencies that took the risk of promising a real co-creation, and which therefore exposed themselves to the risk of producing frustrations, while residencies that did not play the game of co-creation, as long as they had the merit of not making “false promises”, are more immune from criticisms.

## **Participants’ quotes**

*It seemed a very good opportunity to get an inside view into such a work in progress, get to know artists with common interests, see how a director start a work like this, and also take part in the creative process*

*It was really surprising for me not to have any restrictions. We shared a lot of energy, it was really easy-going and open. I think this is the first time that I felt comfortable not knowing anyone from the group*

*I like the process in which we are trying to transplanting our words, our stories, into moves and plays. It’s not like we are totally creating it... but there is something from us*

*It’s one of the most intense experiences I’ve had since many years... I was feeling alone, and I didn’t have any motivation to create something*

*I discover artistic creation from inside. While I experience it, I can see that I am able to bring things out!*

*I didn’t think I could express my feelings through dance. After this experience I feel like I understand a new language. [...] Slowly I felt like I learned new ways to communicate, I saw new signs in movement and expressions*

*I never danced before. I thought I couldn’t do it – theatre it’s not usual for me, talking in front of people is difficult. But, finally, I really like it, it helps me to express myself*

*Through various tips and tasks, hints and exercises, we learned to get out of our comfort zone, to be self-dependent and to take our responsibility as performers*

*For me, it was a demonstration that everybody can be an actor, a dancer, or a performer*

*I discover the new potential of this performing art. Every interaction became a motivation or an inspiration, every movement was carefully chosen to colour the world. I started to make sketches and to be eager to become an artist myself. I started to grow. I want to become an alchemist!*



**Uncertainty and  
vulnerability  
for the sake  
of creativity.  
Reflections on  
Renato Rocha's  
Workshop  
"I Have a  
Dream"**



Renato Rocha (BR) – *Rise*  
(Bakelit Multi Art Center, Budapest, 2018) ©Imre Kővágó Nagy

Amazingly, not only our creative endeavours and our perceptions of life were merging – we also relinquished ourselves as separate entities for the sake of a common feeling.

As fortunate as it is, there was not much preface to what we should expect from the workshop. Renato Rocha employed the *I Have a Dream* theme, directly referring to the Martin Luther King's speech, thus already connecting us all to the universal concept of the struggle for dreams. What we knew before the workshop as well, was that he expected us to come from various artistic backgrounds, to create a "multidisciplinary" workshop. Up to this point, not enough to get the idea, right?

**Nikita  
Khellat**

(Active spectator)

Before we embarked on the creative process, and started tasting his philosophy around the project, we told him about ourselves. One by one, in a cosy circle, we told each other about ourselves: what our lifeblood was, what we were connected to, and what we were struggling with and for. Actually, these were not the criteria that he asked us to follow – all the patterns turned out from our stories; and in the end we found out that however different we all were – there could always be some interconnection. And that is when the ground was set. Different participants from 5 different countries – artists with experiences ranging from contemporary choreography and drama all the way to poetry, opera singing and instrumental music playing – here is how we saw ourselves at the beginning: each one with his/her own different struggles. However different we are and whatever we do, as Renato would say, the ways we relate to art are still universal for all human beings. Just like the social struggles we experience. We started to feel the connections.

Masterfully cherry-picked the ideas from our speeches, be it the fear of future or uncertainties, or the concern for being constantly under control, Renato's approach was to take all our unique perceptions of life and expose them artistically via various art forms, that we as artists-participants were experienced in. And

here the greatest experimental alchemy started to occur. The bittersweet symphony of life performed by the art-forms that we and Renato were conducting, with cooperative spirit and emotional synergy. Amazingly, not only our creative endeavours and our perceptions of life were merging, but we also relinquished ourselves as separate entities for the sake of a common feeling. Working altogether sharing the same idea.

With the help of Renato, we produced an atmosphere free from the oppression of space and time, while experimenting with our own realities. To achieve that emotional and creative unity, Renato also created various exercises for us to open up. Exploring and grasping the concept of vulnerability, he provoked us by pushing the boundaries of what we were already familiar with and what we were used to in relation to art. All for the sake of creativity, to understand how we all are interrelated, how art forms can be combined, and how there are always myriads of possibilities to combine art forms and the ways we can relate ourselves to art as well. The final brain-child of our creative and emotional synergy is the embodiment of his remarkable philosophy of “multidisciplinary”.

Through the creative process, carving his ways in the search of pure essence, exploring the universal human sensations and our unique perceptions of life and art, he also served as a guide for us to:

- ◆ help us understand ourselves in our pursuit of dreams
- ◆ show how art can open us up after the life-long oppression by society
- ◆ allow us to understand the multiplicity of choices and possibilities we always have.

And most importantly, to help us find ways to fulfil the utmost desire of all human beings, for our dreams to come true. Very inspirational workshop *I Have a Dream* with the extraordinary Renato Rocha. Thank you for this experience.

**The Actor Is  
A Spectator.  
Personal  
reflections on  
performance-  
building and  
community-  
building**

Urvi  
Vora

(Active spectator)

*Urvi Vora was a participant in a Be Spectative! residency in Budapest, Renato Rocha's Workshop I Have a Dream. In the following text, she reflects upon that experience. She is a contemporary dancer and researcher from New Delhi, and has recently finished her postgraduate studies in Dance Anthropology, revolving her interests specifically around modern rituals, performance of politics and performative affect. Using her academic training, she tries to create artistic works that question the limits of the body, our understanding of it, and the politics of the body of the other.*

**An unusual call for participants**

I often judge a performance by its poster. I *always* judge a workshop by its description. While the former can often be misleading, the latter is a relatively innocent act. What a description wants is to be read, and the participant is just fulfilling its function. I noticed this workshop had none, but had a very clear demand instead – we needed to have a dream. It was open to “everyone between the age of 18 to 35, with enthusiasm to express and share their dreams, and with various artistic and cultural backgrounds”.

This mysterious announcement by a theatre director was enough to intrigue seven people – from a contemporary dancer to a drama pedagogue, from someone who had never performed on stage to an opera singer who couldn't remember a time when she didn't – who had dreams, or who would be bringing their dreams with them. Or, like me, would try and come up with something on the long tram journey from the centre of Budapest to the theatre space in the outskirts. On the first day, after our scattered arrival, one girl had jokingly asked “is this about our dreams or Martin Luther King's?” and made me put away a small scrap of paper enlisting my recurrent nightmares and that one good dream I had last week.

## The methodology of intimacy and essentialisation

With the patience and openness of an Alcoholics Anonymous group and the performative flair of a theatre company, the circle of people generously began to introduce itself. The tour de table was an elaborate affair, which began with one of the workers at the theatre talking about her dual identity as a Hungarian and a Romanian. As there were no clear guidelines about what we were meant to do, each one of us stitched a narrative together – that one Indian classical dance class I ran away from, the dictatorship that changed me, the fears I have for the future, the perturbations of being a performing artist – we all found something to say. It was a performative catharsis of which the director took copious notes. And I developed a fondness for the people sitting around me.

To my surprise, this session was ended with a set of chosen sentences from our monologues and gave us specific tasks to do. He had picked parts of our lives that he found interesting and suggested we found dance, music, or writing in it. There was a grave assumption that those puzzling moments were our dreams in his parting note. “We all have some big dreams, don’t we?” Suddenly the mystery of what the description referred to had been solved. We had retreated into an obvious, extremely reductive idea of our dreams – and they weren’t really ours. Over the next few days, that one thing he liked about us had *become* us and I remember wondering whether I said only one interesting thing in my introduction. Moreover, we had already been labelled. There was a girl with fears, a girl who knew a military march, a boy who was once Hamlet. That essentialisation of identities in a supposedly research-based framework on active spectatorship seemed antithetical and personally troublesome.

## Is this a community?

It had been a while since I had worked in a dance company and somehow that transported me right back to instances of being in one. The specificity of tasks given to us, the feeling that we were not quite delivering what was asked of us, and the repeated attempts until the director felt we had found it – they had all come together to establish us as the performer and him as a conventional theatre director. There were of course moments when one of us would bring something up but then we would wait for his approval to go ahead. While this is not, in itself, problematic, the constant insistence of us becoming a community of creators made it so. It was as if we had found a way to execute a fake ritual, one that we did not necessarily need to believe in, and assumed that made us a community. Through that, we were pushed towards our final showing, making that a questionable ethnographic museum. An outsider’s glimpse into a “community”, where objects do not always have agency.

Much like a social ritual, the director had the energy of a conductor, demanding our attention. Infusing that energy with passion, he had brought with him a willingness to “do something”. He told us inspiring stories of his previous experiences doing such workshops across continents from Brazil, to the United Kingdom, to India. They stayed with me, firstly, because those were stories of uplift and empowerment for communities who really needed it; and secondly, because they were inherently different from the workshop we were a part of. Perhaps those communities, like the marginalised urban slum dwellers of Mumbai, really benefitted from a strong director like him, who could lead them, push them to channel their thoughts creatively, and bring them from a social setting to the public sphere. We, as a much more privileged group of people than those ones, were here for something else. It would be a gross misunderstanding to equate these two situations as we were at this workshop of our

own volition, having had the freedom to choose an artistic practice to take forward. Rather than find an escape from our reality, perhaps we were trying to enhance it by having a new experience, albeit in different ways. I found that the workshop was spent building confidence of the people who were a bit shy. It was magical to see a girl, who had never performed professionally before, transform into a confident soloist, perform a monologue and even share her own poetry. It was a wonderful initiative, but was that really the right place for it? Maybe, but not for all of us perhaps. At times, as someone who has been performing for a long time, I truly felt that I was completing a job for someone rather than exploring and asking questions in a workshop.

### **Conflicts between community-building and performance-building**

The moments of conflict were not always unpleasant, but appeared also to be quite strong. A lot of them had to do with the insistence on having a small sharing at the end of the week. Which meant our attention had to be diverted to choosing what is good enough to be shown to an audience and for how long. Often, decisions were given the status of unanimous, while we had not actually been asked. So, what was our position in that theatre, were we the active spectators we had been searching for, or actors who often felt like spectators? It was the day we had witnessed a participant break into tears when repeatedly asked to list out her fears about the world. (Note: she was the aforementioned essentialised “girl with fears”). She was afraid of poverty, of upsetting others, of not finding her place in the world, of not succeeding as a theatre pedagogue, she was in tears, and then she ran out of the studio. The director had simple and efficient ways to calm down an agitated group by insisting, “we all have the same fears, don’t we?” I silently protested in my head

though – “no, we don’t”. That protest wasn’t a lack of empathy but rather, a questioning of what provocation meant here. The use of provocation as a methodology usually has a limit and here, it appeared when discomfort did. It had been tipped over by the awkwardness of an emotional reaction of that intensity in such a short duration and the insistence that *we all felt the same*.

### **Contextualising “research” and myself in an artistic process**

Another insistence throughout that period was that “we are only presenting our research”. Somehow, I never reached the point of understanding what the object of the research was. Even in an ambiguous setting, my instinct was to look for elements that could qualify that as good research: criticality, openness, and rigour. I hit a speed bump when we were working with big and small objects brought by us and creating unintentional narratives through them. At random, we made a seemingly odd addition to the work, which would appear after the participant performed an edited monologue from Hamlet in Russian except for one line, “to be or not to be”. Here, it was imperative to ask what is it that we are saying with this work. If we were consciously making a political statement regarding the Hamlet monologue, then I was befuddled by its presence. Or was it just a good transition? And if that was the case, then I was disappointed that we were not doing this work justice by scrutinising every little bit. We did bring up that objection with the director and he immediately removed it without a second thought. That was a lost opportunity for a fruitful discussion of the implications of certain elements, which could have helped the participants as well. In this regard, there was a version of openness and an inclination towards criticality but a lack of rigour. So, what was being researched here?

My own position was an unstable one. I was tiptoeing around some things and finding my voice with the others. The tasks given to me were total abstractions of the years of research I had done on military ceremonies and movement. “Remove that because not everyone can’t do it. Keep that but only the arms look beautiful. Repeat in twice in different directions to end it with the other monologue”. I think I learnt how seeming ordinary sequence of words or movements could be theatrically represented but I have been running away from “dance as mere representation” for so long that it left me dissatisfied. My breaking point arrived on the day of the showing, when we were asked to make pairs and dramatically run and scream while our partner tried to hold us back, to symbolise the freedom we are all searching for. I felt absolutely disconnected, as there had been no build up to this charged, dramatic moment. I was asked multiple times why I wasn’t screaming along. It just wasn’t something real that I could produce in thirty seconds. The repeated questioning pushed me to ask for permission to step out of this section. This request was sternly denied as apparently we, as a group, had to do everything together, and I would ruin the pairs for the presentation if I didn’t do it. So, I ask again, what was being researched here? And who was benefiting from it? Going by the theme of the workshop, I imagine there are multiple ways to realise dreams. This just was not mine.

My general discontentment stopped me from inviting anyone to come and watch the final showing. There could be simple ways of thinking about “active spectatorship” like a post-performance talk, but the passivity of performers themselves can be difficult to bypass. In a fairly conventional space, with time constraints and the pressure to perform on Friday evening, there is a lot that one can learn about one’s own limitations and hesitations, methodologies of experienced theatre directors, and the complications of working with a diverse group. I look up to this director who brought this entire week together with his ideas and

passion for creation. However, the package that this came in was labelled all wrong. We adopted the terminology that we felt represented *Be Spectative!* as a whole, but I am not sure if we understood or embodied it. In my understanding, active spectatorship does not necessarily require participation from the audience nor a community dance/theatre performance, but an innovative way of engagement, of the recognition that the spectator is intelligent and the actor is also responding to the spectator. It could be challenging to ask how it is different, if at all, from a conventional theatre space. Leading the discussion in that direction for future workshops could hold the answer. The discussion after our performance revolved around how we felt we knew each other (I felt it too) and how we built a community for this performance (I was yet to be convinced). I was not convinced that knowing some intimate details about each other translated to being a community. If there is no space for us to counter-question our own privileges and our failure to uphold rigour, then we, as a community, should be doing better.

### **Where do we go from here?**

I think we like communities – the sound of them, the ideal imaginary, the warm feeling they bring with them. The curtain call at the end reaffirmed the theatricality of this workshop and that community-building was almost like an aesthetic preference here. It was absolutely delightful to have some drinks and snacks with this wonderful group of people that weekend – people I felt I knew, and people I had grown fond of. Of course, that did not carry on forever. Some conventional community theatre and dance projects work on a performance to form or strengthen a community. Some, like ours, forge a community to strengthen a performance, for the sake of the performance. And inevitably, we let it go, longing for a little more, as actors, as spectators, as individuals.

**A base to  
build on.  
A critical report  
of the creative  
residency  
*Different?*  
from a  
participant's  
point of view**

**Kinga  
Szemessy**

**(Active spectator)**

These lines are lying here thanks to the fact that I have been researching participatory and community dance practices in the frame of my PhD studies. However, it is more important to acknowledge that what led me to enrol the school was an ache and confusion I had experienced while rehearsing *Different?*, a dance project commissioned by Be SpectACTive!. The next pages intend to report of this particular project that triggered crucial questions on how to research about active dance spectatorship.

**About the invitation and my prior expectations**

*I am in Budapest, late January of 2016 and staring at my Facebook newsfeed. An open call gets issued by the Bakelit Multi Art Center: they are in search for participants (age 18-99) for a project on othering, or on in what extent we feel different from anybody else. Having a dance background is not a requirement, but being a professional is not an excluding factor either. The only must is to be able to speak in English<sup>1</sup>. The announcement informs us that after a week-long workshop there will be a work-in-progress presentation, though there is no explicit elaboration on its meaning. The facilitating choreographers seem to have a lot of experience with children and with non-dancers in general, and their proposal is pretty straightforward: they desire to create a “tactile labyrinth”, an interactive performance for adults<sup>2</sup>. It leaves me the impression of no risk and no obligations. The question of signing an official contract does not come up. The question of what I will receive in exchange my body being appropriated by their paid artistic product also does not appear. I'm in!*

My participating fellows and I were truly intrigued by the proposals of the choreographers: the personal interviews made in our homes, the first night scored space event to meet with each other in an embodied way, and the movement explorations about “continuum”<sup>3</sup> or other qualities of improvisation. We had been always very curious and even grateful until the moment when we realised that there will be a showing, or rather a showing off.



According to the plan, in the final performance we, “guest performers” were supposed to be the guides for small groups formed by the audience. The pathway to walk through with them was first a quick journey through the theatre hall, secondly a devotion for the solos of the “performers”, then a slightly forced common party at the end. The scene in which we had a moment to shine was about enlisting particular gestures as associations to words such as *nation*, *crazy*, and *defiant*. Even if there had always been dissociation between the paid professional dancers and us<sup>5</sup>, I felt that the performance night had highlighted it in its greatest potential.

### **Ambiguous feelings emerged throughout the rehearsal process**

There are two figures who have to be introduced in order to understand how any storm broke out: the spectator and the researcher<sup>6</sup>. Without having the necessity to be exposed to someone else’s gaze, we would not have minded to do clumsy, non-relational moves<sup>7</sup> on stage. Also, without being requested to answer “in what extent we had felt free and invited to contribute to the project”, we would have not complained at all. These moments of display and self-reflection, however, made us losing the will to further contribute to what we had definitely enjoyed doing until that time. That night of the work-in-progress presentation was neither *for us*, nor devised *by* or even *with us*. We were handed a script to follow, dressed in costumes and sort of obliged to attach a smile for the audience including poor countryside kids coming to see a dance performance probably the first and last time ever in their lives. How can one disagree and refuse to perform in such a context?

Nobody really had the radical intention to quit, because we respected that the choreographers were still in a research phase,

which is often vulnerable by its nature. We did get unbalanced though, because at the moment of presenting the performance schedule they seemed to abandon the research itself<sup>8</sup>. The rules of the game have essentially changed by the announcement of the score for the show. We were not anymore welcome to sit aside, and eventually refuse the choreographers’ requests – that would have been considered as a violating act personally against them and their inevitably hard working dancers.

All these above-mentioned issues now make me raise the question: was I too naïve? Or: did I subordinate myself to some seemingly famous artists? Whose responsibility was that we had been treated differently than the paid dancers? Why did the artistic team have to make this compromise of shifting the original methodology? “We could not let it happen that the best dancers of Czech Republic don’t show how skilled they are in terms of moving” – echoes in my ear what one of the producers of the project said at a network meeting<sup>9</sup>. Therefore, I believe, the piece had involved a third choreographer: the institution. Or in other words: prestige and market demands. Considering the art world Be SpectACTive! operates within, these are, of course, indispensable factors.

### **Who is ideal to be appointed to such artist researcher position?**

Compensating some of ours feeling of being used, we “guest performers” received an invitation to watch the final version of the piece in Prague<sup>10</sup>. In the post-performance talk the supervisor of the choreographers, Bush Harsthorn asked the audience who had been the author of the seen performance. The silence was broken by someone expressing a dilemma that it is impossible to differentiate his felt sensations from that he knows what the creative staff wants to hear. The next disturbing task was to raise

our hands when any of the following category applied to us: “dancers” and “experts”. As none of the “performers” moved during the last, for me it revealed that the biggest yield of the project was in changing the artists perception on themselves. What was meant to be audience development, turned to be artist development. But who would be an ideal artist for the network? It will be answered once the needs or the requirements will become clear. Should the partners find a common credo, or rather tolerate each other’s priorities? The process of *Different?* left wounds behind, but had shaken up not only the participants, but the members of the network as well, and had unfolded the hidden tensions based on their diverse intentions.

### **Need for more extended debates and exchanges**

In my belief several groundbreaking outcomes could be dismissed because of the gentle emphasis put on guiding the artists. If there is no platform set up for them to exchange ideas on what problems and successes they faced with, how could anyone expect any advancement in the process of investigating the notion of an “active spectator”? How is it guaranteed that not everyone will start from very basic forms of interaction, such as stepping out of a role and addressing a sentence or a gesture to an audience member?

I am hesitant if there is a point of producing written materials that would just replicate the critical reflections of Claire Bishop (2012), Bojana Kunst (2015) and several academics who had already published books and articles about this well-discussed topic of participation. In the following part I am going to discuss a couple of notions that could have been articulated more in relation to *Different?*, if the staff had been governing the general idea of researching differently.

### **Further (theoretical) considerations**

Since Augusto Boal’s seminal work, *The Theatre of the Oppressed*, theatre became the dominating form to introduce audience participation. But aren’t there any genre specific mechanisms in dance or in puppetry that would be alien to the conventions of realist theatre for instance? Why there is an assumption that there are universal participatory devices for all performing arts disciplines? In the case of *Different?* there have always been audience members feeling awkward to join in and groove with the dancers. Some said after the Prague performance that it is fine to copy some moves, because the performers’ request is put in a friendly manner, but after the second or third time this act transforms into a sole politeness. One goes dancing, because the performers ask nicely e.g. “when you hear me whistling, you are invited to do this movement”. However, according to the concept of the choreographers nobody was supposed to copy, but rather to embody the movements that had been taught to them.

The term “embodiment”<sup>11</sup> is connected to the phenomenological understanding of the body which considers it not only as a physical substance that one possesses, and what is a medium for transmitting a symbolic (either emotional or intellectual) message, but rather a place for an event which through one experience reality. The dancer’s body is always the source and the end product at the same time, and it offers an awareness how to live bodily, thus not under the dominance of ratio, but through activating sensations. This binocular vision of dance is what makes the genre particular when it comes to question why and how to make the audiences to be moved. What are the phases that one has to go through in order to leave behind normative movements (e.g. sitting, standing, walking) and start elevating his or her arms, stepping wider or establishing contact with others via touch? What are the referential situations and places in which the majority of the spectators get rid of their conditioned bodily

habits: disco, religious rituals, sex, extreme sport etc.? How is it possible to generate a sense of community if we don't share the very same body? Such questions could, and, in my belief, should arise in relation to each creative residency that chooses dance as its form, and is dedicated to research the idea of an active spectator.

Retrospectively I believe that the project *Different?* is an outstanding example of a great endeavour that was pulled back due to not daring to risk the saleability of the show. The time frame in which the project was realised<sup>16</sup> also made it difficult to maintain a consecutive research instead of a series of new beginnings in each city (Prague, Budapest, Ljubljana). Yet, I think *Different?* – with all its imperfection: asymmetric power dynamics and unexplored artistic potentials – was essential to the questions that the network has ever raised, therefore nobody should consider it as a failure, but rather as a springboard and a source base for upcoming residencies.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/bakelitmac/posts/917840061599056> (accessed at: 09/05/2018).

<sup>2</sup> <https://vimeo.com/124293143> (accessed at: 09/05/2018).

<sup>3</sup> It could be understood as staying in a constant flow of movement.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/events/1526123211016141/> (accessed at: 09/05/2018).

<sup>5</sup> On one hand, they were rehearsing eight hours per day, thus were pretty exhausted by the time we arrived to Bakelit in the evenings. On the other hand, the promotion materials underlined this asymmetry as the paid dancers were listed with their full names on (Barbora Látalová, Zdenka Brungot Svíteková, Eva Hromník, Klára Alexová, Inga Mikshina, Kim Jun Wan, Daniel Raček), while we with only fragments of (A. Gergely, A. Dóri, Sz. Kinga, M. István, B. Tünde, B. Xénia, H. László, P. Darinka, Jana G., K. Imre) <https://www.facebook.com/events/1526123211016141/> (accessed at: 09/05/2018).

<sup>6</sup> Félix Dupin-Meynard, who was hired to conduct an (action) research on the creative residency. His overall task was to observe, reflect and propose modifications, though never intervening only on his own.

<sup>7</sup> “It did not feel good to reproduce associative movements by memory. I desired new words and new surprises – as it was the core of our sessions. Then the piece outmatched us: we started working for an imaginary system that actually would not exist without us. My interest was never fed by any great compositions in which the characters are easily interchangeable. [...] Unfortunately, the eager research of *Different?* distorted to a basic compositional etude”.

<https://bakelitmac.wordpress.com/2016/03/06/bespectactivebeszelgetesaresztvevokkevendegloadokkal/> (accessed at: 25/05/2016; own translation of my reflections in Hungarian).

<sup>8</sup> Throughout the text I keep referring to “research” that is linked to 1) the hired researchers’ group 2) the artistic research done by the commissioned choreographers and 3) the research as an objective of the network. My criticism targets mostly the latter, and questions the two previous ones as until this point I am not fully aware how these were woven into a common greater picture. Whose methods and findings were the most crucial? How did they become incorporated in each other’s work?

<sup>9</sup> I must admit that ear-witnessing this sentence was due to the openness of the Be SpecACTive! staff, as they had allowed me to audit some of their meetings and later conferences, too.

<sup>10</sup> The trip was co-financed by Bakelit M.A.C. (Budapest) and Divadlo Ponoc (Prague).

<sup>11</sup> In the beginning often used by the choreographers as well.

## CONCLUSION

**Félix  
Dupin-Meynard**

(University of  
Montpellier)

Through the reading of these texts, even with a limited selection of residencies presented and commented, we notice a strong diversity of practices and points of view. All the more points of views may not converge: even if two stakeholders are speaking about a same experience, but from a different position, their feelings and judgments may vary strongly. Producers, artists and participants have different interests to play the game, and as we mentioned in the introduction, they rarely share the same type of goals – consequently, they do not share the same criteria of evaluation. Thus, this conclusion, rather than establishing successes and failures, will summarise the types of effects observed on each involved stakeholder (expected and unexpected), before establishing their conditions and limits, and proposing few lessons from this analysis.

### **Participatory residencies’ impacts on those who make them**

#### *Audience development and cultural democracy*

From an organisation’s point of view, most of the expected effects of residencies relate to audience development classic goals and strategies: increasing audiences (attracting audiences with the same socio-demographic profile as the current audience); deepening relationship with the audiences (enhancing the experience of the current audiences in relation to a cultural event and/or encouraging them to discover related or even non-related, more complex art forms, thus fostering loyalty and return visits); diversifying audiences (attracting people with a different socio-demographic profile from that of the current audiences, including people with no previous contact with the art) (Bollo et al., 2017).

When the participants are not yet audiences, and especially when the residencies are the occasion of a partnership with local

structures or communities which were not represented among the audience, the residencies can make it possible to reach new audiences, by informing people about the existence of the place, creating expectations to see shows, establishing new subjective links with artists or artistic forms. However, connecting with new people does not guarantee they will become spectators. The proposals of the venue have to be adjusted to the desires of these potential new audiences, which can often require voluntarism from the institution: integrating new aesthetics that were not previously programmed, offering support for amateur projects, ensuring long-term partnerships with local communities or structures, etc. Some venues are reluctant to engage in this new kind of actions – or philosophies – because of the perception of undermining “artistic reputation” or for financial and time reasons. Only few partners have actually implemented new proposals, but at least new ideas are emerging from these meetings with new audiences.

Beyond the connections with individuals, some residencies offer the opportunity to build new links between the organisation and specific social groups or institutions (for example, partnerships with neighbourhood associations, community groups or social institutions). These partnerships, on the long term, could also contribute to reaching more diverse audiences.

If this kind of new links appear, residencies can participate, to a certain extent, in cultural democracy. Unfortunately, this is rarely the case: most projects only reached existing audiences – especially because many artists did not choose to target specific audiences, and advertisements for participation went through the venues’ traditional channels. Furthermore, participatory residencies rarely involved more than 10 persons per country, so the potential effect on audiences was of a very limited proportion, even though the word of mouth in new social spaces can play a role.

When residencies only reach existing audiences, they can help setting up new relations with them. On the condition, however, that organisations really get involved in the residency, both humanely and materially, and have something to propose to the participants: offering to join participatory programming groups or decisional boards, being opened to their suggestions, supporting their potential projects, etc. In several cases, the whole *Be SpectACTive!* experience seems to have built groups of audiences able to take a real role in the organisation, becoming close ambassadors or advisors, having the ability to appropriate the place and mobilise its resources.

Thus, the residencies can be springboards, admittedly limited, for new relations between organisations and audiences or local populations. The targeting of participants depends on the goal: is it to offer a new experience and role to spectators, or to reach and involve new people? These two types of objectives imply different mobilisation tools and do not have the same effects in terms of audience development. A residency without target will generally reach existing audiences, while a residency mobilising specific groups can reach non-audiences, sometimes very socially far away from cultural institutions.

On another level, it seems that the implementation of participatory projects can slowly change artistic institutions’ perceptions about their social and cultural role. For instance, the experiment has led certain venues to reflect on cultural diversity and the definition of artistic quality, questioning their usual functions by programming new aesthetics, creating links with non-artistic associations in their neighbourhood, opening their choices to audience’s initiatives, rethinking their decision-making process, etc. After four years of experience, these developments seem rare and limited, but the reflection could lead, in the long term, to progressive transformations towards more democracy, cultural diversity and porosity to the social context.

*Experiment with new creative methods... to produce better shows?*

According to organisations, creative residencies firstly remain an opportunity to finance new shows through co-productions, or to promote local artists by allowing them to be in contact with new countries and diffusion networks. New shows have indeed been created. However, their potential integration into programming circuits depends on the organisations' investment in the promotion and diffusion after the residencies. In many cases, in the absence of support, the projects stopped at the end of the three residencies. It is an important limit to question: if the priority is to produce shows, what about their future? Are these new pieces only ephemeral? Is it the responsibility of artists to find new co-producers?

More than new shows, most partners' speeches are about producing good shows, innovative shows, quality shows. But as participatory residencies often drive to a decreased level of control over artistic creation – as control is shared among different actors more than usual –, it can sometimes challenge the classical forms of shows usually programmed. While production is their first goal, most of the partners consider that participation produces lower quality performances. Why practice participation then?

From the artists' point of view, creating new shows or better shows is also mentioned as a central goal – but their judgement on quality differs strongly. Most artists designed those residencies as experimental processes. For some, it was the first participative experience, while for others it was a new way of looking at participation – but all of them mentioned the experimentation of new creative processes as leading to new ways of thinking. Many were driven to innovate in their methods: new ways to create directly from lived experiences; workshops on collective movements or scenes with participants; discussions and debates at each stage of the show writing; attempts to be partly directed by non-professionals, etc. Residencies also led some artists to

include new skills in their teams, having an influence on the creation in the same way as the participants did.

Through these experiences on the creative process, for those who really try it, matter and form of their shows may have been modified. What is the result? Some artists believe that it is a way to get closer to authenticity, social accuracy, innovative forms, challenging stage directions, or producing shows involving a new type of relationship with their social environment and their audiences. The level of these potential transformations depends on the type of interaction set up with participants (the possibility for the participants to express themselves freely) and the artist's permeability to their influence.

In some cases, residencies can even challenge the classical definition of a show, and its borders with the creation process. Several artists mention that the participatory experience have questioned the only finality of a creative process as a “finalised show”. Some claim the experience of interactive creation could be worth for itself. Even if they feel that a demonstrable result is needed, they prefer calling it “work in progress” or “living documentary” and leaving it open to future influences. Some artists even claim that residencies are “a concept, not a show; a method, not a result”. Behind these shifting notions of creation and show, it is also the definition of artistic quality that can move: within the participatory framework, quality is not presented by the artists in terms of “excellence”, “technicality” or “aesthetics”, but it refers more to values such as “collective experience”, “authenticity”, “learning process” and “experimentation”.

*New relationship and new roles*

When the participative relationship involves a real mutual listening, some artists also learn to build new relationships with their audiences on the long term. Some claim they want to be



closer to their audiences, being more responsive to their feedback, performing by being more aware of the relationship with the spectator.

For some artists, participation is unsettling. Their role is not the same as usual, and some of their reflexes and habits are questioned by participants. Most therefore consider this experience as a learning process about what “creating” could be – or even about what “being an artist” could be. Is the artist’s mission only to create pieces? Or is it also to bring out the beauty of the collective? To share his/her tools of expression? To give word to those who do not have a say? To instil the desire to create? To open a dialogue between different aesthetics and cultural beliefs? Does the artist have a monopoly on artistic creation? – Old questions, which are reformulated in a stimulating way when artists confront participation.

#### *Pleasure and learning*

What about the participants’ benefits from these experiences? To start with what seems the most obvious – but is often forgotten among the criteria for evaluating cultural policies – residencies can be moments of individual and collective pleasure, through the practice of art together, discussions and informal moments, encounters and connections between individuals. Some friendships are born from residencies, some intercultural exchanges too. Some people say it was an occasion to “get out of solitude”, or to dare expressing topics that usually remained private.

Participants also mention much learning from residencies: new tools of individual or collective expression (dance, theatre, poetry, improvisation games, performances, etc.), the discovery of new aesthetics, the familiarity with an artistic vocabulary, etc. Through residencies, participants can also get a better understanding of the creation process and of the “hidden work” of

artists from the inside: this can change their point of view as spectators, but also as art makers.

Some of these learnings contribute to the goals generally assigned to cultural democracy (objectives like access to culture, culture being considered here as a very small part represented by artistic institutions): some people got a new passion for contemporary dance, some others questioned their past prejudices about theatre, some would like to practice an artistic activity or discover a new venue and its programming. As a result, some of them dared to enter in artistic places that they would have judged “not for me” before, while others became more “regular” or “involved” audiences of a venue they already knew.

#### *An (artistic) empowerment?*

Other effects could be linked to the notion of empowerment, often used to qualify the goals of participation. This term usually refers to the process of increasing people’s autonomy, enabling them to represent their interests in a self-determined way, acting on their own authority, becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one’s life and claiming one’s rights. So, to what extent could we say that participation in residencies can contribute to empowerment?

Beside the discovery of new tools of expression, new languages, new perceptions, in many cases participants also claimed that residencies helped them to become less shy and more confident about expressing themselves, overcoming their fears. Some of them never dared to dance in front of an audience before, or never told part of their story or thoughts in public. Some others got the will to create their own pieces and artistic projects. This increasing ability and will to express things by new means, increasing social connections, and increasing confidence in themselves are all elements that could contribute to an empowerment.

The opportunity for the participants to tell their own personal stories – including stories of social marginalisation, migration, violence, sexism, discriminations – which are then played back to them, or with them, or by them, could also contribute to a political empowerment, reminding us about techniques using theatre as a means of solving social problems or promoting social change (as *Theatre of the Oppressed*), where the participants may explore, show, analyses and transform the reality in which they are living (Boal, 2000).

The borderline between artist and non-artist is a hierarchy of status towards creation that is producing inhibitions and restrictions in terms of legitimacy. By saying “everyone is an artist”, some artists are weakening that border, providing the opportunity for participants to reconsider their legitimacy to create (“for me, it was a demonstration that everybody can be an actor, a dancer, a performer”). However, in most cases (except for a residency where participants were paid in the same way as professionals), the configuration paradoxically continues to place them as “non-artists” or “amateur artists” alongside “professional artists” – thus, it would be more accurate to claim that “everyone *could be* an artist (later?)”.

Therefore, we could say that these experiences are at least looking like an artistic empowerment, potentially driving to a political empowerment. Contribution of artistic participation to empowerment is not consensual. Some, like Sophie Wahnich (2006), affirm that even if these projects give the possibility of “speaking in public”, “to make one’s voice heard”, or to “become visible”, they only generate “simulacra”. Having no political outlet in relation to the production of the law, they might remain in the paradigm of “to make see” and “to make speak” which she does not consider as a “political logos” (ibidem). Others, like Jaques Rancière (2004), considers that “the arts only ever lend to projects of domination or emancipation what they are able to lend to them, that is to say, quite simply, what they have in common

with them: bodily positions and movements, functions of speech, the parcelling out of the visible and the invisible” (p. 19). In this last perspective, arts are limited means of contributing to emancipation, but by broadening creative expressions to new people, and thus producing new perceptions of individuals on themselves and on the society, they participate to the transformation of social and political representations.

### *The importance of cultural capital*

All of these impacts are, of course, differentiated according to the social position of individuals, and more particularly to their “starting point” in terms of cultural capital and artistic practices. Many researches explored how our artistic tastes, practices, representations, are determined by our level of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984), that is determined, in turn, by our social trajectories. Therefore, is it possible to speak about participants without specifying their former relationships to art and artistic institutions?

In residencies that target specific audiences different from spectators (migrants, footballers, etc.), participants are usually not very endowed with cultural capital – for the most part, they never entered in a theatre, and had not practiced theatrical forms before. In residencies that do not target a particular audience, the participants are, in fact, spectators of the venue hosting the residency – for the most part they are more endowed with cultural capital: they practice or study dance or theatre, know the codes and vocabularies and seek, for some, to become professional artists.

For those who did not have artistic experience or have never been to the theatre, the residency can constitute a gigantic gain through many discoveries, while for those who were already semi-professional or dance and theatre lovers, these impacts are more

limited: they have less to learn and more to expect. As a result, participative residencies generate more frustrating effects for the latter. They have volunteered to participate and consider the promise of co-creation seriously; when they feel it is limited or unfulfilled, their judgment is legitimately severe.

### **Conditions, problems and solutions**

The positive impacts summarised here are far from being systematic. They are conditioned and differentiated according to multiple parameters, such as temporal and material constraints, local contexts, goals aimed by the actors, choices of the participative method, social position of the participants, capacity of artists and producers to experiment new processes, interactions that emerge from these frameworks.

#### *Daring to play the participatory game*

A first condition for most of the positive impacts mentioned is the *real* participatory content of the artistic project. Some projects seem to use participation as a tool disconnected from the creative process – is it to please funders, or to stick to a fashion? In this respect, the responsibility of Be SpectACTive! network is important. Why choose projects that are not always ensuring a minimum level of participation influence over creation? The criteria for selecting projects seem to be insufficient in respect to participation. The targets, the participatory methods, the specific role of participation in the project have to be defined more precisely, and to be debated among the stakeholders, in order to avoid projects being sometimes more opportunistic than audience-centric. Without genuine motivation to develop participatory practice, and without deep reflection about the role of participation in the creation process, residencies continue to be nothing more than “classic” creation processes, including only few interactions,

such as collections of interviews inspiring a work, or interpretation of a script written in advance. Those projects can lead to misunderstandings among participants: when the project is presented under the seal of Be SpectACTive!, how could they expect something else than an “active” place?

However paradoxical it may seem, the projects that take the risk of real participation are the ones that produce the most frustrating effects. Less ambitious projects are less discussed in terms of participation issues, because there is no promise of participation – they have at least the merit of honesty. We can salute the ones that take risks to affirm “co-creation” as a goal or as a method, but, then, they have to ensure the effectiveness of such goal, giving a real role – even a real power – to participants. If not, participants may feel legitimately disappointed, or even exploited. If the artistic team is at least paying attention to the participants’ feelings, and willing to question themselves according to their feedbacks, they can adjust their method.

#### *Know-how, know who?*

The quality and the prior reflection of the participatory method are crucial. In terms of artistic criteria, being a “good artist” does not imply any particular ability to involve people in participatory processes. The composition and the experience of artistic teams could help: in fact, the participatory capacity could be increased by integrating new skills and profiles into the team. For example, in a participatory residency addressed to migrants, the choreographer was surrounded by social workers and people used to work with migrants, which facilitated the connection with participants and provided a useful methodological basis. Conversely, artists who have never worked with amateurs or who have never taken part in participatory activities may face difficulties such as defining the role of participation within their creation, specifying their requests to the hosting venue, or

anticipating about the types of participants with whom it would be possible or desirable to work.

With regard to the residencies observed, however, there is no systematic link between know-how and participative “success”: some artists for whom the residency was the first participatory experience took a lot more risks than experienced artists. While this may have led to some tricky situations (for instance, being caught between two contradictory injunctions from participants and producers), their residencies were among the most interesting ones, especially since they led to deep debates between the stakeholders involved.

As we have seen, the choice of the groups of participants is vital in the participatory method: are they regular audiences of the venue? Do they have specific social characteristics – young people, women, migrants, inhabitants of a neighbourhood, etc.? To ensure involvement and fertile interaction for everyone, it is necessary to question people’s expectations and willingness to participate. Do they have time for it? What will interest them most? How are intercultural or social issues managed within their relationship? What do they get in exchange from their participation? A participative residency cannot be thought in the same way regardless of whom it is addressed to; it cannot use the same tools, the same rules of the game or the same goals for any type of participant. This point seems to be left aside in a large number of residencies that have not defined a target audience, considering the participant as an individual who is defined only by his/her participation, and not by his/her trajectory, his/her relationship to art, his/her social position.

*Towards a fair exchange: “is it about us, or for us?”*

A reflection about power-sharing in the creative process is necessary to favour participants’ involvement, avoid exploitation

and ensure a mutual respect. A way to solve possible conflicts is to question the contents of the exchange between artists and participants: in exchange for their active participation, what are the benefits for participants? In case of “low participation” modes, such as interviews or collection of testimonies, some participants could have the feeling of giving something away without receiving anything in return.

In some cases, participants remain largely passive and feel frustration affecting their motivation and enjoyment. “I felt like I was used to contribute to their project, I felt like I was answering an exercise, not participating”, a participant commented. Artistic projects written before their participatory phase reduce the power of the participants. To be open to their ideas, projects must keep some degree of uncertainty; otherwise, participants are only “extras”, and the exchange is not really fair. That is what an artist expressed by stating: “we must be empty to receive, we must leave room for what will transform us”.

In the specific case of the residencies in which the participants are paid, that question rises differently. Indeed, paying them gives them recognition for their time, their work and their talent. The differences of status are blurred, and the fact that an artist is very directive is not perceived in the same way: the participants perceive themselves as performers in the service of a professional artistic project.

During one of the residencies observed, some participants described their role as “laboratory rats”: “it’s OK to participate in an experiment, but then we want to know what is the purpose of the experiment”, said one of them. More globally, some participants wonder whether this is made “*about us, with us, or for us?*” – reminding us the famous quote “whatever you do for me but without me, you do against me”. Therefore, if the project is not “made with”, the minimum required to ensure respect for the

participants is to clarify at least the mutual definition of the roles between artists and participants. When the rules of the game are not explicit, or when they change along the way, participants may feel lax, disappointed, betrayed. Conversely, when the rules of the game are clear, participants have the choice to accept a given role, knowingly.

Sometimes, however, their claims could evolve towards a request for more involvement or power during the residency, we could call it the “ripple effect” of participation, one of the often-unexpected effects of citizen participation: the more I am asked for my opinion, the more I will want to express it. That “ripple effect” should be envisaged by artists and producers a legitimate one, driving them to accept to be challenged by participants, pushing them to take more risks and to propose evolutions of their project according to the interaction.

#### *Ethics of the relationship*

In the context of artist-participant relationships, complex social and intercultural relations also play out, particularly because of the nomadic aspect of these residencies, but not only: the differences in positions between artists and participants can create situations that are driving to forms of lack of respect and consideration, misunderstanding, intellectual domination and essentialisation.

Assigning roles to participants based on their testimonies, for instance, can lead to unintended essentialisation, if they feel reduced to one of their characteristics, re-interpreted in a way that can be felt as a disguise of reality and imposing an image of themselves they do not identify with. During a residency, the artistic team proposed to a Roma participant to work on *what is being a woman in the Roma community* – imposing therefore a pre-established theme, and implicitly emphasizing negative prejudices. That

participant had to negotiate to affirm what she wanted to express, namely “the positive aspects of my culture”, in order to fight against the prejudices that she suffered. In other cases, some participants, being impressed by the artists, did not dare to challenge or negotiate their roles, but later claimed that they may have felt humiliated or betrayed.

It is therefore important for artists to pay a lot of attention to the respect of people and their stories, especially when the material used for creation is based on real testimonies. Are participants mere inspirers or are they co-creators with a minimum of power over what they show of themselves?

#### *Pressure of time and pressure of product*

Artists often complain about having to present a “finished product” at the end of the two-weeks residency, because the expectation of a show from the hosting venue may complicate participation and may not meet artists’ ambitions. During one of the residencies observed, some participants clearly felt that the closer in time the public showing was, the less active they were. Some had difficulty in moving from a “collaborative” to an “authoritarian” direction driven by the pressure of the show production: “at the beginning I was feeling freedom, then I felt like I was just performing in a written choreography”.

This is one of the reasons why many artists prefer long-term residencies, located in the same place, thus leading to stronger ties with participants. Some consider that European projects “jumping from city to city” may be interesting to learn new practices, but will never have as many impacts as local long-term residencies. Be SpectActive!’s model of “roaming residencies” is supposed to tend towards the creation of trans-local networks. However, only the artists are trans-local in this model: there are no connections between the different groups of participants. The

groups and their relationships with organisations are localised and take time to be built. It may be possible to make them reach another scale, but only once they have roots.

If artists may feel some pressure during the residencies, it is also because some organisations are considering that producing and programming shows potentially modified by the participation of amateurs represent a big risk. Indeed, some try to maintain a high degree of control over the artistic content of the project and its professional dimension, or strongly insist on the need of a “finished product”. In some cases, that led to stress and pressure on artistic teams and made it difficult to achieve their participatory goals. Several artists felt stuck between two contradictory injunctions, when producers were encouraging them to reduce participation, while they were facing participants claiming more power in the creative process. Could organisations accept to challenge their usual definition of performing arts on stage and potentially be surprised by uncertain artistic forms?

### **Misunderstanding the goals?**

Given the contradictions of feelings and judgments between artists, participants and venues, it seems necessary to clarify the expectations of such a project. Why, about the same experience, some actors speak of a success while others of a failure? Could a residency be an artistic success but a participatory failure, or the other way around? Is an evaluation of participatory residencies possible with a common set of criteria?

As Ben Walmsley (2018) reminded us during a Be SpectAC-Tive! international conference, “artists and organisations that choose to engage in co-creative activity need to clearly define their objectives; plan for a sustainable legacy; and engage with their participants both ethically and authentically” (p. 208). So far, it seems that a misunderstanding persists about the objectives

of participative residencies, which risks damaging the relationships between artists and producers, artists and participants, participants and organisations.

If participatory residencies are simply about producing better performances through interactions with the participants, reduced as a sole tool for artistic creation: why not, but provided that it is assumed as such by the partners and presented as such to the participants. In this case, are we really facing an attempt of experimentation and novelty? Are we really in a paradigm shift towards an audience-centric approach? Are we changing the status and roles of audiences, participants, citizens? Can we afford developing projects on such basis, all in all closely resembling the classical activity of production in performing arts – funding artists to create new shows, inspired by the society surrounding them?

Given what we have called the ripple effect of participation, it must be recognized that projects claiming to offer power to participants are likely to be overwhelmed by legitimate desire for co-creation, which cannot be left unanswered. If we promise, we must agree to share the power. And sharing power is potentially not having the last word on everything, nor doing things the way it would have been done without an opening to participants. Otherwise, participation is only a legitimization of power. It may be time for arts professionals to be jostled by unprofessional participants – after all, offering a seat to citizens means accepting that they take it.

### *Artistic quality versus democracy?*

If the goal is to really include audiences by putting them at the centre of cultural institutions, then it seems we have not succeeded enough. Here, as elsewhere, we are still talking about audiences, participants: everyone stays in his/her own place, the beneficiary



remains the beneficiary. He/she does not become a real partner in the triangle of artistic relationships (producer/artist/audiences).

It is however possible to imagine a deeper change, and some have been trying for many years, mainly outside of major artistic institutions, in the associative sector, underground, squats, community organisations or social centres. Some people have also been thinking and researching about these questions for a long time, and are proposing new paradigms and methods, such as the one of cultural democracy – which is much talked about, but little implemented in the institutional field, often limited by the holy artistic quality.

Indeed, in the course of these experiments, the notion of artistic quality was often used by producers to justify restrictions on the scope of participation, and to a lesser extent by some artists claiming to fear the producers' judgments about artistic quality. Is it necessary to continue mobilising categories such as artistic quality, when trying to invent new practices and new relationships between artists and society? Some argues, as Estelle Zhong (2015) does, that the analysis of participatory art escapes traditional categories of art history: “does this mean that there is no artistic work in participatory art, and so no art? What one could call “bourgeois temptation” resurfaced, this gesture of wanting to withdraw from art an artistic practice immiscible with what we know about art, confronted with a new practice that rejects old forms for the benefit of new forms that do not look artistic. We hypothesise that the artistic part of participatory art is not an issue: our inability to analyse these artist's own work is due to a lack of tools used to evaluate it”.

A lack of tools, certainly, but which could be filled with the mobilisation of many others, such as the ones involved by the philosophy of cultural democracy and cultural rights (Observatory of Diversity and Cultural Rights, 2007), like the promotion of

cultural diversity and artistic empowerment or the access to culture as an access both to cultural outputs and the means of cultural input (Kelly, 1985). That often implies a radical questioning of democracy within institutions. Are they ready to question the current cultural hierarchies and the monopoly of experts on the definition of quality? Are they ready to think their artistic missions as intrinsically social, shareable and movable by citizens? Or do they prefer to stay in their comfort zone, simply continuing to produce or select a “good art” and disseminate it “to the greatest number” – the traditional goal of cultural democratisation, whose failures and democratic weaknesses have repeatedly been attested (Donnat, 2008)?

As we noticed during the whole Be SpectACTive! adventure, artistic institutions are often afraid of “losing” something by democratising their organisation. Several artistic directors said they were scared that artistic quality would be threatened by an indefinite “populism” – a magic word when it comes to confusing real democracy and formal democracy. This kind of argument has also been developed by Claire Bishop (2012), claiming that independence and autonomy of the art field would be in danger, faced with the imposition of a “false social consensus” and a political exploitation. Yet, are the choices of artistic institutions really independent from the economic and political powers, or independent from the particular social beliefs of their leaders? We do believe that participation could make them more independent, insofar as their choices could be legitimised by a contradictory debate with citizen, rather than by prescriptions of experts and elected officials. If the “participatory turn” is made as an honest and real democratic attempt, then artistic institutions have a lot to gain in the long run. Rather than isolating themselves in niches in need of social renewal, threatened by the failure of cultural democratisation, they could become open interfaces between citizens and artistic creation: tools *for*, *with* and *by* the community.

## THE CHALLENGE OF DIGITAL PARTICIPATION



European Spectators Day (Sansepolcro, 2017) ©Elisa Nocentini

*There is a fierce urgency of now for artists and cultural workers who audaciously believe in the immense capacity of art to help shift our sense of what is possible, to unleash our radical imaginations, to model and experiment with new ways of being in the world, to enact social change.<sup>1</sup>*

**Goals and  
challenges of  
Be SpectACTive!  
digital  
participation**

**Luisella  
Carnelli**

**(Fondazione  
Fitzcarraldo,  
Turin)**

**Premise – Making the road by walking: be adaptive!**

The notion of participatory audience practices concerns different levels of involvement, and artistic experimentation with digital technologies leads to a new understanding of the active role of audiences and eventually their impact on artists' creative process. Those notions are aligned with the approach of relational aesthetics that, according to Bourriaud (2002), considers art as strongly interrelated with the social context in which it is produced, and therefore represents a shift of focus from the artistic practice to the beehive of inter-human relations. The artwork itself and the performance can be read as a work in progress and not as static objects completely unrelated to the audience and the broader social context. That notion is now amplified by the potentiality of new technologies. Of course, great art and cultural experiences are still being created and appreciated by audiences in traditional formats, but we cannot ignore that right now audience expectations are changing and so are the practices of artists, creators and curators.

Be SpectACTive! digital experimentation can be seen as an ideal and challenging arena to test how and in which way digital interaction can affect either creative processes and audience active participation and engagement.

We started from the assumption – also shared in the report *Culture is Digital* – that:

Cultural organisations have a powerful role to play for audiences – particularly younger audiences – in the digital age. In the echo chamber of social media where content and commentary can be chosen to confirm existing views, cultural organisations can provide challenge, interrogate our opinions, reveal our history, and support our sense of community (Department for Digital Culture, Media & Sport, 2018, p. 5).

Understanding audiences' behaviour and evaluating the impact and the value of their digital experiences are vital elements in the Be SpectACTive! project. Indeed, one of the project aims is to establish a new way of interaction between artists involved in the project itself and digital audiences. One of the main questions of the project is whether a digital environment can facilitate the creation process of the artists, and how the point of view and the experience of the audience involved can affect the creation of the performance itself.

During the four-year project we tried to investigate if and how we could set up a digital environment to reach new audiences and to deepen the relationship between artists and audiences. We explored digital tools to verify if they could be effective to:

- ◆ deepening relationships with audiences (enhancing the experience of the current audiences, providing a hook for them to join culture in a new or “deeper” way)
- ◆ widening audiences (attracting audiences interested in other forms of culture and artistic production)
- ◆ diversifying audiences (attracting people with no previous contact with performing arts, or those who may have been previously disengaged or uninterested).

But we wanted to go further, we wanted to test in which way the digital and physical spheres could match together and generate new ways of interaction while influencing the artists' creative process. Mainly, we posed the following questions:

1. Can a digital environment facilitate the creation process of the artists?
2. Which are the impacts (on audiences and artists) stemming from this digital process?

In our perspective – which could be defined as artistically-led and audience-centric at the same time – we considered digital not important in itself, but rather a tool, a way to reach different

audiences, enhance their relationship and go deeper into the contents and the creative processes: we consider digital a possible door key, while cultural content and creative processes still remain the key factor.

The action research findings have progressively led us to modify the model originally conceived, shifting from the idea of developing a virtual platform to the idea of building up a digital ecosystem to facilitate the involvement of both local audiences taking part in the “real” creative process of the artists and audiences who did not take part physically but wanted to be engaged digitally, and to spread the results and the effect stemmed from the project.

### *Starting from a gap*

Research shows that the organisations that benefit most from digital technology are those who are *digitally mature*. “Digital Maturity is where digital activity is embedded across an organisation as part of its strategic vision and throughout every aspect of its business, from creative output and audience outreach through to e-commerce” (Department for Digital Culture, Media & Sport, 2018, p. 11). The cultural sector has particular skill gaps around digital, and this lack of expertise is limiting its ability to create and exploit digital content.

Change happens when there is senior recognition of the importance of digital skills and of the transformational role that technology can play to support creative, audience and business model development. In the cultural sector a need exists to focus on digital skills – from basic skills through to the specialist digital skills – to ensure no segment of our workforce is left behind; if leaders understand the importance of digital, they will be able to identify where strategic digital investment and resources are needed. In this way, the project could be also seen as an interesting ground to thrive in a digital landscape.

## Methodology

A variety of sources have fed into this research:

- ◆ Desk research providing background on the notion of participatory audience practices, digital engagement, artistic experimentation with digital technologies, as well as themes, models and approaches to engaging “new real and virtual audiences”
- ◆ Semi-structured interviews using a standard set of questions around approaches, activities, and learning, with artists involved in the online co-productions
- ◆ Audience voice group discussions with audiences involved in the rehearsals and creative processes during the co-productions.

## Why digital matters

Digital technology is increasingly important in our daily lives. As our interaction with technology increases and technology itself continues to advance, audiences’ expectations and our work and leisure behaviours are changing: including the way we engage with culture.

Technology provides an opportunity to turn up the dial on audience engagement, enabling cultural organisations to engage more people and reach out to new audiences. Technology can also allow for a more meaningful or deeper relationship with audiences, including more interactivity, with users able and interested in curating their own experiences and generating their own content, or better sharing, mixing, giving life to different ideas, personalised and seen as the expression of the audiences’ way of thinking.

In 2018 digital users are 4.087 billions and more than 5 billion people around the world now use a mobile phone, with roughly 6 out of 10 among those users owning a smartphone. Meanwhile,

mobile continues to grow its share of social media use, with 389 million people accessing social media via mobile for the first time in the first half of 2018. Facebook is the most used social network with its 2.234 billions of monthly active users. Young people are leaving that medium, as suggested by the latest data: the number of 13 to 17-year-olds using Facebook has dropped by 10 millions since January, a fall of around 6.5 percent in the first half of 2018. But the fall in teenage users has been more than offset by some impressive growth amongst older users, as Facebook added 17 million users aged 45 and above in the first three months of 2018, whose 3 millions aged 65 or over. The average of Facebook’s active users is still under 30, but this creeps up each day, especially given the changes amongst those younger users that we covered above (We are social, 2018).

## Using digital technology to engage audiences

Digital experience is transforming the way audiences engage with culture and is driving new forms of cultural participation and practice. As technology advances, so do the behaviours of audiences, especially younger audiences. We are no longer passive receivers of culture; increasingly we expect instant access to all forms of digital content, to interact and give rapid feedbacks. Audiences are creating, adapting and manipulating as well as appreciating art and culture. Certainly, digital technology is transforming the relationship that cultural organisations have with their public, opening new possibilities. Starting from this assumption we wanted to investigate the potential of digital technology to actively engage audiences through new formats and mediums and by diversifying their distribution channels.

To achieve that goal originally we set up a web platform where audiences and artists could meet, discuss, interact, find new ways to go deeper into the topic of the performance in its making; a virtual space where images, video, pictures, text messages, questions

could be mixed up in order to find easy and intuitive challenges for developing relationships and engaging audiences and users. In our original idea, the web platform had to be a “safe and comfort place” where artists’ stimuli could become the starting point to develop co-creative solutions and to offer diversified opinions, feedbacks, suggestions and new ideas both for artists and audiences. During the four-year project, the consortium co-produced 9 new small scale co-productions or online co-production dance projects, that differs from live co-productions in terms of overall budget needed and in the number of preparatory residencies (2 for the online co-productions and 3 for the live ones).

Online co-productions were conceived as an opportunity for audiences to actively participate to the artistic process in a different manner, both through the physical and digital interaction with the artists themselves. During each residency, choreographers and dancers worked together with a local filmmaker, who operated in synergy with the artists to produce content to be spread, mixed, re-used, commented online. The web platform had to be a hybrid model for producing and circulating user-generated content (UGC), where usually a mix of top-down and bottom-up forces determined how material is shared among users in far more participatory ways.

Going back in time, when the EU project was being developed, blogs were flourishing and the so-called blogosphere was one of the most futuristic strategies to make interaction effective and to find ways to create a relational opportunity of mutual exchange, allowing audiences to become creative and to dynamically interact with artists in a co-operative way on a dedicated web site. But two years is a very long time in technology: the increase in use of smartphones, social media and on-demand content determined an easier distribution of cultural matters among audiences, through an environment where users interact daily, rather than having audiences actively seeking out content.

If during the “blogosphere era” users could stand a non-instantaneous feedback loop, and their way of interaction resembled emails exchanges, now the feedback loop needs immediate responses and the re-mix of content has become a new and more effective way to interact digitally. Audiences are no longer simply passive receivers or consumers of cultural contents; they are more and more selecting on-demand, controlling interactive experiences, instantly sharing, distributing and co-creating “art-work” themselves.

Besides, Millennials (also known as Generation Y, Generation Me and Echo Boomers) do not want filters, tend to form communities, are technology addicted, use a mix of social media to communicate their personality (Instagram for creativity; Twitter to find information; Facebook to show their private life; Snapchat to show off), and have a decreasing attention span. It means that artists (in our case) have a very short lapse of time to gain their attention and keep it. In order to not distort the essence of the content and the process, re-compartmentalising and redesigning relationships taking into consideration new time spans is now a real challenge (that is what has already happened with YouTubers). That means that a static environment is not always the right way to interact via digital: we are overwhelmed by information, data, images; we need to find easy and immediate ways to catch the attention, and we need to go where audiences are (just exactly as it happens in real life). Furthermore, the digital “language” is evolving: we digitally communicate not only by words, but also by images, sounds, videos, emoticons, “likes/reactions” or sharing of contents – as a matter of fact, these are the key performance indicators used to evaluate the digital engagement.

Although it is an immediate and compelling way of expression, encoding a story or a message in digital means such as videos and emoticons may eventually give birth to a collection of standardised and impersonal messages, whose original meaning is directly



belittled by reducing its variety of facets. On the counterpart, multi-layered and multimodal meanings and content overlap: when posting a content (quotes, audio files, videos, images, etc.), social media allow for other users to directly interact with that content with likes/dislikes, comments and the action of sharing. In that way the message itself becomes something different from the original, as its content is further enriched by the reaction of other users.

The stickiness model, focused on considering isolated audience members, becomes reductive when considering the value of social connections and interactions among individuals being more and more amplified by the presence of social media platforms. It means we have to take into consideration not only quantitative data (how frequently and broadly content travels), but also the way media contents are taken up by audiences and the way that interaction can affect the creative process of artists.

If it is obvious that user-generated content and crowdsourcing projects are driving new and closer relationship with audiences, it became self-evident for us that simply making content available does not imply that audiences will automatically engage, or take part, or put themselves into play.

Videos, comments or contents (media text) in general do not spread by contagion, but by a conscious decision of the users that make them circulate: a media text is a cultural product that replicates itself only through human action, responding to key questions:

- ◆ Is this content worth sharing?
- ◆ Would it be of interest to someone in particular?
- ◆ Does it communicate something about my identity? Does it explain something about me or the relationships I have with others?
- ◆ What is the best way to spread it?

### **Lessons learned from data analysis: shifting from the web platform to the digital ecosystem**

One of the advantages derived from the Action Research activity was that the first evidences could be immediately used to re-shape the overall activity, suggesting new ways to achieve the established goals. From the very beginning of the web platform launch – after the first year of activity – we noticed that online interaction did not develop as we supposed. The digital environment did not show itself as the right place to enhance deeper relationship among audiences and artists; and if there is no place or conditions for a trusty relation to be established, it is much more difficult to build up a place of mutual exchange or let others put themselves into play; and this happened both to artists and audiences. This lack of interaction was related not only to the widespread technological ongoing evolution, but also to the linguistic gap, to the digital behavioural changes in terms of way of interactions and expectations. On top of that, artists and audiences involved in the first residencies soon realised that a deep and meaningful interaction is more naturally developed through face-to-face interaction. Artists take specifically advantage of physical practices and artistic approaches, where the language of the body is the source of inspiration for both audiences and visitors to engage. Nonetheless, digital is effective in sharing, remixing and spreading contents.

Moreover, artists identified a further limit to digital interaction: while they were occupied with their daily artistic work, dealing directly with their audiences through real-life interaction, they had to be at the same time involved in the online co-productions. Artists underlined the difficulty in dealing simultaneously with offline and online audiences having different timing, expectations and target communities. Online exchanges were seen as a “cold and de-personalized” manner of communicating, which was further complicated by the language gap. Timing question

was also a critical point: content shared online in the web platform needed to be disseminated in order to reach specific communities according to the topic, needs, artistic languages and goals of each artist. And this timing crashed with the inputs artists reached in reality.

Starting from the assumption that communication via social networks is more pervasive and compelling, we decided to focus a section of our digital engagement strategy on Facebook. By shifting to Facebook, we soon realised that partners and artists were starting to post contents on their participation during the residencies, therefore, the Facebook page provided a source of storytelling of the whole experience, that eased and radically improved the audience engagement process.

After realising that, we decided to work on the creation of a digital ecosystem that would go beyond the sole web platform, by selecting and involving more than one media channel. In fact, at that time our web platform had already revealed itself effective as an archive or repository able to increase the awareness of the project, partners and artists, and as a source of inspiration for artists and cultural managers (in terms of dissemination and exploitation).

Social networks, but mostly Facebook, became the hub where to get information on the development of each residency, and the first entry door for the communities living nearby each venue. In fact, social networks achieved the best results when generated a “domino effect” by reaching the online communities of each partner. According to that, the Be SpectACTive! Facebook page became the collector and the starting point for relating and connecting each partner’s online community and for involving them in artistic and creative processes. Social networks became also a way to build up a bridge between digital and real communities. The evidence of the effectiveness of this new approach is demonstrated by the idea behind the European Spectators Day

(see dedicated chapter), which had been able to matching face-to-face with real-life interactions. During the European Spectators Day, each venue organised a meeting for the active spectators involved in the activities set up during the project (creative residencies and participatory programming) and all the communities were connected digitally through social media. In that frame different communities in different countries were enabled to interact together directly or thanks to the mediation of a local social media manager. Furthermore, during the previous weeks, the event was disseminated not only directly by the Be SpectACTive! fan page but also by each partner’s webpages (translating sometimes messages and texts used).

Being aware of the difficulty to generate digital engagement around personal and self-reflective topics without having a real and trusting relationship, we firstly engaged communities close to us putting them in relationship. We adopted that approach not only during the European Spectators Day but also to disseminate the residencies.

Undoubtedly, the *snowball effect* could have been more pervasive with a more coherent re-targeting activity in synergy with each individual partner and in relation to specific targets needed by each residency and specific artist, but that was only carried through in part. In conclusion, we must underline that not all the artists involved in the online co-productions had an existing online community; that made even more difficult for us to take care of their relationship with their targeted audiences.

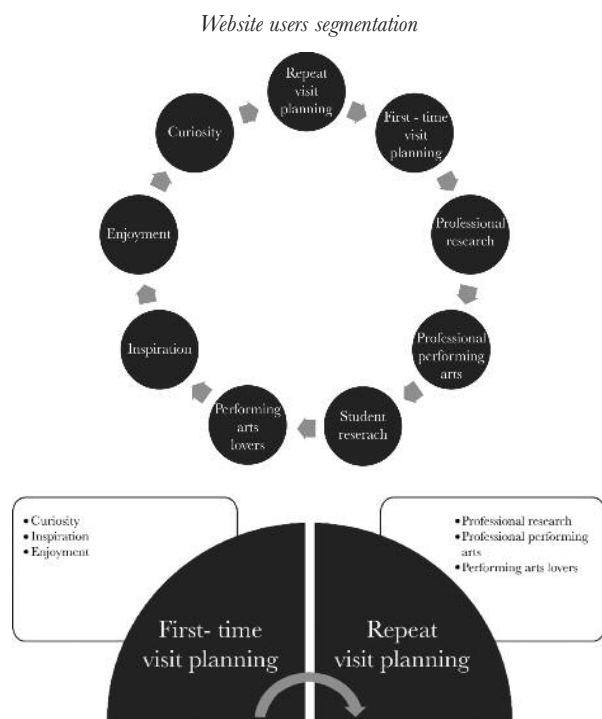
#### *Tools and metrics adopted*

We used different analytics tools and created a dashboard to help the research team monitoring and enhancing Be SpectACTive! digital positioning during the development of the activities. The first digital dashboard was finalised to monitor the overarching digital trends and get a snapshot of Be SpectACTive! digital

activities across its website and social media. It includes an overview of the number of people visiting the website, monitoring how they arrive, which content they visit and whether they engage with that by leaving comments on contents and videos.

### Website | web platform audience segmentation

We adopted the Tate's model segmentation (Villaespesa et al., 2013) of the different types of website visits, based primarily on the motivations that drive users to the webpage, but also taking into account a set of other variables such as their art knowledge, vocational connection and online behaviour.



### The performance of the website | web platform

As already mentioned, after the first year of activity we realised that the institutional website served well as an informational platform, but not as a hub, as an entry door or as a space able to generate a real and trustful relationship. Figures show that users were mainly interested in the project in itself – the activities developed, the partners involved, the artists co-produced in an international environment, the evidences derived from the Action Research activity – while not so much in interacting with artists. Therefore, the Be SpectACTIVE! website has proven itself to be a good valorisation tool in terms of dissemination and exploitation of the project, and for maximising the impact of the project results by increasing its value, strengthening its impact, enabling its transfer and spreading it into different contexts. It works well for fostering general awareness and acknowledgment of the project across Europe, especially in the partners' countries. With this respect, the website answered well to both the dissemination<sup>1</sup> and the exploitation<sup>2</sup> of the project. The interest shown in the project and the adoption of the Participatory Programme model by Artemrede-Teatros Associados in Portugal or by “l'Italia dei Visionari” project are two of the first and most important evidences deriving from the process of exploitation, also conveyed by digital means.

Dissemination is at the core of Be SpectACTIVE!, as the results and achievements of the participatory project are available and purposely spread as learning tools for highly qualified researchers, performing arts organisations, cultural managers, practitioners.

The website is well suited to the following tasks:

- ◆ promoting and raising awareness about the project outputs and outcomes at local, national and European level
- ◆ promoting the co-productions realised during the four-year project
- ◆ raising awareness on the theme of co-creation, co-participation and decision co-making processes

- ◆ enhancing the knowledge of the participatory approaches.

We identified three main levels of action and influence of the project:

The micro level

Target: individual arts and cultural managers, artists, “performing arts lovers”, cultural policy researchers, individual performing arts organisations, festivals, theatres, research institutions

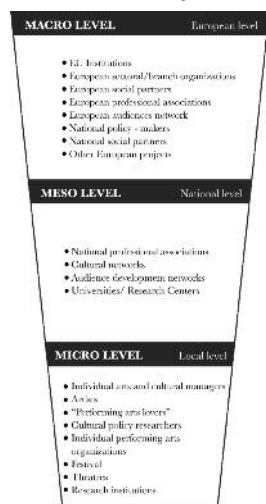
The meso level

Target: national professional associations, cultural networks, audience development networks, universities

The macro level

Target: EU Institutions, European sector/branch organisations, European social partners, European professional associations, European Audiences Network, national policy-makers, national social partners, other European projects.

*Be SpectACTive! 3 main levels of action and influence*



[Source: image elaborated by the author].

The Be SpectACTive! web site reached about 2.000 users per year for a total of about 3.000 sessions per year. 68% of the users are new visitors, the average session duration is about 3 minutes and each visitor sees an average of 4 pages. About 1 visitor out of 4 speaks English; about 60% of the users are aged from 25 to 34. About 88% of the visitors browse the website from desktop, 11% from smartphone and the rest from tablet.

25% of the visitors arrive directly to the web site; 29% by organic search; 28% by referral; 18% by social. That underlines the good Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) activity (which gives visibility through organic search)<sup>3</sup>; the awareness of the project (1 visitor out of 4 directly types the correct address); and the connections established with other partners (traffic from referral). Good is also the engagement due to the social network activity.

In the table below a synthesis of weaknesses and strengths of Be SpectACTive! website is shown.

*Be SpectACTive! website: an awareness platform*

WEAKNESS	STRENGTHS
<p>Be SpectACTive! web site is not perceived as an hub, but as an <b>informative platform (awareness)</b>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 68% of Visitors are new visitors</li> <li>• Returning visitors are a niche</li> <li>• Visitors bounce off (bounce rate 74%)</li> <li>• Pages views: 5   Average time on page: 3 minutes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good number of sessions: about 3.000 per year</li> <li>• Good number of Visitors: 2.000 per year</li> <li>• More than 1 Visitor out of 4 speaks English (good positioning of Italian 27%)</li> <li>• Good positioning of the web site: (thanks to a good SEO activity (29% of the Sessions are from organic search and 25% from direct search))</li> <li>• Good endorsement from other web sites (28% of the Sessions are from referral)</li> <li>• Social sharing is a good way to implement the backlinks (18% of the Sessions are from Facebook)</li> </ul>

[Source: image elaborated by the author].

The web platform, so far, is unable to engage visitors the way we expected: there is a limited interaction and a limited number of views on/of the video of the web platform.

*The other side of the artistic freedom*

We started from the assumption that creating via new technology allows artists to push the boundaries of the possible and designs transformative experiences for audiences – and also for artists to get inspired and to discuss about artistic and creative processes. However, our experience confirmed on one side the assumptions of Simeon, who found a strong association between cultural exclusion and digital exclusion Simeon Yates (in Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, 2018): whilst some parts of the population are being double served by physical and digital offerings, others remain on the outside. That means that, at least for some, technology is not a way to drive cultural engagement. On the other side, some people simply prefer to engage with culture as a live experience or as an opportunity to step away from digital activity for a few hours.

We tried to identify the possible reasons behind this gap:

◆ **Linguistic**

It's hard to interact and communicate effectively in a foreign language. Since the chosen language for the web platform and the whole communication of the project is English, this may represent an actual barrier to reach and engage audiences who are not English native speakers.

◆ **Contextual/technological/behavioural**

It has been underlined that mobile is dramatically changing everything: mobile phones aren't just a more convenient way to access the Internet, they're changing people's fundamental connected behaviour, shifting our social media habits to a more one-to-one, private conversation context, strictly related to a socialisation need; yet, this can happen only in a safe and

well-known “space”, specifically on social networks, and less on a dedicated and customised platform (over one-third of the adult population uses social media at least once a month).

◆ **Structural – strictly related to the way the project planned to generate digital engagement and actively involve audiences**

To be respectful of artists' vision, all the partners agreed in leaving any possibility open, also in terms of defining expectations from the residential journey of the artists: during residency programs, artists are free to work on an online dance performance, or on a “real” performance/show to be performed on a stage, or to realise formats customised for the Web in order to test and enrich their personal artistic research.

That approach is perceived as a form of respect for the creative process, in line with artists' needs and willingness of getting in the game and experiment; nevertheless, that approach has resulted in a manifold constellation of web contents.

All artists involved gave their own personal interpretation of what digital interaction entails, or better, each of them found different ways to digitally interact with audiences: someone asking questions; someone else trying to involve audiences through images, texts, short videos or calls to action; someone else posting videos of short performances conceived for the web (just like web series); others launching calls to action to collect impressions, materials, inspirations, etc. But this kind of miscellaneous outputs did not help the users to easily navigate within the platform. In particular, users need a safe place where rules are clear and well organised – for instance, digital storytelling/story-doing is an effective way to engage audiences. In the case of Be SpectACTIVE!, the meanings/aims/purposes of the video dance co-production were different, developed in a different and discontinuous timelapse, strictly connected and related to the timing of the real residency activities.



In addition, co-production processes responded to different needs, expectations and goals of the artists involved, which were the expression of each personal poetic way of working, vision of the creative processes, need in relation to a specific work or to their specific story. Furthermore, all the projects had different target audiences. Consequently, this approach has progressively weakened the narrative proposition behind the contents of the website, that at now represent a simple juxtaposition of multifaceted and multi-purpose videos. That led to disorientation and incomprehension, especially for those who were not engaged in the process from the beginning. For this reason, the web platform can be seen as a useful archive, a kind of repository, but not as an effective platform where audiences and artists could find a safe place for dialogue, or for a real and authentic exchange.

We are facing a paradigm change in the form in which cultural content circulates, and we can see the effect in the way the *Be SpectACTive!* web platform was perceived: a kind of hybrid model, the result of the mix of institutional strategies from above and tactics from below. Control over the content had to be negotiated with the media audience, connected in networks and able to establish through network sharing the popularity or failure of a content. But that virtual space of interlocation is moving from the web site to the social networks: digital culture is characterised by user-circulated content, rather than by the much abused user-generated content. The shift of focus, from content generated by users, to that circulated by them, helps us to draw a broader and realistic picture of how we could reach and engage audiences by choice, by habit or by surprise (Bollo et al., 2017).

Reachable audiences are also made up of individuals who are passionate about cultural products, who want to enter into dialogue with them, who want to own, remix, use them to create new social links and to negotiate their identity. But the web platform is not perceived as a useful place for audiences, not only for the reasons underlined before. We should remember that also

virtual consumption of cultural content takes place within a known social environment, and we need to facilitate it, going where audiences are.

In the project, taking part could mean interacting with a media text and producing engagement, but not yet giving the opportunity to the virtual audiences to take part in decision-making, create content together with the artists or even do participate in creative decision-making process. The reason of this can be seen not only in the difficulty in navigating a new digital place, in the linguistic barrier, in the lack of narrative path, in the different outputs collected, but also in the digital and real behaviours.

For *Be SpectACTive!* what is important is not the creation of astounding platforms, but the process itself: the way of building up a community's sense of belonging, which can respond to the desire to be at the centre of attention, the feeling of empowerment (whatever this means) and personal satisfaction, the idea of being involved in a journey (not only personal, but also collective), the opportunity to have fun. In order to achieve all that, we soon realised that building up a virtual space was not enough in itself and that we needed to move our space of interaction into a more habitual space, a space where audiences could feel safe and comfortable.

To increase our reach, participation and engagement, content and digital communication strategies must work hand in hand, therefore, face-to-face interaction and participation still remain the key for *Be SpectACTive!*. Cultural organisations should consider the engagement patterns of potential audiences, rather than presuming digital communication and content will automatically reach a wider audience. The most effective audience engagement brings together digital communication with content or experience which are compelling to a particular audience or community, finding a real and authentic hook to raise attention (awareness), generate interest, trigger desire and push to action (AIDA model).



The potential of digital communication and social tools widens the pervasiveness of possible contacts, but the involvement of the public requires a holistic cultural long-term strategy/approach. Other than the real world/physical interaction between artists and audiences, we understood that the real engagement of our project does not rely solely in the interaction on the web platform, but (as data show) it is mostly visible through the entire digital ecosystem. Specifically, in terms of degree of interaction on the following platforms:

- ◆ The **web platform**: <http://www.bespectactive.eu/portal/>
- ◆ **Vimeo**, the video-sharing website: <https://vimeo.com/user38746826>
- ◆ **Facebook**, a good hub for our dissemination strategy and the right tool for the storytelling of all the activities and the project itself: <https://www.facebook.com/bespectACTive/>
- ◆ **Twitter**, a good hub to reach audiences interested in the process

The analysis of the reach of the Be SpectACTive!'s videos shows that overall videos uploaded had more than 130.000 views, with about 350.000 impressions: 90% of the visualisations were on Vimeo while just 3% on our web platform. The different social platforms became entry doors to the project for different kinds of audiences interested in different topics or artists, or simply fascinated by some videos or images. Of course, this is a great result in terms of dissemination and spreading, but not in terms of effective co-creative processes.

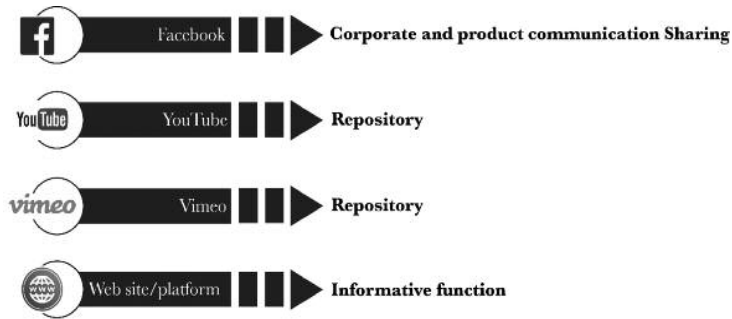
### *Hand in hand with social networks*

The way of building interaction had to be well planned, followed step by step, gradually adapted according to the typology of users, and shared by all the partners directly involved in producing and sharing contents (e.g. Barcelona Conference and ESD). Interestingly, Facebook shows its potentiality as an effective hub/touch point, but also as a social space for discussions and for sharing ideas in a more effective way when all the partners spread these contents in their languages.

Starting from these evidences, in the second year of the project we redesigned our digital model as shown in the picture below. The website became the project hub, the place to collect all the materials and information related to the project; the web-platform – embedded in the web site – became a kind of archive, a repository of all the materials collected by the artists involved and a useful informative tool for other artists as well; the social networks developed within the tool to spread content, to catch attention, to intrigue, to make the audience understand the artists' point of view.

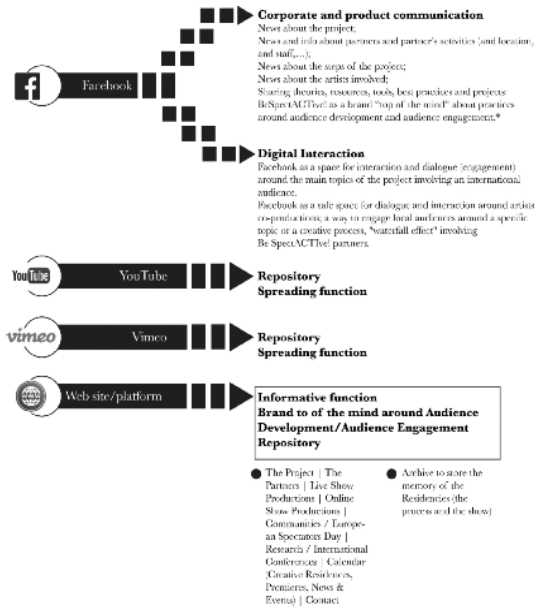
Nonetheless, it is important to underline once again that artists prefer physical practices and artistic approaches where body language and real-life interaction ease the way for both audiences and artists to engage, and that the digital sphere could not be enough to build up a trusty and comfortable space for meaningful interaction. On social networks, audiences and artists could find a place where to keep in contact and in relation with each other, but not an environment where to deepen their relationship.

*From a web-platform to a digital echo system*



[Source: image elaborated by the author].

*Be SpectACTive! digital ecosystem*



[Source: image elaborated by the author].

**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> “a planned process of providing information to key parties on the quality, relevance and effectiveness of the results of programmes and initiatives. It occurs as and when the results become available”.

<sup>2</sup> “making use of and deriving benefit from (a result)”.

<sup>3</sup> Search engine optimisation (SEO) is the process of affecting the online visibility of a website or a web page in a web search engine’s unpaid results—often referred to as “natural”, “organic”, or “earned” results.

**Using digital  
technology  
to influence  
and empower  
artists’  
creative  
processes**

**Luisella  
Carnelli**

**(Fondazione  
Fitzcarraldo,  
Turin)**

If the cultural sector expects audiences to change their behaviour we need to change first. We need to change philosophically in how we think of audiences and participants as creators and partners; we need to change what, where and when we programme; and we need to change how we find and communicate with audiences... arts are for ‘ordinary’ people. If we really want a broad range of people to engage with the arts we need to communicate in a way that speaks to a broad range of people, not in a way that speaks only to other arts professionals, to experts and to critics (Boiling and Thurman, 2018, p. 11).

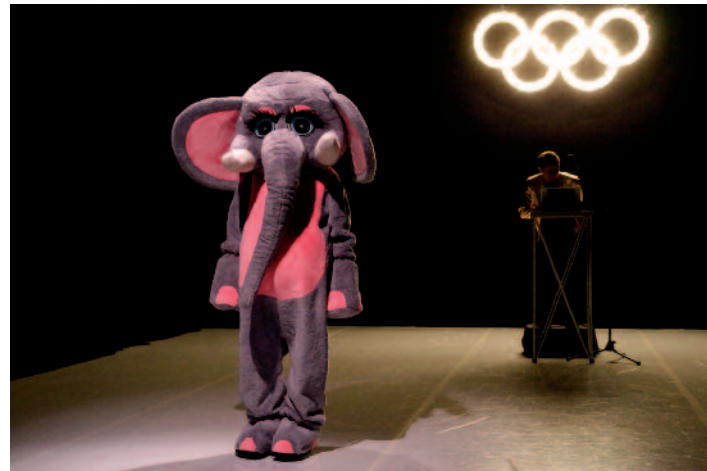
A key question of the project is to verify if a digital environment can facilitate the artists’ creation process and how the point of view and experience of the audience involved can affect the creation of the performance itself.

**The dark side of creative freedom**

Promoting online co-productions responds to a double goal: giving young artists the opportunity to be involved in an international co-productive journey not necessarily finalised to realise a well-defined show, and testing the opportunity to engage physically and digitally with specific target audiences, to enrich their creative processes and to find new ways to discover new and different perspectives. In respect to that, *Be SpectACTive!* fully responds to the idea of realising an artist-led and audience-centric project, focused on the process itself more than on its output (but with a particular attention to its outcomes, both expected and unexpected).

*I could focus just on the research and on my work. That has an impact in the way you work with people.*

Michal Záhora



D’Agostin-Bersani (IT) – *The Olympic games*  
(Kilowatt Festival, Sansepolcro, 2017) ©Luca Del Pia

*I had previous experience in performing work in progress to collect feedbacks. But the work for Be SpectACTive! was something different. Be SpectACTive! was a great opportunity to feel free and to experiment and explore things without a clear starting idea. It is much about the process, something different from normal residencies. I did work in London in Lift, which gave me the chances to meet people and to discuss with them: it is a practice to meet different people...*

*It was not only following people online, but also meeting people in person, speaking with them; I did the same in Praha: I met different kind of people. All perspective from people I would have never met: I had the challenge to change my perspective.*

Dan Canham

The added value of the project was the opportunity for young artists to test themselves in different places and in different environment, establishing connections and relationship in new European countries with various expectations and understandings of what a dance performance can be; different level of commitment and engagement to performing arts creation processes.

*It was a good opportunity working in different contexts, with a different cultural background and history, with various financial situations, social aspects, historical aspects... Two different countries mean different cultures: the context makes the difference, and also social background is heavy.*

Michal Záhora

*I did not expect this experience could be such a powerful opportunity to investigate my creativity.*

Dan Canham

*People from other countries think differently: it is an opportunity to be in touch with other points of view.*

Anna Réti

*I was curious to keep in touch with people who did not speak English, and from different cultures; I did not want to be influenced just by British People.*

Displace Yourself Theatre

This is a very challenging opportunity for young choreographers and dancers to test themselves in a comfortable arena, without any coercive commitment: a free space to experiment, find new ways to develop their creativity and explore new patterns.

*I wanted to be part of this project because of the work with different community for developing the performance. Those 3 different communities affected the show. We met different people participating in the project: they gave different stimuli. It was an exciting experience for me as an artist and a human being: it is about life and how to deal with that circumstance, not some kind of dead and fixed thing. It is always working: you have to stay very present.*

Klára Alexová

*It was great for me not to be forced to create a final show. I had time to think about all the inputs people gave me, and now I'm using all those materials to create a show I'm realising in my apartment. This experience should be part of every artists experience: a time where you can play; this kind of opportunity is essential; with freedom what you think never could happen, happens!*

Anna Réti

Be SpectACTive! artists used a variety of different ways to engage and to activate audiences. And – this is the important point – they shared the vision that the involvement of audiences had to be at the centre of their actions. They felt the importance to create a new artistic work that told stories of, or was inspired by, the people, their stories, feelings, fears, ambitions, etc. It is impossible to engage properly with a place or a person without engaging with all the stories of that place or person. Stories matter: stories can be used to empower, to humanise, to engage, to feed.

## An authentic, meaningful and ethical approach

All the artists involved in the co-production of the online video dance performances had gone through a selection process set up by the project's partners. The resulting group of artists was made of individuals actively engaged in experimenting and testing new ways of production, trying to find new sources of inspiration for their creative process and searching for meaningful ways to involve audiences. In that light, we could deduce artists involved in the co-productions were driven by strong ethical principles concerning social justice, democracy, and developing social and cultural capital, and not only a show of high quality.

*For some people there was a nice conversation and that was all. Others had never had the opportunity to meet an artist, and to find a project/organisation which cared about them. They did not feel invisible. This relationship became a kind of bridge, a way to know each other and to start working together, learning from each other and from different contexts. Working with audiences is not a one-way thing: it is about building relationships to help each other.*

Dan Canham

Related to ethics and authenticity, all the artists involved in co-production activities were aware of the importance of building trust with the target audiences they wanted to engage. This took time, and it also meant not overpromising, and being true, delivering on what you said you would. But both for artists and audiences a digital space was not enough to build up this kind of personal relation, a *conditio sine qua non* to actively engage audiences in a participatory way.

*I had the opportunity to work in two different countries with two different target groups of audiences. In Sibiu I worked with students from art school; in Italy I had a more uneven group of people (also in terms of age, and some of them met there for the very first time).*

*This second group was more closed in itself: people did not want to be naked; they did not trust each other. I had to work with them to build up a comfortable space in which they could open up.*

Michal Záhora

## Digital engagement as a failure for the artists

All the artists involved in the online co-production agreed that digital engagement did not really happen, for a variety of reasons; nevertheless, that experience improved them as individuals and artists.

*Digital is not important in itself while content is still the key*

Digital engagement (either aimed or not at generating a mutual interaction that can flow into a co-creative process or active participation of the audiences) must always combine with the non-digital, as engagement is still the main objective behind the use of digital technology in culture. That is self-evident when you are trying to involve target audiences into something that happens in presence and finds its meaning precisely thanks to the physical presence of actors/dancers and spectators: "what it is important is the conversation with people; if it's just me to be interested in something, why doing that?" (Anna Réti).

It is evident that what it is important is creating art that is meaningful and relevant to people; that speaks of their lives, their stories and their experiences. Not art that is just bounded to these factors, but that uses them as a starting point to tell engaging and amazing stories. Both dancers/actors and audiences underline that it is the reciprocal exchange in presence that constitutes a fertile ground for a generative exchange.

*The online interaction is superficial, you cannot go in a further conversation. The possibility for a proper conversation is quite limited. In general it is very hard to open up a process properly and let people in to what you are doing. Doing it remotely is a big change. It is about what we are asking to audiences: it is different if you ask people about their thoughts or if you make a show in presence. If you open up to many people who are not with you it is crazy... Allowing people go in is all about relationship: relationships take time to trust each other. Audiences can shape what you are doing, but you need to try to have a relationship: we have to ask people to properly be engaged. You need physical contact. People online can be anonymous... some people who watches videos did it, and the expectation need to be managed.*

Dan Canham

This exchange is really effective just when it happens in a safe and comfortable “place”, where a trusting relationship among actors/dancers and audiences can happen. But building up a trusting environment is not easy: you need time and you need to find the right key to establish authentic relations among individuals.

*Your idea is just an idea; when you open yourself during the creative process you can catch many inspirations; it is something organic: changing the way of listening, the way your work is observed.*

Bruno Isaković

For this reason, for the artists, first of all, digital itself is not enough.

*It is impossible to be personal and anonymous at the same time.*

Michal Záhora

*People live partially on Facebook, sharing experiences and their life... but it is different giving a comment of deep sense and meaning*

Anna Réti

Engaging people who are new to dance or performing arts or art in general doesn't happen with spreadsheets in an office or with Facebook advertising campaigns, or in a digital platform, it happens through the power of personal relationships, thanks to a constant, transparent and honest relation. And it really happens when actors/dancers have the personal attributes that make them effective including empathy, patience, persistence, vision, enthusiasm, responsiveness and flexibility.

*The web platform is not serving the purpose very well: people are not engaged emotionally, physically and they can always stay in a superficial way; they cannot go in depth in understanding each other. When people see something from outside there is no space for engagement: you need physical work to be together. There is a kind of therapeutic process: you must be very careful, you don't betray the trust of people. Artists too need to be part of a physical work, in residencies where you can keep in touch with people; making co-production mixing artists too. Being together is the only way to create a mutual exchange.*

Michal Záhora

For the artists involved, a digital platform or also social networks are not ontologically perceived as the right place/space to establish authentic personal relationships: “active participation and involvement of audiences cannot be reduced to a sequence of Q&A, it is something that happens in presence: humans can be humans together and experience something together”. It is just thanks to a flow of continuous exchange that an artistic growth is generated.

*My approach changed all the times in relation to people's reactions.*

Dan Canham

For both artists and audiences involved in the residential activity, individual relationships are at the heart; this relationship building is happening gradually, face to face, and in real life rather than



digitally. For the artists, if you want to give audiences an active role, first of all you must build up a trusting space, a space where people can feel free to express themselves. That implies meeting people, speaking with them, questioning, being able to put artistic urgency and people expectations on a common ground.

*I discovered cultures I had never met before: in London I met afrobeat youngsters; and they let me go into their life... the same did a roman dance teacher in Prague.*

Dan Canham

Above all, engaging means agreeing upon a horizontal relation: understanding the importance of listening and observing is the first step to empathise with your audience avoiding a top-down approach.

*Nobody has a leading role: we are all like a big body moving in synchrony. Everyone is a part of a bigger picture. It is not a pièce of an individual person, but it is like a big complex organic picture. I discovered different things: I felt my body as an instrument. That experience changed me: nothing is right or wrong. You have to trust your choice and feel more confident.*

Audience member

This relationship became more effective when artists adopted a proactive approach, enthusiastically inviting people to get involved.

*During the rehearsals as an individual I had the possibility or the opportunity to influence the performance. I had this power: giving advices and suggestions; and I felt that our feedback was very important for the dancers; in that way we were really part of the process of building up the performance; we were affecting all the creative process.*

Audience member

A digital space is not yet ready to generate authentic trust, vital relationship. In a co-creative process, both artists and audiences are required to put themselves into play, opening to intimate feelings, fears, visions; you are somehow naked, and a virtual space open to everybody does not allow the intimacy needed to really open yourself.

*Doing something directly is the right way to get involved in participation.*

Audience member

*From the beginning we knew we wanted people on the stage. There was no division. We spoke a lot about the strategy of the piece... The interviews with participants came very early and became part of the project. It was the first connection to include the people. We wanted to interview people to find the topic of the show and to keep in touch with the audiences. The topic was then clear, interviews were functional to understand the point of view of people, and to include them.*

Barbora Látalová

To really activate an open-minded exchange, all the actors involved felt the urgency to meet people on their patch, offering them a proactive invitation, showing skills of empathy, flexibility and enthusiasm.

*The word active audience means a lot for us: we ask our audience to feel, to be actively engaged in a physical experience together with artists. It is not just about observing; audiences must be emotionally and physically involved. To be an active spectator from your seat require a submission allowing yourself to feel everything.*

Displace Yourself Theatre

Face-to-face interaction allows artists to better find the way to empathise with the audience:

*Working with audiences is like playing a football match: some situations are very open and strictly related to audiences' reactions.*

*There is a kind of canvas, but within this canvas there is the freedom of action and reaction of the people involved, and they always occur within a set of codified actions. It's like a game-book: we – artists – propose a direction, but what changes is the way in which we arrive.*

Barbora Látalová

Furthermore, real-life relationships allow a more effective and constant exchange flow which nourishes the whole process.

*I can use my imagination very much: it is not so much about your skills but more about how to be together, to create something together, in the space, in the time. We are a group, and then the participants: it's a wilder sensation. And what happened in Budapest with everybody on stage was fantastic! It was rock'n roll.*

Eva Hromnik – *Different?* performer

*Everybody gave something to this production, value through energy and past experiences.*

Audience member

Face-to-face interaction is a more effective way to communicate as the verbal cues are accompanied by non-verbal cues, which allows people to get to know each other better and to build strong bonds, which are at the base of trustworthy relationships.

*The first trustful approach is established using the right tone of voice, using gesture and eyes contact.*

Displace Yourself Theatre

When you work on site, you can also decide to move yourself and to go where your target is: many artists underline the importance of direct observation and of having a listening attitude, which is fundamental to establish a real and genuine relation. In fact, for artists who are interested in working with specific target groups it is vital to go where these people normally stay or live, to really establish a contact with them, using artistic skills and

mediation attitude to gain their interest and attention. Reaching new audiences via digital is of course possible, but gaining the attention of new audiences and effectively engage new target groups is far more difficult, for the reasons described above.

*I really relied on the organisation: I was lucky to find people to involve. I gave a little brief and instructions before the residency about people. I was interested in: people on the margin, people integrate to their places, people everyone knows in Tottenham, for example. I wanted to understand the way they feel; and for me going in the street to meet people directly was fundamental, because it was an opportunity to know the place through the people.*

Dan Canham

Making connections with people who think “arts are not for them” it is vital to work with non-arts partners, to use non-arts places and spaces, to connect with non-arts individuals and to use non-arts language. Such partnerships can provide a “bridge” to audiences both strategically and operationally and also help to achieve sustainability and legacy. Many artists wanted to involve specific target audiences, and to involve them working with other non-arts partners ranging from local authorities through housing associations, refugees, young parents, whistleblowers, football players, etc.

The artists also underlined the importance of being ready to share power. Being ready to share decision-making, to collaborate, giving some things up, being flexible and adaptable, meeting people where they are, are fundamental principles to engaging audiences actively. In particular, they picked up the value, complexities and challenges of working with people on creative activities rather than using a top-down approach.

But we don't have to forget to provide a quality experience. It goes without saying that producing and presenting the highest

possible quality work is crucial. If performances are mediocre, it will be hard to encourage audiences to engage. It is also worth remembering that quality counts across all aspects of the audience experience, not just the art. By quality we mean enabling audiences to have the best possible experience.

### *Digital timing versus real timing*

A further complication element is the temporal discrepancy between online timing, needed to reach and engage people digitally, and live timing. All the artists of the digital co-production decided to involve their specific target audiences not only digitally, but also on spot. But timing for spreading and collecting reactions online are different from timing related to real-life contexts. More specifically, when you use social networks you need to spread and follow the effect of your post, interact with your digital audience, but at the same time artists were managing the rehearsals and the real engagement with real people. This generated a kind of short circuit. Furthermore, people physically involved preferred to maintain the real-life relationship and not to transpose it online. For the artists it was difficult to follow both the processes at the same time.

One of the Active Research tasks is to suggest the road to better achieve established goals. Research activities (interview with audiences and with artists) underlined from the very beginning the weaknesses of the initial idea of digital engagement. Therefore, we partially changed our idea of digital engagement transposing that to social networks (Facebook channels in particular), as more reactive virtual spaces able to spread contents in a faster way.

### *How to transform/turn a weakness into a strength*

In spite of the difficulty of activating audiences digitally, the young artists involved in the online co-productions evaluated positively their experience and pointed out a series of benefits gained thanks to this. For most of them, it was the first time the public was somehow involved in the creative process and the call launched by Be SpectACTive! was a challenging understanding of how to engage audience in the creative process.

*The artist has become just a mediator, a medium: the contents are taken from people. Artists are normally very busy in their personal space, with their topics. Opening to others is something different: you must create human connection to be able to listen. It is necessary to create a big trust to go in deep into an emotional space, very close to human relation in order not to abuse the score of the content. It has to be very careful and choose the right approach, not to betray the trust.*

Michal Záhora

Creating new artistic work – music, performance or visual arts – that tells stories of, or is inspired by, the people and the place was one of the strategies at the core of our artists' work. That meant providing participation opportunities, and both audiences and professionals recognised the value and impact of these participative experiences; shining a light on their stories, which had been invisible and untold, was a transformational experience. This is the power of working in a participatory way, which is still hyper-local but it is thus connected outwards to artists and ideas beyond the local community. For some artists, that approach changed the traditional understanding of their own creative modes.

*The content for the pièce was provided by the people involved in the workshop. The content normally comes from the artist: on this occasion it has been taken from someone else. The artist is only an instrument!*

Michal Záhora

For example, in his work Michal Záhora wanted to investigate the mechanisms of sharing private writings (letters, e-mails, messages, etc.). In this regard, participants were asked to bring a personal letter that, regardless of its literary value, had caused a certain emotional impact in their lives. These correspondences were read aloud, analysed through group questions and the readers' voices were recorded. In order to reinforce the relationship between the participants and the private correspondence, in each session the artists proposed a specific question to be answered during the current and following days. The material collected was then elaborated with simple exercises of analysis and theatrical improvisation proposed by the choreographer. The participants felt personally involved in the project: the artists, who want to study such personal issues, need to be able to actively involve the participants, who are no more mere spectators, but the real protagonists of every meeting. Their commitment and their participation proved to be more active and constant every day.

*All the ideas and all the creation must not always come from just the artists: working with people is powerful, it is powerful connecting people together. People engagement woke up the creative process of people involved: there were things I would have never thought about. Sometimes very interesting ones.*

Michal Záhora

*Some of the people I interviewed during my residencies in Prague and London were involved in other Be SpectACTive! residencies... It is all about having conversation and building up new connections together.*

Dan Canham

For some artists, Be SpectACTive! is also an opportunity to get in touch with festivals and theatres they could not have the chance to meet, an opportunity to grow as artists; this is what happened to Dan Canham, Bridget Fiske, Bruno Isaković and Bersani D'Agostin.

Some artists underlined a few gaps in the development of the project; in particular the need to be followed during their artistic journey, to have some suggestions in term of artistic development. The two residencies for some of them were just a juxtaposition, two separate stocks, they felt the need to be followed in a closer way; but that was not the aim of the project itself.

They felt also the necessity to find someone who could help them in transposing digitally the story-telling of what they were doing. To answer this need, we decided to include in the process a community manager alongside with artists, someone able to put them in connection with specific targets of local communities, and also able to transpose all the evidences online.

All the artists agreed upon the importance of having staff with a real and genuine connection with the place and the people as a way to build trust. In terms of developing organisational partnerships too, personal relationships are just as critical as aligned objectives and strategic fit. It is important to find the "right" people, by thinking about communities in terms of communities of interest as well as geographically defined: it is about finding "gatekeepers" as a starting point to know people. These can be official" community leaders, and it can be just as – if not more – effective when they are individuals who are well connected, trusted and knowledgeable in an informal way. In some cases they underline also the need to find a closer connection with the staff of the organisations: finding someone who could deeply understand their needs and could help them find the right people to get involved.

For some artists the project was also an opportunity to make unexpected discoveries.

*The first meeting they worked with the school they realised this way of working with audiences could become a new artistic "product" for team building! They discovered a new marketing strategy or a new target group.*

Barbora Látalová



Portraits of spectators for the European Spectators Day (graphics by Gianluca Cheli)

**European Spectators Day: how to engage people thanks to social media networks**

**Maria Gabriella Mansi**  
**Gianluca Cheli**

(Be SpectACTive! communication team)

*There is a time when professionals and spectators – in several cities of Europe – share experiences and thoughts about performing arts. They are all connected through social media networks.*

*Is it peculiar? No.*

*It is the European Spectators Day: an offline and online event that connects people, citizens, spectators and professionals to talk about theatre and dance.*

It was the 21<sup>st</sup> of November 2015, when the local groups of active spectators and professionals involved in the Be SpectACTive! project met for the first edition of the European Spectators Day, an initiative finalised to connect different spectators across Europe through social media networks, Facebook above all.

But, what is the European Spectators Day? How does it work?

*The Facebook banner for the European Spectators Day 2016*



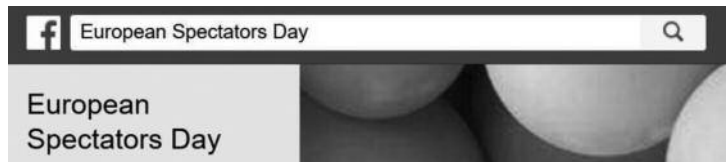
[Source: [www.facebook.com/groups/EuroSpectDAY/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/EuroSpectDAY/)].



## European Spectators Day: the event

Every year Be SpectACTive! organises the European Spectators Day (ESD), a community-based event dedicated to the groups of active spectators and curators taking part in the activities implemented in the framework of the project, and also to other people and professionals interested in engagement practices. The event takes physically – and simultaneously – place in all the venues of the cultural organisations involved in the project: all the participants are linked through the Be SpectACTive’s Facebook channel, in order for people to connect both offline (in their location) and online (all together). During the event, the participants debate the same topics related to culture, theatre and dance, starting from some questions launched during the weeks before the event. The initiative comes to life from the awareness of the growing importance of digital world in people’s life. It is an experimental activity, an opportunity to create new forms of interaction, giving people a comfortable virtual space of dialogue dedicated to their own experiences in the performing arts’ field.

*The Facebook group of the European Spectators Day*



[Source: [www.facebook.com/groups/EuroSpectDAY/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/EuroSpectDAY/)].

Three editions of the event reveal the success of the ESD’s format, making European citizens closer, despite their geographical, linguistic, social and cultural gaps. For each participant, the ESD is an occasion to think about his/her cultural experiences, to get to know other people and debate with them, feeling active part of a community. On the other side, for the professionals involved, the ESD is a precious opportunity to look at the arts

from the point of view of the spectators/citizens and to consolidate the relationship with their own community. Over the years, the ESD has shown its strength but also its points of weakness, mostly due to the event structure, in balance between the offline and the online debate. Indeed, the right timeline, for harmonising the real discussion with the virtual one, is still a topic of discussion for the Be SpectACTive’s team that every year faces the challenge to organise the initiative.

*First step: the creation of the working group and the definition of topics/instructions for the event*

The first task of each big venture is the definition of a good working group. Firstly, work as a team. Every year the working group of the ESD is composed of the Be SpectACTive!’s team (the project managers, plus the communication and the social media managers) and, in turn, of some professionals from the partners’ venues; we are about 6/7 persons per year in each venue. In this way, each partner can contribute to the creation of the event, that also becomes an opportunity to strengthen the relations inside the network. The ESD became a challenge to find new common ways to operate and to keep the staff members connected. In fact, they are normally involved in the operative phases of the project, but are not so related with the other partners’ staff members. The event occurs in November but the preparations start before the summer break, in May or June, with the first Skype-brainstorming-meeting of the “international ESD team”. We work remotely, because each one of us lives in a different city of Europe, so Skype and emails are our favourite tools to get in touch. We dialogue and organise the work, sharing some tasks, ideas, thoughts. It’s a really good opportunity to foster the sense of belonging to the project, to work with different people, to test new tools and keep in touch with different ways of engaging communities, to enhance the relationship among our network’s staff members.



*European Spectators Day: banner 2015*



[Source: [www.facebook.com/groups/EuroSpectDAY/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/EuroSpectDAY/)].

Operatively, the tasks of the working group are two:

1) defining the questions/topics that will be discussed during the event. They can concern theatre and dance experiences, memories, ideas and practices about the way people produce and participate in culture. Questions are also preparatory to the event because spectators have to answer them during the registration phase on the Be SpectACTive! website ([www.bespectactive.eu](http://www.bespectactive.eu)). The questions and the answers given open and prepare the debate before and during the initiative, inviting participants to rethink their role as spectators and to develop a major awareness of themselves in the performing arts' world. These materials are also used to spread information, topics, to start developing a sense of belonging among people with the same interests, passions, habits and to generate curiosity. In this way, a tool borrowed by viral marketing and tribal marketing became strategic for the exploitation of the project and for reaching new audiences. Consider, in fact, that each partner is translating all set up materials in its mother tongue, to make them effective.

2) setting up the instructions about what to do before and during the event on the basis of a clear timeline followed by each group. Instructions specify the participants' registration deadline, the duration of the event, the tasks for each venue's curators, etc. The most important thing is to define a clear timeline for that day, in order to have a unique and coordinated event.

*Second step: communication and promotion of the event*

After the definition of topics and instructions, the work continues with the promotion of the event, developed by communication and social media managers bearing in mind the suggestions coming from the working group and relying on the support of each partner. The partners play an important role because the communication and the promotion of the ESD take advantage of the communicative efforts of every organisation taking part in the event. Starting from the social media kit – graphics to be used on social media channels – and the press release, each participant venue contributes to promote the event by sharing the news on its website, on the social media networks and among its press and institutional contacts. It's the power of the network and its connections that generates a positive “domino effect” or “megaphone effect”. We give a central input to each venue coordinating the promotional phase and supporting the preparations. In this phase, we also contact other European projects asking them to spread our voice and, above all, we keep in touch with Creative Europe that always gives the news about the ESD.

To promote the event and start engaging participants about one month before the day, we launched the Facebook photo-contest dedicated to Theatrical Memories: “share a pic of a theatre or dance memory and win a prize!” (see the following paragraph).

*European Spectators Day graphic materials*



[Source: [www.facebook.com/groups/EuroSpectDAY/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/EuroSpectDAY/)].

*Third step: from the offline to the online event*

The ESD occurs in the venues – theatres and organisations, involved at different times due to lag reason –, in order to have a unique, coordinated, European event. Every venue manages a local meeting to debate the topics. The local meetings are linked through Facebook, in order to put in contact people living in several European cities, coming from different linguistic, cultural and social contexts. The intent is to make the virtual space the extension of the physical venue. Starting from the three questions, in each venue the debate is managed by two persons: the mediator, who manages the offline interaction giving the correct times and feeding the local debate, and the social media manager, who makes the online report of what is happening offline. Every social media manager tells in real time what is happening in his/her venue (who is speaking, what they are saying, etc.), translating it all into English: in fact, English is the online language, while the offline one is the local one, even if people can make comments online using their own mother tongue. So there is the possibility either to write directly or to be mediated: this responds to the aim to give a special voice to people, who feel free to express their feelings and opinions related to the specific field of the performing arts.

*An overview of the 3 editions of the ESD realised during the project*

<b>EUROPEAN SPECTATORS DAY</b>	<b>1st edition: November 21st, 2015</b>	<b>2nd edition: November 19th, 2016</b>	<b>3rd edition: November 18th, 2017</b>
<b>Artistic organizations involved</b>	B-51 (SI), Bakelit Multi Art Center (HU), Domino (HR), Kilowatt Festival (IT), LIFT Festival (UK), Tanec Praha (CZ), Teatrul National Radu Stanca (RO), York Theatre Royal (UK)	Bakelit Multi Art Center (HU), Domino (HR), Kilowatt Festival (IT), LIFT Festival (UK), Tanec Praha (CZ), Teatrul National Radu Stanca (RO), York Theatre Royal (UK); among the external organisations, La Briquerie – CDC du Val-de-Marne in France, Pivot Dance (IT) and Theatron Network (DK)	Bakelit Multi Art Center (HU), Domino (HR), Kilowatt Festival (IT), LIFT Festival (UK), Tanec Praha (CZ), Teatrul National Radu Stanca (RO), York Theatre Royal (UK); among the external organizations, Artemrede (PT), Dominio Publico (IT), Teatro Faraggiana (IT)
<b>Cities involved</b>	Budapest, Ljubljana, London, Prague, Sansepolcro, Sibiu, York, Zagreb	London, Odense, Prague, Sansepolcro, Sibiu, Vitry-sur-Seine, York, Zagreb	York, London, and Barreiro, Moita, Oeiras, Pombal, Lisbon in Portugal.
	Bassano del Grappa, Budapest,	Roma, Sansepolcro, Novara in Italy, Sibiu, Prague, Zagreb, Budapest,	
<b>People involved</b>	active spectators and curators of Be SpectACTive!'s artistic partners (about 60 people among the registered participants and the curators)	active spectators and curators of each organisation (about 90 people among the registered participants, the curators and the outsiders)	active spectators and curators of each organisation (more than 100 people among the spectators registered, the curators and the outsiders)

<b>Where?</b>	Offline, in the venues of the organisations involved; online, on the Be SpectACTive! Facebook page <a href="http://www.facebook.com/events/118897288474608/">www.facebook.com/events/118897288474608/</a>	Offline, in the venues; online, in the Facebook group of the European Spectators Day <a href="http://www.facebook.com/groups/205804306491845/">www.facebook.com/groups/205804306491845/</a>	Offline, in the venues; online, in the Facebook group of the European Spectators Day <a href="http://www.facebook.com/groups/205804306491845/">www.facebook.com/groups/205804306491845/</a>
<b>Questions to answer and discuss</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How does the theatre experience differ from that of other media? (cinema, tv, etc.)</li> <li>Do you remember your first vision experience as a spectator?</li> <li>Why are you interested / intrigued / passionate in theatre?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Why are you interested in theatre and dance? What does it mean to like theatre and dance?</li> <li>Do you remember, or can you tell us more, about your best or worst experience with theatre or dance? Why? What was the "gift" that you received?</li> <li>Now let's joke. You have a new boyfriend/girlfriend who does not like theatre and dance, but you are in love with performing arts. You would like to share this passion with him/her. What should you do to involve him/her? What kind of shows or activities would you share with him/her?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tell us about your theatre and dance experiences: what are your favourite moments while visiting a theatre? Do you have a favourite space in the theatre (anywhere, including in front of house/in the auditorium)? Do you have any special ritual when you go?</li> <li>What kind of theatrical experience/show would you choose for a date?</li> <li>Let's dream: if you could run your local theatre for one day, what would you do?</li> <li>Europe is facing many challenges: economic difficulties, the ongoing migrant and refugee flows, Brexit, terrorism threat, etc. what do you think the role of cultural experiences and the performing arts is within this landscape? What's the potential social impact of being engaged in the arts?</li> </ol>
<b>Duration of the event</b>	1 hour and half, plus the party taking place in each venue after the event	1 hour and half, plus the party taking place in each venue after the event	1 hour and 50 minutes, plus the party taking place in each venue after the event

[Source: image elaborated by the authors].

### **Paying attention to the community manager: how to manage the online event**

The ESD has taken advantage of the many possibilities made available by Facebook. In 2015, the first edition was the pilot experience that allowed us to draw up the first coordination and development strategies for the event, the first and only experiment ever, to connect local communities of spectators coming from different countries all over Europe via social media networks. The element that remains univocal throughout the different editions of the project is the online form on the Be SpectACTive! website: three or four questions developed in collaboration with the project partners, to find and fathom spectators' different experiences related to the theatrical event. About 50 spectators answered the questionnaire of the first edition and, to promote and disseminate their answers, so varied and interesting, we created graphics declined for the several spectators participating in the event. Graphics (available at: [www.bespectactive.eu/eu-spectactors-day-2015/](http://www.bespectactive.eu/eu-spectactors-day-2015/)) were launched a month before the event, to support the ESD.

The choice to use a Facebook event for our first ESD was motivated by the need to gather all the participants in a single place of the social networks, to monitor their interventions and accesses. The dialogue structure during the event was very simple: three questions were launched at intervals of 20 minutes each, using the survey tool and gathering all the answers that online users shared with other participants. During one and a half hour of organised activity, users started posting photos and live testimonies of their activity, creating a further level of narration of the event, which enriched the slim structure of the simple survey-based publication of the three usual questions. It was therefore felt, more urgently, the need to develop a format that also considered the presentation of the local communities of spectators, to give the possibility to the different voices to emerge during the conversation.

The second edition, in 2016, was clearly more defined and rich in terms of interaction possibilities. We continued to use the online form available on the project website: participants answered the questions of the second edition and the Be SpectACTive! communication team developed the graphics to disseminate some of the most interesting answers received before the event.

On the day dedicated to the event, we founded the ESD Facebook group, a community of spectators (which today counts more than 450 users who have freely registered in the group as just earned traffic – no compulsory user subscription campaign was made, nor a sponsored one to increase the number of members). The group proved to be an extremely effective tool for structuring the event: thanks to the participation of associations and theatres, also outside the Be SpectACTive! network (like La Briqueterie and Pivot Dance), it was possible to build a plural and dynamic ESD, exactly as we imagined the event in the planning phase.

Its first part was dedicated to the presentation of groups of spectators gathered in their respective venues (or theatres). Each group had the opportunity to post a small video or photos where they told about the activity in which they had been involved as active spectators during the years, thanks to Be SpectACTive!. After the presentation, the Be SpectACTive! social media managers launched the questions through a single post, fixed at the top, to which users could reply with comments. Three different types of comments fed the online conversation:

- ◆ the comments of the social media managers from the different project partners involved, who had the responsibility to bring into the online discussion the topics emerged from the live discussions in the various venues;
- ◆ the comments of the spectators who declared a good understanding of English and could therefore freely comment during the discussions on the spot
- ◆ the comments of the participants involved exclusively online,

and not in the offline discussions in the various cities joining the event.

That variety of comments and responses made the discussion rich and full of ideas but, during that second edition, the timeline designed for the event was still too tight, preventing a deeper debate and a reversal of issues, born exclusively on the Facebook group within the discussions among spectators in the various venues participating.

For that reason, the third edition saw the development of a softer timeline without losing the dynamism that the event managed to set in motion with the second edition. A fourth question was added, to explore a political and social dimension, and we developed a soft debate without changing the organisation of the event day: a presentation of all the groups of spectators and users who followed the event exclusively online, twenty minutes for each question plus a final part of the contest, dedicated to theatrical photo-memories and greetings.

The photo-contest about theatrical memories was introduced for the second edition of Be SpectACTive!: each participant sent, in addition to the answers to the form on the Be SpectACTive! website, a photo that reminded a theatrical experience. The various photos were published one after the other in the month before the event as a promotional tool, and were placed under the judgment of the social users. At the end of the ESD, each group of spectators chose a photo: the spectator who published it was “crowned” winner and received from the theatre of his/her city some prizes and gadgets in memory of the event. Therefore, the ESD provides three levels of interaction and trans-media telling/storytelling: a first phase through online forms, used in the days before the ESD to spread the most interesting contents received by our viewers, where the viewer responds in a personal and individual way to the questions proposed; a second level of

encounter among the communities of viewers developed by the various partners of the project, where the answers gained individually are analysed and crossed during the meeting moderated by the management of the artistic partners (or moderators/community managers); a third level where all those instances are presented to the audience following the event through social networks exclusively, allowing the various local communities to connect each other and to involve individual users, who thus allow our network to grow systematically and profitably over the years.

### **Three editions: the development of the ESD over the years**

As this writing occurs, three editions of the ESD took place, from 2015 to 2017: three successful editions characterised by hard work, participation and fun. We got to create a big virtual arena where people can interact supported by teams of professionals.

Time has passed from the European Spectators Day first edition and something is changed. First of all, the range of the event: the first ESD involved only the spectators and curators of Be SpectACTive!'s network, while the following two editions included the participation of other organisations, that are not part of the project, although closed to its purposes. So, the number of participants increased (from about 60 people to more than 100, among spectators and professionals/curators). Besides, as mentioned above, we decided to create a special Facebook space dedicated to the event: the Facebook group of the ESD, open to any contribution every day of the year. Last but not least, the event became more complex, presenting more questions and levels of interaction. Edition after edition the working team has been realising the importance of having more time for developing

both the offline and the online discussion. Over the years, we managed to organise a better event, engaging more people in several European cities. The auspice for the future is to extend the range of the initiative, involving even more spectators, professionals, artists, citizens in different European countries, with the aim to continue connecting people in the name of performing arts.

### **Audiences' thoughts about their experience**

*My approach to performing arts has changed; I've never felt so close to a group; this experience make me feel more self-confident.*

*I feel like a contributor in the building of a piece of art: I gave a way to better understand Slovenian audience and their expectations.*

*Taking part in this process changed my way of thinking: I've always seen actors and audiences as different things. This work gave me the opportunity to better understand a creative process.*

*I've always expressed myself by words. I was a little bit afraid, because I did not know what they wanted from me.*

*I'm not a professional dancer, but now I will look at dance performance in a new way, I feel more comfortable with contemporary dance.*

*Projects like this have a great power, they can help who is involved in understanding people, including other people. Experiences like this can have effects on all the aspect of your life, because art is transformative and can transform you.*

*I suggest other people to try things like this: if you feel scared, it is right for you to experience this.*

## **OTHER EUROPEAN EXPERIENCES**



## **Introduction**

**Giada  
Calvano**

**(University of  
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This book would not be complete without analysing the European dimension, which constitutes the background and a core component of *Be SpectACTive!*. The success and buzz generated by the project can be explained, on one side, by the innovative approach to audience development, which consists of adopting an action research methodology and involving venues and festivals with different approaches to audience participation. Of course, the interest generated is also in line with the recent attention of the European Union on themes related to audience development. Indeed, the strong focus on and original approach to audience development surely represent key assets that led to the selection of *Be SpectACTive!* as a Creative Europe-funded project.

The reasons for increased interest of the European Union towards audience development are due to several political, economical, social and cultural factors, that influence and motivate the decision to put audience development as a core challenge of the Creative Europe calls. Of course, audience development is something that has always existed in the very history of the performing arts, starting from the prominent role given to audience in Ancient Greece (think about the loud and proactive citizens of the Athenian drama competitions). However, transformations occurred in the last decades led cultural organisations to adopt a strategic approach to engage their audiences.

Among societal changes affecting this renewed attention of the European Union to the repurposed role of audience development, Benita Lipps (2015b) outlines a range of different concomitant factors. First of all, demographics are changing, due mainly to an overall ageing population, globalisation and migration flows. On the one hand, core audiences are greying and European youth lacks of interest, especially when it comes to attending a ballet, dance, opera or theatre performance (Parvu, 2015). On the other hand, the integration of migrants into a host country cultural life is requiring new languages and modalities to

make them participate, feel an active part of and identify with the (g)local cultural offer.

Greater competition for leisure time is challenging the performing arts sector, that need to find new ways to communicate and engage with its public. In fact, Europeans seem to much prefer “cultural activities”, such as watching TV or listening to the radio, over going to see a ballet or dance performance, which are the least popular activities in terms of attendance (European Commission, 2013).

Digitalisation and technological advances have completely modified cultural contents and modes of consumption. The emergence of the “prosumer phenomenon” is indicative of the shifts occurring in our society, where the boundaries delineated by the post-industrial binary interpretation of production and consumption as distinct processes are now blurring and melting into a continuum (Calvano and Suárez Pinzón, 2018). At the same time, the virtual arena is gaining more and more relevance in our daily lives, and performing arts organisations need to adapt to the new pace and rules dictated by the social media. Just think about the fact that broadband Internet access was used by 85% of the households in the EU-28 in 2017, approximately double the share recorded in 2007 (42%) (Statistical Office of the European Communities, 2018). Moreover, one of the most common online activities in the EU-28 in 2017 was participation in social networking (54%) (idem).

The economic crisis led to a decrease of public funding in the cultural field, pushing the sector to look for new strategies in order to achieve financial sustainability and attract diverse audiences. Along with subsidy cuts, people have also less disposable income, making attendance to cultural events even more challenging. However, it has to be noted that, in performing arts, lack of interest is more determinant than lack of money, as demonstrated by the

partial inefficiency of initiatives such as the reduction of ticket prices.

The practice of artistic activities is also a key aspect to consider, since studies has proven correlation between adult arts engagement and childhood exposure to the arts. Unfortunately, the number of people who actively perform cultural activities in their spare time is decreasing. At the same time, school curricula have been tightened and refocused on the “core skills” required to compete in today’s economy. Ironically, this led to extreme cases: a country deeply rooted in culture like Italy approved the abolition of History of Art in high schools, to make room for more “useful” subjects.

Since the rise of neoliberalism, the political attitude towards culture has also been changing. Nowadays, performing arts are required to meet specific performance criteria, in order to “deserve” public subsidies. Indeed, funding conditions tend to reward quantifiable assets such as economic profitability over artistic excellence. In this context, attracting new audiences and involving the local community has become essential in order to apply to public funds. Sometimes, leading to an instrumentalisation of audience development practices, for the sake of receiving grants.

Finally, a paradigm shift is occurring. The emergence of new aesthetics and models of co-production, co-creation and co-programming are affecting the relationship between cultural organisations, artists and audiences. And engagement and participation are central to this new approach, that seeks experimentation and new forms of dialogue, by empowering the audience in ways never seen before. In addition to the abovementioned factors, Alessandra Gariboldi (2016) outlines also the impact of political reasons, rooted in the idea of democratisation of culture, and social policy reasons, which are crucial for cultural development.

Altogether, these factors marked the path for a renewed relevance of audience development in nowadays performing arts and European cultural policy. This is evident in the decision of the European Commission to introduce audience development as one of the new priorities of the Creative Europe for the 2014-2020 period. The reasons for that choice were highlighted during the “European Audiences: 2020 and beyond” conference, organised by the European Commission on 16-17 October 2012:

[i]n the past, EU programmes focused mainly on supporting the “supply” side, fostering artist mobility and the circulation of works, with less attention paid to the “demand” side. Times have now changed and in the same way that the sector must adapt, so too support programmes must adapt and be relevant for the challenges of the 21st century (European Commission, 2012, p. 12).

This strategy responds mainly to the crisis of cultural participation throughout Europe and the decrease in national funding for culture, on the one hand, and the rhetoric linked to the instrumental value of culture, on the other hand. It could be said that, in a subtler way, the interest on audience development has deeper roots and lies in the evergreen attempt to create a European identity, in this case by means of cultural participation. Whatever the apparent or underlying reasons might be, the future of Creative Europe and European cultural policy is strictly bond to audience development. And this is reflected in the proliferation of dedicated initiatives at the EU level, ranging from networks to co-production and research projects. It suffices to cite some of these successful experiences, from Theatron Network, to Audiences Europe Network (AEN), until the ADESTE and Corners projects.

Throughout this section on *Other European Experiences*, different voices come together to illustrate diverse experiences, composing a mosaic of viewpoints on the meanings given to audience development through the lens of the European dimension. The reader

can get an insight on what audience development means in several parts of Europe, but also find commonalities in the different experiments, innovative practices and trends that are outlining a new panorama in the performing arts sector of the continent.

That part of the book opens with the contribution of Niels Righolt, Director of CKI – the Danish Centre for Arts and Interculture. His introductory chapter provides an excellent analysis and overview on the shifts occurring in societal and political priorities with a view to meeting the new demands of an increasingly diverse Nordic (and European) population. Righolt lists a number of changes that are redefining Nordic societies, but that can be applied also to the general situation in Europe. Ranging from a refocus of national states on domestic agendas, to the influence of migration, the rise of new nationalisms, the effects of digitisation and social media and a new urban growth.

For what specifically concerns cultural challenges, Righolt and his colleagues have identified 8 perspectives in cultural politics that mark the discourse in the Nordic countries. The author depicts a Scandinavian context where cultural institutions have been challenged, the focus has been redirected towards an audience-centric approach and audience engagement have gained relevance for all the stakeholders involved in performing arts. Nevertheless, he warns about the difficulties to break the established code, as the integration of new visions and methods into a cultural institution implies a restructuring of the hierarchies. Finally, he claims the need for a structural change in the cultural field, that cannot pass through projects alone, but has to be built by means of a systemic approach.

Anne Torreggiani, Chief Executive of The Audience Agency, a UK charity promoting excellence in audience development, provides her international perspective on the English cultural context, always with an eye to other European projects. Throughout the chapter, the author explores the specific implications derived by a

new commitment to co-creation for audience development. After a brief historical overview of the cultural policy context in the UK, she observes the perpetuation of a supply-led model of audience development, which could now be challenged thanks to a community-reorientation of cultural organisations. However, a real redistribution of power is far to be reached, and thus claims for the need of true co-creation arise. In fact, Torreggiani notes that different types of co-creation practice corresponds to different levels of audience empowerment, forming a continuum which is graphically illustrated in the spectrum of engagement.

The author stresses the importance of real co-creation as a transformational means for communities, differentiating this potentially empowering practice from arts participation. For true co-creation to happen, Torreggiani calls for the need of inclusive leadership and the development of practices with relevance for specific communities/audiences. And in the near future this seems more possible than ever, thanks to the emergence of a new movement of co-creators willing to re-orientate the artistic practice towards real inclusion and meaningfulness.

In the third contribution, the focus moves to Southern Europe. Bonet, Carreño, Colomer, Godard and Négrier present a comparative analysis of two neighbouring regions (Occitanie and the Catalan countries) in terms of practices of active audience participation in festivals and performing arts venues. In this case, the researchers include in their study not only co-creation activities, but also participatory processes of co-programming, co-production and co-promotion. The research aims at understanding the motivations behind the adoption of participatory practices, the degree of shared power and the symbolic benefits perceived by the audiences, always from a territorial perspective.

A variation of the spectrum of engagement introduced in the previous chapter is here provided. The authors propose an original matrix of participatory practices, tested and applied in real

cases, where diverse experiences are placed along the coordinates of “power” and “skills”, producing four different results according to the degree of transferred power and abilities acquired. The different participatory practices are then analysed according to the type of project (festival or performing arts venue) and the geographical context. The obtained data highlight the difficulties found in the path towards co-responsibility between an organisation and its public and depict the contemporary challenge of intertwining artistic legitimacy and audience empowerment.

The section ends with the special case of *Visionari*, a project born in the village of San Sepolcro within the framework of Kilowatt Festival, that inspired several other initiatives around Europe. The originality of *Visionari* lays in its grassroot foundation, and the success of this bottom-up experiment was demonstrated by its replicability in heterogeneous contexts. Unlike many European projects, that create a network between different local experiments which in turn gain relevance from the same European dimension, *Visionari* started as a small local project, for then growing over time and being adopted and adapted in other Italian and European regions.

Luisella Carnelli from Fondazione Fitzcarraldo runs through the different stages of *Visionari* and explores its surprising adaptations in heterogeneous contexts. She starts with contextualising the approach to audience development in Italy, before moving on to trace the evolution of the co-programming project from its very beginning and to explain its functioning. The author highlights two main spillover effects of *Visionari*. The first concerns the national implementation of the project (*L'Italia dei Visionari*), which involved 9 different organisations in 2018. The second one relates to the adaptation of the format operated by York Theatre Royal, and the emergence of projects enhancing active involvement of young people in the decision-making process of cultural organisations.



Niels Righolt, Be SpectACTive! Fourth International Conference (Sibiu Performing Arts Market, Sibiu, Romania) ©Luisella Carnelli

**Whose culture  
is it anyway?  
Tendencies in  
Scandinavian  
cultural politics,  
trends in  
institutional  
governance,  
artistic leader-  
ship and the  
potential impact  
of a wider  
cultural  
democracy**

**Niels  
Righolt**

**(CKI – The Danish  
Centre for Arts &  
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Copenhagen)**

In a time of transition. A time where ways of communication and inter-human interaction is changing so rapidly and with such steep and overwhelming consequences, that we barely recognise the societal structures we had just a decade ago. A time where the political and financial logics are under pressure from as well the effects of digitisation, the emergence of advanced social media platforms as not least the anti-globalisation movements expressed through e.g. raising nationalism, Brexit and America First campaigns and a still more disparate and diversified public realm and debate. In such a time there is a profound need to redefine purpose, focus and ways of action for all parts of society.

As a result of these changes a redefinition of aims and ways have been going on in the Nordics for well over a decade, accelerated ever since the financial crisis ramparted Nordic economies in 2008. Since then the five Nordic countries have undergone a significant change in terms of societal and political priorities and how to meet the demands of an increasingly divided population's wish for the future. Every aspect of the Nordic societies is under revision these years. No matter whether it's about culture politics, power and resources, urbanisation, social political tendencies in society, audience and diversity, digitisation, competence and innovation, education, health care, migration etc.

### **Domestic agendas**

Across Europe and in the USA we see nation states close themselves around domestic agendas and seek domestic solutions to basically transnational and transversal challenges. Transnational unions and bodies are under a severe pressure from the nation states, not least the EU and the United Nations. Political structures citizens across the continent have put faith in as the potential solutions to shared challenges such as employment,

agricultural sustainability, energy, social development, trade, poverty, global aid etc. are now under fire for being insufficient or – as we see it in the American presidents many tweets and in like-minded European head of states speeches – the very root to everything bad that threatens national sovereignty and undermines the position of those in power. Transnational solidarity and aim for collaborative solutions to common problems are undermined and replaced with increasing national agendas.

One could argue, that this was to be expected as a “foreseen backlash” to the ongoing globalisation and the consequences it bears with it. Those marginalised as a result of a still more intertwined international economy and global trade, and those who might lose their domestic influence have joined forces in political and social alliances aiming at preventing the ongoing resolution of the national state, as they see it.

### **Under influence of migration**

Another major change maker in favour of the nationalist agenda has been the effects of the crisis in 2015, when Syrian refugees crossed the Aegean Sea and fled into Europe stressing and testing European solidarity, which collapsed over the summer and left a number of Mediterranean countries alone with the reception and clearly dismantled an area of action for the political extreme right movements occurring all over Europe. Border after Border were closed and Passport declarations reintroduced.

Migration and growing xenophobia was becoming an influential political cocktail prior to 2015, but nowhere near the impact these issues now have on the daily political discourse across the European continent. Politicians who were considered political “untouchables” just a few years ago are now either in power as in e.g. Hungary, Poland, Norway and Italy or in possession of the “power giving” votes as in e.g. Denmark, the Netherlands, Slovakia

and Finland. Nationalist political populist parties have gained an enormous support in as good as every EU member state during the last ten years and quite often on a mixed policy of traditional “Christian” values and an expressed concern of the effects of the increased migration. Ethnic and religious minorities have been pointed out as deviating and threatening to the coherence and prosperity of the European societies.

### **New Nationalism**

The Nordic countries are no exception to these societal movements. Nationalist parties are either in power or more or less dictating the political focal points in all five countries. In Scandinavia – Norway, Sweden and Denmark – in particular. These rich Nordic welfare states all witness and experience the above mentioned “backlash” to development and are now dealing with a new political reality.

As in most other European countries, culture has become a battlefield for the new nationalism. Many major institutions are either directly or indirectly under governmental auspices and the nationalist parties are often using arguments based on an idea of cultural preservation and heritage to try limit their institutional freedom to engage in e.g. issues concerning migration, politics and religious values. However, it seems to be relatively difficult for the nationalistic political right to exercise these ambitions in the Scandinavian countries due to their legislative practice of “arm’s length” between the donating public bodies and the cultural institutions. But the rhetoric has been sharpened and there is no doubt any more, that the heads of the cultural institutions are sensible to what is being expressed by the populist and nationalistic parties.



## Digitisation

Around the same time as the financial crisis in 2008 another major game changer occurred. Since the emergence of smart-phones and social media we have experienced an unprecedented change in our communication and media behaviours, not least in Europe and North America. Digitisation has become a revolutionary factor in most aspects of our lives. In Scandinavia our self-declaration and tax payments are now fixed via our smart-phones or similar gadgets, the American president creates headlines every morning when he turns up on Twitter, digital experts argue that Russian hackers apparently influenced the US presidential elections, and in Europe we experienced how advanced social media communication “stole” the Brexit agendas from the traditional media platforms and allowed emotional logics to dominate public debate.

It would be fair to say, that with smartphones everybody gained access to a world of news and opportunities; a cacophony of voices and an overwhelming stream of information and misinformation. The classic information and news channels were challenged and the power balanced changed overnight. Today 25% of the world population has a smartphone! In the Nordic countries it is more than a staggering 90%. Already back in 2016 YouTube passed over a 1 billion unique users per month. These numbers are remarkable, not least when you consider the timespan. In less than a decade media logics and traditions were changed on a global scale. We now spend far more time on the Internet with our tablets and smartphones than through our computers.

Paper based daily newspapers are closing or reducing their paper editions and instead building up digital universes, that allows them to reach out far more efficient and to more specific costumers and readers than ever before. Many newspapers die in the process and those who survive are engaged in a media

universe, where strong relations and traditions have changed character. The mass media too is trying to adapt to the technological opportunities and find new ways of connecting to their readers, listeners and viewers.

## Social media and new behaviours

The mix of powerful search engines taking over the navigating function allowing algorithms to be the refined tool providing us with the notion of being seen, and the logic of most social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter has pounded the traditional forms of communication around. Bloggers, Vloggers, intertwined multi-media social platforms form together with billions of users a global digital cacophony of opinions, stories, perspectives – and with YouTube and Vimeo i.e. we are all part of a global shared entertainment channel. Social media has taken the stage and changed the narrative completely.

This is a reality cultural institutions, decision makers and politicians have to relate to when it comes to issues dealing with facilitating access to culture and a wider inclusion of different audiences. Over a short time, audience behaviour has changed quite dramatically in terms of cultural participation and consumption. Institutions are faced with new demands not only in terms of how they communicate but also in terms of what they communicate!

## New urban growth

Alongside the digital shift and the quite dramatic changes in the political realm, the Nordic countries also face an unforeseen urban growth, which to some extent resembles the urban revolution under the time of the industrialisation. The major Nordic cities and urban centres grow, both numerically in terms of population,

economically in terms of their importance for national and regional wealth and not least in relation to their cultural importance, production and usage.

As an example Copenhagen reflects a development that one can recognize throughout the entire Nordic region. Every year the population of the metropolitan area increases with the equivalent of a medium-sized Danish town and alone in the City of Copenhagen the population is growing by approximately 1.200 new citizens a month. This development trend is even more dramatic in Oslo and Helsinki, while the development in Stockholm seems more like that of Copenhagen. But even the major Nordic provincial cities are undergoing similar changes in these years. Cities like Bergen, Tampere, Gothenburg, Aarhus and especially Malmö are in the middle of an urban transformation as a result of the changes to how we today live and work in our part of the world.

The change in the demographic structure and composition is also quite remarkable. In the metropolitan area of Copenhagen live near to 2 million people, of which about 430.000 – between one in four and one in five citizens – have their childhood and/or cultural background outside Denmark. In urban Copenhagen, the average age is now down to about 35 years against 45+ in the rural and less populated parts of the country – a pattern quite similar to the situation in the other Nordic countries.

This obviously puts tremendous pressure on the cities' ability to meet the challenges posed by the development. Housing, jobs, public services, day-care centres, schools, hospitals, infrastructure – in all areas, cities need to upgrade themselves in order to cope with the changes. The same applies, of course, to the cultural area!

## Formidable challenges

For the cultural sector the urban changes and rapid growth involves formidable challenges. The cultural sector has to relate to and meet the effects of an increasingly younger population as well as a larger demographic diversity and at the same time respond to a more and more articulated need to act locally and participate globally. On top of that our changed habits and behaviours create new demands on the cultural institutions; e.g. on the experience of their offerings as appropriate and relevant as well as on concepts like co-creation, participation, interaction, relationship building, innovation, quality, professionalism, etc.

Cultural politicians on different levels also try to respond to the challenges as they see them and translate the new reality into political actions. Together with Nordic colleagues and researchers the Danish Centre for Arts and Interculture (CKI) has monitored and analysed cultural political tendencies and policy work for more than a decade. Influenced by the increasing urbanisation and the digital shift there seem to be a diverse set of different cultural policy perspectives existing alongside and influencing each other in the formation of a new cultural political strategy on a national level as well as on regional and local levels.

## 8 perspectives in cultural politics

CKI has identified 8 perspectives, which seem to go again in all the Nordic countries as perspectives which frame the cultural political discourse and form the backdrop for the legislative decisions and local priorities and initiatives:

- ◆ Culture as a national narrative – representing excellence within traditional western art forms such as opera, ballet, classical music, drama, fine arts, literature etc. as a way to define and set a city or a region as a place of cultural significance.

- ◆ Culture as an identity matrix – making use of culture as a marker of something specific to a city or a region, something that differs from the rest. Copenhagen as a design heaven and landmark for fine art e.g. supporting expressions and initiatives that underpin the specific notion of the place.
- ◆ Culture as entertainment – putting a city/region on the map! Mega events with global superstars as a way to raise awareness of a place and its capacity. Big money, large audiences, revue guarantee.
- ◆ Culture as a societal driver – Richard Florida’s ideas about the potential impact of the creative class still influence many politicians and civil servants. Behind it lies a hope of attracting a well-educated, culturally civilised younger work force, that can provide a better tax revenue and create the foundation for more innovative solutions locally.
- ◆ Culture as democratic glue – reflecting the notion that culture can bridge the gaps, politics doesn’t seem to be able to fill. Whether it’s a matter of social representation or a way to create better inclusion of marginalised groups into society, many politicians value culture as a key factor to provide change.
- ◆ Culture as the innovation engine – in cities and regions with a rich and diverse cultural life, the public investment in new cultural and artistic initiatives and projects are significant and higher than the average. Cultural investments are often connected to a notion of culture as a “place” in constant motion and development, a place where innovation happens.
- ◆ Culture as a glocal fixpoint – recently we see how political strategies embrace culture as a way to highlight the local cultural virtues and opportunities and at the same time reflect the ongoing global tendencies, movements and formats.

Culture as a way to embody globalism without losing the local identity. Acting locally; Navigating globally; Orientating glocally.

- ◆ Culture as the game-changer – probably the most frequently activated cultural political idea in the Nordics over the last two decades. In cities like Aalborg, Tampere, Malmö, Umeå, Stavanger i.e. we see how heavy investments in culture and education are thought to be the stepping stones into a new era for traditionally heavy industrial cities and regions. A way towards a complete redefinition of a given place.

Each of the above perspectives work alongside the others. They are all present in the political debates, the rhetoric, the media coverage, the daily conversations among citizens. They are often intertwined and the political logic seem to make use of them as a way to meet a society, that is increasingly getting more and more diverse, more complex. Relations have become technically easier but socially more complicated. That calls for a new approach, where the above perspectives often form the fundament for new decisions. Decisions that are thought to be flexible, to reflect migration effects and the shifting populations and cultures, to be anchored in the values and ethics in power, to strengthen equality aspects between individuals and groups in society, to work for constructive and sustainable relations between different partakers in society. For quite many politicians in the Nordic countries, culture and the arts need to find resonance in a wider part of society to be perceived as relevant and contemporary in order to get funded, especially outside the capital cities and the major national institutions.

### **A new institutional reality**

For the arts and cultural institutions these demands together with the overall changes in society challenge the traditional modus

operandi profoundly. Becoming relevant to a wider group of people with presumably very different backgrounds and preferences is about much more than just being a matter of pricing and efficient marketing. In order to attract a new audience and open the institutions to “unusual suspects”, accessibility becomes a question of new “narratives” and new ways of programming, of collaborating internally between different areas of expertise, of the ability to master and manage the new media, new competencies, new partners etc. The new demands challenge the cultural institutional practice as a whole and we witness how the former and quite strict boundaries existing between the curatorial and communication departments are being washed away.

The institution’s ability to act interactively and openly in relation to this new reality is a prerequisite for the development of both the institution and its employees. The classical models of organisational skills, professional roles, attitudes and professional development perspectives need to be redefined in order to meet the demands. A process that seem to grow out of a complex interaction and collaboration with its audience, artists, other institutions and organisations. Cultural institutions and organisations that have been able to tap into the new reality often highlight a need for increasing knowledge and the development of a collaborative praxis between individuals and institutions, and between employees with different skills and experience in order to fully exploit the new opportunities whilst providing the basis for new knowledge and stimulate further development in order to reach and anchor with a wider audience.

### **Increased audience focus**

In societies where most of the funding for arts and culture is public it easily becomes a matter of legitimacy and access to participation to uphold funding in a longer perspective. If all citizens are ‘paying’ the party. How can the institutions and

supported initiatives ensure they feel invited to take part in it? This question is heard still more often from the politicians. How can the arts and culture institutions ensure a diversity of modes, stories, expressions, events and projects that reflects different societies in e.g. Copenhagen and finds resonance in their respective communities? There is an expectation that institutions actively will work to reach out beyond the ‘usual suspects’, beyond their existing core audiences.

In a Scandinavian context we see that institutions are now intensely engaged in connecting the field of audience development, user engagement, outreach and community interaction to the fields of urban planning, innovation, cultural politics, youth politics, representation, cultural democracy, institutional development, artistic practice and the models/tools used to reflect and connect to society. Engaging with the audience is of course both a strategy of cultural and political management as well as a toolbox of techniques and methodologies. And it involves a broad spectrum of skills and knowledge to enable increased access to arts and culture to the widest range of people and social groups – particularly among traditionally underrepresented or excluded groups.

### **A matter for all stakeholders**

In the Nordics audience engagement has become a matter for all stakeholders in the cultural sector including the artists, and since new demands on relevance and inclusion has been raised there is a profound need for collegial sharing of experiences and methodologies. Both national and transnational networks and research environments have been established and we see both the legislative level as well as the arts councils, the regions and the municipalities support professional cross-sectorial networks across aesthetics, genres, municipal and national borders.

There is a wide recognition of the importance of the relationship between the artistic expression and the audience, as an in principal equal meeting, where the meaning, interpretation and relevance lies with the audience. That a focus on engaging with the audience and different participatory elements also underline the democratic aspect in the process and opens up for a more nuanced investigation of methods, programming, narratives, participation, recruitment policies, selection of partners etc.

### **Difficult to break the code**

Many Scandinavian arts and cultural institutions try to meet the new reality and promote a state of affairs, where it is possible to test opinions, modes of expression, boundaries and norms, within all aspects of the institutional practice. But equally many institutions find it more than difficult to break the code. Surveys in Denmark, Sweden and Norway show that it is surprisingly difficult to meaningfully integrate new tactics into a cultural organisation's overall strategic mission. One would imagine that this would be an obvious move for any arts institution, but it is not. It has to do both with the internal decisive hierarchy and the role of curation in the overall perspective of the institutions' relation to the society it serves and interacts with.

Mostly still anchored in a modernist perception and tradition deriving from the mid-20th century in terms of how cultural institutions are organised and led, many cultural organisations face the challenge of being 'locked' up in an organisational structure that does not meet the transition that is taking place as a result of the overall changes of our societies. As a result, they have become both politically and financially more vulnerable and exposed.

### **Redefining hierarchies**

Many artistic leaders and institutional managers acknowledge the need of a new approach, but are often unfamiliar with the tools available. The leaders try to create strategies that include new tools in the already existing *modus operandi* rather than to change their own components in terms of organization, programming, recruitment etc. Audience development e.g. has for long been a question solemnly for the communication and marketing officers rather than an organisational cross-disciplinary approach on a managerial level. Some leaders describe the transition as particularly difficult, because it creates a tension between the traditional gatekeepers and curators and those who master the new opportunities and ditto tools. Redefining hierarchies play a significant role for the institutions abilities to master change.

With the words of professor Gerald Lidstone from Goldsmiths University, many culture managers in Scandinavia today recognises that engaged audiences are a cornerstone in the foundation of a strong arts ecosystem. There is an increasing understanding of how concepts such as co-creation and participation can become central to the ability of institutions to attract new audiences, especially the attractive trendsetting educated youth, and thus meet the demand for an inclusive institutional practice.

### **A change of conduct**

Reports and surveys from all the Nordic countries show, that if the institutional challenge is the establishment of adequate and open meetings between audience/public and a diversity of artistic expression, it is important to remember that real change is never made through projects alone. It requires thorough and rooted structural changes within the institution. A change of conduct



which involves all parts of the institution: from leadership and management, employees, directors, stakeholders, donors, etc. – and the presumptive users as well.

There is nothing radically new in articulating the need for an audience strategy. To a greater or lesser extent audience development as a concept has been operating in Scandinavia for the last 25 years. What is new is that the term has taken on a whole different meaning. Now it's not about targeting and audience segmentation alone, it is largely about how to open cultural institutions and how to create the basis for a more dynamic and cohesive cultural democracy, in which different social groups can be covered and included within the cultural offerings.

In Scandinavia at least, there also seem to be a clear correlation between the compositions of the urban environments and the politicians' and institutions willingness to innovate and support audience engagement initiatives. Common for the Nordic countries is a tremendous difference in the degree of cultural differentiation between urban and rural areas. The vast majority of inclusive initiatives that see the light of day take place in cities with more than 100.000 inhabitants or in cities with a high proportion of young people in education. This frames one of the challenges Nordic cultural politicians are faced with these days: How to create a multi-faceted and inclusive cultural environment also outside the culturally diverse cities.



Be SpectACTive! Fourth International Conference  
(Sibiu Performing Arts Market, Sibiu, Romania) ©Gianluca Cheli



**The rise and rise  
of co-creation  
in the search  
for relevance  
in the English  
cultural sector**

**Anne  
Torreggiani**

**(The Audience Agency,  
London)**

Earlier this year I felt privileged to give the summary keynote at the annual Conference of Creative People & Places<sup>1</sup>, a hugely important programme in England, now in its fifth year, that has grant-funded 21 large scale experiments in co-creation. The conference felt like a coming-of-age, with delegates proposing that the network formed the nucleus of a new movement. One standing, admittedly, on the shoulders of giants, in acknowledgement of past generations of community arts practitioners, but a new movement nonetheless, with the potential to influence mainstream arts practice in radical ways, bringing co-production to the forefront.

How have we arrived here? And what does this mean not just for the future of collaborative arts practice, but for the future of publicly supported culture? As Chief Executive of The Audience Agency, the national charity promoting excellence in audience development, I am particularly interested in what a new commitment to co-creation means for audience development practice and policy.

Firstly, I want to place these questions in the specifically English context; it seems there are things we may learn by international comparison. Secondly, I want to look in more depth at how co-creation is developing right here and now as a new form of socially relevant mainstream arts practice.

### **Audience Development**

At The Audience Agency, we think of audience development as a planned, organisation-wide approach to extending the range and nature of relationships with the public by focusing on their needs. It helps a cultural organisation to achieve its social purpose, financial sustainability and creative ambition. Unlike audience engagement – all the ways in which an artist or organisation reaches out to touch their audience – audience development

implies a strategy for change. While many have dismissed audience development as thinly-disguised marketing, we see it as a multi-disciplinary (continual) change process connected directly to an organisation's purpose and values. The endeavor demands long-term strategic thinking and leadership, informed by a deep and nuanced understanding of the people it serves; as such, it has many different outcomes. An entrepreneurial organisation addressing an urban elite may be focused on developing paying audiences with a commitment to nurturing the place of live/visual arts in contemporary narratives. An organisation with a strong social purpose may be far more interested in empowering its local community through creativity. Many organisations, though, are not so single-minded, trying instead to juggle multiple objectives. Audience development, in The Audience Agency's view, is the approach by which any of them might achieve success by responding in an informed and planful way to meet the needs of a broad range of potential stakeholders.

In this sense, then, audience development can be adopted as part of the drive to democratise elite-approved arts and culture, or as a necessary condition of realizing a pluralistic "cultural democracy" that supports the cultural preferences of stakeholders.

### **Reach, Resilience & Relevance**

Without straying too far into the academic debate, suffice it to say that, at The Audience Agency, we think of our work as harnessing evidence, audience feedback and data to boost "3 Rs": Reach, Resilience and/or Relevance. The idea of increasing "Reach" continues the democratising tradition – working hard to up numbers and the social-cultural diversity of audiences by lowering barriers, adopting inclusive practices, and building awareness of publicly funded arts. More than crude income-generation in an austere landscape, "Resilience" is about equipping organisations to navigate changes in society with new and improved organisational and

business models. Less clearly defined, increasing "Relevance" is a shorthand for strategies that enable any given community to develop cultural activities appropriate and specific to their own interests, enabling a shift from a top-down to a bottom-up practice.

### **The English context**

For us in the English policy context, these "3 Rs" respond as much to the drive for meaning and purpose, as they do to the implied duty of public arts funding to provide equal cultural opportunity for all citizens. This responsibility is made explicit in Arts Council England's current "Great Arts for Everyone" policy framework in which artistic quality and public engagement are given notionally equal billing.

The framework is the legacy of 70 years of post-war cultural policy based on a belief in the civilising effects of high art and culture, and the need to democratise these benefits for all. Founded in 1949, the Arts Council of Great Britain's Royal Charter stated that it had been created:

*For the purpose of developing a greater knowledge, understanding and practice of the fine arts exclusively, and in particular to increase the accessibility of the fine arts to the public throughout Our Realm...*

As a result, state subsidy carries the more or less implicit demand that funded organisations should strive to include the widest possible public, with an emphasis on democratising "fine arts". These ideas were challenged by the counter-cultural movements of the 1960s, which questioned hierarchical value judgments about high and popular arts and fuelled the community arts movement. Community arts practitioners championed the right of different communities to determine their own culture in the interests of social justice:

*I really do believe in the community. I really do believe in the genius in every person. And I've heard that greatness come out of them, that great thing which is in people... Good theatre draws the energies out of the place where it is and gives it back as joie de vivre.*

Joan Littlewood, director of the radical, socially-engaged Theatre Workshop in 1950s and 60s

It is not surprising then that socially engaged artists focused their efforts in communities with the fewest advantages, and on creative participation methods that enabled people to express their own genius in their own way.

The influence of radical and politicised community arts practitioners has waxed and waned since those days, depending somewhat on the prevailing politics of the day. Participatory arts practice is now relatively well supported in the funded portfolio of cultural players, but – until recently at least – contained safely in the special-interest box (e.g. discrete work in prisons or with young people) or playing a supporting role in a cultural institution in which high culture takes precedence. These trends are mirrored by changes in the museum sector, which has similarly developed a complementary practice of involvement as part of a radical approach to re-forming historical narratives more reflective of a wider society.

Successive governments of all colours have aligned around the rallying call of great art “for everyone”. This has been reflected in the cultural policy and funding interventions of the past 30 years. Over this time, there has been an increase in grant conditions requiring funded organisations to make specific efforts to reach out to non-attenders and disadvantaged communities. In addition, numerous targeted grant programmes have incentivised projects to draw in “new” audiences. Despite all these measures, the proportion and profile of the population engaging regularly with state-sponsored culture has flatlined. While individual organisations have at different times made drastic advances, the

net overall effect of funding incentives for greater inclusion has been nil. All these interventions have favoured the democratisation approach to audience development. None have actively encouraged the more incendiary participation-driven approach.

Until now, there has been little hard evidence of the crucial role that participation and community involvement play in wholesale engagement of audiences beyond the culturally entitled elite. A notable exception was the *Not for The Likes You* field and action research, which demonstrated that a committed and creative approach to stakeholder involvement in individual organisations could make significant impact on the social diversity of their audiences. Whilst *Not for the Likes of You* made waves in the 00s, its lessons in audience-focus and inclusive organisational practice were neither championed nor invested in at the policy level and were too easily ignored by a change-resistant sector.

In summary, despite the evidence, cultural policy in England has continued to back a supply-led model of audience development in which the role of co-production and participatory practice has been allowed a minor role. Most cultural institutions and cultural organisations have been pushed by this prevailing wind, with the community arts movement often working independently of the mainstream or at its periphery. All this may be changing however, as more and more organisations are reviewing their role and remit, and (re)discovering their community purpose.

### Community purpose

Since its beginnings, community arts practice has been aligned with that of wider “community development”: “a process where community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems”. Both a form of activism and these days a developed professional discipline, it enables strong communities, encourages active citizens, promotes social justice and helps improve the quality of community life.

A growing number of cultural organisations in the UK are starting to make values and ambitions like these explicit in their social purpose, positioning themselves as civic enablers and community resource. Informed by the community arts tradition, it seems this current trend is evidence of a search for social relevance in intolerant times. Change is in the air, as organisations take an overt stand, contributing their creative muscle to the fight for social justice. It adds a new layer to our understanding of relevance, and indeed of audience development.

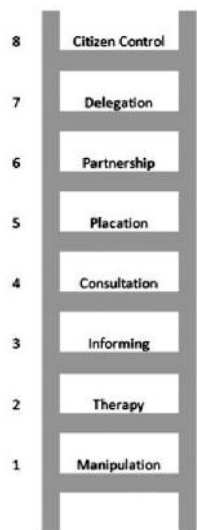
### A ladder of participation?

But are mainstream cultural organisations really ready for the challenge? Taking agency is one thing, doing it well may be another. To be empowered, people need to participate on their own terms, and enabling that requires different knowledge, specialist skills and sensibilities. More uncomfortably, it requires a change in the power balance between the “expert” organisation and its lay community. The implications are far-reaching.

Many have made the link between arts participation and Arnstein’s 1969 eight-rung *Ladder of Citizen Participation*, which climbs from “Manipulation” at the bottom to “Citizen Control” at the top.

*It is the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future; there is a critical difference between going through the empty ritual of participation and having the real power needed to affect the outcome of the process (Arnstein, 1969).*

Ladder of Citizen Participation



[Source: The Audience Agency].

In this model, Informing, Consultation and Placation are considered weaker forms of participation, with those “running” the participatory process retaining power decisions. Real change comes when power is shared and decision making is done jointly. For a cultural organisation, this challenges the unquestioned supremacy of artistic choice, judgements of taste and best use of resources.

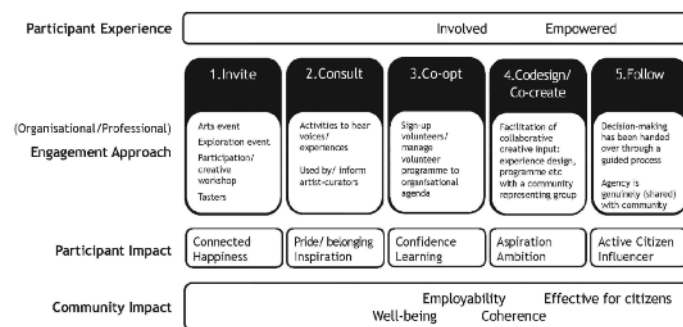
There are of course significant differences between creative and civic participation, but there are also useful parallels. We might for example differentiate between the co-option of participants for the enrichment of an artist-led artwork with little concern regarding the wider experience of and outcomes for the participant, and those designed with and for participants. The former is a perfectly legitimate approach to art making – with often exhilarating results – but is not an empowering experience for participants. Further, recent exploration questions whether the transformative effect of higher-rung involvement on, say, an individual City of Culture volunteer, translate to a similarly transformative effect on a whole community.

In her illuminating think piece for Creative People & Places *Power Up*, community arts champion Chrissie Tiller considers the participation ladder from an arts perspective. She is somewhat dismissive of the practice of lower and middle rungs as tokenism, a diversion from the business of empowerment. “In order to participate, one [interviewed] director suggested, an individual or a group needs to find what is relevant to them – the more it finds relevance on their terms the more involved people will be” (Tiller, 2017).

Some practitioners in Tiller’s research object to the hierarchical implications of a ladder and favour the concept of a journey or spectrum of participation. This chimes with our own experience of programmes and organisations trying to develop an involvement

strategy, and especially for those with high aspirations for social impact. A simplified version of our model, which links the participant experience to the adopted approach of an organisation and then to social impacts, looks like this:

*The Audience Agency Spectrum of Engagement*



[Source: The Audience Agency].

Much of our work has involved experimenting and tracking the impacts and limitations of different kinds of engagement approach. What we have observed is that organisations aspiring to increase their social impact often need to move to and fro across this spectrum.

It is challenging to jump in at the level 5 deep-end, without first developing the relevant skills and sensibilities required, and without taking your community/ies with you. For example, Creative Barking & Dagenham learnt through trial and error that their Community Connectors (volunteer ambassador-activists) are best served by a structured journey of discovery to build the confidence and ideas-bank they need to take on the role of change-makers. Other Creative Places learned that they needed to mount large-scale, visible events to grab the community's interest in the first place. Many programmers continue to operate across the spectrum to serve the needs and expectations of large

numbers of stakeholders with different – and changing – needs and interests.

Based on this experience, we would agree that creative participation per se is “middle-rung” activity and that more transformational impacts – especially on whole communities – are triggered by true co-creation. In arts participation terms, however, we understand this in-between approach has considerable – if different – value and impact, and may be a necessary bridge for an individual or community wishing to take a more leading role. Some cultural institutions may never be ready to “Follow” the decisions of their community, but as enablers of co-creation may play a role as in a wider place-based, collaborative context in enabling citizen control. In doing so, they increase their relevance considerably.

### Participation or co-creation?

If “co-creation” is a collaborative process in which diverse stakeholders take part in a creative exchange, is that really any different from ‘arts participation’? Participation and co-creation both require participants to take on an active role, but some have argued that co-creation goes beyond taking part, to achieving real-world change. So, in the arts context, that means people working together creatively or in a creative setting to bring about positive social change.

More than that, the collaborative and community-focused distinction is important to stress. Co-creation is different from the kind of participatory arts offering pre-fabricated opportunities for individuals to be involved in creating a self-expressing artwork. It is different from painting yourself blue and taking part in a Spencer Tunick happening. However communal, uplifting and personally rewarding, these are still invitations or co-options, by an artist or facilitator, into their frame.

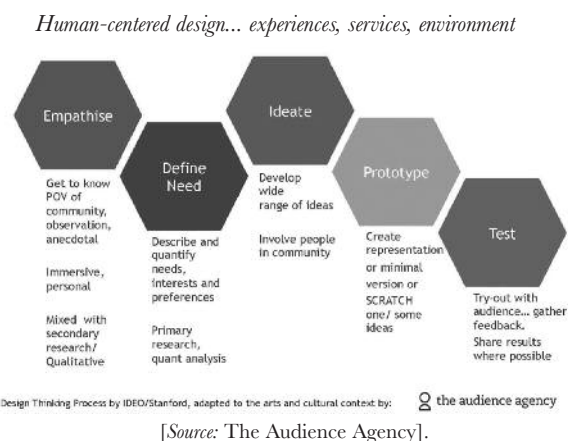
In my view, co-creation is also different from the exercise of personal creativity and Everyday Participation<sup>2</sup> championed by 64 Million Artists<sup>3</sup> and The Get Creative campaign<sup>4</sup> all of whom put forward a compelling argument for the state to recognise and support “cultural capability for everyone”<sup>5</sup> and for an end to assignation of cultural value by a narrow and entitled cultural elite. While all of these forms of participation are pushing towards a new cultural democracy, co-creation is a distinct practice with a special part to play.

I agree with David Jubb, Director of Battersea Arts Centre and founder of practice-focused network *Co-Creating Change*, that co-creation is a recognisable process:

*We struggle to understand how we can distribute work, which is so deeply rooted in communities because we make the assumption that in order to share this work, we must focus on the product... But we need to move beyond this industrial mind-set of product distribution and begin to focus on sharing the creative methodologies, which are used to create this work. We need to share the process not the product.*<sup>6</sup>

I would also agree with *Co-Creating Change*'s positioning<sup>7</sup> of the process as one in which agency and important decision-making – including resources – must be shared with the community, even if it is instigated and facilitated by a cultural player.

For me, though, the critical issue is that the process is able to absorb and assimilate a wide range of views from members of the community, that it is driven by the experience and enthusiasms of the user, not (only) the maker. This is one of the reasons that Design Thinking (aka Human Centred Design) is being adopted by organisations like the Creative Places and The Happy Museum<sup>8</sup> networks. Some have applied this clearly stepped process in a fully conscious way – like Derby Museums who even have their own Human Centred Design Staff Handbook<sup>9</sup> – while others have evolved it unconscious of the theory.



In a digitally enabled world, we are increasingly acclimatised to this design process, in which solutions to all kinds of problems are rapidly proto-typed, adapted and tested with our needs as users in mind. More, that we are actively involved in determining the outcome. Although I consider co-creation as a process driven by the user, the technical practice can only be enriched by adopting some of the tactics of a human-centred design approach. Much of our work in audience/community engagement strategy currently adopts Design Thinking concepts and embeds them in the organisations with whom we are working.

### Challenging the mainstream: Inclusive Leadership

All of this takes a very different kind of creative mediation – it is not for all artists, not for all producers, not for all creative leaders. Nevertheless, and as mentioned, many forward-looking organisations in the English cultural sector are challenging themselves to bring about this change in the search for relevance. And they are challenging the mainstream in doing so. David Jubb again:



*[While] the idea that “theatre with, not for, is the way forward” is sadly not mainstream in the arts, it is definitely upstream, and quickening... We need to co-create with communities... led by [their] passions, interests and concerns...*

Fun Palaces<sup>10</sup> has invited venues all over the country to throw open their doors to community groups enabling “the genius in everyone” (in the tradition of Joan Littlewood). Museums have been motivated by ideas of the participatory museum, pushed by The Happy Museum and inspired by US guru Nina Simon.

We are perhaps in tandem necessarily seeing the emergence of a new form of “inclusive leadership” as coined by participants in The Audience Agency’s leadership programme *From Them To Us*<sup>11</sup>. In our research<sup>12</sup>, common characteristics among “inclusive leaders” include a personal commitment to social justice and an instinct to open out beyond their own institutions. There was consensus among the groups that this is a leadership profile of increasing significance.

*‘Inclusive leaders’ ask questions. They seek others’ perspectives, are able to hear many voices, handle many kinds of events and information without fear of being “knocked off course”. Indeed, they set a course in the expectation of accommodating a multiplicity of views.*

We observed that inclusive leaders find appropriate ways of loosening the reins but within a strong, clear framework. They are comfortable to enter the unknown or uncertain, and to cede control. We noted the capacity to explore possibilities with others, in order to generate outcomes beyond what any individual might have imagined or created, in a restless search for relevance. Most had evolved their own approach to stakeholder involvement and ideation. All shared the view that it was important to learn the techniques of sharing real power, but in a properly managed safe space. Co-creation *without* this approach to leadership seems doomed.

## In search of relevance?

The good news however is that there seems to be an appetite for change, if not everywhere, certainly among a group of vocal and influential leaders in the mainstream, supported by the activists and academics I’ve noted here and others besides. For those not yet in the campaign, the legacy of Brexit may yet drive them to join; lack of arts engagement was a major identifying factor of the Pro-Brexit vote<sup>13</sup>. Brexit has served as a wake-up call to many people in the English cultural sector, making it impossible to ignore the question of relevance in a country divided between haves and have-nots.

As a result, many so-called mainstream organisations are open to embedding co-creation in their work.

*I genuinely believe we are on the cusp of making this happening. But the opportunity could so easily slip away unless we seize the moment and enable change.*

David Jubb

At The Audience Agency, we are using the Spectrum of Engagement model to help enfranchise many organisations that are working towards empowerment in some, if not all, of their work. Many are place-based programmes with earmarked funds to invest in a particular location, notably the UK Great Place Scheme<sup>14</sup> and London Borough of Culture<sup>15</sup>. Beyond these our relationships have spanned a wide range of organisations, from establishment institutions including Historic Royal Palaces and The Science Museum (McSweeney and Kavanagh, 2016), to totally new models like the Cinegi<sup>16</sup> network that is bringing screenings to unexpected places. All of them are adopting co-creation with a clear aspiration for social change as a mission-essential process.

This appetite and interest is reflected in the Calouste Gulbenkian’s *Inquiry into the Civic Role of Arts Organisations*<sup>17</sup>. One of

the major arts funding foundations in the UK, Calouste Gulbenkian is championing the concept of the civic role of cultural organisations in the wider cultural sector. Their research identifies a number of the characteristics of arts organisations that have a strong civic role, all of which align with the conditions and principles of co-creation we have explored. So organisations are:

- ◆ **Rooted in local needs.** They are aware of, and respond to, opportunities to work with other community partners, including those from other sectors, to meet local needs.
- ◆ **Developing community agency.** The local community plays a significant role in determining the artistic programme.
- ◆ **Building capability.** They are effective in developing community skills, capabilities and creativity.
- ◆ **Building social capital.** Significant volunteering opportunities are often provided.
- ◆ **Championing artistic quality.** Both in process and in artistic output, they tend to believe that, in order to have a positive social impact, the art produced must be of the highest possible quality.
- ◆ **Championing diversity.** They aspire to fully represent their communities, to tell untold stories and to give a platform to people and issues often ignored or insufficiently recognised.
- ◆ **Providing change.** They encourage discussion and debate, often about difficult issues. They challenge prevailing orthodoxies and ways of working.
- ◆ **Open and reflective.** They engage in on-going evaluation and dialogue and are receptive to being challenged.

## The rise & rise of co-creation

We circle back, then, to the Creative People & Places Conference earlier this year, where a collective atmosphere of change and possibility united the co-creation practitioners gathered there. The programme is probably one of the most extensive experiments in arts co-creation anywhere in the world. And it is working. No other initiative has ever consistently managed to engage more people from the 40% of the population not usually taking part in state supported culture. Moreover, it has genuinely shown the way, not just in including people hitherto excluded, but in mobilising communities to get creative and get active.

There are four crucial differences between Creative People & Places and the many other programmes that have occupied a “democratising” policy space over the past 70 years. The first is the essential condition that the programme must be co-created with the People in the Place. The second is that the community holds the money. The third is that the programme strategy is conceived as a 10-year plan, not a one-off project. The fourth is that it has significant state sponsorship, with a total current investment of over £60 million.

Scale, visibility and hard evidence make it impossible to ignore. In the past, a weak evidence-base made it easy to downplay the value of co-creation as a force for change and democracy. If ever there was a tipping point, it should be now. In my view, Creative People & Places makes the most powerful case for continued state support for the cultural democracy model. Not because it feels right as an ideology, but because it works.

## Emergence of a Movement

As I said at the Conference<sup>18</sup> at The Audience Agency, we have worked with all of the Places in one way or another and

have watched and lent our support to the development of a confident, skilled and distinctive new community of practice, with co-creation at its heart. We have witnessed these Places balancing the intricate and sometimes tricky relationships between people, power and place. We have talked about how hard it is to give up control, about the awkwardness of checking our own privilege, and about challenging the economics of involvement.

Many others in the mainstream cultural space are watching too, with admiration and not a little trepidation. We are all thinking about how the experiences of the Places – and others like Fun Palaces and The Happy Museum, who might recognisably be part of the same movement – could and should change what we do forever.

With this in mind, I end by sharing some of my observations from the Conference about the Creative People & Places community and the lessons they may have to teach. One of the noticeable shared characteristics of everyone in the Creative People & Places extended community is a very strong sense of personal agency and values-driven focus. Some people, not without grounds, have asked whether, as a state-sponsored programme, Creative People & Places can ever be about a genuine rebalance of power, or whether it is just a salve for the inequities of arts funding. I would respond that the integrity and commitment of those in the community are the best mitigation for that real and present risk.

At the head of the Conference, theatre-maker and disability activist Jess Thom pointed out that exclusion is often accidental, caused by ignorance not bad intention. Inclusion on the other hand is not. As many people demonstrated, genuinely including people takes time, commitment, trust, resource and most importantly a willingness to re-orientate around the needs and interests

of a given community. In every session, I heard how that takes highly-developed and specialist skills, empathy and a particular form of inclusive “with-and-for leadership”. It’s a critical message, that there is no quick-fix co-creation toolkit you can parachute into an organisation.

Creative People & Places operates firmly within an “action research” frame, endorsed by its funders and stakeholders – the principle of “failing better” is a comfortable one, despite the high stakes. This allows for ongoing iteration and adaptation, a process that is innately creative and involving of a wide range of people. It also encourages boldness – among practitioners but among participants too. This was eloquently demonstrated by experienced participants in Left Coast’s project *Everyone Makes Mistakes*, explaining how the process of co-creation changed relationships and power-balances in their community in irreversible ways.

Mostly, Places have even co-created their process for involving the whole community. They have not relied on a theory or a toolkit (although the Creative People & Places Shared Decision-Making Toolkit is a great start!<sup>19</sup>), but developed an approach that works in their specific place, including a wide range of techniques – facilitation methods, panels, ambassadors, governance models, collaborative decision-making techniques, creative inspiration workshops, etc.

This recognisably agile, crowd-sourced approach to co-creation is not the only sign that Creative People & Places’ practice belongs to a digital age. Indeed prototyping was another key theme across many conversations. Being able to adopt an agile approach to idea generation, fast iteration and testing with a community is, I believe, the key to developing relevance and reach as well as resilience. The BBC’s Will Saunders pointed out that CPP is well placed to lead digital change across the whole

sector because it is wired in a different, audience-focused way. Increasingly, Places are experimenting with digitally enabled co-production, crowdsourcing and communications, and using data intelligently. We can expect more digitally enabled innovation in the next phase of the programme.

I left the Conference with a great sense of urgency. My whole career has been about enabling cultural players to respond better to their community/ies. Nothing has worked as dramatically and consistently as Creative People & Places. Can mainstream organisations afford to ignore the new people-centred approaches so inspirationally adapted by some Places? There have been times in the past when community arts practice would become mainstream, but the waves have dissipated. It seems as though now is the time for the wider community of 21<sup>st</sup> century co-creative practitioners to take the keys to the citadel. I left hopeful that in the next 5 years at least some Creative People & Places “People” will be willing to go and run mainstream organisations, that they are inundated by generous appeals for partnership and collaboration and that, in this way, they will bring about a transformation across the wider cultural sector. As one speaker said:

*If we want a Cultural Democracy – we need to unite beyond our own circle...*

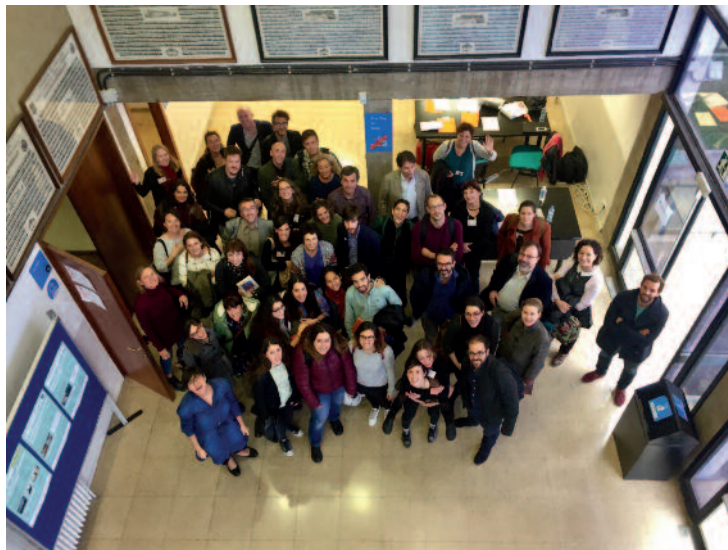
Tina Redford, Left Coast

And as Chrissie Tiller told the Conference: *right now, the power is with all of you.*

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> <http://www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/>
- <sup>2</sup> <http://www.everydayparticipation.org/>
- <sup>3</sup> <https://64millionartists.com/about/>
- <sup>4</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/3P7n390cZc3VBpn7cPn0F5T/about-get-creative>
- <sup>5</sup> <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/Cultural/-/Projects/Towards-cultural-democracy.aspx>
- <sup>6</sup> <https://batterseaartscentreblog.com/2017/12/31/how-can-cultural-centres-also-be-community-centres/>
- <sup>7</sup> <https://batterseaartscentreblog.com/2018/04/25/update-co-creating-change-25-apr/>
- <sup>8</sup> <http://happymuseumproject.org/>
- <sup>9</sup> <https://www.derbymuseums.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Derby-Museums-HCD-Handbook.pdf>
- <sup>10</sup> <http://funpalaces.co.uk/>
- <sup>11</sup> <https://www.theaudienceagency.org/insight/from-them-to-us>
- <sup>12</sup> Report: <https://www.theaudienceagency.org/insight/from-them-to-us>
- <sup>13</sup> <https://www.artspromotional.co.uk/news/brexit-voters-more-likely-shun-arts-research-finds>
- <sup>14</sup> <https://www.greatplacescheme.org.uk/>
- <sup>15</sup> <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/arts-and-culture/current-culture-projects/london-borough-culture>
- <sup>16</sup> <https://www.nesta.org.uk/blog/a-new-stage-how-the-cinegi-artsfilm-project-is-helping-culture-reach-new-audiences/>
- <sup>17</sup> <https://civicroleartsinquiry.gulbenkian.org.uk/>
- <sup>18</sup> <http://www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/conference>
- <sup>19</sup> <http://www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/our-learning/shared-decision-making-toolkit>

**Participation  
and citizenship  
committed to  
the live show:  
a compared  
territorial  
approach**



Be SpectACTive! Third International Conference  
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**Introduction**

The purpose of this article is to describe, qualify and evaluate the practices of active public participation in festivals and live performance venues based on the analysis of two neighbouring regions of the European Union. It is therefore a comparative overview of two specific territories. Examination of their heterogeneous participation profiles completes the Be SpectACTive! experiences that we saw in the previous chapters.

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Any attempt to map an emerging trend is necessarily complex. It poses conceptual problems that derive from the singularity of the observed experiments and their low dissemination. However, it allows us to distinguish convergences and differences according to the nature of the organisms involved (festivals versus permanently active places), or according to the social, cultural and political context that characterises each of the two regions analysed. It may also be relevant to examine the influence of the territorial scope of each project (according to the opinion of its managers) or the existence of an association of spectators accompanying the project.

From a conceptual point of view, the term “active spectator” used by Be SpectACTive! is ambiguous. According to its etymological origin, being a spectator – for Peter Brook (1996) – consists in observing, seeing and hearing the work proposed by the artistic operator. The more or less interactive nature of each proposal can generate more or less active spectators, but in any case the initiative (with the power that implies) corresponds to the artistic proposal. However, participatory practices can go beyond the interaction proposed by artistic creation and relate to other processes: the programming of shows, their management and production, or communication. In the first case we are confronted with forms of artistic interaction ranging from participation to creative documentation and collective interpretation. In the second case, it involves participating in more technical, relational or managerial



processes. These processes are less about the relationship between creators, performers and viewers than between performing arts professionals and citizens, especially those engaged as volunteers. The level of commitment can vary from a simple sporadic companion to the usual accomplice of some projects or, in more limited cases, to a committed collaborator who is willing to provide them with work, resources and/or contacts. In any case, an exchange relationship is established between the artistic project and the citizens who participate, in a more or less active and committed way, in the different facets of the project (Pawley, 2008).

Three questions are important in this regard: a) where was the initiative born?; b) what is the degree of shared power? and c) what are the symbolic benefits (in terms of experience, growth, learning or personal pleasure) that the participating citizen derives? In most cases, the proposal comes from the art institution and is designed and implemented by the professionals responsible for the artistic project. As a result, the term “active spectator” emerges. The implementation of this type of participatory practice may respond to ideological reasons or to the social and economic needs of the project. However, when the commitment – collective or individual – comes from the citizens themselves, the term “active spectator” is no longer so appropriate, although the activities are similar. From this point of view, the initiatives born directly from the community, especially when they are foreign to the artistic or managerial proposal, should not use the term “spectator” (with the adjective *active*) but the term “committed citizens”. Since the identity of the initiator may be unclear, the most appropriate term to describe this phenomenon would be public participation as a committed citizen.

The second issue to be analysed is the degree of shared power between the project professionals and the citizens who volunteer to collaborate. In terms of the distribution of decision-making power, there is a tension, implicit or explicit, linked to concepts such as legitimacy (respectively of professionals and citizens), the

level of artistic quality perceived (by the prescribers of the artistic community, the media of communication and the public), or the achievement of the objectives of the participatory process (Walmsley, 2013).

The third aspect is close to the paradigm of cultural democracy (Bonet & Négrier, 2018; Meyer-Bisch, 2012). It consists in determining the value of the symbolic (and material) benefits gained by those who undertake to collaborate in participatory experiences. This assessment is difficult because it all depends on the starting situation and the expectations of citizens, especially when it comes to measuring symbolic values such as experience, growth, learning or personal pleasure acquired. In any case, it must be borne in mind that the degree of personal development or the skills acquired through participation do not only favor the participating citizens, but also the artistic professionals who are willing to interact with them, and the community as a whole.

To analyse this set of questions, we will first present the range of participatory practices according to a double axis of empowerment: power and capacity. Four theoretical situations follow from this, which we will comment on. In a second time, we will discuss the Catalan and Occitan fields, in order to see to which concrete realities correspond these participative configurations, and what explains their different implementations according to the places and types of operator.

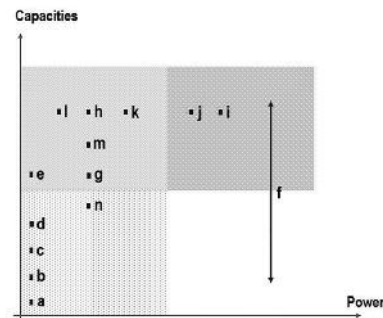
### The squares of participative practices

To assess the interrelation between power and audience capacity development, we propose a matrix organised in a double coordinate axis. We have named “power” the terms and conditions that affect the decision. We have named “skills” those that relate to the development of participants’ skills without necessarily passing on power to them in the artistic field. In theory, this leads



to four possible configurations: (a) the combination of low levels of participation on both axes; (b) the case where a higher level of capabilities is combined with a lower level of power; (c) the case where both modalities are high; d) the case where a strong power level corresponds to a fable level of transmitted capacity. These are the situations we will analyse and illustrate below. In reality, the 14 participation methods proposed to the regional operators only led to three configurations, when analysing the answers. As we will see, the situation where a high level of transferred power corresponds to a low level of empowerment might seem absurd. We will see, however, that it can make sense.

*Level of audience involvement according to capacities and power*



- (a) Sessions of presentation of the Program
- (b) Recommendation of paths based on the cultural capital of the spectator
- (c) Meetings/debates between artists and public
- (d) Open Rehearsals at the artistic venue
- (n) Volunteers engaged to take care of the audience
- (e) Training courses for spectators
- (g) Spectators' participation through documenting the creative process
- (h) community members' participation as interpreters
- (k) Volunteers employed for production tasks
- (l) Volunteers employed to welcome and take care of artists
- (m) Volunteers employed for communication tasks
- (f) Spectators' participation in artistic programming
- (i) Spectators' participation in managing the venue or festival
- (j) Spectators' participation in the creation of special events

[Source: image elaborated by the authors].

### A) Weakness on both axes

This first configuration includes activities that confer both weak decision-making power between the organisation and the participants, and few new skills or abilities to the latter. Obviously, there is a difference between those who attend a banal show and those who decide to participate in a discussion with the artists or attend the presentation of the program. For the first, a heterogeneous audience who doubts the diversity of shows, some programmers – especially those who propose a broad, relatively eclectic offer – have recently chosen to offer recommendations or specific routes. This allows access to audiences with different capital or cultural tastes. Thus, FiraTàrrega used musical references and identification phrases in 2017 edition (for example, “David Bowie, the madmen of each house are welcome to FiraTàrrega, there is life on Mars!”). For others – a more cultured and widely available audience – it has become common in this region to offer the opportunity to participate in activities of greater cultural value, including interaction with artists.

Some theatres and auditoriums, and to a lesser extent also festivals, also offer the opportunity to attend open rehearsals, or presentation of works in progress, like at the end of a creative residency, extracts, etc. For some directors, it's about deepening the artistic experience and understanding the process of enjoying a show. This involves attending the process of creating and producing a job, the residency of a company or the organisation of visits to their own workspaces. This is a type of activity offered by some theatres and to a lesser extent by festivals that produce or co-produce works, especially when they host creative laboratories, like in Occitanie the Théâtre du Périscope (Nîmes), Derrière-le-Hublot (Capdenac-Gare), L'Atelline (Montpellier). For producers, this is an opportunity to show the work in progress, with the opportunity to better understand the public response and incorporate improvements. Some large auditoriums or theatres, especially opera, use open rehearsals to approach stu-

dents and non-traditional target groups at a reasonable price. In such case, the purpose is less to appropriate the creation process than to use the audience potential for general rehearsal, with a finished product. Silvia Duran, Head of Public Promotion for the Catalan Government, comments: “Traditional barriers and patterns need to be broken, high school visits or open rehearsals help to bring the arts closer together and capture the attention of the public” (Festival internacional de teatre i animació de Viladecans, 2014). On these same days, Oriol Martí, director of FiraTàrrrega, the main festival/performing arts market of the Iberian Peninsula, declared: “One of the great advantages of open processes, it is that creators receive contributions from the public and professionals. It is another thing to know if the creator is permeable or impervious to these sensations that he receives during such sessions”.

Finally, another strategy not involving a transfer of power or a participants’ major skill development is that of organisations relying on volunteers to help the public or help with communication. That some members of the community can help their favourite place or event by offering this service is not only civic engagement, but also a way to feel part of the project. It also allows to benefit from invitations, lower prices or other rewards. But the key is to share the commitment. Joan Morros, soul of the Galliner de Manresa – one of the most successful participatory programming experiences in Catalonia – comments that the organisation of activities such as the posting of the programs of the following season becomes a big collaborative party allowing to know the essence of the project. Having volunteers for these tasks is more common in festivals than in permanent venues, given the temporary concentration of the engagement requested, but when a theatre focuses on participation, it becomes more common.

## **B) Strong capacities, weak power: the “usual accomplices”**

In this second configuration, the transmission of decision-making power is weak. But the development of these tools allows participants to acquire new abilities, or skills.

We find the following modalities, with varying frequency levels at our operators:

- ◆ Public training sessions;
- ◆ The participation upstream in the creation of shows (interaction with the artist, documentation);
- ◆ The participation of spectators as performers in participatory performances or collective creation;
- ◆ The participation of volunteers in welcoming artists;
- ◆ The participation of volunteers in production tasks;
- ◆ The participation of volunteers in communication tasks (social networks, web, media relations, translations, etc.).

Without detailing each of these modalities, we can illustrate some cases by examples. The most obvious, and found more frequently in Spain, is the training of public. It is clear here that the transmission of capacities is effective, whatever the precise object of the training. It is also clear that this educational relation does not translate into any transfer of power. It is the same for the upstream participation of the shows, when citizens constitute, through their testimonies, their archives, the interactions that they engage with the artists, the basic material of an artistic creation. The power dimension that this represents can be examined on a case-by-case basis, and be more important in certain specific situations. These are human interactions that, by definition, can take a variety of paths. But in general, such a modality is not about the transmission of power. These two methods (training and participation upstream of the shows), in our configuration, are also the least frequent ones.

On the other hand, participation as an interpreter in participatory performances or collective creations is a widespread modality, exceeding one-third of our total sample. In some cases, it responds to old religious traditions, when an important part of the community theatrically recreates biblical scenes (for example the passion of Christ of Esparreguera or of Olesa de Montserrat, the sacred-lyric drama *Misteri d'Elx*, as well as the shepherds or the Christmas sibyls in a large number of Catalan and Balearic municipalities). Many of these experiences are the first pillars of great theatres or famous professional careers. In recent years, the number of participatory or collective creation shows has increased considerably with the aim of integrating diverse groups into the community. We will see in the next part where it is particularly present. Already, we can see that some registers (such as the arts in the public space, for example) are specifically familiar to this type of modality. It is to the point that actors (artists, operators) tend to deplore a certain “participatory injunction” that would be exercised on them at the time of obtaining funding or to contribute to a call for projects.

In the same vein, the participation of volunteers in seemingly very limited and technical tasks, which come out of sacrosanct artistic skills, can be richer than expected. Thus, Derrière-le-Hublot, in Capdenac-Gare, organises both an artistic season and a festival. Originally, it is the project of a team of friends who, in this rural and mountainous area, are looking for “good reasons to stay there” (Fred Sancère, director, interview March 2018), having made their studies elsewhere. The cultural project is from the beginning mixed with a development project. When the team becomes professional, it does not deny the philosophy of popular education that is at the base. The festival resorts to volunteers on many tasks. The local public is given the responsibility to welcome the artists, to ensure the good conditions of their transport and stay: nothing more limited at a first glance. However, from these relationships comes, formally or informally, the development of

specifically cultural capacities: demystification of artistic identity, familiarisation with its problematic of creation, personal identification with the strategy of the venue, etc. In the same place, the participation of cooking volunteers changes in nature when this sector ceases to be considered as the quantified satisfaction of a need to be requalified as a creative space. Volunteers, accompanied by a professional chef, participate in what can be considered an artistic dimension of the event.

These are the same jurisdictions that come into play when these volunteers are involved in production or communication tasks. There is already a skill involved in inheriting such responsibility. But in the artistic organisation (a venue, a festival), these responsibilities interact with others, so that it is not so much a question of technical competence as of the relation between this competence and an artistic and cultural dimension. Certainly, in some cases, like in major festivals, the division of labour is such that these functions are entrusted in a piecemeal way. The instrumentalisation of volunteering often goes hand in hand with the fact that volunteers conceive their own participation as a way of paying for access to the show, and nothing more. But it is rather the exception that confirms a rule: the porosity of the boundary between technical-administrative and artistic-cultural dimensions of projects.

A very significant case has been the Cabanyal Intim Festival of Valencia, where the local demand to defend the neighbourhood's heritage against municipal urban development generated a self-managed and independent initiative that goes far beyond conventional volunteering. Another example would be the Camveda Jove festival, an event that programs both artistic and protest or political activities within which volunteering acquires a fundamental role enabling both the organisation and the development of the event.

### **C) Strong capabilities, strong power: “committed employees”**

This third configuration groups together strategies that represent both a high level of skills and capacity development and a new distribution of power among community members. It is important to differentiate the spaces where spectators participate in the selection of programming, and those where they participate actively and are strongly involved in the management. The first activity, much more frequent than the second one, may involve very heterogeneous levels of co-responsibility. At one extreme, we find those festivals and venues that have spectator commissions in charge of programming – like the Théâtre de l’Albarède, in Ganges, or the ATP (Associations of Popular Theater) in Lunel (Occitanie) – or a part of it. It is a task of great dedication, sensitivity and collective responsibility, which requires a training process. At the other extreme, the number of experiences on the Internet that require viewers to select some of their shows has increased in recent years. In these cases, similar to the public prize of many competitions, the vote does not involve a rigorous selection process, but allows to give voice to a loyal audience, who can identify with the proposal. Some of these experiences have no continuity given the weak support. However, the most engaged experiences make it possible to share with the artistic directors the difficult task of selecting while taking into account different variables, from the available resources or the technical characteristics of spaces, to the numerous sensitivities of the show potential participants.

On the other hand, the existence of groups of volunteers engaged in management tasks is, in general, rare. Usually, it is a consequence of the formation of self-managed collective projects or the result of negotiations between these groups and the public administrations responsible for spaces or events. The key question is who has the initiative to initiate and implement such a project.

Sometimes it can come from the artistic or management team itself, but in many cases it is the result of engaged social community processes. The conclusions of the meeting of the Association of Spectators and Friends of the Performing Arts in Catalonia, in Barcelona, in October 2016, are interesting in this regard. It defended the need to evolve from a focus on volunteering to support a professional team on its own initiative, towards a model based on co-management. While it is true that the professional team support model facilitates an improvement in the management of the artistic project, it does not contribute enough to the empowerment of the spectators, nor to the co-responsibility of the decisions taken. This change, considers the association, is easier when there are associative platforms of spectators engaged in venues and festivals (Leiva, 2016).

### **D) Strong power and low capacity**

This last category is a bit special because we have not included any of the participatory activities analysed. Indeed, one can think that any transmission of power is equivalent in theory to a more or less equivalent level of capacities. Thus, to associate a person with the choice of a programming, we should suppose that he/she has reached a certain degree of knowledge such as to enlighten his/her judgment. This space of the graph is not so illogical as it seems. It resembles the vision that Aristotle had of relations between democracy, as a virtuous form, and demagogy, as its derivative form. At home, democracy is the government open to all free citizens. Demagoguery, on the contrary, is the instrumentalisation of people by a tyrant who, under cover of entrusting his responsibilities towards the crowd (which he incarnates in a personal capacity), monopolises the decision power. Are we sure not to find evidence of this opposition in the participative practices of cultural places? Are not there cultural operators, as masters at home as suzerains in their stronghold, who claim to have entrusted all or part of their power to the

spectators? Of course, the pure form of tyranny escapes most of the cultural places we are talking about. But the instrumentalisation of a public power with the paradoxical goal of confirming the influence of a leader cannot be excluded. Let's take a few examples. The idea of consulting the public by way of inquiry, vote or institutional procedure, on the programming they would like in the future, corresponds to several combinations of power and capacity. If it is a question of giving the public, without any other procedure than a vote, the possibility of choosing the programming, then it is very likely that the public would choose among its already proven tastes, starting from very variable criteria and little insured. The formula gives power to the public, without advancing it in capacity.

For example, the CanetRock festival, which programs Catalan music, organises a contest that aims to promote emerging musical groups in the territory. The public, through a popular vote, chooses, from a previous selection made by the organisation according to quality criteria, one of the bands that will perform in one of the festival's professional stages. A procedure that consults, through special meetings, the spectators on hypotheses of programming can appear as more favourable to the extension of the artistic capacities of the people. However, this procedure can also be fully instrumentalised by a leader, whom the others follow without really mastering the subject.

A programming that is partitioned between what is chosen by the professionals and what is chosen by the public, likewise gives power to the latter, but according to a division which strengthens the hierarchy between an art chosen for its excellence and another selected in a "social" framework, as conceded from above. On the other hand, a procedure which integrates, within the formal organisation of the place or the event, representatives of the public alongside other qualified persons, allow capacity building by learning, presumably at the end of some acclimation time.

This is what is happening in the Théâtre du Grand Rond, in Toulouse, within the programming committee. This structure, initially associative, choose to transform itself into a cooperative society of collective interest (SCIC). This formula has the advantage of associating directly the protagonists (employees, companies, audience, partners) within colleges, in the instances of the structure. In the programming committee, non-professional members are therefore involved in programming decisions. They move to see the show projects, report back to the committee. "People who come from the college of founders (i.e. non-professionals) may not have all the keys: they discuss more...) but we think about how to associate people who do not exactly know what program means" (Eric Vannelle, coordinator of the Grand Rond Theater).

The lesson that emerges from these examples, theoretical or empirical, is that entrusting a power to the citizen through a specific modality is not enough to strengthen the artistic abilities of people. Here, the procedure is crucial within the organisation, through the interactions between individuals. It determines, according to each case, the border between democracy and demagogy.

This classification into groups of modalities, thus, gives us keys to understand how the increasing participative current is organised among the cultural and artistic operators of this great region. We can see that the most established boundaries are finally debatable when we observe them closely. A task that requires only technical skills can be a source of cultural development and power in the organisation. It also illustrates a porosity of the border that distinguishes the utilitarian and symbolic aspects of participatory exchange. That can always be identified as a resource exchange. The operator grants "his/her" volunteer access to certain resources, in exchange for which the latter performs a service or produces a good. In doing so, he/she

progresses on skills that he/she puts at the service of the venue or the festival. But beyond that, the volunteer (without necessarily having “interest”) removes from his/her participation a new identity, a representation of oneself in evolution. The operator finds there an opportunity for recognition or legitimacy that goes beyond the mere utilitarian vision of his/her interest.

These findings have been made in general so far, drawing on numbers and cases in this inter-regional set. However, it can be hypothesised that certain practices are more specific to festivals than permanent venues, to Catalan operators rather than Occitans, to institutions whose influence is either local or regional and beyond. The second part will show these possible differences, and discuss some hypotheses that try to explain them.

### **Participation in venues and festival of the Catalan countries and Occitanie region**

From an internal point of view, many cultural organisations try to attract the maximum attention of their spectators, since they are the main beneficiaries of the artistic project that identifies them. Traditionally, attracting and retaining audiences has been the responsibility of mediation, marketing and communication management. From this point of view, loyalty and public satisfaction are the fundamental objectives to be achieved. Other venues and festivals place the public and the local community at the centre of their cultural project, either for ideological reasons, as part of the organisation’s mission, or to legitimise themselves in their social environment.

One of the strategies used to achieve these goals, in either case, is to promote the creation and activities of a spectator association. There is a huge diversity of spectator associations; from those who initiated the project and retain an important role in the governance of the institution, up to simple marketing

platforms with the ultimate goal of building audience loyalty. Many of these associations are inspired by the theatres and auditoriums themselves, with the aim of having a closed circle of loyal people to exchange proposals, content and services with. Let’s keep in mind, however, that their organisation and dynamism are fundamentally dependent on where they come from and who has leadership responsibilities. Public empowerment initiatives do not always require the existence of a formal association, but the existence of an association implies a certain tension in the distribution of power between the direction of the theatre or festival and the council of administration of the association.

Another important issue concerns the incentive role of public authorities. Is there a strategy to support the active participation of citizens by the different levels of government involved in performing arts? Do they promote them explicitly or simply observe them with good eyes without affecting them directly? This is a question that we are trying to answer from the interviews.

To perform the comparative territorial analysis, two large adjacent regions located in two different European countries were chosen. The two correspond to the place of residence of two of the research teams that have accompanied the *Be Spect-Active!* project since the beginning, with the dual intention of bringing a general territorial perspective to the project while contributing to the development of these experiences in their respective regions. The research used the same methodological framework in both territories, with surveys and interviews with its most significant stakeholders. The data used here are the result of a survey of all performing arts and music venues and festivals of the new Occitanie region (formerly Languedoc-Roussillon and Midi-Pyrénées) and the three Spanish autonomous Catalan communities (Catalonia, Balearic Islands and Valencian Community).



*Survey data*

<b>AREA OF INTEREST</b>	Census of the regional governments plus the Profestival platform and Réseau en Scène
<b>DATA COLLECTION</b>	Electronic self-administrated survey, with the support of direct telephone calls
<b>QUESTIONNAIRES SENT</b>	1,260
<b>FINAL SAMPLE SIZE</b>	320
<b>RESPONSE RATE (%)</b>	25.39%
<b>PROJECTS WITH ACTIVE AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION</b>	221 (69% of the final sample)
<b>TARGET GROUP</b>	Director or Manager of the venue or festival
<b>FIELDWORK PERIOD</b>	February - October 2016

[Source: image elaborated by the authors].

The results obtained attest to the situation of the two regions, as analysed in 2016. It should be kept in mind that in most of Europe, there is a certain expansion of this kind of practices, always depending on the particular cultural, social and political context and institutional characteristics of each organisation involved. In this sense, although the two experiences of South-West Europe present comparable cultural values, it is to be considered that the existing public policies in terms of practices and incentives are not the same. This territorial factor adds value to the analysis.

In order to promote maximum collaboration (and not self-exclusion) on the part of organisations aware of the current growth of the subject, a broad definition of the concept of active cultural participation was taken into consideration. The starting point was the list of 14 active participation modalities presented in the matrix.

A first question of delimitation made it possible to know the degree of implication of the various places and festivals. However, as expected, the projects that chose to answer the questionnaire were, for the most part (69%), already active in terms of involvement and empowerment of their audiences. Only 14% said they

had not previously developed any strategy in this regard, while the remaining 17% planned to do so in the near future. For this reason, the following analysis focuses on the first group, that of theatres, auditoriums and festivals with a more or less ambitious program of active participation of their audiences. In all cases, in order to locate the dominant typologies of participatory practices, the level of response is presented below for the entire sample.

*Participative practices according to the step of implementation*

	Yes	Not yet	No
Presentation of the programme	71%	63%	13%
Recommendations based on the audience's cultural capital	21%	13%	0%
Meetings-debates between artists and audiences	67%	56%	4%
Open rehearsals in the production space	44%	26%	2%
Enrollment of volunteers to look after the public	41%	30%	2%
Audience training sessions	25%	19%	0%
Participation of spectators in interaction and documentation processes for performance creation	17%	2%	4%
Enrollment of local audience as interpreters in participatory shows or collective creation	43%	33%	0%
Enlisting volunteers for production tasks	36%	28%	7%
Enlisting volunteers for artists' hosting and liaison activities	37%	37%	7%
Enrollment of volunteers for communication tasks (social network, web, press)	36%	28%	4%
Participation of spectators in the choice of programme	26%	20%	0%
Participation of spectators in day-to-day venue management	12%	2%	0%
Participation of spectators in the management of special events	21%	17%	0%

[Source: image elaborated by the authors].

Of course, practices where the level of public engagement is higher are much less common than those designed for audiences that are demanding, but less involved. However, while 28% of organisations active in this field and 20% of those planning to implement it soon target participation in arts programming; only 21% and 13%, respectively develop recommendations for different itineraries related to cultural capital tastes. In all cases, the most common practices are program presentation sessions and debates between artists and the public. Rarer is the implementation of open rehearsals or the use of volunteers for looking after the public.

With regard to participative proposals with a more explicit artistic aim (performances programmed with members of the interpreters' community, and participation in documentation processes for the creation of shows), the former is much more frequent than the latter. Even if it is only occasionally in the programming of a festival or a theatre, a good number of them produce shows with community amateur interpreters.

The venues and festivals participating in the analysis present, beyond the strategies described, quite heterogeneous behaviours in terms of interaction with different social groups. From the beginning, theatres and musical venues offer many more activity programs for schools, social organisations and, in particular, disadvantaged groups, than festivals. Another source of distinction is the territory where they are located. The projects identified in Occitanie, perhaps because of a tradition and the incentive of public policies, develop much more intensively activities involving other social groups than their southern counterparts do. Only active support for artistic initiatives by non-professional groups is more important in Catalan countries.

*Programming targeting social collectives by territories and type of project*

	PROJECT		TERRITORY	
	Venue	Festival	C, CV, IB	Occitania
Presentations or workshops addressed to a schools	59%	47%	50%	65%
Presentations or workshops addressed to associations, organisations or companies	57%	35%	31%	47%
Integration of disadvantaged collectives and groups at risk of social exclusion in the theatre's activities	82%	31%	35%	79%
Active support to artistic initiatives by non-professionals	68%	42%	54%	25%

[Source: image elaborated by the authors].

Whilst the analysis focuses only on organisations that are already operational in active participation with the community, there are differences in behaviour depending on whether they are festivals or permanent venues (see figure below). These differences do not emerge in practices with low intensity of participation,

those intended for a demanding public but little involved in the organisation. Nevertheless, in activities with a higher level of involvement (i.e. open rehearsals, volunteers participation), the differences between festivals and venues are evident. Curiously, no great divergences appear in the activities involving the most demanding audience (those we have called “committed collaborators”). On the other hand, distinctions are obvious in the case of usual accomplices. The presence of volunteers is much more frequent among festivals – in Occitanie, for example: CIRCa (Auch), L'autre festival (Capdenac-Gare), Les Tranes Cévenoles (Sumène), Détours du monde (Chanac) – than among stable facilities, probably because of their different durations and intensities, and the greater appeal of festivals, especially among younger groups. Festivals also organise more shows with people from the community as performers. The only activity more common in permanent venues is the organisation of open rehearsals in programming. Having a regular schedule facilitates the development of this type of activity.

*Active participation strategies by territory and type of project*

	PROJECT		TERRITORY	
	Venue	Festival	C, CV, IB	Occitania
Presentation of the programming	70%	74%	72%	70%
Recommendations based on the viewer's cultural capital	19%	20%	19%	26%
Encounters between artists and audiences	60%	63%	61%	74%
Open rehearsals in the production space	48%	38%	30%	66%
Enrollment of volunteers to accompany the public	28%	65%	30%	45%
Audience training sessions	22%	29%	25%	26%
Participation of spectators upstream of the creation of shows	15%	22%	10%	28%
Participation of spectators as interpreters of participatory shows	38%	54%	44%	42%
Enlisting volunteers on production activities	24%	64%	30%	38%
Enlisting volunteers on artists' hosting activities	24%	60%	28%	51%
Enrollment of volunteers on communication	29%	49%	30%	45%
Participation of spectators in the choice of programming	20%	26%	16%	17%
Participation of spectators in the day-to-day management	14%	9%	9%	17%
Participation of spectators in the management of special events	21%	22%	16%	30%

[Source: image elaborated by the authors].

The location of these organisations, respectively north or south of the Pyrenean mountain range, also shows some notable

differences. Permanent festivals and venues in Occitanie tend to have a higher proportion of volunteers than those located in the Spanish territories included in the study. On the other hand, at the artistic level, we observe in Occitanie a greater frequency of open sessions and documentation upstream of creation. This peculiarity may partly result from the political projects that have diversified the French venues network. In the opposite direction, the Catalan territories, south of the Pyrenees, have developed more spectator participation experiences in the selection of programs than their French colleagues.

A predictable factor that can be significant in the development of active public participation activities is whether or not there is a spectator association linked to the project. A little more than a quarter of the permanent venues and festivals, without much difference between them, have an association of spectators. From a territorial point of view, there are notable differences between the projects of the analysed regions. While only 13% of the theatres and festivals in Occitanie have a spectator association, the percentage rises to 38% in the Catalan communities. In any case, contrary to what might be expected, the existence of a spectator association does not significantly influence the implementation of specific community empowerment activities. Only the presentation of the artistic program and the participation of volunteers in the selection of the program are positively correlated with the existence of an association of spectators related to the project. Faced with this situation, we ask ourselves, are most of these associations simply instruments of loyalty and training, rather than of public empowerment of theatres and festivals?

## **Final considerations**

What are the obstacles that explain why, although the subject of citizen participation is fashionable in practice, its development remains relatively rare in performing arts? One of them is perhaps the difficulty of the artistic programmers to entrust responsibilities to groups not professionally legitimised or the lack of willingness of the management teams to develop participatory governance. Could this be a new space of confrontation between professional and amateur spheres? A project of audience empowerment requires a high level of professionalism by which the role of each part will be assured. However, not all artistic directors or management teams have the necessary training and experience or feel comfortable in this situation. Co-responsibility towards people in the community involves taking additional risks in an area where quality and prestige criteria are vital to the survival of a project.

Another factor related to the confrontation between the two spheres is the problematic of leadership professional legitimacy of the venue or event. The artistic direction remains the most prestigious role in the art ecosystem. It still conditions its legitimacy, vis-à-vis of pairs in the programming dimension. On the one hand, development of active participatory practices induces that leaders lose a part of their artistic power. On the other hand, they have to find other sources to legitimate themselves. It's not so sure that participatory orientation may provide.

Are there two scales of measurement that are significantly different between the quality of the artistic offer and the process of active participation of audiences and communities? A festival or venue aimed at offering the best possible product to its audience is evaluated by them and by the institutions that support it (public administrations, sponsors, media). When, beyond the product, what matters is the process of qualitative growth of the

audiences and the community that receives them, two logics in tension come together: that of the product measured by ad hoc quality indicators, and that of the process measured as an advance in terms of the taking of responsibilities and the multiplier impact on a variety of groups. At present, the issue of legitimacy and public support of the artistic project remains largely dependent on the first category of users. This is one of the contemporary challenges of Be SpectACTive! and other projects alike in Europe (Matarasso, 2013): to find a perspective that associates, rather than competes, artistic legitimacy and empowerment.

**What is the  
legacy of Be  
SpectACTive!?  
The Italian  
experience**

**Luisella  
Carnelli**

**(Fondazione  
Fitzcarraldo,  
Turin)**

*Artists like Duchamp were so prescient here – the idea that the piece of work is not finished until the audience comes to it and adds their own interpretation, and what the piece of art is about is the grey space in the middle. That grey space in the middle is what the 21st century is going to be all about.*

David Bowie

**Much ado about audience development in Italy**

Starting from the launch of the Be SpectACTive! project in December 2014, in Italy the topic related to audience development became more and more crucial both for cultural operators and policy makers. Definitely, the European Program Creative Europe (2014-2020) played a decisive role, identifying audience development not only as a goal, but also as a strategic and long-term approach required to cultural organisations to tackle the change. The centrality that this theme assumes within Creative Europe underlines the importance of political intentionality, which arises from the observation of how poor cultural participation is a missed opportunity that results in economic, social and cultural loss.

While especially in the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian context, the audience development operational dimension applied to the scale of individual institutions has been strengthened over the last years as *modus operandi*, in Italy the concept sounds a little bit new. Italian policy makers, organisations, artists and cultural operators started dealing with a kind of unavoidable mantra, running the risk to see audience development as a salvific and politically winning fetish to play on the downside and on safe bets; modern tools for obsolete and no longer required repairs.

Giving to the fact that the Italian cultural sector was experiencing a phase of tremendous seismic shocks – related to changes in the ways of communication and inter-human interaction, political and financial logics, the anti-globalisation movements,

migrations, emerging of new nationalisms, effect of digitisation, etc. – many cultural institutions have begun to rethink their role, to find new relevance, to explore new ways to pursue sustainability, overcoming the vision that in the recent past has led many of them to conceive their own economic sustainability and legitimacy regardless of the ability to involve an enlarged social base. This “fluid” context challenges cultural institutional practice, requiring new narratives and new path of programming and acting.

This is the frame in which *Be SpectACTive!*, a creative large scale cooperation project lead by an Italian municipality, started its journey. The consortium was aware of the importance and the necessity to develop a coherent and multi-layer dissemination and exploitation strategy both nationally and at European level. The project structure organically embeds the dissemination of activities as well as the exploitation of results through the direct involvement of arts and cultural organisations, cultural managers, practitioners, highly qualified researchers and students. The double-sided character of the project (an action-research project) and the interdisciplinary approach guarantee the promotion of the results and outcomes to a wide range of stakeholders.

*Be SpectACTive!* started its dissemination activity, developed in a very capillary way: organising directly one International Conference per year (the first one was in Sansepolcro in July 2014), taking actively part in conferences, training courses specifically addressed to cultural operators and networks in many different institutional and non-formal contexts, to present the project, its concept, its activities, its way of working, the partners and their activities related to active engagement of participants. This was the way to spread our activity, the results generated, the lessons learned and the experience gained by the Consortium over the widest possible audience. The dissemination activities were finalised to maximise the impact of project results by optimising their value, strengthening their impact, transferring them to different contexts, integrating them in a sustainable way and using

them actively in systems and practices at local, regional, national and European level.

This chapter is dedicated to the spillover effect generated by the dissemination activities of the project, which, as it will be further explained in the next chapters, have met a fertile, attentive and reactive ground in Italy. The dissemination activity was aimed not only to spread our project, but also to take an active and meaningful participation in the national debate around the topic of audience development, audience engagement and active participation, starting from Bjørnsen’s point of view, who affirms that

this type of target-led audience development relies to some extent on the cultural democracy of the 1970s, in which audience groups were allowed to influence what was offered more than curators, artistic directors and other decision makers in the culture sector. This represents another type of cultural leadership, one that is less predicated on an art sector driven by artistic goals, and more on a desire to combat social and cultural exclusion. The question, of course, is: are the arts institutions prepared for this? (Bjørnsen, 2014, p. 7)

While promoting our work, we had the great opportunity of getting actively involved in the debate on a change of paradigm that puts the audience at the centre, beyond the rhetoric and the “fashion” of the moment, showing also how that vision (or approach) implies the need for a profound rethinking by cultural organisations on the meaning of their action and on who should be the recipient. Furthermore, we had the opportunity to contribute to the debate at national level – involving not only cultural operators and organisations, but also policy makers, researchers and private Bank Foundations – on this buzz topic, stressing the fact that audience development cannot be conceived only as a set of technicalities or as a warning device about the importance of considering, acting and engaging different audiences (regarding



social and economic background) in order to obtain the best economic results and pursue the institutional mission. Instead, audience development is configured as an approach capable of prefiguring a “third way” that puts audiences at the centre and takes to a rethinking of educational activities and culture (and related participation models) as a tool to develop citizenship, cohesion and social integration.

Furthermore, active participation is considered as a way of interpreting audience development both in technical terms (engagement as an operational step after reaching audiences) and in political terms (active participation as the key of ownership). Moreover, presenting Be SpectACTive! activities became the arena where questioning about Rancière philosophical perspective<sup>1</sup> and about meanings and limits of participation in the very “extreme” form of co-creation within the performing arts, as underlined by Walmsley (2013, p. 110).

The rising trend of co-creation reflects the evolving role of the audience in the creative process. At first sight, co-creation represents a movement towards democratizing the arts through a process where creativity is demystified and opened-up to participant engagement.

Therefore, by engaging with this project, we had the chance to further the debate around these topics, and introducing Italian cultural operators to this open and meaningful discussion on the role of active participation as an approach which is undertaken specifically to meet the needs of existing and potential audiences, visitors and participants and to help arts organisations to develop ongoing relationships with them.

We see our project as an experiment in *cultural democracy* with the public involved as decision makers as well as audiences or participants. We moved from the idea that it was important sharing our approach (even if in progress) and the process, a process in which agency and important decision-making could be

shared with the community. First evidences suggest that this can be an effective way of allowing people to discover or rediscover their own creativity and to shape local cultural opportunities to be more reflective.

We can highlight two main spillover effects:

- ◆ The diffusion and the national implementation of the *Visionari* model;
- ◆ The growing interest and the emergence of models derived from the TakeOver Festival, the format developed by our partner York Theatre Royal and the birth of projects related to the active involvement of youngster in the decision making process of cultural organisations.

### **The *Visionari* model: *L'Italia dei Visionari***

*The original idea: Kilowatt festival, the starting point*

Kilowatt is a festival conceived in 2003 and dedicated to new artists and companies of the contemporary scene (theatre, dance, music, literature, performing and visual arts, circus and cinema), which takes place every summer in Sansepolcro (a small village in Tuscany, Italy)<sup>2</sup>. From its birth, the festival has been constantly growing: from 400 tickets sold in 2005 (the festival 4<sup>th</sup> edition) to more than 5.000 in 2018 (and 5.000 attenders to free activities). Although this rise is due to the growth of the festival itself, we can assume that much of the change has been brought about by the *Visionari* project.

The audience-led approach is intrinsic to the festival, its mission and vision. All the activities (festival, residencies and winter season planning) are conceived by putting the audience at the centre of the process. The festival is aimed to share with the audience the decision-making role, providing spectators with responsibilities in a common space for creation, exploring new



models and concepts of participation, accessibility, interaction, social cohesion and empowerment.

Kilowatt audience development strategy is much focused on local audiences, but the festival yearns for creating a modular format, which could become a model for other organisations in Italy and abroad. For Kilowatt, audience development activity concerns the way a performing art organization conceives and operates to actively engaging people; the ultimate goal of the organisation is to improve understanding, fulfilment and growth of all the actors involved in the artistic experience.

The idea of *Visionari* was born after the third edition of the Festival (at that time a small 4-day festival) to bypass the lack of involvement and participation from citizens: in spite of the artistic relevance of the shows planned, the attendance from local community was very limited. Indeed, the challenge of the festival was both to give life to a festival linked to the contemporary and the most innovative experiences in the performing arts field, and to read needs, desires, and expectations of local communities.

The pre-definition of the whole concept behind the festival was actually triggered by a technician's consideration: "the whole municipality should feel the festival as something in which taking part and being involved in; if it doesn't happen, it's better to stop working on it". The artistic director was conscious that the festival had to find a way to give voice to the local community, empowering it with the right tools to read and understand the new languages of creation, expression and meanings related to the performing arts. He was also conscious of the difficulty to give importance and centrality to the languages of the contemporaneity in a village famous for the birthplace of one of the most important painters of the Italian Renaissance, Piero della Francesca, and so proud of its ancient glories and traditions. At the same time, he was aware that in a small village like Sansepolcro – with less than 16.000 inhabitants – they could not reach quantitative objectives in terms

of people involved, while the aim was to create a participative and critical approach to the contemporary scene, by building up a collaborative decision-making process and by sharing power with the local community in a trustful environment. They could not expect the audience to change if their approach was not changed first and foremost; changing philosophically in how they think of audiences and participants as creators and partners; stemming from a belief that arts are for "ordinary" people; inviting them into the core of the festival and its making.

The artistic director peered outside the performing arts sector to find an inspiring idea, looking at the way of working of some publishing houses which use the collaboration of external "ordinary" strong reader to make a first selection of the possible new books to publish. These readers fill out a short evaluation form and the books with positive tabs are submitted to the editor. He decided to replicate this kind of format adapting it to the field of performing art. Luca Ricci moved from the idea that

*live shows are like an open and democratic assembly, which concerns the essence of every citizen. Aesthetics is useful to achieve the purpose, but it is not the very purpose. Festivals, as well as the vision of a single show, are not interludes between a commitment to another of our lives: they are part of our lives.*

They decided to invite people from the Sansepolcro area to work with the staff of the festival, giving them the opportunity to take an active part in the most delicate and precious process of the festival: the choice of the shows. It was an opportunity to work with people on arts programmes rather than to them. An open call was launched and the first nucleus of *Visionari* was born<sup>3</sup>: for one year 9 "ordinary" people – very different in background and profession<sup>4</sup> – have been meeting regularly once a month to evaluate with the artistic director the proposals submitted by national theatre companies to the festival. At the end of this process, *Visionari* chose 2 shows for the festival.

The active and direct involvement of citizenship in the decision-making process and in the creation of the programme of the festival became the identity trademark of Kilowatt. It was a great and innovative challenge: conveying high-risk cultural content in a context of province, far away from big cities. It was also an opportunity to have meaningful consultations with the local community, who eventually acted as advocates and ambassadors by promoting the programme of the festival in first person.

Real sharing of power entails a give-away of power by those who already possess it: “Sharing power is about who gets to speak and who doesn’t in terms of decision making but it is also, importantly, about: ‘whose voices count’, and ‘whose voices go unheard’. The dominance of certain voices continues to be a feature of the arts and cultural sector: particularly in the public realm” (Tiller, 2017, p. 20). The importance of offering communities the possibility to participate in art, that not only celebrates their history and heritage but also allows them to engage critically with the real issues facing them, cannot be underestimated. During the years of the explosion of the “Festivalisation” phenomenon, this insight has proved very innovative as it questioned the top-down decision-making process to embrace a bottom-up decision-making. Thanks to this active involvement of citizenship, Kilowatt has started its process of growth as the director underlines: “our organisation started existing and really working thanks to our audience development project”.

The growing process of the festival started with the *Visionari* and it is still running; this kind of approach took the festival to the attention of professionals and policy makers too. Kilowatt has gradually become much more than a festival; now it is a centre of productions and production supports, a residence of creation, a place open to experimental music, contemporary literature and visual arts.

### *How the Visionari model works*

The audience development strategy of *Visionari* is finalised to deepening the relationship with the audiences. It is based on the concept that “culture”, as Holden (2008) suggests, can no longer be something that is “given”, “offered” or “delivered” by one section of “us” to “another”. It needs to be something, “that we all own and make”: by encompassing “power with” as well as “within”.

*Visionari* are recruited by an open call, they meet during the whole autumn and winter, watching together all the videos submitted to the attention of the festival and they eventually select 9 shows – the number of the shows selected by *Visionari* grows year by year and is included in a special section of the festival called *Visionari* selection. Nevertheless, the format of *Visionari* evolved in time. Now, *Visionari* are split in different groups; each group watches a variable number of shows at home, and can decide how to watch them (there are little groups who prefer watching each one individually, groups who prefer watching together at someone’s home). For each show they fulfil an evaluation form (including considerations about the artistic quality of the shows, their originality, technical considerations about the staging, performing quality of the actors, etc.); so each group has a short list of preferred shows. All the videos are hosted on a web platform<sup>5</sup>, so each *Visionario* can see all the shows submitted to the festival selection, or can decide to see just those entrusted to his/her group. Periodically, *Visionari* meet together to discuss and share opinions, ideas. At the end of this first round of selection, all the groups present its shortlist, describing the reasons behind the inclusion or exclusion in the shortlisted selection, showing some topics of the shows, liked and disliked elements. Every year, according to the number of videos selected for the shortlist, the final selection can be concentrated in one or more rounds. When *Visionari* agree to the final shortlist, those

videos are seen and discussed in the final day of selection; the artistic director of the festival (who already watched all the shows by himself) takes part in this final round. This final discussion is conceived as an opportunity not only to share opinions but also as a way to debate, to have a fruitful conversation and to share ideas among *Visionari* and the staff of the festival. Nevertheless the final decision is up to the *Visionari*.

*The first evaluation on a show is normally something visceral, empathic... most of the time we agree, but sometimes we argue a lot about a show...*

*Sometimes it happens you fall in love with a show and you defend it, you want everyone could see it... and so we discuss lively...*

*Sometimes it can happen you see a good idea, a strong message, but the set-up is still unripe... but you have to choose and sometimes you gamble; other times you know the artist or the company and you can make a comparison; anyway, we always start from the show, later we read the technical file or look for other shows or reviews about the show or the company.<sup>6</sup>*

During the past years *Visionari* were supported by external critics who helped them in this selection process giving advices and indications to better understand the shows (in particular contemporary dance ones, which are perceived as more complicated to be understood in their potentiality); now this accompanying path is bypassed, and it is done by the older *Visionari*, who have acquired the skills during the years. In fact, the group of *Visionari* is changing year by year, but there are some very engaged *Visionari* who now are like evangelists/mentors or guides for the younger ones. The whole process is followed by a local community manager in order to facilitate the relationship among *Visionari*, to give advice if required, to host the meetings in the festival venue.

*What have people learned?*

The *Visionari* experience is perceived as an opportunity for the direction to share decision-making, be flexible and adaptable, and meet people. The process is perceived by *Visionari* as an opportunity to empower their knowledge, but also as a way to deal with a set of soft skills useful in their ordinary life: being patient, constant, being able to give up and to defend their position, exercising leadership and mediation are all ability gained thanks to this experience.

*The contemporary theatre is a kind of mirror of the society; it helps you to see things around you from a different perspective. When you see things from a different point of view, you feel you can do things in a different way! This experience enriched me more and more every time: it makes me feel more confident with myself and with my potentiality.*

Sharing opinions related to a show is an opportunity both to deal with a different sensibility and to change your point of view (*You can change opinion about a show; sometimes thanks to another point of view I change my mind... and to be honest, the best shows selected are often those I would have never chosen...*) or to discover elements and characteristics you have not seen (*I'm an architect and my approach is related to the visual aspect of a show, and I let my judgment be influenced by these aspects*). This process enriches humanly and personally who is taking part in the project: *I felt more confident with myself: thanks to this experience I think I have developed greater critical sense.*

This process has changed also the perception of the performing arts as a whole creative sector. *Visionari* feel very engaged with the process and they feel the urgency to be honest with the artists they chose, as they feel responsible about their decision. They are conscious their feedbacks could be useful for the artists, helping them improving or changing something in the creation of their shows (some of the submitted works are still in progress and an external point of view could be useful to the artists to improve them).

*How do people find and manage the responsibility given to them?*

*Visionari* feel responsible also to the “ordinary” audience; when they select a show they look at different aspects: originality, ability of the artists, set, direction, but they pay attention also to the value they transmit and to their language: *during the past years we often selected more “traditional” shows, but with innovative languages or messages shareable to a mainstream audience.*

Thinking about communities in terms of communities of interest as well as geographically defined, we can look at *Visionari* as gatekeepers, as a starting point to getting more and more people engaged and enriched by the experience of performing arts:

*I feel the urgency to transmit my passion to other people, to let them know contemporary theatre is nice. Contemporary theatre is not easy; sometimes people feel floored by its languages.*

*When you feel part of a project you can really deal with it; I started meeting actors, technicians, all the staff of the festival; you feel part of something... and when you feel the ownership of something you can involve other people; you are moved by a sincere passion and you feel the urgency to share this passion with other people!*

*When you are part of a project you know what's behind the scenes and you know actors, organisers, technicians; just because you feel it you can convince, for example, your students to volunteer for the festival. You have a perspective on the transformation of the festival but also of the town. You witness this transformation of the human heritage: a passing down of the skills that you hope can be transferred to others. This look at the contemporary gives you new challenges: Piero della Francesca was contemporary for his period. Rediscovering the ability to be contemporary, in a country like this, strongly linked to history is a breath of oxygen.*

*Visionari* feel responsible about their choices: *When we select a show we always ask ourselves “Do you really want to see this show? What about taking someone to this show? Could it be loved?”... Sometimes we saw wonderful shows, but they were not the right shows for our festival.*

But *Visionari* experience has also a social aspect: *I like discussing with other Visionari; we have shared interests... Now we have also started going to see other shows together. My passion has grown. They feel very involved in all the aspects of the festival I feel part of the festival: we, all together, are the festival!* and sometimes fight for it.

*Working together to build up a common project: l'Italia dei Visionari*

One of the main interesting spillover effects of the dissemination activity related to Be SpectACTive! is the birth of the national project *L'Italia dei Visionari*. An intuition of active spectatorship becomes a format playable in different contexts and environments: the format was exported and applied not only by the partners of the European project, but also by other Italian organisations not directly involved in the EU project.

In 2018, nine Italian institutions, theatres and festivals collaborated together to *L'Italia dei Visionari*. Theatres and festivals involved are: CapoTrave | Kilowatt as part of Be SpectACTive! (Sansepolcro), Festival Le Città Visibili (Rimini), ACS Abruzzo Circuito Spettacolo (Teramo), Nuovo Teatro (Novara), Pilar Ternera | Nuovo Teatro delle Commedie (Livorno), TiPi Participated Theatre Season (San Felice sul Panaro, MO), Utovie Teatrali (Macerata), Sosta Palmizi (Cortona AR), Fertili Terreni Teatro (Turin)<sup>7</sup>.

The format is the same of the original *Visionari*, but all the organisations can build it up, organise and manage their groups in total freedom according to the target groups they want to

involve and their audience's goal. For example, Nuovo Teatro Faraggiana in Novara decided to work with youngsters, involving in 2017 more than 100 young people under 30 to build up a whole season of 8 shows. During the first year of activity they achieved incredible outcomes: 120 teenagers answered the call (and 62 are actually operating), 80 teachers, around 600 under 14 and 2.500 attending audience in 8 evenings for theatre schools; about 60 students of the Classical Lyceum for 4 readings and around 1.000 public appearances. For Nuovo Teatro Faraggiana the active inclusion of under-30-year-olds is a project coherent and very close to the mission of a theatre, which has been closed for 16 years. The management of the theatre is dealt by a foundation born from a civic movement aimed at re-opening the venue (the theatre should have been knocked down to build a parking lot) which is working very closely to the citizenship; for the theatre the project is strategic and embedded in its mission. Currently 8 people of the theatre are involved as tutors to assist the production of the season created and directed by under-30-year-olds.

A common call is launched for individual artists and emerging and independent companies working professionally in contemporary theatre, dance and performing art<sup>8</sup>. Each company or producer may participate in the selection with one work only. Each organisation follows different criteria in the building up of the *Visionari*, as mentioned above; but they are always people who are not in any way "authorised personnel", rather, they are passionate citizens, or intrigued by theatre or dance. The number of people involved in each group varies from place to place.

In each town, the local group of *Visionari* works independently from the other groups of *Visionari* in the other towns, so both the results of the selection and the number of selected shows are different<sup>9</sup>. All the materials are stored in a web portal ([www.ilsonar.it](http://www.ilsonar.it)), which is used as a platform to archive videos,

technical riders, information about companies and shows<sup>10</sup>. All *Visionari* have a personal account to enter the system and to watch all the videos. During the 2018 edition, 350 artists/companies submitted their projects (and all the videos have been seen by *Visionari*); 23 artists/companies were selected to show their projects<sup>11</sup>.

*L'Italia dei Visionari* project has grown significantly in the last years, as well as the active participation to the project by audiences coming from different geographic contexts: in the light of this, it is important to underline the ability of each organisation to adapt the format to specific social and cultural local contexts. *Visionari* from each organisation are listened to and help shape a programme that's relevant and inspiring to them and the place they live in.

## Young Board

### *TakeOver Festival, the beginning*

*A bit like learning to drive, you can only learn to drive if you're in the driving seat. But when you start to learn you don't go out unless you've got somebody there to point out hazards and who can, in a worst case scenario, put the brakes on – and you've got someone alongside you who's got that experience.*<sup>12</sup>

York Theatre Royal (YTR) is a theatre based in and for the community of York, following the footsteps of a long tradition of live performance in York dating back to the Medieval Mystery plays. YTR understands the importance of having a community-centric approach as an organisation, and recognises its significance in creating a sustainable organisation. It is in the process of transforming how its community engages with values and facilitates cultural activity. If the arts are to thrive it, YTR feels its responsibility to shift perceptions and create new possibilities. To achieve this, it needs to take the many with whom it has a direct



relationship on a new journey, whilst engaging with those who seldom recognise its value in a new vibrant conversation. There are multiple strands to this transition process, but the journey started with its pioneering TakeOver project.

Since 2009, YTR has been running a project called TakeOver, which is now part of Be SpectACTive!. TakeOver is aimed at under 12-26-year-olds who are given full decision-making power over the curation and delivery of a festival. TakeOver was designed to be a platform for young people to work together in a professional environment and realise their own potential. TakeOver is an opportunity for 12-26 year olds to develop their skills within a professional organisation that forms a supportive environment where learning can be acquired by actually doing something rather than being taught. The participants find that working together across such a broad age group is in itself supportive.

The festival team structure mirrors that of YTR. It is the TakeOver Board, made up of young people who govern the festival. The decision to establish a TakeOver Board that would mirror the YTR Board was therefore a good way to establish a governance structure for the programme whilst also enabling under-18-year-olds to have as much opportunity to participate meaningfully in TakeOver as the over-18s. The younger school-age participants have expressed a confidence that learning about business and governance and communication skills has helped them apply this knowledge to other authoritative situations, such as School Council, and helps them to get a job or apply to University in the future. The Board recruits a TakeOver Senior Management Team who plans, programmes and delivers the festival with support from their YTR mentors, although the theatre has invested a significant amount of trust and autonomy in the participants. Support from the staff mentors in the theatre provides the right level of security.

Recruitment for TakeOver follows a formal structure, the same as that for YTR staff recruitment: filling in an application form downloadable from the YTR website and an interview. The interviews are conducted by representatives from the TakeOver Board and a YTR staff member. The reason for this level of formalised recruitment is to ensure that successful participants enter onto the programme with a high level of ambition and conviction.

*My interview for Artistic Director probably to this day is one of the hardest interviews I've done and it should be.*

The TakeOver Senior Management Team includes the Artistic Director, Associate Director and Producer who programme a work that reflects the spirit and ethos of the festival. The Senior Management Team also includes the Production Manager, Head of Communications and Marketing and General Manager who help to realise the programme along with many other roles such as Education Officer and Youth Theatre Director, who, with the support of the Associate Director, provide provision for children and young people.

Over the 8 years of TakeOver, each team, newly recruited every year, was usually unique in its composition and variability of personalities involved and therefore had a direct impact on the festival outputs. The result being that YTR and regular TakeOver audiences know that TakeOver is the occasion to see artistic creations that would never be seen at YTR. The increasing amount of new works of art, straight from Edinburgh Fringe and creations made by local artists, encourage new audiences, and in particular young people, to come through the doors at YTR and experience the festival.

The TakeOver Senior Management Team has complete ownership over the work schedule, creating the marketing and press campaign for the festival, drawing up contracts, managing



the budgets, recruiting a team of volunteers and supporting productions and artists. At the same time, real life industry experience with full support and mentorship allows the entire team to gradually become young advocates for the organisation because of the rising commitment they feel for the community of York.

*My view of theatre before TakeOver was that I had to wait for things to happen to me to get to the next step... I have to work through the system... where it changed for me was to understand that you can do things yourself and TakeOver gave me the skills where I didn't have to wait for somebody to give me the right to do something – you could do it yourself.*

With TakeOver in its 8th year, there is evidence of a positive transformative effect<sup>13</sup>. Participants have referred to it as a “life-changing” opportunity that raises and enforces aspirations. There has been an empowering effect felt by all participants in TakeOver but for the younger ones, the under 18s, this is particularly relevant. TakeOver was clearly pinpointed by individuals as the catalyst that transformed a challenging or negative life situation into one of real possibility and greater hope. By taking on board the responsibility given to them, however challenging it may have been at first, participants have felt eventually rewarded, experiencing a higher level of confidence and independence.

TakeOver is significant in “place-making”, with participants expressing a much more positive view of the city of York since participating. York is now seen as place with appeal and many diverse opportunities for young people, especially in the arts, and TakeOver has made York a desirable place to be. Countless, previous participants of TakeOver have moved on into successful professional industry careers, which demonstrates that the beneficial impact of TakeOver extends beyond the building into the wider community and different creative industries.

*Being thrown in the deep end and being allowed to swim out a little bit, I feel that anything is possible...*

The participation opportunities provided by TakeOver are both meaningful and impactful, encompassing a broad scope of choice for people to actively engage as both artist and social citizen. TakeOver is seen as an opportunity to be *part of something* and meet like-minded people. TakeOver is seen as a chance for the participants not only to learn about the industry but also to learn about themselves and to create something meaningful *with* and *for* others. The risks and responsibilities that the participants have taken on in delivering their different roles have accelerated their development.

#### *The impact on the Organisation*

The cultural change the YTR organisation has gone through in the past years, from seeing themselves not just as artists or cultural leaders, but as *enablers*, has eventually and radically modified their Mission Statement, which is now: “We exist to inspire and cultivate the potential of our community through the creative arts”<sup>14</sup>.

They now see their work as having four distinct yet interwoven strands, which will fulfil their aims. They are:

- ◆ Inspire: be inspired by a diverse range of professional art;
- ◆ Shape: shape what we offer and what we are;
- ◆ Make: make art with us;
- ◆ Share: actively seek new ways to reach and connect with the wider community.

They aim to nurture in their community a deeper appreciation of the arts and to offer various ways in which the community can express the value perceived of the arts around them. They

want their community to pass from “users” to “owners”. The quality and reach of their work in collaboration with the community was recognised in 2015 when the theatre was awarded the annual regional theatre award from the Clothworkers Foundation. This competitive award supported the theatre in a number of Community Collaborations across 2016/17 and 2017/18 including the annual TakeOver Festival.

The positive impact of the TakeOver experience is not only an opportunity open to those young people who have already accessed or had experience of theatre, but it also wants to “widen the reach” of participants, who for social or financial reasons may have barriers that stop them engaging with theatre. An outreach project, *Access All Areas*, has been set up alongside TakeOver to ensure the participation of “harder-to-reach” young people aged 12-16 from the community of York. The TakeOver education team works with the group on the lead up to the festival and then mentors them during the week, so that they can participate in a positive, exciting and meaningful peer-led experience as part of TakeOver at YTR. The impact of TakeOver on these young participants was great. A big part of this is the sense of belonging and ownership that they feel when they are part of the team and occupy the building.

#### *Italian experiences under 30*

Following TakeOver footsteps, in Italy some cultural operators are working in order to reach and involve the same target audiences, *Millennials*, whose cultural consumption rate is constantly decreasing and represents the most difficult target to reach. Nuovo Teatro Faraggiana in Novara (as mentioned above) has developed a *Visionari under 30* project, to create an alternative approach: putting the young audience at the centre of the organisation, actively involving them, following their indications to reinvent together a meaningful presence.

In 2017, National Theatre of Genova together with Teatro dell'Archivolto (Genoa) gave life to the project #GAIS – *Giovani Ambasciatori in Scena* | #GAIS – *Young Ambassadors on the stage*. They involved a team of thirty young people to enter the theatre, attend the performances and gradually becoming attenders. The team can benefit from a short and soft training, seen more as an opportunity to talk as little as possible, letting youngsters propose a new way of telling the theatre. In spite of the various activities set up to engage the youngsters, such as the increasing collaboration with universities, reviewing pricing policies, investing in communication, they did not achieve any appreciable outcome. This is a turn of the screw: *what if the approach was wrong? If instead of insisting on contaminating the outside with our institutional language, we would try to let ourselves be contaminated by them.*<sup>15</sup>

Young Ambassadors are now working to design a new digital platform, a promotional tool for single tickets and season tickets sale but also for the proposal of events dedicated to their peers: aperitifs at the theatre, meetings with artists and more. Over the medium term, the concrete goal is the promotion of ten shows from the 2018/2019 theatre season. *On the long-term side, we would like the platform to be used by other cultural associations as well, becoming a shared reference for the entire territory of Liguria and Lower Piedmont*<sup>16</sup>.

The *Young Board OFT*, a project realised by Turin Philharmonic Orchestra (Turin), followed a similar path. During 2017 they worked with a selected group of 5 young university students to follow closer with the organisation staff all the step to organise the season of the Orchestra: the board mainly dealt with making contact with the Orchestra reality, starting to intervene on how to communicate and promote the concerts in the programme and finally organising it all – deciding in accord with the Artistic Director also the program: *We asked the Young Board to design, produce and promote an extra concert, which has been added to the nine programmed by the Orchestra. They will do everything: from the selection of artists to ticketing, from logistics to promotion*<sup>17</sup>.

The initiative was presented to students of university degree courses such as DAMS and Economics of Culture, but not to the Conservatory, because they wanted to reach an audience that did not attend concerts, trying to understand the reasons for that distance. The Young Board is conceived as something organic with the Orchestra; the idea is to involve this closed group of young students for 2 years, changing four of the five members, while the fifth will stay a year longer to act as a tutor to others. The Young Board is conceived also as a tool to keep in touch and to listen to expectations, ideas and needs of those target audiences. The first year of activity has already revealed many interesting things both about the musical tastes of the kids, oriented above all towards the intertwining with film soundtracks; and on the distorted perception that many of them have about classical music, e.g. about the pricing – they were convinced that a ticket for any classical music concert costs at least 100 euro. The Young Board is working especially on the communication and the development of Social Network activities.

Another example is the Festival Dominio Pubblico – la città agli Under 25 | Public Domain Festival – City to Under-25s (Rome). The original concept of the Festival was born in 2014 from an idea of Kilowatt Festival, Teatro Argot Studio and Teatro dell’Orologio.

*We thought about a project similar to Kilowatt, but targeted to under-25s: a group of 40 young spectators, every year different, chooses the performances of under 25 artists among those who responded to a call for proposals. The festival is made of the shows they preferred. Clearly, the aim is an artistic scouting operation, but also the education of active spectators because the recruiters take also care of the organisation, with our supervision.<sup>18</sup>*

In 2015, the National Theatre of Rome became Main Partner of the project, hosting the activities within its main spaces: Teatro Argentina, Teatro India, Teatro Valle. Dominio Pubblico

is presented as a “public education project aimed at young Under-25s who want to experiment in a path of active spectators aimed at the production, promotion and organization of a multidisciplinary festival”<sup>19</sup>. From December to May, 50 youngsters (from Rome and the whole Lazio Region) worked together to help create the festival. The artistic direction – under 25 as well – has the opportunity to work in all the areas related to the festival creation: starting from the selection of the shows to the programme, each participant has the opportunity to deal with aspects such as organisation, logistics, promotion, press office, partnership, graphics, technical aspects, administration.

Dominio Pubblico aims both to realise a public engagement project addressed to youngsters and to become a significant Italian event focused on under-25 creativity in the fields of theatre, dance, music, visual arts and short films. The goal is to disseminate and promote best practices of cultural enjoyment among young generations born in the 90s, through the promotion of contemporary artists in the context of show, dance, music and visual and cinematographic arts.

Thanks to the renewed collaboration with the National Theatre of Rome, during the 2018 edition, Teatro India became the main location of the 5th edition of the Festival. For six days, all the spaces of its former industrial complex have been invaded by over 100 young artists from all over Italy, selected by the Under 25 Artistic Direction: more than 50 events including shows, exhibitions, projections, special events, workshops and concerts were presented, reaching over 5.000 persons (number of tickets sold).

The process of engaging youngsters is built up by steps: it starts from a journey of vision, where under-25s have the opportunity to subscribe a membership card allowing them to see 10 shows programmed in the city theatres. Active viewers (*followers*) can see the shows and take part in the meetings with the artists after every show. In this way they will be able to develop

and refine that critical sense necessary to manage the role of the artistic director who will select the festival events. When from Active spectators they will become leaders<sup>20</sup>. After taking part in the selecting process, with the support of a mentor from the staff of the three theatres managing the project, the Under-25s are involved in the production of the festival. From November till May, every Monday the Under-25s meet to work together for 2 hours.

In 2018, the project was also enriched by a new initiative: *MILLENNIALS A(r)T WORK*<sup>21</sup>. Starting from November, the new under-25 group began to work to the festival planning and to create a permanent exhibition designed and implemented, named MA(r)T\_MILLENNIALS A(r)T WORK. The exhibition produced was hosted at Teatro India– Ex Mira Lanza Factory: it was conceived to be at the same time a performative action, a permanent urban exhibition, a laboratory on the young generations with a specific focus on the topic of work. Cross-disciplinarity and active participation are the main characteristics on which this project is based, thanks to the interaction among young cultural operators, artists and active citizenship of the neighbourhood. Furthermore, Dominio Pubblico's mission is also making the under-25 group interact with their urban territories of reference.

Before becoming the centre of the contemporary creation in Rome, Teatro India was a factory producing detergents – Mira Lanza factory – symbol of the first industrialised Rome. The youngsters in their exhibition are telling the story of the factory and of the people who were living there through a collection of materials inherent to the neighbourhood evolution and transformation. The site hosted one of the most important poles of private industry in Roman history and over the years has been converted into a territory to be returned to society by opening to urban and social fabric. The exhibition has been hosted in the theatre until summer 2018<sup>22</sup>.

In 2018, the artistic direction of the festival has become part of an experimental network project composed by the artistic direction of the Under-25s in Italy. The network was born from the collaboration between Festival Dominio Pubblico, 20 30 Festival in Bologna and the Direction Under 30 award of the Social Theatre Gualtieri. During the further network development, delegations of each under-30 group have been hosted by each partner in different cities.

Festival 20 30, organised by Kepler group 452, was born in November 2014, thanks to the funding and the accompaniment of the Monte Foundation. The central idea was to give voice to the twenty-thirty years old generation. During the first edition of the festival, four young theatre companies presented four shows related to youngsters. Each company held a four-day workshop with a group of young people from the area and each of those workshops ended with a public opening. This approach with an active involvement of youngsters conducted by youngsters, related to the topic they are interested in and with the language they spoke was successful. From that laboratory work, in 2015, Avanguardie 20 30 was born: a group of young people who entered directly the direct management of the festival supports Kepler-452 in the artistic direction and organization of the Festival.

Direction Under 30 is a project entirely dedicated to the under-30 national theatre scene taking place at Teatro Sociale Gualtieri, a theatre of the beginning of the 20th century completely abandoned in the late Seventies and reopened in 2009, thanks to the work of a citizens' association that took care of its refurbishment. Direction Under 30 is structured as a competition for the staging and awarding of shows by emerging theatre companies, through processes of artistic direction, criticism and awards entirely entrusted to under-30 juries. Young people reward young artists, in a sort of “theatrical mutual aid” mechanism. The project also aims to characterise itself as a cultural

platform and a place for relationships to grow as active young spectators. A cycle of free training sessions, with the presence of guests in open dialogue with the participants, prepare the juries of young people in the selection and awarding process of the candidate shows.

Since its first edition (2014) *Direction Under 30* was based on the idea of “theatrical mutual aid”: the work of young emerging companies is often submitted to the scrutiny of artistic directors or juries (in the case of competitions) belonging to the most “institutionalised” generations in the theatre world. Implicitly, however, there is often a principle of hierarchical verticality on a generational basis, which sometimes has strong limits. *Direction Under 30* is meant to be an attempt to experiment with a new, more horizontal perspective, in which the processes of artistic direction, selection and awarding are traced back to the same generational stream as those “subjected to judgment.”

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> “We don’t need to turn spectators into actors. We do need to acknowledge that every spectator is already an actor in his own story and that every actor is in turn the spectator of the same kind of story”, (Rancière, 2011, p. 17).

<sup>2</sup> The festival is promoted and implemented by *CapoTrave* theatre company (a cultural organisation located in Sansepolcro since 2009). Since its foundation, the company has been recognised by the Tuscany Region among the most interesting young companies in the regional landscape, and therefore eligible for funding. Since 2003, thanks to the recognition of the Province of Arezzo, *CapoTrave* has been a member of the network *Rete Teatrale Aretina*, which includes eight professional companies operating in the province. The *Visionari* project was born in 2007. From 2008 *Kilowatt Festival* has been supporting theatre, dance and performing arts productions. In 2009 the festival opened a contemporary music section, and the year after a visual arts section. In 2010, the Region of Tuscany placed *CapoTrave* among the top 30 theatre companies supported by regional

funding, in 2013 it was recognised as a Theatre Residency by the Region and in 2015 it was recognised by the Italian Ministry of Culture as an Artistic Residency devoted to stimulate artistic creation and mobility, enhance emerging artists and companies, and foster the participation of local audiences.

<sup>3</sup> The name itself is evocative: the Italian word is strictly connected with the poetic word *dream* (having a vision) but also with the concrete and objective action of seeing something (vision as sight).

<sup>4</sup> One of the most important evidences of this process is the importance of not underestimating, assuming or patronising audiences in terms of type of arts experiences they might be interested in.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.ilsonar.it>

<sup>6</sup> Extracts from interviews to *Visionari*. The sentences in italics in the following pages are all extracts of interviews to *Visionari*, unless indicated otherwise.

<sup>7</sup> This is a project managed by four production companies (ACTI Independent Theaters, Il Cerchio di Gesso, Tedacà and Mulino di Amleto) that organise three different seasons in Turin (BellArte, Cube Theater, San Pietro in Vincoli).

<sup>8</sup> All individuals and groups who have produced or are about to produce a new show can submit their proposal; works that have already debuted are excluded from the selection.

<sup>9</sup> 9 shows at *Kilowatt Festival Sansepolcro*, 1 at *Le Città Visibili Rimini*, 2 at *ACS Abruzzo Circuito Spettacolo*, 6 at *Teatro Civico Faraggiana in Novara*, 1 at *Little Bit Festival in Livorno*, 1 for *TiPi*, 1 at *Utovie Teatrali*, 1 for *Sosta Palmizi*, contemporary dance festival in *Arezzo*, 3 for *Fertili Terreni Project in Turin*.

<sup>10</sup> The system is also a search engine dedicated to the emerging theatre that allows artists to upload and make their own work visible.

<sup>11</sup> Each institution/theatre/festival has its own budget for the purchase of selected shows. Not being able to predict in advance what kind of shows will be selected, it is considered appropriate not to define a single and equal budget for all to be allocated to every show. This is because every institution/theatre/festival involved in the project provides that amount among the various selected shows, taking into account the number of artists involved, the displacements and the technical needs of representation. In any case, the selected groups are guaranteed an appropriate cachet for the show. Selected companies are asked to indicate in the materials and credits of the show the words “L’Italia dei Visionari” followed by the name of the theatre/festival that selected them.

<sup>12</sup> A young participant of the *TakeOver* project. The sentences in italics



in the following pages are all extracts of interviews to TakeOver participants, unless indicated otherwise.

<sup>13</sup> Cfr. *York Theatre Royal – TakeOver Evaluation*, &Co Evaluative analysis of TakeOver, March 2014.

<sup>14</sup> Previously it was: *We exist to bring delight and fulfilment to the people of York and beyond by offering a rich and diverse programme of creative activity.*

<sup>15</sup> Raffaella Rocca, Head of Public Relations at National Theatre of Genova.

<sup>16</sup> Valentina Mossetti, General Secretary of Teatro dell'Archivolto.

<sup>17</sup> Gabriele Montanaro, general coordinator of the activity of the Young Board OFT.

<sup>18</sup> Luca Ricci, Artistic Director of Kilowatt.

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.dominiopubblicoteatro.it/il-progetto/>

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.dominiopubblicoteatro.it/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/cs-dominio-pubblico-call-2018.pdf>.

<sup>21</sup> A project part of the program *Contemporaneamente Roma 2017*, promoted by Roma Capitale Department of Cultural Growth in partnership with SIAE.

<sup>22</sup> The realisation of the work entitled *Metropolitan Indians*, was entrusted to the visual artist and videomaker Marco Raparelli.



European Spectators Day, Nuovo Teatro Faraggiana Novara (IT), 2017  
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## **A provisional epilogue**

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The theme of participation raises many expectations. Perhaps they are even more vivid for public authorities, cultural organisations and certain artists than for the audiences themselves. The classical structure of cultural policies, traditionally more oriented by (public) supply rather than by demand preferences, still retains much of its legitimacy. This book reflects at least the many tensions that the introduction of a participative project generates in places, creators/artists, curators, producers, and in the spectators themselves. The polysemy of the term “participation” certainly opens to a broad spectrum of practices. On the one hand, some stakeholders only engage in a modest, if not non-existent, level of audience empowerment. In this case, one can wonder if the display of participation is not a way of assuming no real modification of the established hierarchies. On the other hand, some projects are totally based on the subversion of the classic relations between supply and demand (i.e. artistic sovereignty upon audiences expectations), which we have analysed in the book *Breaking the Fourth Wall* (Bonet and Négrier, 2018). *Be SpectACTive!* represents an attempt to deepen the possibilities offered by the participation in the artistic decision and programming, management, creation in progress, by the direct engagement in the casting or by an interaction with the creators via a digital platform.

In this book, we have shown all the potential these instruments represented for artists, cultural institutions and audiences. We also showed the limits to be kept in mind, and above all the diversity in assuming a “participatory project” according to the locations, instruments, “political cultures of culture”, approaches, aims and goals of organisations. Beside *Be SpectACTive!*, we have finally presented how participation is spreading, if not as a new paradigm, at least as a lever for changing cultural policies and the way cultural organisations and their staff work.

In this conclusion, we will return to the major lessons we have learned, assuming an action-research approach. We chose to do

this by distinguishing four dimensions. The first is the challenge of participation for organisations. Are they all up to the challenge? Do they do it with the same strategies, the same constraints, the same success? The second is the role of participation within the sociological challenge of cultural inequalities. Is it true that participatory processes are consistently favorable to the audiences that are already the most endowed in cultural capital? And if it's not true, how to explain it? The third dimension concerns the role of artists within participatory interactions, and the conditions of their appropriation of this new paradigm. How do artists feel about the proposal, even the participatory pressure? Is there a specific artist profile that would ensure the success of a participatory approach? Finally, we will address the challenge of quality in participatory projects. It is often said that the more participatory a project is, the more its artistic quality becomes suspect. How to discuss this belief? Under what conditions?

For each of these four dimensions, we will present our concluding analyses, as well as the more operational implications that our conclusions lead to. As Action-Research requires, it is this philosophy of cooperation between the academic vision and the practical consequences that drives us.

### **An organisational challenge**

The implementation of participatory processes entails a reassignment of priorities in the artistic organisations that assume this challenge. On the one hand, this implies not only reallocating priorities between objectives and programs, on the other hand, it also results in a new distribution of the available budget (and its recipients), and in the profiles and responsibilities of the team members (both resources being, generally, very limited). Any change of priorities, unless accompanied by a generous and supplementary contribution of resources, generates tensions: in personnel, sometimes in audiences, and very often among the

stakeholders directly affected (e.g. companies without participatory projects or traditional intermediaries). In an endogamic sector, this particularly affects the staff members closest to stakeholders. The result is that, while the potential costs of change generate resistances, the positive impact takes time to be perceived; and the beneficiaries of it are not yet aware (and therefore do not come out to defend it).

Internally, the struggle between departments for the available resources (having a sufficient budget and the appropriate staff) add an immaterial dimension: the fear of losing the freedom to develop without restricting their own priorities, or the internal and external recognition of their work. Artistic organisations move by the convergence of two interests: achieving the project mission, and achieving the objectives and individual motivations of the key personnel (artistic and managerial). When the two interests do not converge, key personnel lose motivation and end up leaving the organisation. For this reason, it is important that the implementation of new projects that break with the organisational culture or the traditional objectives of the organisation are, as far as possible, shared by the entire team.

Another problem of the breakthrough initiatives is that, shortly after starting, the lack of experience can lead to imbalances, make mistakes or undesired short-term results. These aspects can ballast the illusion and multiply the initial doubts. In addition, these feed the criticism between those who did not share the initial decision, or who have had to take on new tasks that they did not want or for which they lacked incentives or training. In addition, when new talent or specific staff has been incorporated, the reactions of the most conservative ones intensify.

In the particular case of those organisations that are not cohesive around a shared mission, or with very limited human and economic resources, the struggle between programs (and those responsible for them) for not transferring material resources or

symbolic space is accentuated. The socio-cultural and political-institutional context is also an important factor to be taken into account. In those societies more open to the values of cultural democracy, the development of active participation initiatives multiplies, either because society demands it, or because artistic organisations experiment with it. Conversely, in hierarchical political-institutional contexts, reluctant to the loss of material or symbolic power, it is much more difficult for such initiatives to appear. And when they occur, they must go against the tide, internally and externally.

For all these reasons, it is important to bear in mind what motivated an organization to start up a participatory project, and what its implications are for it (social and artistic recognition, acquisition of supplementary funding, etc.). When the initiative is born from a process of internal reflection, shared by the team, that allows to better develop the mission and is well led, its chances of success are great. When the initiative responds to an instrumental or extrinsic reason to the mission (commercial, financial or political, for example) it is much easier to fail or generate tensions, internal and external. But sometimes, an initially instrumental motivation can reach highly positive results. For example, not all institutions that for different reasons (experience of cooperation, prestige, geographical balance or availability of resources) present themselves as members of a consortium and win an innovative European project, have experienced the innovation in question. On the other hand, in the end, they can end up obtaining a great result and contributing a valuable experience to the consortium as a whole. This is the case of the *Be SpectACTive!* project. All participating festivals and theatres contributed with co-production capacity and prestige, but not all of them had previous experience in active participation strategies with their audiences. Some, initially, had doubts about how it could work in their context. But the result, each on its scale, has ended up being positive for all.

Those who have advanced the most may not seem at first glance the most original or the most successful, but it must be measured from a process perspective.

International comparison, when not part of a good knowledge of each local context (social, cultural, economic and political) may be somewhat unfair. Sometimes, those who in absolute terms seem to have achieved more, probably started from a more advantaged position. And those with more discrete results had to travel a long way to get there. The important results are in terms of transformation and learning achieved. There is a risk of a certain arrogance on the part of professionals located in favourable contexts, with resources, effective governance models, innovation trajectories, good training, and efficient government incentives. What counts in the field of international cultural cooperation is not that, but the ability to transform one's vision, to pose challenges and questions, and to share the results transparently with others.

In the case of audience active participation strategies, the forms of mediation and leadership are fundamental, since they will be more effective the more respectful they are with the contribution of the others. Active participation experiences are based on soft skills: ability to put oneself in somebody else's place, empathy, listening attitude, flexibility, curiosity and shared value. Each one of the practices developed in the *Be SpectACTive!* project, from the deliberative programming to the residencies of artists, imply different challenges for the organisation. But in some as in others, it is necessary to empower or incorporate staff with mediating capacity, able to understand the expectations, motivations and needs of all stakeholders of the process, from the artist to the usual audience, including those citizens willing to participate in the participatory game.

In any case, a virtuous relationship with participants requires to offer them the place they were promised. The purpose of the experience should be transparent, and ethical guarantees have to

be respected, ensuring that people don't feel frustrated, betrayed or instrumentalised. In other words, power relations – differences in status, legitimacy, right to decide – have to be made explicit through clear rules of the game.

### **Expectations and impacts on the prism of the social**

When we speak about participants, audiences, artists, artistic institutions or venues, these are socially situated institutions and people – institutions with their own history, people with different levels of cultural capital, involving specific representations of art, artistic quality and values, and the functions of creation and participation. Their positions in the participatory experiences are also specific, as they are inserted in a power relationship: some pay and command, others make things done, others are invited to participate. Although participative devices seek to transform these relations and positions, inviting each actor to a displacement, the analysis of projects led by *Be SpectACTive!* cannot avoid a reflection on their social positions: their objectives, their expectations, their subjective feelings are different; the mutual impacts of the experiences they live are also different. How could everyone benefit from the relationship?

This reflection concerns in particular participants, whose expectations and potential benefits are determined by the way in which the participative proposal encounters their previous social trajectory – more precisely, their level of cultural capital in relation to artistic practices and knowledge. Do they ever attend a show? Do they know or visit any artistic institution? Do they think that “contemporary dance is not for me”? Do they practice performing arts as amateurs? Do they pretend to become professional artists? According to these answers, their experience often strongly differs.

This brings us to the recurrent question asked to participatory attempts: is it true that artistic participatory processes are consistently favourable to the audiences that are already the most endowed in cultural capital? We could answer: yes and no.

Yes, most of the time, in participatory projects that seek to mobilise spectators voluntarily or involuntarily: this is the case in most participatory programming groups, and in creative residencies that do not target specific audiences. In these cases, we could effectively talk about an “*élite of spectators*”. Most of these participants, already involved in the world of live performance, have important expectations. When they are invited to take a bigger place, they could accept it, but provided that it is a real place. Thus, they are more often exposed to potential frustrations, implied by false promises of co-creation or co-decision.

On the other hand, some participatory initiatives target participants who are not “*actual*” audiences. This only happens when it is explicitly sought: an open call published on a venue website cannot reach non-audiences, but a proactive action can. In these cases, we find that participant's expectations are often less important, as the experience could be totally new to them: getting in touch with an artist, getting on stage, or acquiring an artistic vocabulary can be significant gains. Gains that we have been able to qualify as artistic empowerment, potentially participating in a more global empowerment, in terms of capacity of expression, artistic legitimacy or social inclusion. However, the participation is still not a simple gift: the proposal and the exchange have to be fair. Here too, the participants must be able to appropriate the place they are offered, not to be imposed.

Consequently, everything depends on the goals assigned to participative actions. If the goal is reinforcing the place of the spectators in the artistic democracy, then it is possible to assume that participants are strongly endowed with cultural capital, since a great majority of spectators are. This operation can be a great

opportunity for artists and venues to create closer relationships with their audiences, to be more attentive to their feedbacks, to be enriched by a less top-down and more collaborative relation. It can work, but provided the offer of a real sharing, a real exchange.

If the goal is rather to contribute to artistic empowerment and to reach more diversified audiences, then it is necessary to make efforts to get in touch with them and propose experiences that suit them. In this perspective, artistic institutions often need to set up partnerships with local institutions or communities, even out of their comfort zone, involving non-cultural partners. But above all, they need to be able to open up to the differences and desires of these non-audiences. When this happens, it can be an opportunity for venues to connect with new social fields and contribute to the diversification of audiences, but also to stimulate innovation and partnerships, enlarging the functions and the connections of an artistic institution.

Questions of scale and sustainability are still important: are these experiments on such a micro scale satisfactory? What proportion of spectators does a group of participatory programming represent? Is enough being in touch with 10 participants in a residency, to talk about diversification? Are these groups going to persist and grow? How to think about enhancement and renewal, in the long term? What is the legacy of these activities?

According to what we have called the ripple effect of participation, it must be recognised that projects claiming to offer power to participants are likely to be overwhelmed by a legitimate desire for co-creation, which cannot be left unanswered. If it is promised as such, power has to be shared – implying potentially not doing things the way they would have been done without any participant. Otherwise, participation may be just a new legitimisation of power. Giving a role to citizens means accepting that they really take it, accepting to be challenged by their presence and their feedbacks. Risk-taking is intrinsic to an honest participatory

initiative: rather than considering it as a threat, artistic institutions could see it as an opportunity to be more open and receptive to their social environment.

### **The artistic dimension in interaction**

One of the keywords of the project is *active spectatorship*, referring to each mechanism through which audiences, namely spectators or citizens, take an active role in the artistic processes. Creative Residencies are the privileged corner both to support the work of young and innovative European artists and to promote their interaction with local audiences, testing new and experimental ways to engage with them, according with the topic of the work, the target audiences to involve, the journey developed by the artists. Creative residencies are also the ideal ground to connect artists with different contexts, scales and practices and to experiment forms and models of active engagement, giving artists the challenge to experiment new creative processes, which can be nourished by the active involvement of participants.

The journey undertaken by Be SpectACTive! involves tearing up existing maps: especially where the routes offered till now no longer seem useful; it could even take us into the territory of creating a new cartography; a cartography more fitting and maybe able to respond to the shift in values embodied working with people and developing more collaborative arts practices. “A cartography that refuses the over simplified label of ‘instrumentalism’ but is not afraid to work with community partners to address burning social and political issues: drawing on the power of art to affect and transform its audience” (Tiller, 2017).

The Action Research gave an opportunity to analyse a co-creative approach in an international context, giving artist the challenge to experiment new forms of artistic creation, working with different audiences and communities, relating with different

organisations in countries with distinguishing social, cultural, economic and political characteristics. We know from our previous experience and extensive literature that change making in a proper “audience-thinking” is pretty unlikely to happen, unless the organisation as a whole is fully committed to support artists in becoming enablers or agents of change within the context the same organisation is relating to every day. As Dragan Klaić argued: “Art can be international but audiences are always local”. This means an artists must be put in the condition to understand the context in which a single organisation is working to find a proper “bridge” to keep in touch with the desired audiences they want to reach. The horizontal commitment of all the staff of the organisation is the starting point also to facilitate artists’ work, to allow artists to understand *where* they are acting, to find a way to make their work significant, relevant and meaningful in a specific context. In the case of artists coming from different backgrounds and countries, it is fundamental having a “mediator” – what we called “community manager” in the second edition of the project – to understand artists’ needs (ex ante) and introducing artists in a community, to answer artists’ needs (during the process), and to feed the relation (ex post). The mediator can also be seen as an agent of internal change: it is fundamental to create clarity and internal buy-in around audience engagement initiative’s objectives, having clear the level of involvement of all the staff in implementing it.

The project offered us also the possibility to investigate the reason why and the implication for an artist to encompass with a co-creative process, trying to analyse how participation can shape artistic creation and how the active involvement in the creative process can shape the way in which audiences take part in creative activities.

Artists selection processes did not questioned if the artists chosen were the “right” ones to be involved in a participatory project. These started analysing each single proposal, independently by

past experiences, but having a clear perspective: giving a chance to experiment and to test new ways of working for emerging artists, by giving them the opportunity to question their creative approach in dialogue with different backgrounds, social, economic and political contexts. It moved from the idea that from the creative perspective there is no right or wrong; this to encourage experimentation and risk taking as part of the arts process. Regardless the context artists were coming from, their ethics and aesthetics, the project was a comfortable arena to experiment, to find new ways to develop their creativity and explore new patterns.

It became self-evident that the ideal enabling context needs to be shared among all the organisation staff: all the staff must be aware of goals, implications and need to adopt an audience-centric approach, respecting the artistic vision and way of working of each artists. As Holden (2008) suggests, culture can no longer be something “given”, “offered” or “delivered” by one section of ‘us’ to another; it needs to be something that we all own and make, by encompassing ‘power with’ as well as ‘within’. To be able to do that, artists need to find organisation, which want to change their perspective, willing to shift the balance of power between organisations and communities, to invite people to participate not only as nominal sharers in a decision-making process but also as commissioners, curators and co-creators. Artists involved are called not only to create a new production that told stories of or is inspired by the people, their stories, feelings, fears, ambitions, but artists must be able to face reciprocity, in terms of practice of exchanging something with others for mutual benefit. Reciprocity is possible if the artist and the community create a shared space where they can engage in real dialogue; this means undertaking a process of negotiation and collaboration in which each uncovers the skills, knowledge or expertise of the other. A reciprocal engagement, through which artists and participants are able to recognise and exploit the needs and expectations of each other.



While the artists' offer in sharing their process and the participants in sharing their stories or life experience has often been spoken of as an act of mutual 'generosity', the unequal nature of the relationship continues to persist. Partly because the artist is usually the one being paid for this act of collaboration, but also because certain types of knowledge and expertise are still valued over others. The artist is still too often perceived as the one, 'bestowing' a gift of, 'enlightenment, education, experience' or 'entertainment' (Tiller, 2017).

To break down this preconception, artists are called to set up a truly collaborative practice, that allows listening, speaking, reflecting to create a common ground for shared discourse. To build up this safe and trustful metaphorical space, artists need to be supported by the staff of the organisation where the activity takes place. This happens when there is a shared comprehension and a tension to discovering a community's capacities and assets. Artists start from a pro-active acceptance of the belief that everyone can give something valuable, and therefore both the parties are ensured they will not be exploited, co-opted or devalued. Developing relationships that create the trust needed to work in this way can only be based on mutual respect for different people's expertise: it is about creating a mutual understanding that is part of a shared process. It means being transparent about possibilities, including the role of the audiences within any project: it is a question related to the way of finding the connections, the shared issue, and listening. Artists who want to work genuinely in a co-creative way with communities and audiences need to start from listening. This is particularly necessary for artists willing to engage particular target communities, far away from their usual context (culturally, socially, economically, territorially, etc.). Artists need the help of the local organisation to keep in touch with the specific target groups needed: rules must be clear, artists must have a clear artistic project to develop. Each artist has shown a different methodology to engage audiences and has found different solutions to develop a

proper strategy to interact with the people involved. Artists underlined the difficulty in really building up trustful relationships in a short timeframe, and in some cases working on a specific topic very closed to the people could help in involving them.

It is evident that what it is important is to create art that is meaningful and relevant to people; that speaks of their lives, their stories and their experiences. Not art that is just bounded to these factors, but that uses them as a starting point to tell engaging and amazing stories. This exchange is really effective just when it happens in a safe and comfortable place, where a trustful relationship among actors/dancers and audiences can happen. Establishing authentic personal relationships requires time and specific skills, like empathy, patience, persistence, vision, enthusiasm, responsiveness and flexibility.

Working with non-artistic partners, using non-artistic places and spaces, connecting with non-arts individuals and using non-artistic language are all tactics to engage people who might be thinking that "art is not for me". Multiple partnerships with non-artistic organisations like health authorities, rugby clubs, community and voluntary groups or housing associations, to artistic organisations may bring different kinds of capital to the table.

Despite sharing a sense of common direction and final destination, every co-production has been a unique response to a single artist/company's aesthetic, a specific artistic aim, a particular mixture of languages, a distinct dramaturgical development.

The purpose of the journey, however, has been made clear. To develop a sense of agency and empowerment within communities. The first step is always to recognise that the journey is necessary. Being clear about our reasons for travelling and the values and principles driving us means we can then focus on the process of making the road. The way, they suggest, will become clearer once we have committed "to walk".

What is fundamental is being transparent about our intentions: being clear with ourselves and those we are working with why engaging with a particular group of participants, a particular issue or in creating a particular piece of collaborative work. This means taking on the responsibility and the time to understand the social, political and economic contexts in which the work is situated: acknowledging the power structures. This learning is the starting point for an open dialogue with audiences: a genuine enquiry can happen just where audiences can be invited in to become part of both the creative and the decision-making processes.

### **In the quest for quality**

Talking about quality is like walking a slippery slope. Quality is such a subjective term that it is nearly impossible to reach an agreement on its definition. Scholars and philosophers have been tried through the centuries to propose a convincing and ultimate description of this phenomenon. However, due to its personal and intangible characteristics, no consensus has been reached on the issue yet, and maybe never will.

Nevertheless, over these years of active research within the Be SpectACTive! project, we realised that during interviews and debates different layers and nuances emerged when talking about quality, and thus, it would be more correct to talk about *qualities* instead of *quality*. Of course, when dealing with the concept of quality in performing arts, the first thought that comes to mind is that of artistic “excellence”. The desire to reach perfect execution and brilliant performances is a common goal of many performing arts organisations. Technical perfection and masterly skill often match also with effectiveness in impressing the audience, hence in awakening the emotions and feelings of the public. In fact, artistic quality is about both emotional and intellectual experiences, where technical prowess could represent

a less subjective criterion of judgement, whilst an audience’s “readiness-to-receive” the art (Brown and Novak-Leonard, 2007) would pertain to the personal (individual) domain of evaluation.

However, in Be SpectACTive! and in every art project aiming at audience engagement, the focus is not (or not only) on artistic quality, but on the different paths to reach real and proactive participation of spectators. Engaging in participatory activities means working in close relationship with communities and questioning ideas such as that of citizenship, inclusion, belonging, empowerment, etc.

In some way, we could distinguish between *artistic quality* and *civic quality*. We could say that the former pertains to the realm of aesthetics and its desired outcomes are, beyond artistic excellence per se, linked with generating intellectual and emotional stimuli in the spectator. Also, artistic quality can be related to perceived success and positive image generation. However, especially in the case of participatory experimentation with audiences, civic quality has more to do with the social and individual domains. In this case, desirable results would be ideally building stronger and more meaningful relationships with the community, generating a sense of belonging with the artistic environment and promoting awareness, responsibility and active citizenship.

As expected, things get more complicated when the debate covers the dichotomous relationship between artistic and civic quality. It is general opinion that the two visions cannot go hand in hand, since a propensity to reach artistic excellence would supposedly compromise real participatory outcomes. And vice versa, when efforts are conveyed in the process of empowering and engaging audiences, the artistic result is inevitably undermined. The dilemma could be reworded in the following way: is it more important to achieve real engagement, even at the expense of artistic excellence, or instead quality cannot be sacrificed for the

sake of participation? And again, are we more interested in the process or the outcome of our participatory activities?

During our Be SpectACTive! journey, we as researchers have observed multiple positions on the issue when analysing the different viewpoints of the theatres and festivals involved in the project. Some partners have highlighted the impossibility to combine artistic freedom of creation with decisional and curatorial responsibility given to the public. For others, quality was more related to pushing boundaries and focusing on the participation-building process, rather than a matter of technical perfection of the final performance. Finally, other voices called for a balance between process and outcomes, arguing that excellent results can be obtained when working in a structured and reasoned way on both aspects.

There are no right or wrong solutions. Probably, the best approach would be to work for obtaining both artistic and civic quality, but this can be hard to achieve. If having to choose between the two, maybe in the case of organisations whose main mission is to actively engage audiences, it would be recommended to prioritise civic quality and thus participatory results over artistic excellence.

Another problem faced in the debate around quality is evaluation. One of the questions we posed ourselves since the beginning of Be SpectACTive! is how to evaluate the overall outcomes of the project and the specific results obtained by each organisation or festival. In this sense, we talk about the *project quality*, as a whole and of its single components. Within this framework, we tended to focus more on the evolution and the trajectory that each organisation has undertaken, since our partners present different starting points in the path towards audience engagement. They also have discordant opinions about what active participation means and, consequently, what degree

of involvement should be adopted. For example, our partners present different models and levels of audience engagement in the Participatory Programming, that in some cases resulted in disruptive experiments like the work of LIFT with the Tottenham children.

Thus, it would have been useless to compare such disparate situations in terms of obtained results. Then, we focused more on the efforts and energies put for enhancing the participatory approach and creating meaningful bonds with the respective audiences/communities. A great achievement has been to see the incredible evolution of these venues and festivals over time, especially in the case of organisations that were new to audience engagement practice.

Last but not least, we could talk about *transformative quality*, or the capacity to generate an impact in the long term, a long-lasting legacy, thus transforming and innovating the surrounding cultural environment. This quality is probably the hardest to achieve. Nevertheless, working and researching for a reasonably long time period, connecting and sharing experiences in a network, learning from previous experience and maintaining the focus on the participatory mission could help cultural practitioners to accomplish great results.

## GLOSSARY

Luisella  
Carnelli

Jaroslava  
Tomanová

*This is a glossary of essential language used in Be SpectACTive!. The purpose of this document is to encourage representatives of partner organisations to define the terminology frequently used within the project, in order to achieve a common understanding of the key terms. This activity aims to help the project partners achieve coherence in the language spoken when writing the new project proposal as well as in the general communication during project activities, such as project meetings, public events etc. This glossary is based on direct citations of literature reviewed and referenced as well as on collaborative writing of those willing to take part in creating it.*

### Access

Access to Culture is an essential right of all citizens but becomes fundamental in the case of those with economic and social challenges such as young people and the elderly, people with disabilities and minority groups (Bamford, 2011).

The problem of access is a crucial one, since it is not only related to physical, economic or geographical access but, and probably in a less visible way, to cultural access (see “Barriers to access”). Accessibility involves taking into consideration all citizens in their diversity, the creation and carrying out of cultural policies, the creation and management of cultural venues – their programmes and audience policies (Bollo et al., 2017).

### Barriers to access

Traditionally, issues related to access have been associated with physical and financial barriers (indeed, such barriers are still among the main obstacles compromising the accessibility of heritage institutions, especially in the case of “disadvantaged” groups).

Recently greater attention has been devoted to more “intangible” kinds of barriers, such as sensory and cognitive barriers, cultural barriers (i.e. individual interests and life experiences), attitudinal (having to do with culture institutions and overall atmosphere), technological barriers (e.g. the inadequate use of ICTs to facilitate accessibility to the institution’s programmes), psychological barriers (e.g. the perception of cultural institutions as elitist places, targeting the well-educated and sophisticated people; the refusal of specific forms



Queer Festival, Zagreb (HR), 2018 ©Silvija Dogan

of cultural expression, perceived as uninteresting or offensive; the low priority given to cultural participation) (Bollo et al. 2017).

### **Action learning (sometimes referenced as ‘active learning’)**

A broad label encompassing a range of engaging instructional methods. What is common among the active learning approaches is the focus on developing deeper understanding (rather than reciting facts, for example) and promoting thoughtful engagement.

The core of action learning is that we learn best when we have a real issue to settle and when what we are trying to change or resolve is something that we are responsible for. Action learning offers: support and challenges from peers; the opportunity to learn from good practice and develop new ideas and different solutions; development of individual listening and diagnostic skills; practice and receipt of feedback from peers on their leadership and management skills; a safe environment to explore strengths and weaknesses; a group of people who are, for a period of time, mentors for each other (Revans, 1998).

### **Action research**

Research that is carried out in order to solve a particular problem and to produce guidelines for best practice (Denscombe, 2010, p. 6). Action research involves actively participating in a change situation, often via an existing organisation, whilst simultaneously conducting research. Action research can also be undertaken by larger organisations or institutions, assisted or guided by professional researchers, with the aim of improving their strategies, practices and knowledge of the environments within which they practice. As designers and stakeholders, researchers work with others to propose a new course of action to help their community improve its work practices.

### **Active citizenship**

Participation in civil society, community and/or political life, characterised by mutual respect and non-violence and in accordance with human rights and democracy (Hoskins et al., 2006).

It is also a form of literacy, because it implies being aware of what is happening around us, acquiring knowledge and understanding so

as to make informed judgements, and having the skill and courage to respond in the appropriate way, individually or collectively. Active citizenship embodies the conviction that every individual can make a difference to the community he or she lives in – whether that means the local, national or global community (European Economic and Social Committee, 2012).

A joint practice of self-determination (Habermas, 1994).

### **Active spectatorship**

Active spectatorship refers to each mechanism through which audiences, namely spectators or citizens, take on the role of decision makers with regard to many of the aspects needed to carry out a festival or a theatre or dance programme (Be SpectACTive!, 2014).

### **Active involvement**

Based on the definition of the term “involvement” = 1) the act of taking part in an activity, event, or situation; 2) the interest or enthusiasm that you feel for something

### **Active involvement intervention**

- ◆ An engaging presentation of novel content which is arousing and involving;
- ◆ Use of small groups to increase exposure to peer views with relatively equal participation among group members to maximise self-reflection;
- ◆ An activity where groups publicly present views (often to a larger group) and possibly group competition to increase motivation to thoroughly reflect on the presented views;
- ◆ A brief intervention format to encourage attention (and maximise dissemination);
- ◆ An activity designed to engage the target audience in multiple perspective taking, evaluating alternatives to risk behaviour, and analysis of motivations for risk behaviour (e.g. planning a risk-prevention message);
- ◆ Consideration of developmental appropriateness, taking into account target cognitive development, experience as persuader, and experience with topic (e.g. prior substance use) (Greene, 2013).



## Artist

Most often, the term describes those who create within a context of the high culture, activities such as drawing, painting, sculpture, acting, dancing, writing, filmmaking, new media, photography, and music — people who use imagination, talent, or skill to create works that may be judged to have an aesthetic value. Art historians and critics define artists as those who produce art within a recognised or recognisable discipline.

Six activities, services or functions of contemporary artists (Getlein, 2010, p. 593):

- 1) Create places for some human purpose;
- 2) Create extraordinary versions of ordinary objects;
- 3) Record and commemorate;
- 4) Give tangible form to the unknown;
- 5) Give tangible form to feelings;
- 6) Refresh our vision and help see the world in new ways.

## Artistic process

The artistic process is a unique combination of vision, creativity, intuition, and collaboration balanced with craft, technique, accountability, discipline, and use of time and resources. In a highly relative world, the artistic process is one of the few absolutes irrespective of artistic discipline, style, size, age, locale or working format. The artistic process is a complex multiplicity of processes. It is a consilience, literally a *jumping together* of beliefs, aesthetic sensibility, personal interactions and cooperation, access to and expenditure of a variety of resources — specific to each arts entity; all supporting the making and connecting of art (ARTS Action Research, n.d.).

The artistic process is qualitative problem solving; it is the controlled procedure of instituting qualitative relationships as means to the achievement of a qualitative end or total. Qualitative problem solving is not a neat progression of steps but a single, continuous means-ends progression, sometimes hesitating, halting, groping; it may be rethought, move forward again, start over, in short, it is experimental behaviour. And all that one can attempt is a logical analysis of distinguishable phases of the artistic process, as Dewey

(1934) did in his description of scientific processes of thought. Rules or recipes as such, for producing good art (or science for that matter) have never been established, and are perhaps anathema to the genuinely creative art of each age. It may be said that qualitative problem solving is a mediation in which qualitative relations as means are ordered to desired qualitative ends. Thus to choose qualitative ends is to achieve an artistic problem. Whenever qualitative problems are sought, pointed out to others, or solved, therein do we have artistic endeavour, art and art education (Ecker, 1963).

## Artistic research

Artistic research seeks to convey and communicate content that is enclosed in aesthetic experiences, enacted in creative practices and embodies in artistic products. Professional artists feel that it is particularly important for them to be able concentrate on a clearly defined theme over a longer period of time and with sufficient financial support to be able to work on it in terms of both depth and breadth.

In the literature on artistic research, we regularly see a distinction between (Borgdorff, 2010):

- ◆ **research on the arts** = the interpretative perspective which makes art practice their subject of study;
- ◆ **research for the arts** = the instrumental perspective which is characteristic of the more applied, often technical research done in service of art practice, this research delivers, as it were, the tools and the material knowledge that can then be applied in practice, in the artistic process and in the artistic product itself. In this case, art practice is not the object of study, but its objective;
- ◆ **research in the arts** = when that artistic practice is not only the result of the research, but also its methodological vehicle, when the research unfolds *in and through* the acts of creative and performing.

## Artistic residency

Based on “artist-in-residence” programs, which exist to invite artists for a time and space away from their usual environment and obligations. These programs provide a time of reflection, research,



presentation and/or production. They also allow an individual to explore their practice within another community; meeting new people, using new materials, experiencing life in a new location. Art residencies emphasise the importance of meaningful and multi-layered cultural exchange and immersion into another culture. In general, there is no single model of an artistic residency, and the expectations and requirements vary greatly. The relationship between the resident and the host is often an important aspect of a residency program. Sometimes residents become quite involved in a community – giving presentations, workshops, or collaborating with local artists or the general public. At other times, they are quite secluded, with ample time to focus and investigate their own practice (Cafe, 2011).

In the frame of Be SpectACTive!, artistic residencies follow the “audience-focused” model and require the artist to engage with audience members. Artists are expected to include groups of local spectators in their working process. The groups of spectators engaged in the residencies reflect the particular interests of the artists and each host organisation is responsible for creating these connections (e.g. the artists can choose specific demographic and social characteristics of the audience they want to work with). At the end of each residency the artist is expected to present their work in an open rehearsal and engage with the audience members in an open dialogue. An important part of the Be SpectACTive! residency program is the production of digital content and interaction with audience online before, during and after the residency. The aim is to receive feedback from audience members and encourage them to join the discussion with the artist during the creation process including early stages, ideas, inspiration material, etc.

## Audience

Audience is a collective term that includes a variety of different and often opposing points of view: there are many terms used to describe the cultural audience (spectators, visitors, members, customers, users, consumers, participants, paying spectators, attendance, rarely people). Public funded cultural players usually consider audience in terms of “attendance”, “viewers” or “visitors”, as receivers who seal a pact and, more or less implicitly, are part of a community.

Three main audience categories can be outlined (Bollo et al., 2017):

◆ **Audience by habit.** People who usually attend and/or participate in cultural activities, whose barriers to access are relatively easy to overcome, and towards whom different strategies are possible, like audience education to attract similar audiences not currently participating; taste cultivation to increase and diversify content and attendance. “Habit” in this framework means that those audiences are familiar with the idea of *being an audience*, therefore cultural experiences are not just something they are used to do, but much more a part of their identity and self-perception.

◆ **Audience by choice.** People for whom participating is not a habit, or who rarely choose to attend a show or a concert, but don’t have any particular social or cultural disadvantage; to engage them different strategies are possible, as extended marketing but also education and participatory approaches.

◆ **Audience by surprise.** People hard to reach/indifferent/hostile who do not participate in any cultural activity for a complex range of reasons, related to social exclusion factors, education and accessibility. Their participation could hardly be possible without an intentional, long-term and targeted approach.

Kawashima’s approach enables a deeper comprehension of the “not easily available audiences”, arguing that the concept of not easily available audiences ranges from those who have almost never attended any arts events to lapsed or infrequent attenders (Kawashima, 2000). Considering the above-mentioned issues, it is clear that these categories might in some cases overlap, since the boundaries among them are not neat. These are in fact flexible categories, which should help organisations in better understanding their audiences not as self-explaining audiences’ segmentations but as tools to be used in relationship with the strategies of widening, deepening and diversifying audiences and with the key action fields (Bollo et al., 2017).

## Active audience theory

The view (particularly associated with mass-media usage) that the audiences are not merely passive receptacles for imposed meanings

but rather individual audience members who are actively (albeit often unconsciously) involved — both cognitively and emotionally — in making sense of art works. This active involvement has several interrelated dimensions: perception, comprehension, interpretation, evaluation, and response. Proponents of active audience theory claim that we cannot assume that the meaning of an artwork is fixed in advance of its reception because meaning is the product of a negotiation between the audience and the text in a particular context of reception (Chandler and Munday, 2011).

The spectator is active, just like the student or the scientist: S/he observes, s/he selects, s/he compares, s/he interprets. S/he connects what s/he observes with many other things s/he has observed on other stages, in other kinds of spaces. S/he makes her/his poem with the poem that is performed in front of her/him. S/he participates in the performance if s/he is able to tell her/his own story about the story that is in front of her/him (Rancière, 2011).

### **Audience diversification**

Based on the term “diversity” which is used in the broadest sense to cover considerations of age, gender, ethnicity, cultural background, disability and sexuality. Audience diversification is aiming to take steps to include people as equally as possible based on the premise that publicly funded arts, culture and heritage, supported by public funds, are predominantly accessed by an unnecessarily narrow social, economic, ethnic and educated demographic that is not fully representative of the population (Warwick Commission on the Future of Cultural Value, 2015).

There are two kinds of arguments for diversification: there is the argument on the morally right thing to do, which is philosophically based and the one that most staff and boards from arts and culture organisations identifies with. The other one is the “financial” argument, which focuses on the economic stability of the institution in the long term: we need to engage diverse audiences now in order to ensure a smooth transition as demographics change, it is a matter of sustainability (Acevedo, 2011).

Despite a strong desire to attract a greater diversity of people to attend and participate in the arts, there remains a lot of conjecture

and fear surrounding the programming of so-called “diverse” work and what effect it might have on existing audiences. This is compounded by the financial uncertainty that many arts organisations find themselves in. The barriers to engagement of those currently underrepresented in arts audiences appear to be numerous and deeply ingrained, and the arts sector acknowledges that a sustained, long-term effort focused on outreach and education is required to shift the perceptions of those who believe the arts are “not for them”. But a more fundamental issue is whether the sector needs to reevaluate its artistic offer, including the concepts of “high quality” and “diverse” art. Ultimately, all the issues surrounding diversity in the arts are of circular nature: a more diverse audience will not be attracted until the artistic workforce is diversified and becomes capable of presenting high-quality art that appeals to a wider range of people. But this is difficult – and potentially costly – to do without the engagement of those who are currently underrepresented (Richens, 2017).

### **Audience development**

Audience development (AD) is the active and deliberate process of creating meaningful, long-term connections between people and an art organisation. Strategic AD goes beyond increasing visitor numbers, aiming to build community ownership, participation, relationship with, and support for the organisation, its programme and its people (Lipps, 2015a).

Audience development is a strategic, dynamic and interactive process of making the arts widely accessible. It aims at engaging individuals and communities in experiencing, enjoying, participating in and valuing the arts through various means available today for cultural operators, from digital tools to volunteering, from co-creation to partnerships. Audience development can be understood in various ways, depending on its objectives and target groups (Bollo et al., 2017):

- ◆ increasing audiences (attracting audiences with the same socio-demographic profile as the current audience);
- ◆ deepening relationship with the audiences (enhancing the experience of the current audiences in relation to a cultural event

and/or encouraging them to discover related or even non-related, more complex art forms, thus fostering loyalty and return visits);

- ◆ diversifying audiences (attracting people with a different socio-demographic profile than the current audiences, including people with no previous contact with the arts).

Three drivers for Audience Development can be highlighted:

- ◆ Responsibility: public funding and policy imperative to be inclusive, promote cohesion;
- ◆ Revenue: sustainability, low public subsidy;
- ◆ Relevance: speaks to and for whole communities, wider society, social justice.

### **Audience Empowerment**

In a general sense “empowerment” is defined as a process, a mechanism by which people, organisations, and communities gain mastery over their affairs (Rappaport, 1987). In this way it refers to the capability of individuals, communities and groups to access and use their personal/collective power, authority and influence, and to employ that strength when engaging with other people, institutions or society (Punie, 2011). In the concept of audience empowerment, sovereign audience perspectives are not seen as challenges to authority but rather as catalysts for engagement through productive talk. The ultimate goal is to authorise everyone in the room to feel, to think, and to understand (Conner, 2013).

According to several arts audience research academics, our goal should be to empower audiences to engage in constructive and pleasurable dialogue about the arts. Our mission should include offering twenty-first-century arts goes a bill of rights assuring that every member of the audience has by definition not only the right to interpret but also the right to be heard as a viable interpreter. In order to create a more perfect union of arts workers and arts audiences for the twenty-first century, we need to acknowledge that when it comes to making meaning and ascribing value, our audiences want to have a voice, and they want that voice to matter (Conner, 2017).

Some understand audience empowerment and validating audience experience as a new measure of quality in the performing arts

and genuine representation of the audience’s interests, drawn from their experiences, in decision-making by an arts organisation (Radbourne et al., 2010).

Some arts organisations and theatre companies claim to empower the audience through opportunities to tell their own personal stories—including stories of social marginalisation—which are then played back to them by a company of actors and musicians (Park-Fuller, 2003). Some other techniques use theatre as means of promoting social and political change (Theatre of the Oppressed) where the audience becomes active, like in the case of “spect-actors” who explore, show, analyse and transform the reality in which they are living (Boal, 2000).

### **Audience Engagement**

Audience engagement is a unifying philosophy bringing together marketing, education and artistic programming in common service of maximising impact on audiences (Brown and Ratzkin, 2011). This term is used to highlight the dimensions of involvement in the arts. Audience engagement is considered as one of the two phases of the more purely operative audience development, that is the phase of reach (ways to get in touch with the audience) and the phase of engage (engagement actions based on relations and mutuality). It is, therefore, a phase made up of heterogeneous and articulated processes, actions and organisational behaviours that may include activities and mediation devices; active involvement through workshops, educational activities, digital devices, intercultural approaches; public participation in the planning of cultural activities and creating expressive, artistic and creative content (co-creation, active spectatorship); outreach (Bollo et al., 2017).

### **Co-creation**

Activity where audience members contribute to an artistic experience curated by a professional artist (Brown and Ratzkin, 2011). Arts and cultural products are also often imbued with co-creation activities (i.e. by both the producer and the consumer). Co-creation has been defined as the processes by which both consumers and

producers collaborate, or otherwise participate, in creating value (Pongsakornrungrungsilp and Schroeder, 2011).

In a view of marketing specialists, artistic and cultural value co-creation activities are subsequently undertaken by stakeholders such as patrons and funding bodies. These actors recognise the artistic potential and attempt to diffuse it, generally to individuals and organisations labelled as “experts” (critics, theatres, museums, etc.). The final stage of the co-creation relates to the interaction of the consumer with the art and culture production. This transition from one actor to another implies progressive enhancement in its social value and subsequently its economic value (Botti, 2000).

### Co-managing

In the frame of Be SpectACTive!, co-managing refers to activities where the general management of a festival or a theatre season is shadowed by audience members. The main aim is to experiment with forms in which the notion of audience engagement is pushed and experimented at different organisational levels. This does not mean we want to make every single spectator take over the management of theatres and festivals, but open opportunity exists for those who would like to take part and give it a go in a fully supported environment.

### Co-commissioning

In the frame of Be SpectACTive! we understand the term as citizens commissioning the artistic residencies with local partners, which allows participation of the specific audience group before the artistic residency. The aim is to extend the participation to the spectators’ command of art work. This concept is based on the so called *Nouveaux Commanditaires* protocol where the art is understood as a tool for constructing democracy. The aim of the *Nouveaux Commanditaires* protocol is to take on the challenge of creating a common world with individuals who have become free and equal, with different conceptions and convictions by opening a new chapter in the history of art. The concept builds on the premise that over two centuries after the democratic revolutions, citizens still remain the great absentee from the art scene even though this is the terrain

where they could freely exert, test and solve their fundamental cultural needs. In order to give a voice to these great absentees and enable them to play a role, the actions of the *Nouveaux Commanditaires* give responsibility to the audience as an active player and create situations where the citizen becomes equal to the artist and acquires the authority to publicly express a need to create as well as to assess what is produced in the name of art. These reflect and demonstrate the fact that both citizens and artists have the intelligence and the courage necessary to highlight contemporary cultural necessities and act consequently (Hers, 2017).

An example of the 3 steps of co-commissioning within the frame of Be SpectACTive! is provided (Be SpectACTive!, 2017):

- 1) each venue may identify a context within which a group participates in an artistic order related to some aspects of their own situation;
- 2) this group would be accompanied by a mediator who analyses the request and connects with artists;
- 3) the group formally commissions the work to the artist who is then invited to create through an artistic residency with the group.

### Collective intelligence

Collective intelligence is shared or group intelligence that emerges from the collaboration, collective efforts, and competition of many individuals and appears in consensus decision making. The term appears in sociobiology, political science and in context of mass peer review and crowdsourcing applications. It may involve consensus, social capital and formalisms such as voting systems, social media and other means of quantifying mass activity. Collective intelligence strongly contributes to the shift of knowledge and power from the individual to the collective. Philosophers (Jenkins, 2006; Levy, 1999) support the claim that collective intelligence is important for democratisation, as it is interlinked with knowledge-based culture, sustained by collective idea sharing, and, thus, contributes to a better understanding of diverse society.

### Collective problem solving

Problem solving is applied on many different levels – from the individual to the civilisational. Collective problem solving refers to problem solving performed collectively. It has been noted that the complexity of contemporary problems has exceeded the cognitive capacity of any individual and requires different but complementary expertise and collective problem solving ability. Social issues and global issues can typically only be solved collectively (Novick and Bassok, 2005).

With the Internet, a new capacity for collective, including planetary-scale, problem solving was created (Flew, 2008). Crowdsourcing is a process of accumulating the ideas, thoughts or information from many independent participants, with the aim to find the best solution for a given challenge. Modern information technologies allow for a massive number of subjects to be involved as well as systems of managing these suggestions that provide good results (Engelbart, 1962).

### Cultural democracy

Cultural democracy can be seen as presenting as valid the public's chosen forms of cultural expression and engagement, rather than promoting a prescribed definition of what is included in "the arts".

The Pillars of Cultural Democracy (Kelly, 1985) can be described as follows:

- ◆ A genuine cultural pluralism;
- ◆ People should have rights of access both to cultural outputs, and the means of cultural input;
- ◆ Does not oppose the high arts;
- ◆ Not concerned with producing the "right art";
- ◆ Wants to produce conditions within which communities can have their own creative voices recognised and given sufficient space to develop.

### Cultural development

The process of enabling cultural activities, including the arts, towards the realisation of a desired future, particularly of a culturally rich and vibrant community (Cultural Development Network, n.d.).

### Decision-making role

In the frame of Be SpectACTive! this term acknowledges the audience taste as an important component of the artistic decision-making process. Participation in the decision-making process is an indicator of the role that the public, as audience members and as citizens, played in evaluating important pieces of institutional art in the history of Western tradition. This type of social interpretation also points to a fundamental desire among cultural consumers to be heard in a way that matters (Conner, 2013).

### Democratic engagement

Public conversation is facilitated in a respectful, thoughtful, and democratic way (meaning everyone gets to talk, everyone gets to listen). According to audience-oriented approaches, the more arts workers accept and encourage this idea, the healthier the arts industry will be (Conner, 2013).

### Democratisation of culture

Democratisation of culture is underpinned by a long-standing belief in the value of the civilising aspects of art and culture and thereby a concomitant desire to democratise access to it. Democratisation of culture refers to processes where the "official" culture, typically represented by large and well-funded institutions, is made accessible to non-participating communities, often in the belief that it will do them good. It is a plan of action based on the belief that cultural development proceeds from the improved distribution of the experiences and products of high culture (Adams and Goldbart, 1988).

### Interactive experience

Interactive art is a genre of art in which the viewers participate in some way by providing an input in order to determine the outcome. Unlike traditional art forms wherein the interaction of the spectator is merely a mental event, interactivity allows for various types of navigation, assembly, and/or contribution to an artwork, which goes far beyond purely psychological activity (Paul, 2003). Interactivity as a medium produces meaning (Muller et al., 2006).



Interactive art can be divided into 4 categories in ascending order, in relation to the openness of the system and the consequent level/depth of user interaction (Dixon, 2007):

◆ **Navigation** = the “simplest” form of interaction, e.g. single click of a control device to answer “Yes or No” to a screen prompt, or to indicate “Right, Left, Up or Down”, it is the very act of web surfing and includes interaction with varied Net art pieces and hypertext narratives.

◆ **Participation** = here the sense of direct agency is limited and interactivity operates more on the level of cooperation than conversation.

◆ **Conversation** = dialogue that is reciprocated and is subject to real interchange and exchange. Twofold conversation – through its sophisticated level of spectator control (e.g. “conversation” between user and software); and in the interactions between users themselves, who come together and “converse”. Complex relationship or negotiation established between the user/audience and the work, which is reliant on issues such as trust, cooperation, and openness.

◆ **Collaboration** = doing something that alters significantly the artwork/interactive performance space itself. Interactive collaboration comes about when the interacting person becomes a major author or co-author of the artwork, experience, performance or narrative. In the context of *Be SpectACTive!*, this notion of “collaboration” refers to the same meaning as “co-creation” (see co-creation in this glossary).

### Local groups

This term is often used in the *Be SpectACTive!* vocabulary and it indicates groups of spectators regularly engaged in participatory activities of the partner organisations (residencies, co-programming, European Spectators Day, etc.). Usually this term is used in relation to “loyal audience” members who have closer relationship with the partner organisations than random visitors.

### Participation

The 2009 UNESCO Framework for Cultural Statistics (FCS) defines cultural participation as including: cultural practices that may involve consumption as well as activities that are undertaken within the community, reflecting quality of life, traditions and beliefs. It includes attendance at formal events, such as going to a movie or to a concert, as well as informal cultural action, such as participating in community cultural activities and amateur artistic productions or everyday activities like reading a book. Moreover, cultural participation covers both active and passive behaviours. It includes the person who is listening to a concert and the person who practices music. The purpose of cultural participation surveys should be to assess overall participation levels, even though it may be difficult to distinguish active from passive behaviour (UNESCO, 2009).

If, on the contrary, we accept the concept of participation within the larger domain of everyday life and citizenship exercised with forms, voices and diverse social dynamics, the processes in place are characterised by a greater degree of people leadership and involvement. All models offer an interpretation of the public distribution based on the nature of its relationship with the cultural practice. Several researchers have theorised models based on the nature of the relationship between audience and cultural institutions.

### Participatory programming

In general, a participatory activity is characterised by providing the opportunity for people to be involved in deciding how something is done. In the context of *Be SpectACTive!*, participatory programming refers to the continuous dialogue between leaders of the programming activity in each of the partner organisations and their local group of spectators. The term signified regularity of opportunities to discuss the programming and consequently leads to specific programming decisions.

### Peer to peer learning

Peer learning is an educational practice in which students interact with other students to attain educational goals (O’Donnell and King, 1999). Whether it takes place in a formal or informal



learning context, in small groups or online, peer learning manifests aspects of self-organisation that are mostly absent from pedagogical models of teaching and learning.

### **Performing arts**

Traditionally recognised as forms of creative activity performed in front of an audience, such as drama, music, and dance (“Performing Arts”, n.d.). The performing arts range from vocal and instrumental music, dance and theatre to pantomime, sung verse and beyond. They include numerous cultural expressions that reflect human creativity and that are also found, to some extent, in many other intangible cultural heritage domains (Ich.unesco.org, n.d.). The traditional notion of the “staged performance”, which is being performed in front of the audience, has been continuously challenged since the 1960s. Today, performing arts include so called “immersive” techniques and various methods of augmenting the reality when the audience member, its presence and action (or inaction) becomes part of the artwork and the boundaries between artist-spectators and stage-auditorium are blurred.

### **Process-oriented**

This term refers to activities that emphasise or focus on processes, systems, or procedures rather than results or underlying causes (“Process-oriented”, n.d.). A process-oriented approach emphasises that creative activity itself is a developmental process that creates self-discovery and meaning. Process-oriented approaches concern the process of how ideas are developed and formulated in creation. Involvement in an artistic creation is considered a process through which meaning is created and it can involve exploring and experimenting with materials and techniques without the aim to generate an outcome. The process is characterised by following intuition, making mistakes and letting go of a set outcome in favour of discovering what emerges in the moment.

This way of making art gives space and opens the door for discoveries and surprises on the level of the arts and on the level of personal experiences. There are no right or wrong ways to act on the level of personal experiences and there is no close leading of the

audience member - for example by demonstrating how to do it. A professional provides a frame and a safe container and serves as a witness with open presence and sometimes motivates audience members to do a step into the unknown. In this way, it is believed that process orientation does not exclude the leading tasks of the professionals (Eberhart and Atkins, 2014).

### **Product-oriented**

Action where a product is created in line with the producer’s own self-desire. The outcome is then offered to the audience who choose to accept or decline. In the context of Be SpectACTive! the term is usually used in order to label activities which prioritise the aim to create a finished artwork, i.e. a live performance ready for programming or touring, rather than considering the process of creation itself as sufficient result in terms of creating value and meaning making.

### **Live production**

Live art production comes into being at the actual moment of encounter between artist and spectator. Or at least, even if they are not physically present, the artist sets up a situation in which the audience experiences the work in a particular space and time, and the notion of “presence” is key to the concerns of the work (Sofaer, 2002). Live art has always broken the rules of cultural production and exchange. It is often as much about the process of making art as the artwork itself, often made in response to a specific place and space, and often collaborative, blurring the distinctions between spectators and participants and stimulating dialogues (Keidan, 2010).

### **Digital production**

Definition based on “digital performance”, which is broadly defined to include all performance works where computer technologies play a key role rather than a subsidiary one in content, techniques, aesthetics, or delivery forms. In the frame of Be SpectACTive!, it refers to the process of generating digital content before, during and after an artistic residency which is primarily produced for the Be SpectACTive! online platform in order to encourage a high degree of

interactive experience (see above) with audience members. The aim is to generate co-creative, collaborative action (see above). Interactive collaboration comes about when the interacting person becomes a major author or co-author of the artwork, experience, performance or narrative. The collaboration may be between a single spectator and the computer/virtual environment, but more usually occurs when spectators work together with others to create a new work by means of computer technologies or within a virtual environment.

Collaboration is one of the digital performance's most pronounced and characteristic features. Projects and installations where visitors insert material that is then directly stored and incorporated in the artwork can also be regarded as collaborative interaction, although the degree of artistic impact on the piece overall clearly varies from work to work (Dixon, 2007).

### **Professional**

Frequent word in the Be SpectACTive! vocabulary, used as a noun as well as an adjective. The term refers to individuals whose type of job needs a high level of education and training. Other sources understand "a professional" as someone who has a particular profession as a permanent career. As an adjective, the term is used to describe quality and relates to work that needs special training, education, skills, organisation, seriousness of manner ("Professional", n.d.).

### **Social cohesion**

Social cohesion refers to the extent of connectedness and solidarity among groups in society. Social connection refers to two broader, intertwined features of society, which may be described as: 1) the absence of latent social conflict – whether in the form of income/wealth inequality; racial/ethnic tensions; disparities in political participation; or other forms of polarisation; and 2) the presence of strong social bonds – measured by levels of trust and norms of reciprocity (i.e. social capital); the abundance of associations that bridge social divisions (civil society); and the presence of institutions of conflict management (e.g. responsive democracy, independent judiciary and so forth) (Berkman and Kawachi, 2000).

Social cohesion is defined as the willingness of members of a society to cooperate with each other in order to survive and prosper. Willingness to cooperate means they freely choose to form partnerships and have a reasonable chance of realising goals, because others are willing to cooperate and share the fruits of their endeavours equitably (Stanley, 2003).

### **Social exclusion**

A state and/or a dynamic process, which prevents an individual from participating in the social, political and economic system of his/her own country. These dimensions can easily overlap because of their interrelated nature. Social exclusion represents a broader term compared to poverty and it defines those people who, whether living in poverty or not, do not participate in the different systems of society: it refers to the lack or rupture of relationships between individuals and their families, friends, community, state (Bollo et al., 2017).

### **Trans-local dimension**

Translocality is used to describe socio-spatial dynamics and processes of simultaneity and identity formation that transcend boundaries – including, but also extending beyond, those of nation states. Sometimes, translocality (or translocalism) is used as a synonym for transnationalism. As such, the term usually describes phenomena involving mobility, migration, circulation, and spatial interconnectedness not necessarily limited to national boundaries. Translocality can be also defined as a space in which new forms of (post)national identity are constituted, it can also refer to being identified with more than one location.

As such, the concept is used to simultaneously address localities and mobilities within a holistic context. Such an approach overcomes the notion of container spaces and the dichotomy between "here" and "there", between "rural" and "urban".

Translocality, thus, refers to the emergence of multidirectional and overlapping networks that facilitate the circulation of people, resources, practices and ideas. Translocality emphasises significant spatial scales beyond the national entities and their specific non-

hierarchical interactions and configurations. In particular, it highlights the importance of networked places, which are constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as place (Greiner and Sakdapolrak, 2013).

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