

Shared Stages:

**A comprehensive
guide to
participatory
circus**

**Insights and breakthroughs
from the BETA CIRCUS
participatory experience**





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Italian



Portuguese



Latvian



Serbian



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**“It was especially moving to see
a 92-year-old villager in the
audience, listening to parts of her
own story aloud in the square,
and her daughter's tears
as she thanked us for giving her
mother this spotlight.”**

Lali Álvarez Garriga (ES)

1.

**From spotlight
to participation:
blending the
circus arts with
community
engagement**

Circus arts have long been one of the colourful, brightening elements in the cultural landscape and a source of incredible skillful presentation. However, untapped potential rests in using circus arts as a way of fostering deeper engagement and empowerment within communities. BETA CIRCUS Participatory experience aimed to embark on an ambitious journey in connecting the world of circus arts to participatory arts. This toolkit is the brainchild of the creative process involved in this project and encapsulates the translation from idea to action, offering an exploration into the transformative potential that lies at the intersection of circus arts and participatory practices.

At the heart of this project lies the recognition that contemporary circus, while growing significantly in Europe, has yet to fully embrace participatory methods that have gained traction in other art forms. Participatory arts do not concern involving audiences as passive onlookers but engaging them as active co-creators within the artistic process. It increases the level of community involvement in the approach and turns the artistic experience into a collaborative journey. Conventionally, the circus has been about a spectacle to be presented for an audience, usually leaving them in a role such as an observer. BETA CIRCUS seeks to break this dynamic by creating a framework in which the audience becomes part of the process of creation. The project brings together a consortium of partners, including Bússola from Portugal, Teatro Necessario from Italy, Rīgas Cirks from Latvia, and Ludifico from Serbia. Each of these brings on board its diversity and added-value to this pioneering project. The organisations are spread across different regions in Europe but share one idea: to explore new ways of engaging with communities and pushing the boundaries of contemporary circus.

The journey from project proposal to implementation epitomises a dynamic interplay between ambition and practical challenges. Initially, aligning the diverse artistic visions of the partners with the goal of participatory engagement proved to be challenging. But this process also crystallised flexibility and adaptability: basic tools in the delicate balance between artistic ambitions and community needs



and expectations. Thus, the project mentors were key to facilitating a participatory process by circus artists working with deference and a relationship of mutual respect and learning. The artists had to stand back and let go of the leadership role to guarantee that the artistic process was collaborative and inclusive. This integration in itself of the participatory arts in a context of circus arts is a big leap from the traditional ways of things. In participatory arts, there has to be a stepping back as an artist to allow participants the agency and creativity in shaping the final output. It appeals for an entirely new reconsideration of the relationship between the artist and the audience: to make creator and spectator roles fluid and interchangeable. Embracing participatory methodologies can turn the eyes of circus artists toward other art forms that have managed to effectively integrate community engagement into their practice. This toolkit acts as a guide for artists and organisations interested in this new frontier with practical strategies and understandings of the participatory process.

This thus offers the potential for dissemination of this experience throughout the circus sector, with a potentially profound impact. As more artists and organisations take up participatory practices, the possibilities within circus arts increase, offering in turn deeper opportunities for community engagement and cultural exchange. Thus, it is in this shift that the transformation of local cultural policies into a more inclusive and participatory cultural landscape for Europe can be rooted. BETA CIRCUS Participatory experience is not an isolated experiment but a forerunner to a more extensive movement within the circus community. To this end, the learning experiences and developed methodologies are to be shared in order to encourage other practitioners of circus arts to participate in these kinds of arts, further enhancing their community's richness of culture and beyond. This project has been co-funded by the European Union through the Creative Europe programme, which simply highlights the relevance of transnational collaboration in boosting artistic and cultural development. The program presented the consortium with the opportunity to explore uncharted territories of the circus arts by offering the appropriate resources and frame for risk-taking and innovation. It has also underlined the role European cooperation can play in fostering artistic creativity, supporting cultural diversity, and creating opportunities for new art forms and community-based activities to develop.

The conclusion of this project marks not just the end of a phase but the beginning of a new era for circus arts. Proper dissemination of results and knowledge gained from

the project is one of the most important steps towards the long-term impact of the initiative. By making the developed methodologies and insights part of the BETA CIRCUS Participatory experience initiative available, a new wave of participatory practices within the circus arts community can be inspired. This implies making accessible platforms for knowledge exchange and creating dialogues between artists, cultural organisations, and communities. This toolkit, alongside the other resources, will be invaluable for artists looking to engage in participatory practices and helping guide and inspire the integration of these methods into their work. Seeing this likely impact, we envision a future where circus arts are not only a show to watch but are a platform for collaboration and connection — one in which communities stand as active participants within the creative process. This vision can refocus the role of circus arts in society, making them a powerful tool for cultural engagement and social change. Embracing participatory methodologies opens up new avenues for the creation of vivid artistic experiences that, in turn, are inclusive and resonate with both audiences and participants.

“Once we provided them a safe frame to express themselves, very beautiful and artful things came out. Not only in the stories they shared but also through their willingness to move, to play, to dance, to connect and try new and “risky” things with us.”

Ana Jordão & Vincent Kollar (PT/DE)





2.

**Understanding
participatory arts**

Participatory arts is a dynamic field, characterised by diversity and fluidity — the parameters are elusive; it can be hard to pin down in one definitive version. The aim of this toolkit is to give a broad overview on participatory arts in our project, and it does so through discussing some core principles at length while also respecting that these practices are essentially fluid. Community arts, socially engaged art and collaborative art often all come under the term “participatory arts”, a move that signals an important shift in these swollen times when it is no longer clear where the artist ends and audience begins. These modes of artmaking are ones in which artists partner with communities — in capacities ranging from bare collaborations to more fully integrated practices — to create meaningful, socially impactful art that falls across a wide spectrum.

The collaborative nature of participatory arts

The essence of participatory arts is collaboration. Unlike most traditional forms of art, wherein a lone artist is cooped up in his or her studio to come up with a final output, participatory arts have the element of shared decision-making. Claire Bishop, in her seminal work “Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship” (2012), contends that these practices have perturbed previous modes of art production by now putting directly into the creative work the audience. This not only transforms the dynamic previously existing between an artist and an audience but also challenges traditional notions of artistic borders that enclose the process of making art, thereby resulting in artworks reflective of a multiplicity of voices and perspectives. Andrew Mount’s exploration of participatory practices in “Participation, Hosting And Mimesis: The Double Being” (2012) delves into the dual role of the artist as both host and participant. This duality underscores the delicate balance between guiding the creative process and actively engaging with participants. In this context, the artist acts as a facilitator, creating an environment where shared experiences and mutual influence shape the artistic outcome. Mount’s analysis

underlines the need for creating a collaborative space where diverse perspectives can be examined and artistic works created. Arlene Goldbard and François Matarasso, in their work “Ethics and Participatory Art” (Art and Community Notebook N.01, 2021), emphasise the ethical dimensions of participatory practices. They assert that inclusivity and respect are fundamental principles that underpin participatory arts. By engaging diverse groups, including those who are often marginalised or underrepresented, these practices ensure that a broad spectrum of experiences and viewpoints shape the work. This inclusivity is not merely a procedural requirement but a core principle that drives the process, ensuring that all participants’ contributions are valued and ethically managed.

“Participatory art requires the artist that they either not be present, or that they somehow are able to recede far enough to become equal with the participants. This is the only way that participants might be offered the agency of creation; without this detail, participants will always respond within the domain of authority of the artist; they will be subjugated in this way, and the work will fail to be participatory. This detail is centrally important in asserting participation as a form in itself, and effectively differentiates participation from interactive, community based art and socially engaged art.”

Andrew Mount (2012). *Participation, Hosting And Mimesis: The Double Being*.

Process over product

Another major characteristic of participatory arts is its process-oriented feature. Unlike more traditional art forms, which concern themselves mainly with the end result, in participatory arts, equal — and at times more — consideration is placed on the journey of actually creating it. Craig Vear, in “The Routledge International Handbook of Practice-Based Research” (2022), says that on the methodological level of description, participatory arts practices have been explicitly aligned with iterative and practice-based research methods. Through this continuous feedback between artists and participants, the creative process is enriched in a way that allows for dynamic and organic exploration of ideas. This process-oriented approach highlights the collaborative and experimental nature of participatory arts, where the act of making art is as significant as the end result. Participatory arts are also deeply context-specific, adapting to the unique needs and circumstances of the

communities involved. Paul Cooke and Inés Soria-Donlan, in their edited volume “Participatory Arts in International Development” (2020), explore how these practices can address local issues and reflect cultural identities. They argue that participatory art practices are instrumental in fostering social change, building community cohesion, and empowering individuals. The adaptability of participatory arts ensures that they resonate with the specific contexts in which they are situated, making them a powerful tool for community engagement and development. The outcomes of participatory arts projects can be diverse, ranging from performances and visual art installations to other forms of creative expression. This variety reflects the fluid nature of participatory arts, where the results are shaped by the collaborative process and the specific contexts of their creation. The dynamic and evolving nature of these outcomes is a testament to the success of participatory arts in creating a space where art becomes a collective experience.

Insights from the BETA CIRCUS Participatory experience labs

The BETA CIRCUS Participatory Experience laboratories eloquently express the diversity and adaptability of participatory arts practices. Reports by Marleen Scholten and Ana Bragança & Ricardo Baptista (Ondamarela), in their unique way, stress the issues of international collaboration and community engagement. It brings artists of different origin and disciplines together into one setting where the rich varieties of perspectives may influence creation. This enriches not only the artistic outcome but also the connections among participants and communities. Marleen Scholten’s reflections on the BETA CIRCUS Participatory experience Lab#2 underline once again the strength of cross-border artistic collaboration. She stated that bringing together artists from another country and discipline allows for a setting where new ideas and approaches can emerge. This diversity of perspectives enriches not only the creative process but also testifies to a broader commitment to artistic solidarity and exchange. Here, the emphasis on international collaboration gives expression to the potential for participatory arts to break through cultural and geographical boundaries, redounding to a sense of global community and shared purpose. Ana Bragança & Ricardo Baptista further explore the transformative potential of participatory arts. Ondamarela draws inspiration from people and places in the development of projects with dimensions of art, social intervention, and education. They underline how it is powerful to give people a voice in the making



of a work of art. It stresses that people and communities have the potential to effectively participate and produce influential change in democracy. This work evidences the ability of participatory arts to involve communities in the building of an idea of shared ownership and agency. Another good example of how participatory arts can help in discussing and solving social problems is the work by Nicola Borghesi and Enrico Baraldi with Kepler-452. It has involved non-professional performers and local communities in the creation process, therefore developing performances based on participants' life experiences that give voice to voices often unheard. This not only enriches the artistic outcome but also creates understanding and appreciation for diverse perspectives.

The role of participatory arts in addressing social issues

Participatory arts occupy a special place in the context of tackling social issues and provoking important conversations. In her report from the BETA CIRCUS Participatory Experience Lab#1, Samara Hersh provides examples of instances when participatory arts have spoken to identity, belongingness, and community. This can be facilitated by opening an area for reflection and dialogue through which individuals can delve into their experiences and relate to others by engaging participants in the creativity process. According to Corinne Linder, the great potential of participatory arts lies in the empowering of people and communities. In addition, participatory arts could provide a sense of ownership and self-efficacy for the actors, offering them an arena within which they feel that their voices are heard and of value. This empowerment is not only beneficial for the individuals involved but also for the broader community, as it fosters a sense of connection and cohesion.

Ethical considerations in participatory arts

Among the very fundamental reflections of participatory arts that a practitioner takes into consideration is their ethical dimensions. In her report from the BETA CIRCUS Participatory experience Lab#1, Lali Alvarez Garriga places strong emphasis on ethic engagement for participatory practices. She argues that an artist should commit to the creation of a safe and inclusive environment in which all participants feel valued and respected. This is key to the idea of building a collaborative, inclusive creative process. A second guiding principle in the



participatory arts could be said to be the concept of inclusivity and respect. Arlene Goldbard and François Matarasso (2021) have already expressed in their work on ethics in participatory arts that the participatory arts should be underpinned by a commitment to ethical engagement. This means taking care of the contributions from participants through their ethical management. It is not a procedural necessity in itself but a guiding core principle of the process that seeks to ensure participatory arts are inclusive, meaningful, and transformative.

The impact and potential of participatory arts

It is, therefore, in essence, a dynamic and transformational area of work with innate possibilities of collaboration, creativity, and community engagement. Participatory arts create meaning and impactful art that resonates with communities to make a difference in fostering social change by setting up a collaborative space in which many different perspectives are considered and accorded equal respect. Participatory arts are those which do not allow for a marked line that separates the artist from the audience, rather provides a space of collaboration within which art happens as a co-existence and is evolving in experience. Participatory arts combine ideas of inclusivity, ethical engagement, and creativity while remaining process-oriented. As such, it offers a very special and impactful approach to the practice of art. This toolkit will frame those practices within a structured approach, based on the BETA CIRCUS Participatory experience project, to give clear guidance while conserving the inherent flexibility of participatory arts and their relationship with circus arts.

Concept

Also known as “community arts” or “socially engaged art,” participatory arts entail the collaboration of artists with communities in the production of work that can be meaningful and impactful. Such practices blur the distinction between the role of the artist and the audience, building a shared creativity.

Collaboration and co-creation

Characterised by common decision-making processes in which ideas, skills, and perspectives from the artists and members of the community are integrated for a common process to influence the final outcome, therefore giving a multiplicity of voices and, potentially, the reflection of diverse points of view in the art.

Inclusive engagement

Keen on inclusion, works with diverse groups, including those who are marginalised or underrepresented, and ensures that their voices are shaping the work. Ethical engagement and respect are central in safeguarding a safe and welcoming environment for all participants.

Process-oriented

Emphasise the process of making rather than the end result. The journey, that is collaborative, and the interaction are at least as important as the end result. Iterative feedback loops and practice-based research methods enrich creation.

Empowerment and skill-building

Aims to empower participants by developing new skills and expressing creativity, fostering personal growth, confidence, and a sense of community. By engaging in the artistic process, individuals gain a sense of ownership and agency over the work.

Context-specific

Individual adaptation to the specific contexts and needs of the communities involved either in relation to local issues or as a means of expressing cultural identities: participatory arts practices for social change, community cohesion, and empowerment of persons.

Dynamic outcomes

Outcomes are variable and fluid, as performances, visual arts installations, or other types of artistic expression might well ensue from such collaboration. What exactly these results look like will depend on the specific situations and contributions of participants.

Ethical considerations

Emphasises the importance of ethical engagement, ensuring that participants' contributions are valued and managed responsibly. Inclusivity and respect are core principles, fostering an environment where diverse voices and perspectives are acknowledged and appreciated.

Social impact and change

Participatory arts have the potential to address social issues, promote dialogue, and foster understanding among diverse groups. By engaging communities in the artistic process, these practices can create meaningful social change and build stronger, more cohesive communities.

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3.

BETA CIRCUS
Participatory
Experience

BETA CIRCUS Participatory Experience was the very first collaborative project aimed to build a European transnational platform for exploring participatory circus as a future trend by involving the public in the creative process. This initiative strived to make audiences co-authors, editors, and observers of artistic work, increasing the relation between communities and contemporary circus. By developing participatory arts methodologies in the circus scene, BETA CIRCUS wanted to express participation by local communities at the highest level in the creative process. The project brought contemporary arts closer to intangible local cultural heritage by means of unconventional artistic spaces, such as public areas, thus making local inhabitants co-creators alongside professional artists. It was an increase in the artistic process, but also a part of the cultural landscaping with different identities and stories of participating communities.

The project represented a collaborative partnership among Italy, Latvia, Portugal, and Serbia, with groundwork laid toward a European vision and methodology. It was open to artists from all over Europe who wished to experience participatory work in the circus arts. Through an open call, circus artists were selected to join local collectives with experience in participatory arts, and they collaborated dynamically with expert mentors. Among the principal steps of the process were artistic residencies, co-design meetings, and artistic research, which were held in chosen locations with local communities and closed with public performances. This was a test and exploration of future potential trends in the integration of contemporary circus and participatory arts methodologies. Within BETA CIRCUS, capacity-building was combined with co-creative artistic activities, together with research and monitoring. This toolkit and a documentary resulted from this and were put at the disposal of artistic professionals all over Europe and beyond to help achieve a better understanding and uptake of participatory arts within contemporary circus.





Objectives

Promote artistic capacity building: develop a programme focused on participatory arts methodology applied to contemporary circus, enhancing artists' skills and practices.

Create transnational opportunities: facilitate experiences for emerging circus artists from across Europe, supporting the internationalisation of their professional careers.

Audience engagement and development: increase cultural access and participation in hosting communities, fostering a more inclusive and engaged audience base.

Valorise public and non-conventional spaces: encourage the use of public spaces and non-conventional venues for artistic intervention, promoting new ephemeral stages and supporting territorial cohesion through artistic innovation.

Celebrate European cultural diversity: develop artistic projects based on co-creation between diverse artists and participating communities from hosting cities, highlighting and disseminating European cultural diversity.

Contribute to cultural equity and European integration: by fostering collaboration and understanding, the project aims to enhance cultural equity and support the integration of European communities through shared artistic experiences.

Project Stages

1.

#selection

European open call for circus artists

2.

#capacity

Immersive laboratories

3.

#co-creation

Artistic experiences

4.

#dissemination

Analysis and knowledge sharing

#selection European open call for circus artists

The BETA CIRCUS Participatory experience started from an open call at a European level for the selection of four circus collectives coming from any Creative Europe country. These collectives were matched with local artistic collectives in each country where the activities were implemented. The criteria through which the circus collectives were chosen were experience in participatory arts and the desire to develop collaboration between artists and local communities. The open call received 49 proposals from 18 countries. It was through this selection procedure that a powerful and energetic group of artists was put together to participate in this transformative journey for creative research and community engagement within BETA CIRCUS.

#capacity Immersive laboratories

Two intense laboratories, in the second phase of the BETA CIRCUS Participatory experience, have immersed participants in participatory arts methodologies, giving rise to international-local artistic collaboration. These laboratories have functioned as a platform for idea exchange, creative process investigation, and relations between artists, mentors, and partners.

The first laboratory took place in Riga, Latvia, from 16th to 18th August 2023, within the framework of the Re! Riga festival. This event brought 22 participants — artists, mentors, guests, and partners — together for three days of immersive workshops, discussions, and collaborative thinking. The laboratory was dedicated to researching participatory arts techniques and encouraged the artists to experiment with new forms of expression and have hands-on experience with the possibilities for creation that participatory arts offer. The second laboratory took place in Ílhavo, Portugal, from 30th November to 2nd December 2023, as part of the LEME festival. There were 26 participants in this second edition. The second laboratory picked up on themes that had been started in Riga and provided more space for participants to share their practices, reflect on their experiences, and further engage with external guests who brought new insights into participatory arts.

These laboratories achieved several key outcomes. Participants engaged in creative exchanges, sharing diverse artistic practices and exploring new collaborative methods. They developed valuable skills in participatory methodologies, enhancing their ability to engage communities effectively.



Moreover, the laboratories fostered a supportive network among participants, mentors, and partners, encouraging future collaborations and creating a vibrant community of practitioners dedicated to advancing the field of participatory arts within the contemporary circus landscape. Importantly, these labs laid the groundwork for collaborative work between circus artists and local artists in each country by establishing working groups and allocating mentors to each team. As a result, the second laboratory marked the launch of the digital mentoring programme, which preceded the next phase of the project.

#co-creation **Artistic experiences**

The third leg of BETA CIRCUS consisted of artistic residencies across Europe, each culminating in a public performance. These artistic residencies afforded artists the opportunity to engage in participatory arts practices within real-life scenarios by collaborating with local communities to create innovative performances that are engaging.

Residency in Novi Sad, Serbia, was from 1st to 19th May 2024, with performances on the 17th and 18th May in Cirkus Danas. The second residency was based in Colorno, Italy, from 12th August to 1st September 2024, where performances occurred from 31st August to 1st September as a part of Tutti Matti per Colorno. The residency in Riga, Latvia, took place from 28th October to 17th November 2024. The creation presentations were taking place on the 15th and 16th of November in the frame of La Nuit du Cirque / European Circus Night. In Ílhavo, Portugal, the residency took place from the 20th of November till the 8th of December 2024, with presentations within the frame of the LEME festival on the 7th and 8th of December.

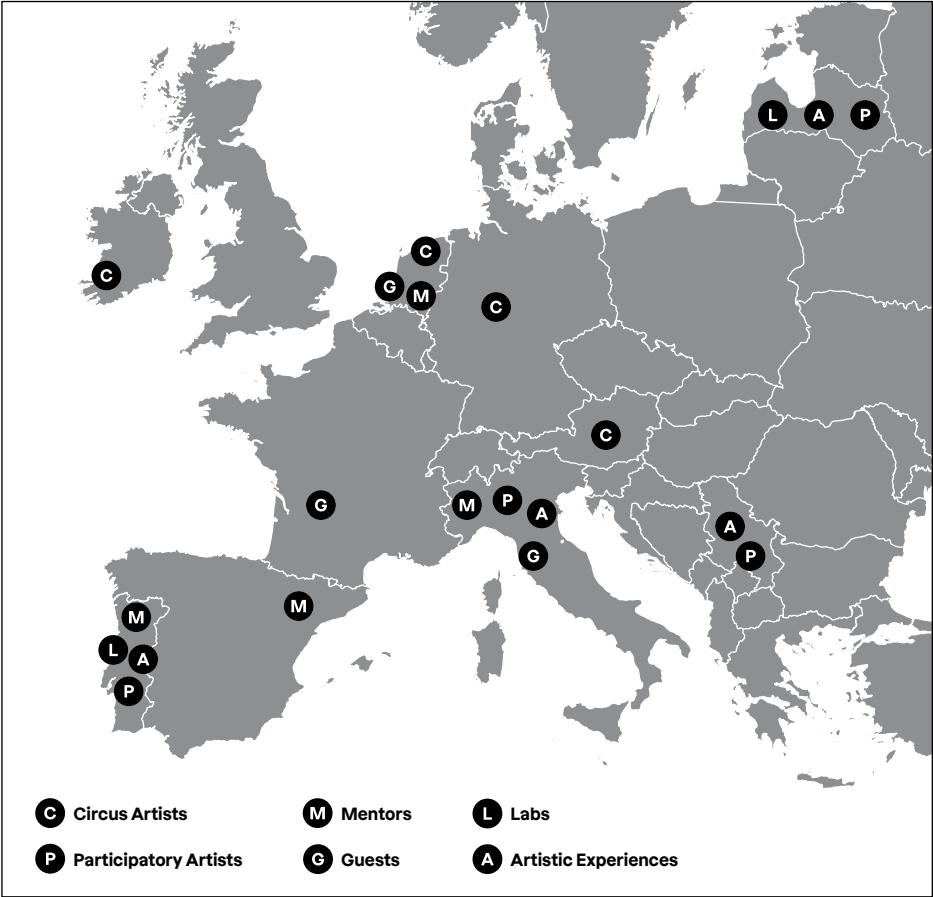
Outcomes of such artistic experiences are the case studies that will be further investigated in the next chapters of this toolkit, highlighting good practices and areas for improvement that can be disseminated to inspire other artists and organisations.

#dissemination **Analysis and knowledge sharing**

The last phase of BETA CIRCUS Participatory experience was devoted to the evaluation of residency outcomes and sharing best practices with participants, partners, and the artistic community at large. This phase aimed to consolidate insights gained throughout the project and ensure the sustainability

of participatory arts practices. Comprehensive assessments were conducted at multiple stages, gathering feedback from participants, mentors, and audiences. Regular reflection sessions were incorporated into the residencies, allowing artists and community members to evaluate progress and address challenges. Feedback was used to iteratively improve the project, ensuring lessons learned were applied to future initiatives. Processes and outcomes of this project are to be documented through this comprehensive toolkit and, therefore, as useful as possible for artists and other cultural practitioners involved in participatory arts. This helped in building an increasingly strong network of artists and organisations committed to developing participatory arts, paving the way for future collaborations and projects.

#map



Artists:

Circus

**Ana Jordão &
Vincent Kollar** (DE/PT)

Ana Jordão and Vincent Kollar are a dynamic duo of multidisciplinary performers, each with unique artistic expertise, yet united by a shared commitment to exploring the boundaries of contemporary circus, dance, and physical performance. Together, Ana and Vincent create performances that not only challenge physical limitations but also invite audiences to actively engage with their work, fostering a sense of shared responsibility and connection.



Ana Jordão is a versatile performer whose roots lie in contemporary circus, but her work seamlessly crosses into dance, improvisation, and artistic research. Her current project, *Body and Other Objects* (working title), delves into the concept of the body as “matter,” “object,” and “container.” The performance examines the body’s capacity to hold and express, using objectification as a lens through which to blur the lines between body and object, and by extension, circus and dance. Hair-hanging serves as the initial point of exploration, as Ana’s suspended body interacts with both human and non-human objects, engaging the audience in themes of agency, manipulation, gender, and physicality. Ana’s artistic process is highly participatory, incorporating performative rigging and inviting audiences to contribute to the transformation of the performance space. Her installation-like performances emphasize endurance and challenge the role of the body in art.

Vincent Kollar is a performer, teacher, and expert in the ancient Chinese circus art of Meteor manipulation. With a meticulous, methodical approach to his craft, Vincent combines circus skills with dance, developing a rich and hybrid performance style. His deep understanding of rigging and passion for climbing and balancing is reflected in his dynamic stage presence. A graduate of CODARTS, Vincent has pushed the boundaries of Meteor manipulation, blending traditional techniques with contemporary performance. His work often engages with elemental themes like fire and water, reflecting his interest in control, risk, and sustainability. As a founding member of Collective Penguin Production and Pile en Face, Vincent has collaborated with circus and dance companies, musicians, composers, and opera productions, bringing a distinct sense of energy and choreography to every project.

Compagnie FENFIRE (AT)

FENFIRE was founded in 2004 by Sebastian Berger and a group of visionary artists in Vienna. From its inception, the company has placed a strong emphasis on technical excellence and innovative stage design, specialising in the art of object manipulation, particularly in fire performance. Today, FENFIRE is led by its two core members, Christiane Hapt and Sebastian Berger, who explore the experimental, transdisciplinary fields of juggling and object manipulation. Much of the company's distinctive repertoire has been developed by Sebastian, showcasing their mastery of these crafts.

FENFIRE's work spans a broad spectrum, including corporate productions, theatre, street theatre, festivals, varieties, and both traditional and contemporary circus. They are also active board members of the Austrian Federal Association for Circus Pedagogy. With backgrounds in both product design and circus arts, Christiane and Sebastian aim to merge sculptural and dramatic arts in their performances, offering audiences a unique experience of object manipulation. A commitment to sustainability is at the heart of FENFIRE's productions, with efforts made to support environmentally friendly travel. Their performances break away from clichéd representations of gender, featuring androgynous or human figures, and are designed to be accessible, with no spoken language used. FENFIRE has performed in 43 countries across



four continents. Since 2016, they have been at the forefront of contemporary circus in Austria, engaging in advocacy and producing critically acclaimed works such as *Trust in Time. Inc* (2017), *Dot and Line* (2018), *inSTABil* (2020/21), and *IS IT A TRICK?* (2021/22). These productions were supported by The Arts and Culture Division of the Federal Chancellery of Austria, with some additional funding from the Cultural Department of the City of Vienna. Notably, *Dot and Line* was shortlisted for the CircusNext platform in 2020/21.

Fanzini Productions (IE)

Fanzini Productions, founded and directed by Con Horgan in Tralee, Co. Kerry, has been a prominent contemporary circus company since 1997. Known for their street circus performances, they tour extensively both nationally and internationally, supported by the Arts Council of Ireland. Their critically acclaimed productions include *Cannonball Circus*, *Professor Plunger*, and *Circus Jukebox*. The company collaborates with renowned clowns and directors such as John Lee, Joe Dieffenbacher, and Fraser Hooper. Fluent Irish speakers, the Fanzini Brothers curate Irish language circus events, supported by *Ealaíon na Gaeltachta*. They also lead the National Circus Festival of Ireland, a groundbreaking annual event. For the artistic experience, the company was represented by Jonathan Gunning and Robbie Blake.



Jonathan Gunning is an actor, writer, and clown whose work is always socially focused. His *Troubadours for Health* project ran for ten years in the geriatric unit at Merlin Hospital, Galway. He has worked extensively in refugee camps throughout the middle east and east Africa. His first play *Llandovery 2084* was produced in Llandovery, west Wales, in 2024. Jonathan recently

performed on Broadway with the bi-lingual theatre company Branar. His film and television credits include, Dune part II, Andor, and Game of Thrones. Jonathan is currently doing an MA in creative writing at Swansea University.

Robbie Blake is an Irish composer-performer, director and creative producer. A music and philosophy graduate, their artistic practice focuses on collaborative, experiential and multidisciplinary performance. In addition to their freelance practice, Robbie is Artistic Director of contemporary vocal group Tonnta Music and General Manager of Galway Theatre Festival.

**Melody Nolan &
Omer van Soldt (NL/USA)**

Melody Nolan and Omer van Soldt bring together their unique artistic backgrounds to create Place/Make, an experimental circus performance and installation where human meets habitat. Drawing from their individual expertise, the duo's work blends physical performance with narrative exploration, offering a fresh and immersive approach to contemporary circus. Melody, a circus artist from California, is known for her ability to craft a dialogue between the body and space. With a BA in Circus Arts from Codarts University and the BNG Bank Circusprijs under her belt, she uses her acrobatic and handstand techniques to explore physicality and creativity. Her passion for site-specific work aligns perfectly with Place/Make, where her movement is integrated into urban landscapes, inviting audiences to reimagine forgotten spaces. Omer, a multidisciplinary artist from the Netherlands, adds a complementary narrative layer to the project. His background in writing, filmmaking, and immersive art, nurtured at the Artscience Interfaculty in The Hague, lends Place/Make a deeper conceptual framework. By combining his storytelling abilities with Melody's physicality, Omer helps shape a performance that challenges viewers to engage with the hidden stories and spaces within the city. Together, Melody and Omer fuse their strengths in circus, writing, and interdisciplinary art to present Place/Make, a unique exploration of how humans inhabit and shape their environments, inviting the audience to experience a city through its unseen stories.



Artists: Participatory Arts

Caterina Moroni (IT)

Caterina Moroni is an interdisciplinary artist and cultural and social activist from Italy. Her work centres on artistic creation in public and unconventional spaces, with a strong focus on participatory processes. She holds a degree in Communication and Business Management and completed her training at the European Professional School for Actors under Societas Raffaello Sanzio in 2007-2008. Even before her formal education, she collaborated with various artists and directors in the contemporary arts scene, both established and emerging. Throughout her career, she has worked as an artist, project manager, and Outdoor & Experiential Educator, partnering with numerous cultural and social organisations dedicated to theatre research, education, and ecological practices. In 2008, Moroni launched her personal creative research project, and her performances have since been featured in numerous national and international festivals. From 2016 to 2018, she was part of the international team selected for Arts'R'Public, a Euro-Mediterranean laboratory focusing on the creation and transmission of the arts in public spaces. In 2019, she was selected to receive support from IN SITU, the European platform for artistic creation in public space, led by Lieux Publics, a European and national centre for artistic creation based in Marseille,

France. In 2023, Moroni was appointed as the director and mentor of the FNAS LAB, a training and support programme for the creation of art in public spaces, designed by the National Federation of Street Arts (FNAS). Her artistic research consistently engages with communities, encouraging the active participation of the public or specific citizen groups. Her works, often shaped by the context and participants, manifest as contemporary rituals, urban walks, installations, games, and experiences. These projects aim to forge connections within local communities while addressing urgent social issues and taboos.

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BETA CIRCUS
Participatory Experience



**Jovana Rakić, Marko Milić
& Milena Todorović (RS)**

Milena Todorović, Marko Milić, and Jovana Rakić are members of a collective renowned for their expertise in contemporary dance and commitment to participatory practices for children. They have dedicated themselves to researching and refining approaches that engage diverse participants in the performing arts, sparking creativity, curiosity, and empowering young people through contemporary dance and multimedia. The collective has realised several remarkable participatory projects and programmes aimed at young audiences. Notable examples include Mali Bali (2022), an educational project that fostered innovative and immersive learning experiences. Another stand-out success is the participatory dance performance Under the Half of a Drop, which won the Audience Award at the Festival of Ecological Theatre for Children in 2021. From 2017 to 2019, the artists curated Museum of Dance, an interactive dance performance tailored for children aged 4 and above. Their educational programme, Teen Generator (2016–2022), explored the vibrant history of dance through insightful dialogues between artists and young people aged 12 and above. Their work is rooted in nurturing children's curiosity and providing structured environments for active participation, exploration, and self-discovery. By facilitating fresh and direct encounters with art, their practice for children and young people draws inspiration from their own artistic journeys as well as the exemplary works of fellow artists. Embracing a participatory ethos, they invite the audience to co-create, fostering shared experiences and interpretations of artistic practice, and ensuring a sense of collective ownership in the creative process.



Krista Burāne & Mārtiņš Eihe (LV)

Krista Burāne and Mārtiņš Eihe are renowned artists celebrated for their contributions to participatory art. Krista Burāne, a filmmaker and theatre director, holds master's degrees in philosophy and film directing, while Mārtiņš Eihe is a distinguished theatre director currently heading the Latvian State Puppet Theatre. Together, they co-founded NoMadl, an international summer theatre festival for children and young people, which ran until 2014 and dramatically reshaped the



understanding of contemporary theatre for young audiences in Latvia. Their work through NoMadl introduced innovative perspectives, fostering a deeper connection between young audiences and theatre, and establishing new creative pathways. More recently, Krista and Mārtiņš played a crucial role in the cultural programme for the European Capital of Culture 2027 project in Daugavpils, focusing on participatory arts. Their collaborations have garnered widespread recognition and several awards, as they explore thought-provoking themes such as trust in a world facing radicalisation, feminism, and the intricate dynamics of violence. Krista's recent works - including *Nocturne* (2019), *..trees have stopped talking since then* (2020), *The End of the World and Other Nonsense* (2021), and *All Birds Sing Beautifully* (2023) - stand as striking testaments to her vision. Through these projects, she reflects on the consequences of human-centric lifestyles, challenging audiences to reconsid-

er their relationship with nature. Her co-creative processes engage diverse communities, inviting them to envision alternative futures and rebuild a harmonious connection with the natural world. Together, Krista Burāne and Mārtiņš Eihe push artistic boundaries, captivating audiences and inspiring a profound reflection on the world we live in.

WETUMTUM (PT)

WETUMTUM is a non-profit cultural association dedicated to promoting, developing, and supporting artistic projects and movements primarily aimed at children and families, with a strong emphasis on community participation. The fundamental premise of WETUMTUM is that every individual

possesses the innate ability to create, engage, and flourish through interaction with music and performance. We believe that this potential is evident from an early age; thus, our artistic initiatives are designed to extend beyond mere observation. Through playful experiences, we strive to foster participation and interaction. Currently, WETUMTUM boasts a repertoire of 16 performances, 3 workshops, and 2 installations, and is the creator and organiser of the Festival Papagaio in Ílhavo. The collective was founded by Artur Carvalho, Bruno Estima, David Calhau, and David Valente, who share a commitment to percussion as a fundamental learning tool, alongside a quest for personal enrichment through the integration of other complementary artistic disciplines, such as theatre, movement, and circus arts. Together and individually, they have directed or participated in numerous artistic projects, both within and beyond WETUMTUM, including collaborations at Casa da Música in Porto, Culturgest in Lisbon, MEXE in Porto, Tokyo Bunka Kaikan in Japan, and projects associated with PARTIS (Gulbenkian Foundation), Erasmus+, Universidade Católica, and Palau de la Música Catalana, among others.



Mentors

**Ana Bragança & Ricardo Baptista,
Ondamarela (PT)**



Ana Bragança and Ricardo Baptista are co-founders of Ondamarela, a Portuguese collective specialising in participatory arts.

Ana Bragança is a cultural manager with a focus on participation, mediation, and community involvement projects. She served as an advisor for the participatory and mediation programme of Braga'27, the candidate city for European Capital of Culture, and is currently involved with Braga'25 – Portuguese Capital of Culture.

Previously, she worked as a consultant for Opium, contributing to initiatives such as the Plan for the Dynamisation of the Douro Wine Villages, the Management Plan for the Historic Centre of Porto World Heritage Site, and Guimarães' bid for European Capital of Culture in 2012, where she was part of the executive board. Ana also served as project manager at A Oficina, coordinating the incubator for creative industries at the Plataforma das Artes e da Criatividade. Additionally, she collaborated with the educational service of the Centro Internacional das Artes José de Guimarães and co-coordinated the West Way Lab Festival 2014. She was also part of the team that developed the exhibition guide for the Casa da Memória de Guimarães.

Ricardo Baptista is a musician specialising in the conception and development of community-based projects. His work includes significant initiatives such as "GuimarãesPlay" for Guimarães 2012 – European Capital of Culture, "Operação BigBang," "Orquestra da Bida Airada" (Ílhavo), "Ode to Joy – a Citizens Orchestra" (Presidency of the European Council – Malta 2017), "Mewga Muzika" (Valletta 2018 – European Capital of Culture), and "Genau!" – Festival Der Regionen (Austria, 2019). Currently, both Ana and Ricardo are engaged with the Acts programme from the National Odyssey of Teatro Nacional D. Maria II, alongside other participatory or collaborative cultural programmes that involve various artists and communities.

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Lali Álvarez Garriga (ES)

Lali Álvarez Garriga is an author, stage director, creator of participatory art projects, poet, and educator. Her work centres on documentary and artistic creation inspired by reality, focusing on non-conventional spaces and exploring the relationship between spectators and participatory creation, with a primary emphasis on sustainable cultural practices.

She studied Philosophy at the University of Barcelona and Stage Direction and Dramaturgy at the Institut de Teatre in Barcelona. Additionally, she has trained in audiovisual production, writing, politics, and artistic creation in public spaces. Her works have premiered at notable venues such as the Teatre Lliure in Barcelona, the National Theatre of Catalonia, and Antic Teatre, as well as at festivals including Festival Grec, Temporada Alta, and FiraTàrrrega, among others. In 2015, she directed the participatory project “TEMPS” involving elderly residents from a retirement home. The following year, she directed her second play, “Barcelona (against the wall),” with LAPÚBLICA company, which premiered at FiraTàrrrega. In the same year, she led the participatory project “Catex, Felipa, Nosotros Assembly,” engaging over 150 residents and associations from the Poblenou neighbourhood in Barcelona. From 2017 to 2021, Álvarez Garriga was a resident artist at the Nau Ivanow Creation Factory, where she founded the company HuiBasa. In 2020 and 2021, she served as the artistic director for the first two editions of “Escena Pilot,” a theatrical teacher training and collective creation programme at Teatre Lliure, involving approximately 70 teenagers from five different secondary schools in Barcelona. In 2022, she created and directed the inaugural edition of “The Unfinished Human Manifesto” at Fira Tàrrrega, a long-term participatory project that she continues to develop. She teaches acting at the EOLIA Superior Centre for Dramatic Arts in Barcelona and conducts courses and workshops on reality-based creation, creation in unconventional spaces, and participatory artistic creation with communities.



Marleen Scholten (NL)

Marleen Scholten is an actress and co-founder of the Dutch collective Wunderbaum. She graduated as an actress in 2001 and has since created more than 50 performances, both nationally and internationally, with the company. Wunderbaum has undertaken various projects across Europe and has

presented their work in cities such as Los Angeles, New York, Tehran, Rio de Janeiro, and Toronto. The collective writes its own texts, directs its productions, and performs, starting from political and social themes. They strive to foster a sense of community with each performance, involving individuals from diverse backgrounds, including architects, homeless individuals, choir singers, judges, innovators, and writers. In addition to her work with the collective, Scholten develops her own projects as an actress and director. Six years ago, she relocated to Italy, where she has created works such as *Who Is the Real Italian?*, *The National Song*, *La Codista*, and *Il Disperato*. These productions have been showcased at the RomaEuropa Festival, Mare Culturale Urbano, and the Triennale Teatro in Milan, as well as in Germany and the Netherlands. In collaboration with African refugees and Italian teenagers, she initiated a clowning project in Carrara, invited by Casa Betania, an organisation supporting refugees in Italy. In 2017, Scholten was invited by the Tramedautore Festival and the Piccolo Teatro di Milano to conduct a masterclass for young actors, focusing on the theme of sexuality in the age of social media, drawing inspiration from Pier Paolo Pasolini's documentary film *Comizi d'Amore*. Wunderbaum, based in Rotterdam, collectively managed the artistic direction of Theaterhaus Jena in Germany from 2018 to 2022. The collective has received numerous accolades, including The Proscenium Award for Most Impressive Theatre (Amsterdam), The Mary Dresselhuys Award for Best Show of the Year (Rotterdam), The Total Theatre Award (Edinburgh), and was nominated for Most Outstanding International Piece (Toronto). For *La Codista*, Marleen won the National Playwright's Prize, Premio Nazionale Drammaturgico "Antonio Conti", and the production was selected as one of the best performances of the year at the Dutch Theaterfestival in 2022.



Nicola Borghesi & Enrico Baraldi,
Kepler-452 (IT)

Kepler-452 is a theatre company established in 2015 in Bologna, driven by a vision, a desire, and an urgency to open the doors of theatres and explore the world outside through the lens of performance. The company operates under the firm belief that reality possesses an autonomous dramaturgical force, eagerly awaiting its stage. Kepler-452's theatrical formats encompass the participation of non-professionals – referred to as "world-actors" based on their biographies – as well as theatrical reportages that transform investigations into reality into performative experiences. They also create audio-guided itineraries and various interactive devices for engaging with urban spaces. In 2018, the company embarked on a production journey with ERT / Teatro Nazionale, culminating in *The Cherry Orchard – Thirty Years of Happiness on Loan for Use*. This show, which won the Critical Network Award, intertwines Chekhov's text with the story of an actual eviction that occurred in Italy in 2015. In 2019, they developed *It's Absurd to Think That Planes Fly* for the Museum of Memory of Ustica, an endeavour aimed at reconstructing the biographies of some victims of the 1980 DC-9 accident. Kepler-452 has also produced a series of audio-guided tours entitled *Lapsus Urbano*, which investigate urban spaces in an effort to challenge conventional perceptions of cities. During the pandemic, the company offered a range of "interstitial" formats, fostering dialogue with restrictions and preserving the possibility of theatre at a time when it seemed unattainable. In 2022, Kepler-452 won the Daily Bread tender from Stronger Peripheries, enabling them to undertake a series of residencies in Italy and Hungary.



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BETA CIRCUS
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“Looking back on the whole thing, on our side, what really changed was the awakening of a will to collaborate with circus artists and add to the movement, the thought and debate about participation and co-creation in art.”

Ana Bragança & Ricardo Baptista, Ondamarela (PT)





4.

**Case studies
and analysis**

Art has the power to weave threads of connection, transforming spaces, communities, and individuals through shared stories and collective creation. The BETA CIRCUS Participatory experience stands as a testament to this potential, with its four artistic residencies in Serbia, Italy, Latvia, and Portugal revealing the profound ways in which participatory arts can bridge divides and ignite transformation. Each location became a canvas where artists, participants, and mentors worked together to explore themes as diverse as reflection, empowerment, and memories. These residencies, rooted in their unique contexts, unfolded as intricate dialogues between artistic practice and community life, offering not only performances but moments of deep connection and insight. This chapter, captures the essence of these transformative journeys, reflecting on the methodologies, challenges, and triumphs that emerged. As we delve into the key themes and lessons of each experience, we invite readers to discover how participatory arts can inspire new ways of thinking, feeling, and creating together.



Serbia

Reflection

Identity

Perception

Balance

Collaboration

Latvia

Empowerment

Adaptability

Inclusivity

Community

Sustainability

Italy

Integration

Empathy

Transformation

Resilience

Connection

Portugal

Storytelling

Participation

Engagement

Public space

Memories

4.1. Reflecting through art: a participatory circus residency in Serbia

The artistic residency at Highschool Tvrdava in Novi Sad, Serbia, represents a pioneering approach to contemporary circus arts through its innovative combination of digital mentoring and on-site collaboration. This project serves as a valuable case study for cultural practitioners across Europe, showcasing how structured preparation, community engagement, and reflective practices can lead to profound artistic and social outcomes.

It began with an online mentoring program specifically designed to develop a bond of unity among the artists before they came together in Serbia. It was a few months long preparatory phase, which included informal meetings and regular group sessions online. The primary objective of such online meetings was the sharing of creative ideas, along with getting everybody on the same page and laying the foundation based on mutual trust and respect between participants. Important in this phase is the fact that it opened the doors for different artists to come and bring their different points of view and life experiences, thereby creating a rich intercultural tapestry. Through the digital mentorship program, participants got familiar with the core themes of the residency, which especially revolve around identity, perception, and the metaphorical meaning of mirrors. By inviting the artists to arrive with work prepared that was inspired by these themes - proposed by the artistic team - in advance, and having them travel to Novi Sad with these ideas already a bit developed and somewhat uniformed vision and desire to collaborate. The mentoring team led by Ana Bragança and Ricardo Baptista (Ondamarela) became influential in helping facilitate these conversations, fostering feedback, and setting the tone for innovation and openness.

Upon arrival in Novi Sad, the residency took place at Highschool Tvrdava, which had been specially chosen for the purpose of the residency due to its dual role of educational institution and community hub. That setting suited best the theme of the project with such main ideas as participatory arts and community engagement. The artists worked with local students and staff, setting artistic expression against an

educational background. This discourse was very relevant given the context of Serbia, with incidents like the 2023 Belgrade shooting¹ drawing everyone's attention to the safety of schools and the presence of supportive, creative spaces. The artistic process was participatory in methodology to a large degree, with artists and members of the community working together from the beginning to the end of the process. The approach was such that the project had to be innovative in its artistic aspect while being socially relevant to the issues faced locally and reflective of this community's unique cultural identity. This process was further supported by the participatory arts expertise of the Ondamarela collective from Portugal, a group that ensured all voices were valued and heard.

At the core of the residency stood the theme of mirrors as a reflective and critical medium. The artists have urged participants to take a critical look at their roles of mirrors in self-perception and behaviour and challenge them to think about the metaphorical holding up of a mirror to the Serbian education system and what it brings into focus. This investigation was made possible through mirrors, handheld lighting, and recordings of sounds, set together to form an interactive and engaging performance environment. The non-verbal nature of the performance opened it up to universal accessibility so that the audience was able to engage in the work at an intuitive and emotional level.

The residency also made use of circus techniques to represent balance as a metaphor for challenges in personal and social lives. This metaphor greatly reverberated with participants on the fine line of tradition and innovation, stability, and change. Thus, the choice to create a performance with non-verbal aspects increased the project's accessibility by crossing the linguistic barriers between the audience members from different backgrounds, so they could interpret it personally. This collaborative process manifested itself through the public performance, held within the school building, in a familiar environment, which suddenly became a stage for artistic inquiry and reflection, open to both the school community and the wider public. The venue choice underscored how much the project cared about accessibility and engagement with the community by opening opportunities for audiences to see firsthand the power of art in rendering newness within everyday spaces.

The artistic residency at Highschool Tvrdava represents an interesting case study for cultural practitioners across Europe. Linking digital mentoring with participatory arts and

1. The 2023 Belgrade shooting is one such horrific event that occurred on 3rd May 2023, in which a 13-year-old kid started shooting at the Vladislav Ribnikar Elementary School in Belgrade, Serbia. In the shooting, nine people were killed, including the security guard and eight children, while some others sustained injuries. It really turned out to be a shocking incident for the whole nation, raising debates over school safety, mental health, and gun control. One of the deadliest shootings in Serbian history put the whole country on high alert, resulting in a declared national day of mourning and protests hitting the streets over what the government had to say on the issue of youth violence and public security.

community engagement, the project has shown that collaborative art can transform. Bringing into focus reflection, identity, and social relevance, the experience has been a great platform for effective artistic expression and dialogue, leaving lessons and inspiration for further initiatives. It will be such projects that form the bridging base of cultures, foster understanding, and create spaces for creativity and connection among cultural landscapes as they continue to evolve.







4.1.1.

Location	Highschool Tvrdava, Novi Sad, Serbia
Duration	1 – 19 May 2024
Context	In the frame of Cirkus Danas Festival
Produced by	Ludifico

Artistic Team

Artists Circus	Christiane Hapt Sebastian Berger (Compagnie FENFIRE)	(AT)
Artists Participatory Arts	Jovana Rakić Marko Milić Milena Todorović	(RS)
Local participants	Anamarija Dimitrijević Danica Bošnjak Đorđe Putnik Jovana Likić Lazar Vasić Minja Stepanovska Sofija Vasiljević Srna Vasić Stefania Rubl	(RS)
Mentors	Ana Bragança Ricardo Baptista (Ondamarela)	(PT)

Mirror of
Novi Sad

“Mirror of Novi Sad” was a participatory arts residency realised in Highschool Tvrdava, Novi Sad, Serbia. It was trying to question issues of identity, perception, and the educational system filtered through the prism of contemporary circus arts. This innovative residency unites international artists with local participants to create wordless performances that change the environment and stage of the school into art, question, and reflect. The residency took off from the metaphorical functions of mirrors as devices that put into question self-perception and some of the maxims held by society. In doing so, artists used mirrors, manual light sources, and sound recordings to create an immersive experience that provokes audiences to reflect on their personal and collective identity.

Objectives

Building collaboration between international artists and local communities through a participatory arts approach: it is meant for theme development and criticism concerning identity and perception, using mirrors as a metaphor.

Design a public performance that will capture audiences and transform everyday spaces into an artistic platform: make use of an accessible artistic experience that is non-verbal and, therefore, transcends language barriers.

Key themes

Identity and perception:
how mirrors shape self-perception and behaviour.

Community engagement:
the artistic process integrated local context and cultural identity.

Non-verbal performance:
building an accessible experience beyond the barriers of language.

Public Performance

Dates: 17 — 18 May 2024
Venue: Highschool Tvrdava,
Novi Sad, Serbia

Synopsis

How truthful is the reflection in the mirror? Did I exhibit different behaviour when a mirror was present in the room? What occurred when I held a mirror up to the education system in Serbia? How did I perceive my situation, my surroundings, and myself in the mirror? And was I able to successfully balance a stick while gazing into a mirror? The Austrian circus company Fenfire, along with Jovana Rakić, Marko Milić, and Milena Todorović from Serbia, explored these and other questions. Collaborating with students and staff from the private gymnasium Tvrdava in Novi Sad, they engaged in a two-week participatory process to create a performance. This performance took place within the school building and was open to the public. The project was supported by the Ondamarela collective from Portugal, known for their participatory artwork with diverse communities.

The primary materials used included mirrors, manual light sources, and sound recordings. Additionally, the circus element as a form of expression was empirically analysed. The outcomes and answers of this experiment, much like in the fairy tale Snow White, may only be known by the mirror itself.

The full video of the artistic output is available online. Please follow the QR code below.







“The private school setting brought a diverse group of students into our project but none of them chose to stay in the process, raising questions on values in education and creative processes.”

Jovana Rakić (RS)



4.1.2.

Critical analysis and emerging opportunities

This section gives way to the different perspectives of those involved in the creative process of the residency and artistic process. We draw on international circus artists, local artists experienced in participatory arts, and artistic mentors to reflect critically on methodologies and outcomes of this innovative project. Their reflections offer nuance to the collaborative dynamics and artistic exploration that defined the residency. Participants' experiences convey valuable lessons learned about the strengths and challenges faced during the implementation of the project, thus vividly showing what areas could be improved upon and adapted. This is a kind of analysis that opens up a space for unique creative processes to be revealed but also contributes to a wider discussion of trends and emerging practices within the contemporary circus sector. By synthesising those insights with others stemming from artistic experiences within the project, we hope to trace common themes and tendencies that can help inform and inspire future initiatives in the field. This will help us add to the discourse on participatory arts, fostering innovation and collaboration across cultural and artistic divides. In reflections on this residency, we invite the reader to reflect on how the lessons learned can be applied to similar endeavours and ultimately enrich the broader landscape of the contemporary arts.

Mentorship analysis

Ana Bragança &
Ricardo Baptista,
Ondamarela (PT)

The experience in Serbia gave a unique opportunity for cross-disciplinary collaboration and investigations into participatory art-making as part of contemporary circus practices. Mentors Ana Bragança and Ricardo Baptista from Ondamarela, Portugal, came to the project with curiosity but also apprehension because of their lack of experience with circus practices. The participatory arts working experience, however, had given them a strong foundation for engaging with the innovative goals of the project. Reflections by participants offer rich insights into the creative journey, challenges faced, and potential future improvements.

Initially, the mentors were a bit puzzled about the direction and aims of the collaboration between Serbian and Austrian artists. Early meetings did help in clarifying the potential of the project and providing further common space for the engaged collectives. Ana and Ricardo witnessed the curiosity and empathy of the artists as a necessary condition for the success of a participative project. Their interest and commitment signalled that this residency would be an engaging and fruitful effort. Some guiding questions in the process were: who are the target audiences, what kind of participation is looked for, and how to integrate circus techniques into the co-creation experience? These framed the preliminary discussions and made relevant the workshops that followed. Ondamarela usually creates new artistic material with the participants right from scratch and often secures diversity to encourage varied perspectives and ideas. The approach is supposed to spur creativity by creating shared artistic experiences that ultimately lead to transformation – a process the mentors believe can manifest through the arts.

During the residency, it was more reactive than prescriptive. The mentors responded to ideas and processes already underway rather than entirely new concepts. This approach had been deliberate as part of their philosophy: to listen, observe, and guide creative flow with a very light hand. Ana and Ricardo would continually point to things like, “is this meaningful?” and “are we really grasping the ideas of the participants?” to provoke reflection and guarantee that the project remained focused on the participants. The spirit of cooperation was great, but it was suffering from enormous problems, especially a lack of sufficient logistical support and structures in the school. Full integration into the school community was quite a challenge because the workspace was not appropriate and communication with the school was not reliable. Scheduling was also not easy. The potential for the program was somewhat diminished by having meetings and workshops in less-than-ideal conditions. Nevertheless, the artists and mentors persisted, showing resilience and flexibility when faced with such odds.

On the better side, it was deeper insights into the boundaries of circus arts and levels of participation. Such discourses initiated further development in the performance approach and gave new ground for future collaboration. The final performances exhibited an integration of many elements: mirror metaphors, sound, light, installations, dance, and object manipulation - all fusing together as multi-dimensional artistic practice, reaching audiences in the most appropriate way. The mentors were particularly impressed by the commitment and

creativity of the young participants. Although for most of them, it was their first experience with participatory arts, the degree of engagement and understanding reached by the students was remarkable for a democratic process. Briefly stated, the potential for participatory arts to inspire and empower people was evidenced by the students' ability to design, produce, and play complex ideas intelligently and relevantly.

For Ana Bragança and Ricardo Baptista, looking back at the experience was to take note of the fact that greater heights could have been achieved if there were more time and conditions. Areas earmarked for future improvement included enhanced levels of participation, audience management strategies, and further developed means of communication. At the same time, they found the potential for the insertion of other circus elements into performances to be highly likely, further adding to the creative product. Ultimately, the residency fostered a new interest in collaboration with circus artists and deepened the mentors' appreciation for participatory arts. This experience once more proved how much they believed in co-creation and dialogue within creative processes and became evidence of meaningful exchange across artistic disciplines.

The mentors' reflections underline the role that flexibility, openness, and participant-centeredness play in artistic collaboration. Their thoughts yield very valuable lessons for future projects, advocating for a well-balanced mix between structure and spontaneity, which would allow creative ideas to flourish while trying to overcome the challenges in logistics and context that might arise. Case studies such as this will help to become very useful learning opportunities and inspiration to cultural practitioners trying to innovate and grow the horizons of participatory arts in a field under constant evolution.

Circus artistic collective feedback

Christiane Hapt & Sebastian Berger,
Compagnie FENFIRE (AT)

During a collaborative and exploratory artistic project in Novi Sad, Serbia, circus artists Christiane Hapt and Sebastian Berger, from Compagnie FENFIRE, bravely plunged into the realm of participatory arts. With a van full of mirrors and a need to learn, they drove off for a three-week investigation into how to make a performance with local dancers, Portuguese mentors, and a community of students from the town. This was a radically different way of approaching the work compared to their experiments in contemporary circus, which had included audience participation also - for example, "Is it a trick?"

In this regard, Hapt and Berger accepted that their perception about participatory art grew immensely through the project. At Novi Sad, they could get a feel of the complexities involved in working as a community. The entire process of decision-making, adjusting the themes, and motivating each other in a large group was daunting yet exhilarating. This confidence was instigated by the presence of mentors Ana Bragança and Ricardo Baptista. Their “hands-on mentality” and honest interest in the project were there from the very first meetings. Invaluable in fostering a positive creative environment was the fact that mentors could seamlessly integrate into the team to offer guidance without imposition.

The artistic process began by overcoming obstacles, as Orthodox Easter holidays delayed the start of student involvement even further. In turn, this allowed refinement of concepts and building of relationships within the core team. The process was democratic, encouraging theoretical discussions, creative exercises, and team-building activities that extended beyond traditional artistic practices. These created foundations for a collaborative and cohesive atmosphere in which to work. The workshops, through the course of the project, were held to recruit participants and attract a wide range of volunteers. These were “fishing time” sessions to attract volunteers who would commit their interest in the project. By frustratingly slow account of getting students’ interest, this resilient focus group did materialise into a group of eight teenagers. Participants brought tremendous commitment and imagination, all from a public school with drama majoring. Their contributions emphasised voluntary participation so as to allow choosing roles both onstage and backstage and take over the project with a sense of ownership. The inclusion of circus elements provoked debate among the core team. Hapt and Berger wanted to avoid any kind of enforcement of their artistry on the participants and searched for expressions that corresponded with the experiences of the teenagers. This opened new channels of exploration, such as a circus-like use of the classroom chairs and tables. To underline how to discover the very basic essentials of an art form so that it becomes accessible helped to steer the creative process with the advice of mentors.

The residency was not without its challenges. For example, the setting was a private school, and the facilities were not adequate, adding to a list of other shortcomings such as a lack of institutional support. According to Hapt and Berger, it was a “wild ride” of constant adaptation and resilience. The carelessness expressed by the school management in being

surprising and disappointing added problems to securing the participant commitment. Despite all these odds, the project was able to light up the spark of interest and engagement with the focus group and the audience. Novi Sad itself contributed much to the setting and themes of the project. A city marked by recent events that stirred fear and uncertainty in the education system provided a poignant setting for exploring issues of reflection, privacy, and public engagement. Although challenging were the problems encountered in the private school venue, nevertheless, the dynamics between the private and the public spheres were sharpened. The project, although probably not leaving a lasting effect on the school itself, definitely did so with participants and audiences who became excited about its innovative approach of performance and possibility of further exploration of the theatrical and multifaceted nature of contemporary circus.

The final performances, alive with organisational surprises, were in fact quite a success. Participants opened new, unexpected channels for self-expression, surprising the audience and leaving them inquisitive. The performances were a culmination of this journey of collaboration, identifying value more in the process than in a final product. The excitement and empowerment that participants experienced in expressing their ideas to an audience are illustrative of the success of this project in creativity and empowerment.

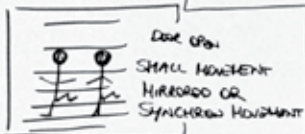
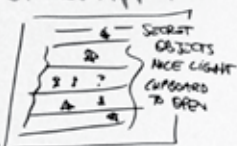
Looking back, both Christiane Hapt and Sebastian Berger see this experience as a development step in their artistic lives. This residency became huge in opening up perceptions about the practice of participatory art and deepening their experience with new ideas and viewpoints. Being circus artists, this project diverged enormously from the work they usually do, but it brought out how working together can mean something, that there is beauty in the connection and dialogue of participatory arts. This experience inspired them to plan other projects with participatory elements, which proves a sustained impact on their artistic practice. The case proves that flexibility, open communication, and participant-centeredness are critical keys in such processes – ones that need to operate across potential challenges if desired by the participants. It is case studies like these that allow for key lessons and inspiration to take back to the everyday practice of artists and cultural practitioners toward an extended definition of art today. The experience of Compagnie FENFIRE evidences the force of collaboration, creativity, and lasting possibilities opened by participatory artistic practices.

LOOK UP
HALLWAY
STAIRS
CHANCE
ST ITS

WINDOW TOP



Q. HIDE YOU
SEE EVERYTHING OF
ATTIC
STAIRS ATTIC



VENDING MACHINE

WIMED PROPS
OF TRICKS
INSIDE

WRIGHT
STAYS WITH
HIDING

FURTHER
REVEALS
MACHINERY



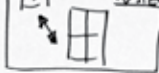
INFO ABOUT CUE

ALLEY 1st FLOOR

1st
OUT WINDOW
PERFORMERS BLIND SPOT
HIDING OPPOSITE



OUT WINDOW
SPY TO OTHER WINDOW
GHOST STORY ABOUT
MYSTERY OF HOUSE



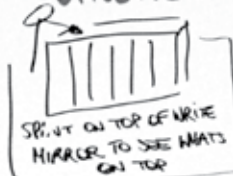
AUDIO OR BELL
FREEZE

PERFORMER

CONNECTION
TO ATTIC STAIRS 100%



BASEMENT ALLEY



HEATING ROOM?

FOCUS HIDEING IN
CROOKY ROOM

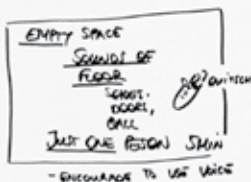


VIDEO GAME
MOVING FORWARD
RECKONING

GYM

POSSIBLE COMBINATIONS
SOUND CLOTHES
WORKING ALL FOR STH.
WHATS FOR WHAT?

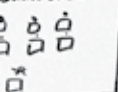
- COMMODITISATION
- IMAGINARY PEOPLE
- LIVE MC: IN EVERY CORNER



SOUNDS OF SCHOOL OUTSIDE

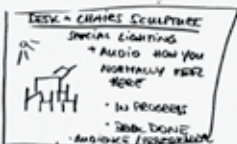
CLASSROOM

PERFORMATIVE
IN COMBINATIONS
CURRICULUM



CONCRETE
STORY TELLING
MOUNTAIN
MOUNTAIN (COMMENTS-)

PLACE TO COME BACK
FACE, ACTIVE
HUG
PAINTING PROGRESS



TURCHES + SHADOW PLAY
VID ON BORDER + AUDIO +
ALSO DONE CAUSE?
DISTORTED CLASSROOM
PERFORMED INTERVIEW OF STUDENTS

STAIRS

BODY PREZATION
TO ARCHITECTURE



MOVE SCULPTURE
TIME OF PERFORMANCE

SILENT WALLS
NORMALLY NOT
ALLOWED TO RUN
OR SIT?

DISCREPANCY
FLIGHT ARCHITECTURE

MOVING PERFORM
THROUGH WHOLE BUILDING

STAGE FOR
MOVEMENTS WE
CREATE

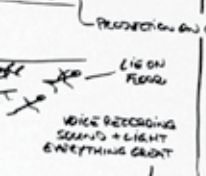


HANGING ART

- HUG UP WITH VIDEO ONES

LONG ROOM

ADISE ROOM



MARK THICK NOISE
LIVE RECORDING SOUND FREQ

CHOCOLATE

STORAGE ROOMS



SYMBOL -
CIRCLE
THROUGH WHOLE
PERFORMANCE

DEMAND PROSECUTOR:
LIGHTS + SHADOW
OF OBJECT

FILL OBJECTS WITH BODY ON
WALL
FILLING
SHADES

DISCORD
- STORING THINGS
+ SHADOWS
WITH SHAPES
AND COLOUR
METHOD
PERFORMANCE

WORKS WITH AUDIENCE



“A breakthrough moment that we all collectively shared was how the participants developed a complete performance station on their own overnight and brought it into the team.”

Christiane Hapt & Sebastian Berger, Compagnie FENFIRE (AT)





Participatory arts collective feedback

Jovana Rakić, Marko Milić,
Milena Todorović (RS)

For this artistic experience, the Ekspedicija collective (Serbia), comprising Jovana Rakić, Marko Milić, and Milena Todorović, embarked on a massive foray into participatory arts. This was informed by substantial previous experience in this kind of practice with children between the ages of 7 and 12. With a decade of performance and workshop collaboration experience, the trio took this initiative as a given concentrated forthcoming three-week collaboration. The period was to give them the chance to get back into the refining of their practice, developing a new performance sketch, and securing funding for further work in what had been - culturally - a very challenging landscape in Serbia.

The initial interaction with their mentors left a positive impression on the team. Busy as they were in their schedule, they still showed their kind heart and sincerity in wanting to help and collaborate. Quite early in the relationship, this contact set the parameters of a very efficient relationship driven by mutual respect and collaboration. The project evolved dynamically and at multiple levels. The collective, surprised by the exclusive nature of the private high school venue, initially grappled with integrating this environment into their artistic process. Even after eight workshops aiming to involve the students and present the BETA CIRCUS project, no student from the private school decided to get involved in the final performance and the artistic process. All these circumstances demanded a turn over in the approach. Their practice was marked by day-to-day planning and reliance on public art high school students who were finally involved in the project. This shift underlined that it was far away from their normal preparation, usually organised in advance and through long-term collaboration. The immediate task became adjusting and responding to the needs and schedules of the students - a frustrating and enlightening process. Testing times did, however, include some breakthroughs. The practice with eager students refreshed their attitude toward the creative process. The collective found value in including students' ideas and taking on challenges like the lack of participation by the private school students and the limited availability of young performers. Such experiences were viewed as opportunities for reflection and adaptation that validate the commitment by the collective toward collaborative creation.

The intersection of participatory arts and circus posed challenges and unique opportunities. The team wanted to rethink the notion of "skill" away from special circus activities into everyday life settings. By authenticating such ordinary activities as walking and sitting, they wished to further democratise the idea of skill and bring it closer to familiar surroundings. The private school venue held great significance. The commercialism of the school radically contrasted with both the artistic and educational aims of the collective. Added to this was the complexity provided by the recent traumatic events in the school's history. The lack of enthusiasm of the staff gave the tension between the business oriented nature of the school and the collective's artistic aims an additional sharpness. This setting underscored broader problems with the values of education and creative processes that were reflected in students' reluctance to engage.

Although it was organisationally challenging, the final performance proved to be brilliant and exciting. Working off a series of mini-performances around the school, it drew on the ready-at-hand materials and spatiality of the school to create a site-specific work. This approach allowed for the collective to explore and highlight in a dynamic and engaging manner the student's perspective.

In retrospect, the project represented a break of many sorts from what the collective had been doing earlier. Here, there was a rare autonomy and liberty to be had in the exploration of new ideas and methods without compulsions of any sort. This experience of working within a school environment, experimenting with site-specific performance, opened new possibilities for future projects. Finally, the collective showed interest in having a future collaboration with the Novi Sad students they met, which alone is testimony that these new insights have been integrated into their future artistic work. The process of realisation within the Novi Sad project brought very valuable lessons regarding adaptability, collaboration, and appropriation within participatory arts as associated with traditional circus practices. It illuminated, in this sense, both potential and challenges in this area when working with different, and often unpredictable, environments.

Expanding horizons: diverse insights and perspectives

Overall, the assessments of this participatory arts project from mentors, circus artists, and local artists arouse complex senses in the creative and collaborative processes behind such initiatives. These reviews turn into critical sources of information

on problems, successes, and areas for improvement in the participatory arts and both their potential to transform and the complexities entailed in such projects.

Mentors' evaluation reveals a deeply reflective experience. The role was played for guiding the circus artists through the participatory process and transcended the need to be flexible and adaptable. For these mentors, one of the major challenges was finding one's way in unknown land: working with a new group and balancing one's own artistic vision with the collaborative needs of the team. They appreciated the openness to uncertainty taken by the artists and their commitment to including the participants in all aspects of the creative process. This approach created respect and an opportunity for learning from each other. However, mentors felt that some of those issues could be clearly communicated at the beginning, and with more structured planning perhaps some of these challenges could have been averted.

The project evaluation by the circus artists, Compagnie FENFIRE, highlights its dynamics and continuous improvement potentials. Initially grappling with logistical issues and cultural differences, the artists demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability. The artists were faced with many difficulties, among which were the bad conditions of the places and the withdrawal of some participants, which they used to their advantage. This led to a site-specific final performance characterised by reflection and becoming both the artists' collaborative output and the proof of ability in sailing through diverse inputs and integrating them into the work. It reflects the growing realisation that participatory art not only requires high doses of artistic skill but also patience and flexibility.

The case is different for local artists Jovana Rakić, Marko Milić, and Milena Todorović. These facilitators are very experienced in the field of participatory arts realised with children, but the project was very recent and showed them something new. Having that, of course, brought many complicated aspects into the process - the private school background was already characterised by its commercial attitude, not to mention the recent traumatic events. Still, the local artists could adjust their strategies and find other ways of working together. Even though they struggled to engage the students and grapple with the structures of the school environment, this struggle also allowed for fruitful reflections about everyday skill and creativity. The final performance, which repurposed the school's physical spaces, was both a creative triumph and a critique of the educational system's commercialisation.

These assessments, taken as a whole, emphasise some of the key themes. Flexibility and open lines of communication are critical in participatory arts projects. Only through flexibility and the willingness to roll with things as needed could all the logistic issues, cultural differences, and other challenges that cropped up be worked out by the various stakeholders. The second major point that these reviews drive home is attention to collaboration and inclusivity. These art projects show that engaging the participants within the creation process can result in new artistic innovation and deeper artistic experience, but it also demands deep consideration of the needs and contexts of the participants at the same time.

Looking back at the project, there are a number of strengths and weaknesses that do emerge and turn out to be useful pointers toward future initiatives. It has been an important element of collaboration and co-creation in this project. The residency, as such, had inbuilt ownership and pride with the local participants at each step, which would ensure that the performance would resonate within the community's unique cultural and social context. The approach just enriched the artistic outcome by also bringing meaningful dialogue and understanding across cultural boundaries. Another key strength is the digital mentoring phase, which provides a structured framework for preparation and collaboration. This did, actually, present a structured framework of the preparation and collaboration that would help set clear ways through which effective communication and shared objectives will help lay a successful residency on which artists can come to Novi Sad, feeling their sense of purpose and direction. While in many ways, the project was a success, there were also problems that made clear the areas for improvement. One of these challenges included the mismatch at the outset between the different individual artistic goals of the participants and the collective aims of the residency itself. Although somehow or other, these problems were solved belatedly by the digital mentoring phase, clearly much more could be done at the very start of residency to impress upon residents the importance of collective collaboration. Integrating local context and sensitivities also proved a challenge, particularly in the areas of school safety and prescriptive education system. It would have been valuable to consult widely with local communities, considering that it was fruitfully engaged in issues, so that there could be an enhanced understanding and assurance that the effects of the project are relevant and effective. This may involve appealing to a wider group of community stakeholders, from parents to local authorities to cultural leaders, in an attempt to gain a deeper understanding of the needs and aspirations of the community at hand.

Strengths

Collaborative process: the residency strongly emphasised co-creation, increasing thereby the ownership and pride of local participants.

Digital mentoring: structured preparation facilitated effective communication and collaboration.

Non-verbal accessibility: the performance was accessible to a diverse audience, transcending language barriers.

Flexibility and adaptability: mentors and artists demonstrated resilience in navigating new environments and integrating diverse inputs.

Innovative outcomes: the site-specific approach and emphasis on reflection led to creative and dynamic final performances.

Engagement with local communities: local artists adapted their strategies to the context of the private school and the needs of its students.

Weaknesses

Alignment challenges: the initial difficulties in aligning individual artistic visions with collective goals indicated that more work on team-building was necessary.

Contextual sensitivity: greater community consultation could have enhanced understanding and relevance.

Logistical challenges: some facility limitations and unexpected participant changes presented opportunities for improvement.

Unfamiliar terrain: navigating the unfamiliarity of new groups and balancing artistic visions with collaborative needs presented challenges.

Institutional constraints: the private school's commercial focus and recent challenging events created some obstacles to effective engagement and collaboration.

Planning and communication: more detailed initial communication and a more structured planning approach could have helped to address some of the challenges encountered during the project.

While looking ahead, various areas for improvement and further development open up. In particular, some of the problems encountered might have been averted if there were better planning and more explicit communication at the beginning of a participatory project. Moreover, a more supportive and responsive setting for both artists and participants can smooth interactions and make collaborations more successful. It will further enrich the participatory art experience if new ways of engaging diverse audiences are explored in settings with commercial or institutional constraints. As the assessments indicate, the richness and complexity of participatory arts projects go hand in hand with the requirement for continuous reflection and adaptation, and they illustrate the potential of such projects to achieve meaningful artistic and social impact.





4.2. Engaging communities through art: a participatory circus experience in Italy

The artistic experience in Colorno, Italy, stands as a compelling example of how participatory arts can transcend traditional boundaries and create meaningful connections within a community. The methodology employed throughout the project not only showcased innovative artistic practices but also offered valuable insights into effective strategies for engaging diverse groups and navigating complex artistic processes. This narrative presents a comprehensive overview of the methodologies and best practices associated with the development of the project, aiming to serve as a case study for potential replication by other professionals across Europe.

The project's foundation rested on a core principle of participatory arts: to deeply engage with the community and integrate their experiences into the artistic process. From the outset, the approach involved a thorough exploration of the local context. In Colorno, the focus was placed on the town's public swimming pool - a central hub for the community and a metaphorical representation of the themes of water, displacement, and connection. This choice was strategic, as it allowed the project to tap into an existing social space where interactions and relationships were already established. The pool's significance as a refuge from the summer heat and a gathering place for various local groups provided a rich tapestry of experiences and narratives to weave into the artistic creation.

The methodology adopted was both inclusive and adaptive, following a structured yet flexible approach. The process was divided into three phases: exploration, workshops, and co-creation. During the exploration phase, the team immersed themselves in the local environment, engaging with community members and gaining an understanding of the pool's role within their lives. This initial phase was crucial for establishing rapport and identifying key themes and participants for the subsequent workshops. These sessions were designed to foster creativity and collaboration, inviting local residents to contribute their ideas and perspectives. The workshops were structured to accommodate varying levels of experience and engagement, ensuring that participants felt valued and heard.

This inclusive approach was instrumental in building trust and encouraging active participation. The diversity of participants - from young people in foster care to elderly women in aqua gym classes - enriched the project, bringing a range of voices and experiences to the forefront. The final phase, co-creation, involved synthesising the insights and ideas gathered during the workshops into a cohesive performance. This stage required careful coordination and integration of contributions from all involved. The artistic team worked collaboratively to develop a performance that reflected the collective input of the community while staying true to the project's thematic core. The result was a dynamic and immersive experience that resonated with both the participants and the audience.

The project's strengths lie in its commitment to genuine community engagement and its ability to adapt to emerging challenges. By choosing a central and familiar location like the swimming pool, the project effectively leveraged an existing community space, fostering a sense of ownership and connection among participants. The iterative nature of the methodology - moving from exploration to workshops to co-creation - allowed for continuous feedback and adjustment, ensuring that the final performance was both relevant and impactful. However, the project also faced significant challenges. One notable issue was the lack of clear leadership within the artistic collective. This absence of structured direction led to difficulties in managing expectations and resolving conflicts, impacting the overall efficiency of the project. Additionally, the unpredictable nature of working in an informal and semi-public space presented logistical challenges, including scheduling conflicts and communication barriers. The heat and demanding working conditions further compounded these issues, affecting the well-being and effectiveness of the team. To address these challenges, future projects could benefit from a more defined leadership structure. Ensuring clear communication channels and contingency plans would also help in navigating the uncertainties of working in dynamic environments. The inclusion of team members with strong language skills and cultural adaptability can mitigate communication barriers and enhance collaboration.

Despite these challenges, the BETA CIRCUS project stands as a testament to the power of participatory arts in fostering community engagement and artistic innovation. Its methodology, characterised by immersive exploration, inclusive workshops, and collaborative co-creation, offers valuable lessons for future projects. By embracing both the strengths and weaknesses of the process, other professionals

can build on this experience to create meaningful and impactful participatory art that resonates with diverse audiences and contributes to vibrant cultural exchanges. In conclusion, the experience in Colorno exemplifies how a thoughtful and adaptable approach to participatory arts can yield profound results. By integrating community voices, navigating logistical challenges, and fostering collaboration, the project has set a benchmark for future artistic endeavours. Its legacy provides a rich source of inspiration and practical insights for artists and cultural practitioners aiming to engage with communities and explore new creative possibilities.



4.2.1.

Location	Piscina Comunale Casanova, Colorno, Italy
Duration	12 August — 1 September 2024
Context	In the frame of Tutti Matti per Colorno
Produced by	Teatro Necessario

Artistic Team		
Artists Circus	Jonathan Gunning Robbie Blake (Fanzini Productions)	(IE)
Artists Participatory Arts	Caterina Moroni	(IT)
Local participants	Il Lago di Pane ODV: Ellot · Gea · Qasim · Hashim Andrea · Aicha · Mirta ZT Active Aqua Gym: Emanuela · Elisa · Catia · Silvana Fatma · Loredana · Anna · Miriam Maria · Barbara · Barbara · Laura Local community: Stefano · Marilena · Oltian Marco · and many others Thanks to Comune di Colorno and Piscina Casanova – Colorno/ Hera Sport & Fit (Giusy Ferrara and Nicola).	
Mentors	Enrico Baraldi Nicola Borghesi (Kepler-452)	(IT)

NEL BLU
– surface to
the depths

The artistic experience executed at Piscina Comunale Casanova in Colorno, Italy, was an innovative participatory arts residency focusing on themes of water, community, and human displacement. This immersive experience aimed to utilise the unique setting of a public swimming pool to foster creative collaborations between international artists and local participants, resulting in a site-specific performance. The residency embraced the concept of using the pool as a metaphorical and literal space to explore and express themes of displacement and communal interaction.

Objectives

Foster international and local collaboration: bring together a diverse group of artists from various backgrounds and community members to co-create a performance that reflects the unique characteristics of Colorno and its swimming pool.

Explore themes of water and displacement: utilise the swimming pool as a central motif to examine concepts of displacement, safety, and community through artistic expression.

Create a site-specific performance: design and present a performance that integrates the physical space of the pool and engages the audience in an immersive experience.

Key themes

Water and displacement: the project used water as a central metaphor for displacement and the search for safety and belonging.

Community engagement: engaging local residents and pool users in the creative process to reflect their experiences and contributions in the final performance.

Participatory art: emphasise collaborative creation and interactive elements to ensure active involvement from both artists and the community.

Public Performance

Dates: 31 Aug — 1 Sep 2024
Venue: Piscina Comunale Casanova, Colorno, Italy

Synopsis

What moves us, what anchors us, and what drives us towards new horizons?

In the heart of August, the hottest time of the year, when many seek refuge elsewhere, what happens in a town like Colorno for those who remain? What becomes the town's centre, its heart?

Together with the residents of this historic town, three artists explored the theme of human displacement through a collaborative journey.

Water, the precious resource and centre of power, is the poignant focus of our exploration. The municipal swimming pool, a human and urban setting for our research, becomes a metaphor for all the waters of the world: from unknown depths to uncharted seas, from scenes of human disasters to cisterns collecting precious water, and to puddles where children play.

At the end of our research journey, the audience was invited to take part in an experience that is part happening, part performance, part team game, where we will seek answers from the surface to the depths of our human existence: what drives us to leave, what drives us to remain? What do we leave behind, what do we gain?

The full video of the artistic output is available online. Please follow the QR code below.



**“The swimming pool itself
would have its own personality.
The space is very unusual, like
an independent state with
its own rules, its own habits.”**

Jonathan Gunning (IE)







4.2.2.

Critical analysis and emerging opportunities

In this section, we will delve into an analysis of the creative process by examining the perspectives of key participants, including international circus artists, local artists with experience in participatory arts, and mentors. This critical evaluation aims to uncover insights and trends that emerged from the BETA CIRCUS experience in Colorno. By synthesising their feedback and experiences, we seek to provide a comprehensive understanding of the project's methodologies and outcomes. This analysis, in conjunction with other artistic experiences documented, will offer valuable conclusions and potential trends for the sector, contributing to a broader discourse on effective practices in participatory and site-specific arts.

Mentorship analysis

Enrico Baraldi & Nicola Borghesi,
Kepler-452 (IT)

The BETA CIRCUS project serves as a compelling case study in the realm of participatory arts, illustrating the intricate dynamics of engaging with local communities through innovative performance practices. According to the mentors from Kepler-452, the project's aim was to transcend traditional theatre settings and embed the artistic process within the everyday environment of Colorno's public pool. This approach was not merely about creating a performance but about cultivating meaningful connections between artists and the community, thereby enriching both the artistic and social landscape of the locality.

In the initial phase, conducted through online meetings, the mentors took the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the artistic and personal backgrounds of the participating artists. These virtual interactions allowed for the identification of key thematic elements, such as water and community, which were crucial for shaping the performance. This preparatory work laid a solid foundation for the residency, ensuring that the project would be deeply rooted in the local context and resonate with the pool's regular visitors.

Upon arrival in Colorno, the mentors encouraged a hands-on, immersive approach for the artists. They were urged to engage directly with the community and use their

observations to inform the creative process. The mentors' strategy emphasised a collaborative and iterative methodology, granting the artistic collective the freedom to explore and develop their ideas. This approach fostered a sense of ownership and creative autonomy among the artists. The mentors were notably impressed by the pool environment's potential for artistic engagement, citing its popularity and the receptiveness of the local population as key factors in the project's success. The metaphorical significance of the pool - representing a microcosm of the wider world and a site of human interaction - was effectively woven into the performance, adding depth and relevance to the artistic work.

However, the mentors' evaluation also highlighted several critical challenges. One significant issue was the lack of clear leadership within the artistic collective, which led to difficulties in maintaining focus and coherence throughout the project. The mentors acknowledged that this challenge is not uncommon in creative contexts but suggested that future projects could benefit from a more defined leadership structure to streamline decision-making and ensure a unified artistic vision. Additionally, the mentors noted logistical and organisational difficulties that arose during the residency. Although the artists demonstrated resilience and adaptability, the need to adapt to the pool's unpredictable environment and the demands of working with a diverse group of community members posed considerable challenges.

Feedback from the artists themselves echoed some of these observations. They valued the opportunity for direct community engagement and recognised the impact of this immersion on the performance. Nonetheless, they also noted the physical and emotional demands of working in challenging conditions, such as the extreme heat and intense schedule. This feedback underscores the need for improved planning and support systems to enhance the overall experience for participants.

**Circus artistic
collective feedback**

Jonathan Gunning & Robbie Blake,
Fanzini Productions (IE)

In reflecting on the BETA CIRCUS experience, the feedback provided by Jonathan Gunning and Robbie Blake from Fanzini Productions offers a profound and nuanced examination of the participatory experience. Their insights not only reveal the complexity of working within a dynamic and unfamiliar

environment but also highlight the critical aspects of successful participatory arts practices. The evaluation underscores both the successes and challenges faced during the project, providing valuable lessons for future initiatives.

The initial impression of the project, as recounted by Gunning, highlights a common theme in participatory arts: the unpredictability of real-life engagement compared to pre-project planning. The project began with a seemingly informal meeting among the team members in Riga, where their diverse backgrounds and expectations were briefly shared. This initial interaction, while seemingly casual, set the stage for the complex interplay of personalities and professional experiences that would later define their work in Colorno. Gunning's reflection on the disparity between virtual meetings and the reality of working together in person underscores a fundamental truth in collaborative projects: virtual communication often fails to capture the full scope of interpersonal dynamics and logistical challenges.

Upon arriving in Colorno, the team encountered the pool's unique environment, which became a central character in their project. The pool, with its own distinct "personality" and unpredictable management, presented both opportunities and obstacles. This environment became a fertile ground for artistic exploration, reflecting the community's diverse needs and experiences. Gunning's account reveals that the pool was more than a mere backdrop; it was an integral part of the narrative, symbolising broader themes of community and displacement. The participants' enthusiastic and unprompted involvement further enriched the project, demonstrating the power of immersive, site-specific art in fostering genuine connections. However, the feedback also illuminates several critical challenges that impacted the project's execution. The team's initial schedule, designed to avoid the intense heat of the day, quickly fell apart due to a series of logistical issues and unanticipated disruptions. Gunning's recounting of these difficulties highlights the importance of flexibility and adaptability in participatory projects. The need for frequent adjustments, emergency meetings, and last-minute changes created considerable strain, particularly for those with specific health concerns, such as Gunning's struggle with heatstroke.

The mentors' feedback points to a critical area for improvement: the allocation of roles and responsibilities to ensure that the artistic team can focus on creative work rather than being overwhelmed by administrative tasks. Furthermore, the feedback sheds light on the varying levels

of language proficiency within the team. Gunning and Blake's experiences highlight the crucial role of language skills in facilitating effective communication and collaboration. Caterina Moroni's fluency in Italian proved invaluable, bridging gaps and managing interactions with local participants. The language barrier faced by the Irish artists, who lacked sufficient Italian proficiency, illustrates the need for clear communication strategies and support systems to enhance team integration and participant engagement.

Despite these challenges, the project culminated in a performance that was both innovative and reflective of the community's essence. The final performance, structured as an immersive tour, effectively engaged the audience and incorporated diverse elements from the pool environment. This creative approach, combining monologues, soundscapes, and interactive scenes, successfully conveyed the project's themes of water, community, and displacement. The performance's design, which included hands-on participation and symbolic gestures such as launching origami boats, demonstrated the project's commitment to creating an inclusive and engaging experience.

**Participatory arts
collective feedback**
Caterina Moroni (IT)

The feedback from Caterina Moroni on the BETA CIRCUS experience provides a rich and introspective analysis. Her reflections offer a detailed examination of the creative process, the challenges encountered, and the profound connections established throughout the project. This critical review draws attention to both the successes and areas for improvement, providing valuable insights for future projects in the field of participatory arts. From the outset, Moroni highlights the transformative nature of the BETA CIRCUS experience. Her description of the project as a "living, breathing process" captures the essence of participatory arts, where the journey is as significant as the final product. The project's focus on human displacement, a theme proposed by the Fanzini collective, allowed for a deep exploration of migration and belonging. Moroni's engagement with this theme was guided by a resonant quote from Pina Bausch: "I'm not interested in how people move but what moves them". This philosophical approach underscores the project's commitment to understanding and conveying the emotional and psychological drivers behind physical movement.

One of the primary challenges Moroni identifies is the initial uncertainty and lack of clarity regarding roles within the collaborative artistic group. This ambiguity, coupled with the changing composition of the team, created a sense of instability. Despite these difficulties, Moroni's extensive experience in participatory arts proved instrumental. Her role as the primary translator, while mentally taxing, was crucial in maintaining communication and cohesion within the project. This highlights a key lesson for future projects: the importance of clear role definitions and effective communication strategies to mitigate the stress associated with complex, multi-lingual collaborations. The role of mentorship emerged as another critical aspect of the project. Moroni acknowledges the value of the mentors' guidance, noting that their late involvement required a swift integration of their insights into an already established process. This delayed mentorship, while beneficial, added an additional layer of complexity. Future projects could benefit from involving mentors earlier in the process to provide continuous support and guidance, ensuring that their input is seamlessly integrated from the outset.

Engagement with the local community was a stand-out success of the project. Moroni's reflections on working with diverse groups, including minors from the "Lago di Pane" community and elderly women from the Aqua Gym group, reveal the project's impact on and enrichment by the local population. The swimming pool, serving as a central metaphor, represented a place of social aggregation and resistance. This symbolic use of the pool as a space of refuge and connection underscores the potential of participatory arts to create meaningful interactions and reflections on shared human experiences.

The structure of the project, divided into exploration, workshops, and co-creation phases, allowed for a methodical approach to creativity. This phased approach provided a solid foundation while allowing flexibility to incorporate new ideas and feedback. Moroni's description of the hybrid nature of the final creation, resulting from a blend of influences and perspectives, highlights the dynamic and evolving nature of participatory art. The final performance, characterised by its immersive and interactive elements, successfully engaged the audience and reflected the collaborative spirit of the project.

In her conclusion, Moroni reflects on the broader implications of the BETA CIRCUS experience. She notes that the project transcended traditional circus arts, merging various forms and cultural elements into a vibrant and collaborative creation. This intersection of genres and ideas underscores the potential of participatory arts to push boundaries

and explore new creative territories. Moroni's insights into the process of creating art with others, especially under challenging conditions, emphasise the value of the journey and the connections made along the way. Looking forward, the feedback suggests several areas for improvement: the need for clearer role definitions, earlier involvement of mentors, and effective communication strategies are essential for enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of future participatory arts projects. Additionally, the integration of dedicated logistical support and the consideration of language barriers are crucial for ensuring smooth operations and fostering collaborative success.

Overall, Caterina Moroni's feedback provides a comprehensive and reflective analysis of the project. Her experiences and observations offer valuable lessons for future participatory arts initiatives, highlighting both the transformative potential and the practical challenges of collaborative creative work. The legacy of this experience, as Moroni articulates, lies in the profound connections made and the insights gained, which will continue to inform and inspire future artistic endeavours.



**“By working together
towards a common goal,
both artists and community
members experienced a
sense of connection, which
strengthened and encouraged
future collaborations and
creative projects.”**

Enrico Baraldi & Nicola Borghesi, Kepler-452 (IT)

Reflections on collaborative innovation: insights and future directions

The evaluations of the BETA CIRCUS Participatory experience in Italy by mentors, circus artists, and local artist provide a comprehensive overview of the experience, highlighting both achievements and areas for improvement. Each perspective offers unique insights into the project's implementation, the creative process, and the impact on all participants. This summary aims to synthesise these evaluations, drawing conclusions and suggesting future directions for similar participatory arts projects.

The mentors' evaluation underscores the importance of guidance and support in navigating complex collaborative environments. They recognised the project's potential but also noted the challenges faced due to the late involvement of mentorship. The mentors highlighted that their role was pivotal in refining the artistic vision and providing strategic direction, particularly when the group encountered creative roadblocks. Despite joining later in the process, their contributions helped to consolidate and enhance the project's outcome. For future projects, the early integration of mentors could provide continuous support, ensuring that their insights are incorporated from the beginning and potentially mitigating some of the issues observed during this project.

The feedback from circus artists, particularly Jonathan Gunning and Robbie Blake, sheds light on the practical and interpersonal challenges within the project. Gunning's reflections reveal the unpredictability and complexity of working in a non-traditional space like a swimming pool. The artists' experiences with language barriers, the dynamic nature of the local environment, and the collaborative process underscore the need for clear role definitions and effective communication. Gunning's emphasis on the importance of language skills and adaptability highlights the need for thorough preparatory work and logistical support to facilitate smoother interactions and project execution. The successful incorporation of local perspectives and the creation of an interactive performance were significant achievements, demonstrating the artists' ability to adapt and thrive despite challenges.

Local artists, as described in Caterina Moroni's evaluation, appreciated the project's focus on human displacement and its integration with the community. The involvement of diverse local groups, such as the young people from "Lago di Pane" and the elderly women from Aqua Gym, enriched the project, adding layers of meaning and connection to the final

performance. Moroni's feedback highlights the successful use of the swimming pool as a metaphor for community and resistance, illustrating how the project resonated with the local context. The deep engagement with local participants and the creation of meaningful relationships were key strengths of the project, demonstrating the power of participatory art to foster connections and reflect on shared experiences.

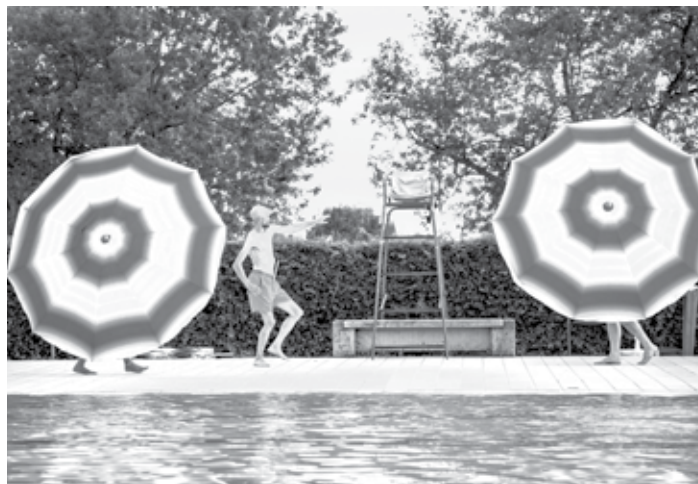
In conclusion, the evaluations collectively highlight the BETA CIRCUS project's success in engaging with diverse communities, exploring profound themes, and creating a hybrid artistic experience. However, they also point to areas for improvement, such as the need for earlier mentor involvement, clearer role definitions, and better logistical support. Future projects would benefit from these lessons, incorporating comprehensive planning and preparation to address potential challenges. The feedback also opens several perspectives for future participatory arts initiatives. There is a clear opportunity to further explore the integration of non-conventional spaces and the adaptation of artistic practices to diverse environments. Emphasising the role of local communities in shaping and influencing artistic outcomes can lead to more impactful and resonant projects. Additionally, enhancing communication strategies and providing robust support systems for artists and mentors can facilitate smoother collaborative processes and more successful outcomes. The analysis of the BETA CIRCUS project's evaluations provides several key insights into methodologies and processes that can enhance future participatory arts projects.

One effective methodology to disseminate and replicate is the use of flexible project phasing. Dividing the project into distinct phases — exploration, workshops, and co-creation — allows for a systematic approach that ensures thorough groundwork, adaptability, and responsiveness to feedback. This structured framework helps teams manage their creative processes more effectively and make informed adjustments as needed. Additionally, integrating local engagement from the early stages of the project is crucial. By establishing relationships with local participants from the outset, projects can benefit from genuine involvement and valuable local insights, thereby increasing the project's impact and relevance. This early engagement fosters deeper connections and ensures that the project aligns closely with the community's needs and perspectives. Another important methodology is the implementation of adaptive scheduling. Developing flexible scheduling strategies helps teams manage unforeseen logistical challenges and maintain progress despite interruptions. Having



contingency plans in place enables teams to adapt to changes and continue moving forward smoothly. In terms of communication, incorporating bilingual or multilingual support is essential. Effective communication within diverse teams and with local participants can significantly enhance the collaborative process. Providing translation services or multilingual support ensures that all team members and participants can engage fully and contribute to the project's success.

However, certain processes require improvement for future projects. Clear role definitions should be established from the beginning to reduce uncertainty and ensure efficient collaboration among team members. Defining roles and responsibilities clearly helps streamline project execution and prevents confusion. Engaging mentors early in the project is also recommended: their consistent guidance and support from the start can prevent last-minute adjustments and ensure that the project benefits from their expertise throughout its duration. Early mentor involvement provides stability and direction, enhancing the overall quality of the project. Finally, addressing health and safety concerns proactively is important, especially in challenging environments.



Strengths

Effective project phasing: structured phases of exploration, workshops, and co-creation ensured a solid foundation.

Early local engagement: involving local communities early on created strong connections and enriched the project.

Adaptability and flexibility: ability to adapt to changing conditions and participant needs was a key asset.

Multilingual communication: effective use of language skills facilitated collaboration and community engagement.

Collaborative synergy: dynamic collaboration among artists and community members led to creative and meaningful outcomes.

Rich artistic exploration: the use of water as a central metaphor provided deep thematic engagement and reflection.

Weaknesses

Role definition: clearer role delineation among collaborators is needed to avoid confusion and improve efficiency.

Early mentor involvement: earlier engagement of mentors could have provided guidance throughout the process.

Health and safety measures: improved measures to address health concerns and manage physical demands are essential.

Expectation management: clearer communication of project expectations could enhance alignment and reduce surprises.

Cultural adaptation: better preparation for cultural nuances and local practices could streamline integration.

In summary, the BETA CIRCUS project's evaluation highlights several key strengths and areas for improvement. The flexible project phasing, early local engagement, adaptive scheduling, and multilingual communication were significant assets that contributed to the project's success and should be disseminated and replicated in future participatory arts projects to enhance their effectiveness and impact. Conversely, improvements in role definition, early mentor involvement, and proactive health and safety measures are necessary to address the identified challenges. Implementing these recommendations will foster greater cohesion, efficiency, and overall success in future projects, offering valuable insights for refining participatory arts practices and contributing to the ongoing evolution of this field as a powerful tool for community engagement and artistic exploration.





4.3. **Connecting with nature through art: a participatory multidisciplinary experience in Latvia**

The artistic residency in Latvia, as part of the BETA CIRCUS participatory experience, stands as a compelling case study for innovative and community-driven creative processes. Held in Riga, within the evocative space of Rīgas Cirks, this project exemplified a methodology grounded in collaborative exploration, participatory engagement, and an adaptable creative process that bridged the gap between professional artistry and local involvement. Its outcomes offer a robust model for future projects, showcasing how participatory arts can foster meaningful connections, empower individuals, and generate unique artistic expressions.

The residency was anchored by the desire to explore the relationship between humans and nature, with trees serving as both metaphor and medium. Central to the project was the ambition to foster deep listening, balance, and care - qualities intrinsic to both ecological systems and collaborative artistic processes. The starting point for the methodology lay in a shared commitment among the artistic team to create a space of trust and openness. This foundation allowed participants to engage deeply with the themes, transcending barriers of language, discipline, and background. The methodology employed began with a preparatory phase where the artists gathered and tested exercises designed to elicit performative material. The focus was on inclusivity, ensuring that activities were accessible and engaging for participants regardless of prior experience. Techniques from participatory theatre, contemporary circus, and sound design were combined to create a multifaceted approach. By incorporating exercises such as trust-building activities, improvisation, and sensory exploration, participants were gradually introduced to the project's themes and encouraged to contribute their unique perspectives.

From the outset, the residency emphasised a co-creative process where the participants were equal collaborators. The workshops began with simple physical and narrative exercises, gradually building complexity as trust and confidence

grew within the group. Participants explored movement, storytelling, and sound-making, allowing their experiences and reflections to shape the emerging material. This gradual progression was instrumental in fostering a sense of ownership and commitment among participants, as they saw their contributions take tangible form within the performance structure. A critical aspect of the methodology was its adaptability. The artists adopted a responsive approach, allowing the process to evolve in alignment with the needs and dynamics of the participants. For example, exercises that resonated particularly strongly with the group were expanded upon, while less effective methods were adjusted or set aside. This iterative framework ensured that the project remained participant-centred, with the community's voices and experiences guiding the artistic direction.

The integration of sound as a participatory element was particularly innovative. Using microphones, recording devices, and everyday objects, participants were invited to create a soundscape that reflected their relationship with nature. This auditory dimension added depth to the performance, providing a sensory layer that enriched the audience's experience while offering participants a new mode of creative expression. The use of simple but effective tools empowered participants to experiment and play, reinforcing the accessibility of the process.

The rehearsal and composition phase marked a shift from exploration to refinement. Scenes and moments generated during the workshops were woven into a cohesive dramaturgy, with input from all collaborators. The mentor played a role as an external observer, offering insights that helped shape the final performance while maintaining the participatory ethos. Importantly, the project maintained flexibility even at this stage, allowing for adjustments based on ongoing feedback and reflections from the group.

The performance itself was the culmination of weeks of shared effort, embodying the values of inclusivity and collaboration that had defined the residency. The final presentation was designed to engage both participants and audiences in a dialogue, blurring the lines between performer and observer. The use of the historic Rīgas Cirks building added another layer of resonance, as the space's architecture and history became integral to the artistic narrative. By transforming this familiar venue into a site of reflection and interaction, the project demonstrated the power of site-specific work to reimagine spaces and create meaningful connections between people and place.

**“Its dramaturgy was based on
the participants’ reflections and
stories about their relationships
with trees and the delicate
connection that exists between
us and nature.”**

Krista Burāne (LV)

Reflecting on the outcomes of the residency, several best practices emerge that can inform future participatory projects. First, the importance of creating a safe and supportive environment cannot be overstated. This foundation enabled participants to engage fully with the process, fostering creativity and openness. Second, the iterative nature of the methodology proved essential in maintaining relevance and responsiveness. By continuously adapting to the needs of the group, the project ensured that all voices were valued and integrated. Another key insight was the value of interdisciplinarity. By blending elements of theatre, circus, and sound design, the residency offered participants multiple entry points into the creative process. This diversity of approaches enriched the project and allowed for a broader range of expressions. Furthermore, the integration of ecological themes highlighted the potential for participatory arts to engage with pressing societal issues, offering audiences and participants alike a space for reflection and dialogue. Finally, the project's adaptability and openness to experimentation were critical to its success. By embracing uncertainty and allowing the process to unfold organically, the residency created space for genuine connection and creativity. This flexibility also enabled the project to overcome challenges, such as language barriers and varying levels of participant experience, transforming potential obstacles into opportunities for growth.

This experience offers a compelling example of how participatory circus arts can foster meaningful connections, empower communities, and create impactful artistic experiences. Its methodology and outcomes provide a valuable model for practitioners across Europe, demonstrating the potential of participatory approaches to transcend boundaries and address shared challenges. By building on these insights and best practices, future projects can continue to push the boundaries of participatory arts, creating work that is both inclusive and transformative.

PARTICIPATION RULES

We are here to learn from each other.

We listen with an open mind, heart, and body,
and we are fully present.

We speak directly, unafraid to say what we
truly think.

We support, notice, and highlight the good,
and we challenge each other.

We accept emotions and conflicts.

We don't judge each other, don't hurt or harm
one another.

4.3.1.

Location	Rīgas Cirkis, Rīga, Latvia
Duration	27 October — 17 November 2024
Context	In the frame of La Nuit du Cirque/ European Circus Night 2024
Produced by	Rīgas Cirkis

Artistic Team		
Artists Circus	Ana Jordão Vincent Kollar	(PT) (DE)
Artists Participatory Arts	Krista Burāne Mārtiņš Eihe Andrejs Poikāns Nikola Suhareva	(LV)
Local participants	Baiba Miķelsone Elīna Vendija Ribena Ilze Bloka Inta Vītoliņa Jana Mikosa Kamilla Kūna Karu Treij Liene Dreimane Māra Ulme Māris Jonovs Pēteris Krastiņš Santija Biezā Sintija Krūmiņa Una Rozenbauma Viktorija Krone	
Mentors	Marleen Scholten	(NL)

ONE TWO
THREE, AND
NOW YOU
ARE A TREE!

The artistic experience held at Rīgas Cirks in Riga, Latvia, was an immersive participatory arts residency that explored the deep connections between humans and nature through the lens of contemporary circus. The project engaged international artists and local participants in a co-creative process, culminating in a public performance that merged physical expression, sound, and storytelling. The residency highlighted the dynamic interplay between ecological themes and participatory methodologies, offering a profound example of how art can reflect and inspire meaningful community connections.

Objectives

Foster a co-creative process: build a collaborative environment where artists and participants (co-creators) share equal roles in the creation of a unique artistic work.

Explore ecological interdependence: use the metaphor of trees and the natural world to examine themes of care, balance, and connection.

Create a participatory performance: engage participants and audiences in a dialogue that transcends traditional performer-audience boundaries.

Highlight the versatility of circus arts: integrate physical theatre, sound design, and contemporary circus practices into a cohesive artistic experience.

Key themes

Nature and interconnection: the project used trees as a central motif to explore ecological principles and human interdependence with the natural world.

Participatory engagement: participants were co-creators, contributing their perspectives, stories, and movements to the development of the performance.

Collaborative art-making: the residency emphasised interdisciplinary methods, blending circus arts with participatory theatre and sound design.

Public Performance

Dates: 15 — 16 Nov 2024
Venue: Rīgas Cirks,
Riga, Latvia

Synopsis

In this playful collective experience, the contemporary circus duo Ana Jordão and Vincent Kollar will join forces with participatory theatre makers Krista Burāne and Mārtiņš Eihe, alongside a local community of tree enthusiasts, to explore the deep connection between humans and their rooted companions – the trees.

During the creation process, the makers will seek answers to questions connecting trees and people:

If we could slow ourselves to the heartbeat of trees, what would we hear? If trees would whisper their names, would we greet them as ancient friends? How can we restore the fragile equilibrium between trees and human tribes? In a world crying out for care, what does it take to truly offer it?

Through highlighting care and the search for balance in our tangled relationship to nature, the project will

weave together the voices of people who recognise the nature of trees in themselves. One two three, and now you are a tree! is an ode to the intricate web of all living things, human and non-human alike.

“Let me introduce you to the tiny beetle nestled against my rugged bark, finding refuge in the texture of my being. I shield it from dust and the roar of engines, from raindrops too forceful and the blazing sun, from hungry beaks and prying eyes. But hold on, aren't you a little creature yourself? And I – I am your tree. I thrive with your presence, just as you find solace in mine. Come back again. Dance, read, write, breathe, touch, and awaken my senses like the gentle spring breeze. You're my little beetle!” (by a Linden Tree in Riga, listened to- and written down by Laura)

The full video of the artistic output is available online. Please follow the QR code below.



“It was beautiful to see that the participants were physically involved in the circus acts and really experienced that world, even for just a short time.”

Marleen Scholten (NL)











Critical analysis and emerging opportunities

The following section presents a methodological analysis based on the perspectives of co-creators in the creative process, including international circus artists, local participatory arts practitioners, and mentors. By examining their insights and reflections, we aim to provide a critical evaluation of the residency in Latvia. This analysis will contribute to a broader understanding of trends and practices in participatory circus arts, aligning the findings with those from other artistic experiences in this programme. Together, these evaluations will help outline significant conclusions and potential future directions for the sector.

Mentorship analysis

Marleen Scholten (NL)

The evaluation of the creative process in the Latvian residency offers a wealth of insights into the dynamics of participatory art-making, especially in the context of interdisciplinary collaboration. The mentor's reflections provide a critical lens through which to assess both the successes and challenges of the project, offering a nuanced view of the methodologies employed and the outcomes achieved. Marleen's initial apprehension about her role, stemming from a lack of circus-specific experience, underscores the interdisciplinary nature of the project. Despite her background in participatory arts and theatre, she noted the distinct challenges and opportunities presented by integrating non-professional participants into a circus context. Her decision to refrain from imposing a pre-defined methodology allowed the artists to develop their own processes organically, respecting their expertise and fostering innovation. This choice reflected the adaptability required in such projects, where methodologies from one discipline must be reimagined to fit another.

The diversity among the participating artists posed an initial challenge, as they came from vastly different backgrounds and artistic philosophies. This divergence required time and effort to harmonise their approaches, but it also enriched the project by bringing multiple perspectives to the table. The mentor praised the circus artists' ability to create



a safe and inclusive space for participants, which was crucial for fostering engagement and creativity. This adaptability proved instrumental in overcoming initial uncertainties and allowed participants to feel empowered as co-creators. One key area for improvement identified by both the mentor and the artists was the timing of her involvement. Her arrival after the first working week limited her ability to facilitate the initial stages of collaboration, which could have helped establish a cohesive approach earlier in the process. This observation underscores the importance of early-stage mentorship in participatory projects, particularly when the artists involved are not accustomed to working as a collective. Providing mentors with sufficient time and resources to engage from the outset can enhance the overall cohesion of the team and streamline the creative process.

The final performance exceeded expectations in artistic quality and participant involvement, reflecting the effectiveness of the iterative and participant-centred methodology employed. By prioritising both the process and the presentation, the project created a meaningful experience for participants while delivering an impactful performance for audiences. This dual focus is a valuable lesson for future projects, as it ensures the benefits of the process extend beyond the immediate participants to engage wider audiences.

The mentor's reflections also emphasised the emotional and social impact of the project. She described the participants' involvement in circus acts as transformative, providing them with rare opportunities to engage creatively and physically in ways they may not have experienced before. Additionally, the collaborative nature of the project facilitated connections across disciplines and cultural boundaries, reinforcing the value of participatory arts as a tool for building bridges and combating negativity. Looking forward, the mentor's observations suggest several recommendations for future participatory projects. Early and consistent mentorship is crucial for establishing a strong foundation and guiding the collaborative process. The integration of diverse disciplines should be embraced as a strength, but it requires deliberate effort to harmonise differing approaches and expectations. A dual focus on process and presentation ensures that projects deliver value to participants and audiences alike, while creating a safe and inclusive environment is essential for meaningful engagement.

Circus artistic collective feedback

Ana Jordão (PT) &

Vincent Kollar (DE)

The reflections of Ana Jordão and Vincent Kollar reveal the transformative impact of engaging non-professional participants in co-creation, shedding light on the methodologies, challenges, and opportunities that emerged throughout the project. Ana and Vincent, who entered the residency with limited prior experience in participatory arts, noted a significant shift in their understanding of what participation truly entails. While their previous work often incorporated audience impressions into their creative choices, this experience required a deeper engagement with participants. They observed, "This is the first time we develop a stage work that is so focused on and derived from what the participants bring with them to share with us". This shift from a creator-led approach to one centred on co-creation allowed participants' contributions to shape the content and direction of the performance.

Central to the success of the process was the creation of a safe and supportive environment. Ana and Vincent highlighted the importance of providing "a safe frame to express themselves", allowing participants to share stories and explore new physical and creative territories. This emphasis on trust-building aligns with broader principles of participatory arts, where mutual respect and dismantling hierarchies are key. The structured phases of the process began with exploratory workshops introducing participants to storytelling, physical theatre, and sound-making. The artists integrated their circus expertise into these sessions, sharing signature acts that served as both engagement tools and metaphors for themes of care and preservation. Subsequent phases refined this material into a cohesive dramaturgy, featuring motifs such as interconnectedness and mycelium-like structures. These themes underscored the project's ecological focus while connecting participants' stories to broader narratives of care and responsibility.

The venue, Rīgas Cirks, significantly influenced the residency's success. Its technical infrastructure enabled ambitious creative decisions, while its historical resonance enriched the performance. The inclusion of collaborators such as a sound designer and lighting artist elevated the production further, demonstrating the importance of integrating diverse expertise into participatory projects. This support also allowed the participants to be compensated for their contributions, an important aspect of valuing their involvement as co-creators.

Despite the residency's successes, Ana and Vincent acknowledged the complexities of such an undertaking. They described the process as "intense and exhausting", requiring them to juggle roles as artists, facilitators, and collaborators. Vincent's reflections on participatory rigging highlighted the balance of physical risk and collective responsibility, offering valuable insights into blending circus techniques with participatory frameworks.

Participatory arts collective feedback

Krista Burāne &
Mārtiņš Eihe (LV)

The creative process and artistic experience in Riga highlighted both the opportunities and complexities of merging participatory arts with contemporary circus. Reflections from one of Latvia's leading participatory artists provide valuable insights into navigating diverse methodologies and approaches while striving for meaningful collaboration with communities. The artists, with extensive experience in participatory arts, brought a strong interest in exploring its synthesis with circus. While the ambition of the project was clear, in their opinion, the initial stages revealed ambiguity regarding the role of mentorship. Although the mentors possessed expertise in participatory practices, their limited familiarity with circus work raised questions about the scope of their contributions. The mentor primarily acted as a mediator, assisting in team dynamics and resolving conflicts rather than shaping artistic solutions. While this support was valued, it underscored the need for more clearly defined roles and expectations at the project's outset.

The collaborative process relied on intensive efforts to align the varied working styles and principles of the team. The thematic focus on Latvia's forests and trees provided a shared foundation, with the open call for community participants successfully engaging 16 individuals passionate about these issues. Their stories, physical involvement, and creative input became integral to the performance, showcasing the strength of participatory art in fostering shared ownership and generating meaningful content. The structured progression of activities, from initial workshops to rehearsals, was commended for its clarity and purpose, allowing participants to see how their contributions shaped the final outcome. However, the process also highlighted areas for reflection and growth. A significant challenge lay in bridging the artistic languages of participatory and circus practitioners. The participatory

approach emphasised narratives rooted in specific social contexts, while the circus artists often favoured abstract imagery. While creatively stimulating, these differing priorities occasionally created tension in balancing the project's objectives with community needs. The artist emphasised that participatory art must centre on addressing community concerns and ensuring that artistic solutions arise organically from these priorities. The compressed timeline and emphasis on delivering a final performance limited the depth of community engagement, though the final product was celebrated for its multilayered and impactful nature.

The setting of Rīgas Cirks played a pivotal role in shaping the project. The venue's technical resources and organisational support enabled ambitious artistic decisions and provided a professional platform for the final presentation. However, this also introduced a responsibility to deliver a high-calibre artistic outcome, which at times conflicted with the exploratory and process-oriented nature of participatory art. The resulting performance, which included a photography exhibition, individual and group scenes, and audience interaction, was cohesive and well-received. Nevertheless, the emphasis on presenting a polished "work-in-progress" added stress to the process and detracted from the open-ended exploration that participatory art often thrives on. Artists suggest the experience in Riga offers several recommendations for advancing the field. Participatory projects must prioritise community needs, ensuring that artistic practices are developed collaboratively rather than imposed. Adequate preparation time and opportunities for artists to build trust and understanding are crucial for success. Striking a balance between creating high-quality performances and engaging meaningfully with participants is essential, with flexibility to prioritise the process over the product when necessary.

Collaborative creativity unveiled: reflections and future horizons

The evaluations of the participatory circus project, as shared by mentors, circus artists, and local artists, collectively offer a nuanced perspective on the successes, challenges, and potential future directions of this innovative endeavour. The project, built on the intentional blending of participatory arts with circus practices, aimed to introduce participatory methodologies into the world of circus while empowering its artists to adopt more community-centred approaches. As such, the choice to draw mentors exclusively from participatory arts

was a deliberate and strategic decision, ensuring that the expertise provided would address the project's core goal of fostering capacity-building in this area.

The mentors' reflections underscore the challenges and opportunities inherent in this approach. While their expertise in participatory art brought invaluable insights into methodologies for engaging communities, they acknowledged their own learning curve when working with circus-specific practices. This interplay of strengths and gaps highlighted the potential for cross-disciplinary mentorship to act as a two-way learning process, enriching both the artists and the mentors themselves. As the mentor noted, their role often shifted from traditional mentorship to facilitation and mediation, ensuring team dynamics remained constructive and that blind spots were addressed. This adaptive approach contributed significantly to the smooth progression of the project and its eventual outcomes.

The participating circus artists, on the other hand, reflected on the transformative nature of the experience, particularly in relation to their understanding of participatory art. They entered the project with limited exposure to such methodologies, yet they were able to integrate these principles into their creative practice. For these artists, the process marked a shift from working predominantly on self-driven, individual projects to embracing a more community-oriented framework. They highlighted the richness of working with co-creators who brought their own stories, movements, and creative inputs into the process. However, this shift was not without its challenges, as the artists had to balance their established practices with the demands of participatory approaches, often requiring significant adjustments to their artistic methods and perspectives.

The local artists and community participants emerged as a vital cornerstone of the project, embodying its participatory ethos. Their active involvement in co-creating content brought authenticity and depth to the performances. The local artists noted the empowering nature of the process, with its emphasis on creating a safe and inclusive space for expression. The structured workshops, which blended storytelling, movement, and creative exploration, allowed participants to see their contributions materialise in the final performance, fostering a strong sense of ownership and pride. However, the compressed timelines and the pressure to produce a high-quality performance presented notable constraints, occasionally limiting the depth of community engagement. Despite these challenges, the participants expressed satisfaction with the outcomes and valued the opportunity to collaborate in such an innovative and inclusive artistic endeavour.





The synthesis of these perspectives offers key insights into the project's broader impact and its potential as a model for future participatory circus initiatives. Firstly, the intentional selection of mentors from participatory arts rather than circus proved to be a strength, aligning the project with its primary objective of capacity-building. However, the evaluations also suggest that clearer role definitions and more robust preparatory phases could enhance team cohesion and set clearer expectations, especially for cross-disciplinary collaborations. Secondly, the integration of community voices into the creative process was a major success, but balancing this with the demands of producing polished performances remains an area for further reflection and refinement.

To build on the successes of the participatory circus project, several methodologies stand out for dissemination and replication. Cross-disciplinary mentorship, particularly the engagement of mentors from participatory arts, proved effective in guiding circus artists towards community-centred practices and fostering mutual learning between disciplines. Prioritising community voices as co-creators ensured that local experiences and narratives were integral to the artistic process. Flexible and iterative design frameworks, combined with structured yet inclusive workshops, allowed participants to explore storytelling, movement, and creativity within a clear framework while encouraging individual expression. Additionally, the establishment of safe and inclusive environments fostered active engagement and empowered participants to contribute meaningfully.

Looking forward, some areas for improvement have emerged to enhance future experiences. Extended preparation phases are essential for building trust, aligning methodologies, and defining roles among team members. Shifting the balance between process and product can allow for deeper community engagement, even at the expense of highly polished performances. Improved communication protocols are critical, particularly in cross-disciplinary or international collaborations, to ensure alignment and smooth execution. Longer timelines for co-creation would further enrich relationships with participants and enable a more profound exploration of themes. Lastly, incorporating sustainability planning can ensure that projects leave a lasting impact, extending the benefits of participatory arts beyond the performance itself and fostering enduring community connections.

**“It was beautiful to see some
of the neighbors waving from
their windows, and visitors
from the market coming to
experience the show.”**

Melody Nolan & Omer van Soldt (NL/USA)

Strengths

Cross-disciplinary mentorship: the integration of participatory arts mentors enriched the creative process, fostering mutual learning and introducing innovative methodologies to circus artists.

Community engagement: local participants were actively involved as co-creators, ensuring authenticity and depth in the artistic outcomes.

Flexible methodologies: adaptable planning frameworks allowed for iterative design and adjustments based on participant feedback and emergent dynamics.

Empowering workshops: structured yet inclusive sessions combined storytelling, movement, and creative exploration, encouraging individual expression within a supportive environment.

Collaborative team dynamics: the collaborative efforts of diverse artistic and technical teams resulted in high-quality performances and a seamless process despite challenges.

Safe and inclusive spaces: respectful, non-judgmental environments fostered trust and creative freedom among participants.

Weaknesses

Sustainability concerns: lack of strategic planning for extending the project's impact beyond the performances, potentially limiting its lasting benefits for participants and communities.

Compressed timelines: short creation periods limited the ability to explore themes thoroughly and build long-term relationships with participants.

Limited preparation time: insufficient time to build trust, align methodologies, and establish clear roles among team members prior to the residencies.

Communication gaps: inconsistent or unclear communication between international and local collaborators caused misunderstandings.

In conclusion, the project has demonstrated the profound potential of participatory circus arts to bridge disciplines, engage communities, and foster innovative practices. By prioritising inclusivity, collaboration, and adaptability, such initiatives can continue to challenge artistic norms and create spaces for meaningful connection and expression. The lessons learned from this project offer a valuable roadmap for future endeavours, positioning participatory circus as a powerful tool for cultural engagement and social transformation across diverse communities.









4.4. Bridging stories and spaces: a participatory experience in Portugal

The participatory artistic residency in Portugal demonstrated how innovative methodologies and adaptive practices can shape meaningful creative processes, even in the face of logistical and thematic challenges. Rooted in the ethos of community engagement, the project unfolded over several weeks, intertwining local narratives with artistic expertise to deliver a unique and site-specific performance. Through a combination of storytelling, movement, and physical installations, the residency offered a compelling example of how participatory art can empower communities while producing high-quality, thought-provoking artistic outcomes.

From the outset, the project prioritised establishing trust and rapport with local participants. Initial efforts focused on reaching out to residents of the apartment buildings surrounding the performance site, Planteia, to foster dialogue and collaboration. This phase was not without its challenges; engagement was slower than anticipated, and logistical barriers hindered immediate connections. However, the team adapted its approach with creativity and persistence, employing personalised letters, door-to-door outreach, and exploratory visits to key local spaces such as the market and the maritime museum. These efforts helped to gather narratives and cultural insights while also embedding the artists within the community's social fabric.

The project's methodological framework was iterative and participant-driven. Early sessions revolved around interviews and storytelling workshops, ensuring that the narratives shared by residents became the cornerstone of the artistic process. Themes of connection, memory, and shared space emerged organically from these interactions, as participants shared personal accounts that were later adapted into the performance. The use of physical elements, such as the installation of tubes, became a powerful visual metaphor for the threads connecting individuals, their stories, and the broader community. This symbolism was woven into every aspect of the creative process, uniting disparate elements into a cohesive narrative. Workshops with local participants were critical in developing the performance's physical and conceptual components. These sessions combined storytelling with

movement, knot-tying inspired by maritime traditions, and collaborative exercises that encouraged trust and co-creation. Participants were given the opportunity to explore new skills, including elements of physical theatre and basic performance techniques. These workshops were not only educational but also transformative, fostering a sense of collective ownership and shared purpose among participants. By prioritising a safe and inclusive environment, the project ensured that all participants felt empowered to contribute meaningfully, regardless of their prior experience with artistic practices.

The residency also highlighted the importance of technical and logistical considerations in participatory arts projects. The outdoor performance setting posed specific challenges, such as ensuring adequate visibility and sound quality during evening rehearsals. The technical team worked diligently to address these issues, devising creative solutions to optimise the installation of the tubes and testing audio equipment to ensure it complemented the narratives. Despite these obstacles, the residency remained flexible and solution-oriented, as reflected in the detailed weekly agendas that allowed for real-time adjustments and continuous refinement.

The culmination of the residency was a two-day performance that transformed Planteia into a vibrant and immersive space for storytelling and collective reflection. Drawing on pre-recorded audio narratives, site-specific installations, and live interactions, the performance invited audiences into a shared experience that bridged the divide between private and public spaces. The integration of the participants' stories into the artistic fabric of the performance underscored the residency's commitment to co-creation and its dedication to amplifying local voices. The audience, too, became active participants, engaging with the installation and responding to the evocative blend of sound, movement, and visual elements. While the residency achieved significant successes, it also illuminated areas for improvement. The condensed timeframe, while ambitious, limited opportunities for deeper relationship-building with the community and more extensive exploration of the themes. Expanding the preparatory phase in future projects could allow for a richer exchange of ideas and a stronger foundation for collaboration. Additionally, the project highlighted the need for enhanced mediation efforts to ensure clear communication and alignment of goals among all stakeholders. Thorough documentation of the process emerged as another key area for development, providing a transparent record of the project and offering a valuable resource for future initiatives.

Ultimately, the residency showcased the transformative potential of participatory arts to foster connection, celebrate shared cultural heritage, and create compelling artistic works. By combining adaptive methodologies, a commitment to co-creation, and a focus on community-centric narratives, the project set a benchmark for participatory arts initiatives. It demonstrated how artistic practices can serve as a platform for collective storytelling, amplifying voices that might otherwise remain unheard and creating works that resonate deeply within their cultural and social contexts.



4.4.1.

Location	Planteia, Casa Cultura Ílhavo, Ílhavo, Portugal
Duration	20 November — 8 December 2024
Context	In the frame of LEME 2024
Produced by	Bússola, in partnership with 23 Milhas

Artistic Team		
Artists Circus	Melody Nolan Omer van Soldt	(USA) (NL)
Artists Participatory Arts	WETUMTUM	(PT)
Local participants	Local community: Fernando Mouta Joana Ratola Soares Miriam Rodrigues António Calisto Filipa Lopes Manuel Neves Maria Edite Neves Mercado Municipal de Ílhavo: Fernando Maria do Céu Alzira Isabel Pedro Thanks to: 23 Milhas Municipality of Ílhavo.	
Mentors	Lali Álvarez Garriga	(ES)

Weaving Windows was an artistic experience held in Ílhavo, Portugal, representing a transformative participatory arts experience, blending community engagement with the interdisciplinary language of circus and performance. Centred around themes of storytelling, local identity, and the dynamics between public and private spaces, the project sought to connect the residents of Ílhavo's central square with their community and cultural landscape. Through creative workshops, collaborative storytelling, and site-specific installations, the residency culminated in an evocative public performance that brought the windows and voices of the community to life.

Objectives

Community connection: strengthen ties between residents, local spaces, and their shared cultural identity through participatory creative processes.

Engagement with local narratives: capture and amplify the voices, stories, and experiences of Ílhavo residents, bridging the private and public realms.

Innovative artistic integration: explore the intersections of participatory art and circus to foster new forms of creative expression and audience engagement.

Key themes

Storytelling and identity: residents' personal narratives formed the backbone of the creative process, providing an authentic and emotional connection to the community.

Public and private dynamics: the performance emphasised the transition from private windows to the public square, symbolising openness and shared experiences.

Participatory creation: collaboration with the local community was central, ensuring their voices and creativity were integral to the artistic output.

Public Performance

Dates: 7 — 8 Dec 2024

Venue: Planteia,
Casa Cultura Ílhavo,
Ílhavo, Portugal

Synopsis

In 2023, during the LEME festival, a striking moment captured our attention. As we watched a performance in the square, we noticed residents standing silently on their balconies, observing the event from above - a quiet yet poignant presence that resonated deeply.

In 2024, those balconies came to life. Together with the residents of the buildings surrounding Casa Cultura Ílhavo Square, their stories were woven into the fabric of the festival. Their homes, lives, and cultures spilled into the square, transforming the space into a living canvas. Through a dynamic collaboration, the narratives and experiences held within their walls were shared with the wider community, creating a shared moment of connection.

Weaving Windows invited audiences to witness a unique fusion of personal storytelling and public performance. By opening a dialogue between private and public spaces, the project bridged the gap between viewers and performers, celebrating the interconnectedness of people, places, and stories.

The full video of the artistic output is available online. Please follow the QR code below.











4.4.2.

Critical analysis and emerging opportunities

The next pages delve into the perspectives of key participants in the creative process: international circus artists, local artists experienced in participatory arts, and mentors. By examining their insights, we aim to conduct a critical analysis of the methodologies, challenges, and successes encountered during this artistic experience. This reflection, when considered alongside the findings from other artistic residencies within the project, will help identify trends, draw meaningful conclusions, and propose actionable recommendations for the sector. By bringing together these diverse voices, the analysis seeks to contribute to the ongoing development and refinement of participatory arts practices, offering valuable guidance for future initiatives.

Mentorship analysis

Lali Álvarez Garriga (ES)

The experience of mentoring the Weaving Windows project within the BETA CIRCUS programme highlights the profound intersection of participatory art and circus, providing insights into the challenges and rewards of such innovative collaboration. Initially, the mentor, with extensive experience in participatory art but limited exposure to circus methodologies, approached the role with curiosity and a commitment to adaptability. This alignment with the programme's intention to integrate participatory practices into circus creation marked a pivotal step in fostering cross-disciplinary approaches.

The preparatory phase, spanning over a year from the initial meeting in Riga (August 2023) to the residency in Ílhavo, underscored both the benefits and limitations of extended timelines. While the extended duration allowed for deeper discussions on participant roles and co-creation methods, it also risked diluting focus and momentum. As the mentor observed, ideas had the advantage of settling but sometimes felt disconnected between meetings. Despite these challenges, the groundwork laid during this period enabled the team to arrive in Ílhavo with clarity about their objectives and methodologies, though the realities on the ground required significant adaptation.

Upon arriving in Ílhavo, the team faced unexpected hurdles. Mediation with the local community had commenced

late, resulting in a lack of public engagement and participant outreach. Regular participants in local artistic initiatives were reportedly fatigued from prior projects, and the pre-Christmas period added logistical challenges. These obstacles necessitated a recalibration of the process, which the mentor aptly described as a need to “walk, accept the challenge, and understand the opportunity hidden behind the difficulty”. This adaptive mindset became a cornerstone of the project, showcasing the value of resilience and openness in participatory art. A turning point occurred when the team decided to engage directly with the local market, uncovering narratives that resonated deeply with the community. The discovery of the historical significance of the market space and its symbolic disconnection from the Casa da Cultura provided a thematic anchor. This revelation shifted the focus from merely integrating non-professionals into a circus performance to creating an event centred on the community’s collective identity and the buildings themselves. The team’s ability to pivot their approach based on these insights highlights the importance of deep listening and responsiveness in participatory art.

Despite initial difficulties, the project succeeded in fostering connections between the artistic team and the community. Interviews with locals enriched the dramaturgy of the final performance, while technical and artistic challenges were addressed collaboratively. Although the response to the open call for workshop participants was limited, the team adapted by focusing on individuals who showed sustained interest, ensuring meaningful engagement rather than token involvement. The final performances at the LEME festival were described as profound, simple, and effective, seamlessly blending circus elements with participatory storytelling. The audience played a pivotal role in the dramaturgy, physically and symbolically tying the buildings together. The emotional resonance of the event was epitomised by the reaction of a 92-year-old villager, whose story was shared, bringing visibility and recognition to her life. This moment encapsulates the power of participatory art to amplify individual voices within a collective narrative.

The mentor’s reflections provide valuable lessons for future projects. Firstly, the importance of aligning preparatory processes with on-the-ground realities cannot be overstated. Ensuring timely mediation and participant engagement is crucial to avoid last-minute adaptations. Secondly, the project highlighted the necessity of balancing artistic ambition with community needs, ensuring that the latter remains central to the process. Lastly, the mentor emphasised the transformative potential of stepping outside one’s expertise, demonstrating how participatory practices can enrich artistic disciplines like circus.

**Circus artistic
collective feedback**
Melody Nolan (USA)
& Omer van Soldt (NL)

The artistic process behind Weaving Windows unfolded as a powerful exploration of participatory arts and its integration with circus, offering valuable insights and challenges for artists seeking to connect with communities. This project, in the view of circus artists Melody Nolan and Omer van Soldt, marked their first foray into participatory practices. Their reflective evaluation provides a detailed account of their learning journey, the obstacles they faced, and the transformative outcomes of their work with the local community in Ílhavo. Both artists approached the experience with an openness to learning, informed by preliminary exposure to participatory methodologies during the BETA CIRCUS labs. However, the practical application of these concepts, especially within the context of circus, posed new questions. As Melody and Omer explained, “translating the methodologies discussed in the labs, primarily concerned with theatre and music, to circus was challenging due to the physical demands of the discipline”. These challenges became evident as they navigated the short timeframe of three weeks, a period insufficient to fully establish the collective, non-hierarchical creative process that participatory arts ideally require.

The mentorship of Lali Álvarez Garriga was a guiding force throughout the process, particularly in reframing the artists’ approach to their role within the community. Lali Álvarez’s philosophy, centred on reflecting a community’s truths rather than attempting to “solve” its challenges, became a crucial principle. Her question, “what do we leave behind when we leave a place?” prompted Nolan and van Soldt to focus on amplifying the voices of Ílhavo’s residents rather than imposing external narratives. This emphasis on observation and honest reflection underscored their entire process.

Upon arriving in Ílhavo, the artists were met with a reality that forced immediate adaptation. Initial plans for interviews and participant outreach had not materialised, leaving them to build connections from the ground up. This period of discovery led them to the local market, a pivotal site for the community’s social and historical identity. The artists learned that the square now housing the Casa da Cultura had once been home to Ílhavo’s market, a space deeply missed by residents. This revelation reshaped their project’s purpose: to tangibly connect the residents’ voices with the Casa da Cultura,



bridging a perceived cultural divide. The process of collecting and incorporating community stories became the heart of the project. Interviews with local residents were recorded and anonymised to create an atmosphere of trust, ensuring participants could share freely. These narratives were then woven into the installation and performance, forming a dialogue between the square, the cultural centre, and the community itself. As Nolan and van Soldt reflected, “We found a way to bring the experiences of the people we spoke to onto the stage so that their stories became the subject of the performance”.

The creation of the performance also involved physical experimentation with tubes as a metaphorical and literal connection between spaces. Daily rehearsals in the square not only familiarised the artists with their material but also gradually invited curiosity and interaction from passers-by. Over time, even the most hesitant observers began to approach and engage, demonstrating the cumulative power of consistent presence and openness in public spaces. The final performance at LEME festival was a profound culmination of this process. A sweeping installation of tubes carried the recorded stories from neighbouring houses into the square, creating a physical and symbolic bridge. The performance itself, featuring both professional and local participants, centred on connecting these stories to the Casa da Cultura, allowing them to be heard by all present. The moment was imbued with poignancy as neighbours waved from their windows and market visitors joined the audience. Nolan and van Soldt described the scene as “a space for the neighbours to be heard by the Casa da Cultura, and all who joined us there”.

Reflecting on the experience, the artists highlighted its transformative impact on their practice. For Melody Nolan, the project was a revelation of how participatory arts could enrich her circus work, offering new methods to engage with communities and incorporate their narratives into performance. Omer van Soldt, meanwhile, valued the opportunity to adapt his technical skills to participatory contexts, deepening his appreciation for community-driven creation. Both expressed a commitment to applying the lessons of Weaving Windows to future projects, recognising its potential for replication in other communities.

**Participatory arts
collective feedback**
WETUMTUM (PT)

The participatory project at the LEME festival in Ílhavo marked a pivotal moment for the WETUMTUM collective, blending their long-standing expertise in participatory arts with new methodologies and challenges. With a history of community-driven projects rooted in the CRASSH aesthetic and collaborative processes, WETUMTUM entered this initiative with high expectations, hoping to engage at least 20 participants and integrate the distinct elements of circus arts into their work. The reflective evaluation by WETUMTUM's Bruno Estima sheds light on the project's evolution, its obstacles, and its transformative outcomes.

From the outset, the collaboration with mentor Lali Álvarez was described as empathetic and smooth. Her experience in participatory arts shaped the team's approach, creating an environment of trust and experimentation. Álvarez encouraged the artists to step outside their comfort zones and to see challenges as opportunities for innovation. Her guidance was particularly valuable in addressing the unexpected low participation from Ílhavo residents, a striking deviation from WETUMTUM's past experiences of high community engagement. This situation prompted a shift in strategy, leading the artists to conduct impromptu interviews at the Ílhavo market. This approach proved to be a turning point, as vendors enthusiastically shared their stories and contributed to the project. Estima's reflection on this day underscores its significance, noting that the market, despite being a local landmark, had been unfamiliar to him as a resident, a realisation he found profoundly moving.

These recorded stories became the backbone of the project, allowing the community to be represented symbolically in the final performance. While their physical absence was felt, their narratives echoed through the space, establishing a unique form of participatory representation. This method, unconventional for WETUMTUM, expanded their understanding of community engagement, proving that symbolic and indirect participation can be just as impactful as physical involvement. As Estima noted, the inclusion of these voices highlighted the essence of the community, even if its presence was not overtly visible.

The integration of circus arts into WETUMTUM's work also proved transformative. Initially met with some scepticism, the collaboration with circus artists Omer van Soldt and Melody Nolan introduced new perspectives and enriched the collective's creative repertoire. The exploration

of corrugated tubes, a material WETUMTUM had previously used in their projects, exemplifies this synergy. Under the circus artists' guidance, the team discovered innovative ways to manipulate the material, enhancing both the aesthetic and symbolic dimensions of the performance. This collaboration demonstrated the potential of circus practices to add depth and layers of meaning to participatory art, a revelation that Estima described as a discovery.

The site-specific nature of the project added further resonance. Planteia, located in the square of Ílhavo's Cultural Center, became a focal point for exploring the tensions between the building and its surrounding community. The installation of tubes on the balconies of nearby residents symbolised a dialogue and connection between the cultural centre and the community, addressing past conflicts and fostering a space for shared stories. This metaphorical bridge was a central element of the final performance, underscoring the project's thematic focus on connection and reconciliation. The culminating performance at LEME Festival was described as singularly poetic and beautiful. While the limited physical presence of the community was a noted challenge, the symbolic power of their recorded voices and narratives created a profound sense of inclusion. For Estima, this process not only reinforced the value of participatory arts but also revealed new methodologies and possibilities. The project's success lay in its ability to adapt, innovate, and meaningfully engage with the community, even under unexpected constraints.

Looking forward, WETUMTUM sees the integration of circus arts and the alternative approach to community participation as transformative steps in their artistic journey. The project demonstrated the importance of flexibility, deep listening, and symbolic representation in participatory arts. It also highlighted the value of interdisciplinary collaboration, showcasing how different artistic practices can intersect to create new forms of expression. As Bruno Estima aptly concluded, this project was not just another step but a discovery, offering valuable insights and inspiration for future participatory initiatives.

Threads of connection: storytelling, community and future perspectives

The evaluations of the participatory artistic experience at LEME festival in Ílhavo, reflecting the perspectives of mentors, circus artists, and local artists, provide a nuanced understanding of both the achievements and challenges of this

innovative project. Each perspective highlights the complexity of blending participatory methodologies with circus arts, while collectively underscoring the transformative potential of such collaborations. Together, these reflections offer valuable insights and future directions for similar initiatives.

From the mentors' perspective, the process illuminated the importance of fostering trust, creating a safe space for experimentation, and maintaining flexibility in addressing unforeseen challenges. Lali Álvarez emphasised the delicate balance between respecting the community's voice and the artists' vision. Her role as a mediator rather than a director proved instrumental, especially in a context where community engagement did not initially unfold as anticipated. The mentor's guidance in reshaping strategies, such as conducting spontaneous interviews at the Ílhavo market, exemplified the adaptive mindset crucial for participatory projects. This flexibility not only enriched the process but also underscored the value of prioritising the community's narratives, even in unconventional forms.

For the circus artists, this project marked a significant departure from their traditional practices. As relative newcomers to participatory arts, they encountered both challenges and revelations in adapting their physical and performative techniques to this context. The low initial turnout of community participants tested their ability to remain open and inventive. Yet, through collaboration with the mentor and local artists, they discovered alternative pathways to inclusion. By incorporating the voices and stories of market vendors into the performance, the artists transformed what initially seemed like a limitation into a source of profound creativity. This experience not only expanded their understanding of participation but also demonstrated how circus arts, typically grounded in physical virtuosity, can embrace more abstract, narrative-driven approaches.

Local artists brought a unique depth to the project, leveraging their familiarity with the community and their own participatory art practices. However, they too faced unexpected hurdles, particularly the initial disconnect between the cultural centre and the surrounding residents. The history of the square and its symbolic tensions informed their approach, leading to the use of visual and auditory metaphors, such as the tubes, to bridge the gap between the two. The local artists' adaptability and ability to find resonance in the market vendors' stories highlight the power of proximity and shared cultural understanding in participatory projects. Their reflections underscore the significance of aligning artistic interventions with the community's values and histories, ensuring that the project remains contextually relevant and meaningful.

**“This symbolic gesture aimed
to link the building to the
community, to purge past
tensions, and to create a space
for sharing stories.”**

Bruno Estima, WETUMTUM (PT)

Across all three perspectives, several recurring themes emerge. The importance of adaptability is evident, as the project required ongoing recalibration to address the realities of the Ílhavo community. Additionally, the intersection of circus and participatory arts posed both opportunities and challenges. The artists and mentors discovered that while the physical demands of circus may seem inaccessible to non-professionals, abstraction and symbolic gestures can open new avenues for engagement. The use of the tubes, both as a creative material and as a metaphorical link between the cultural centre and the community, exemplifies how simple yet thoughtful choices can carry significant meaning. Looking ahead, this experience offers several valuable lessons for future participatory projects. First, the importance of establishing trust and connections within a community cannot be overstated. Early and sustained engagement, combined with clear communication and realistic timelines, is essential for meaningful participation. Second, interdisciplinary approaches, such as integrating circus arts with participatory methodologies, hold great promise but require careful adaptation to align with the participants' capacities and interests. Finally, the process reaffirmed that participatory art is as much about the journey as it is about the final performance. While the outcome at Ílhavo was deeply moving, the real success lay in the relationships built, the stories shared, and the new artistic possibilities discovered along the way.

The experiences and evaluations of the BETA CIRCUS project highlight several methodologies that should be disseminated and replicated to maximise the impact of future participatory arts initiatives. One of the most significant approaches is prioritising community-driven narratives, where local stories and voices become central to the creative process. Integrating symbolic elements such as audio recordings and installations proved effective in representing communities even when direct participation was limited. Flexible and adaptive planning emerged as essential, allowing the project to evolve in response to unforeseen challenges, such as low engagement. The blending of disciplines, particularly introducing circus arts into participatory methodologies, demonstrated how innovative combinations could expand creative possibilities and offer new layers of meaning. Mentors played a crucial role as facilitators, guiding artists through community engagement and encouraging a collaborative, non-hierarchical process. These practices exemplify how participatory arts can be inclusive, impactful, and responsive to the needs of diverse communities.



However, the process also revealed areas for improvement in future experiences. Early and consistent community integration is vital to establish trust and rapport, ensuring local participants feel genuinely involved from the outset. Clear role definitions among artists could streamline collaboration and prevent misunderstandings. Emphasising sustainable outcomes, such as installations or other forms of legacy left with the community, ensures the project's impact extends beyond its duration. Additionally, structured reflection and documentation are critical for evaluating successes and challenges, providing valuable insights to refine future methodologies. By addressing these areas, future projects can foster stronger connections, create deeper cultural resonance, and achieve lasting social and artistic impact.

Strengths

Community-driven narratives: centralising local stories and voices effectively represented the community and gave depth to the project.

Adaptive planning: flexibility allowed the team to overcome challenges, such as low participation, by exploring alternative approaches like market interviews.

Blending disciplines: integrating circus arts with participatory methodologies enriched the creative process and introduced new artistic dimensions.

Symbolic engagement: using elements like audio recordings and installations enabled meaningful representation even when physical participation was limited.

Mentorship support: the mentors' facilitation provided essential guidance, fostering collaboration and non-hierarchical processes among the artists.

Weaknesses

Late community engagement: delayed outreach hindered the initial involvement of local participants, reducing physical participation in the final stages.

Role ambiguity: unclear definitions of responsibilities among participants occasionally led to inefficiencies.

Short timeframe: limited time for community integration and artistic development constrained the depth of participatory processes.

Sustainability: the absence of long-term mechanisms to ensure the project's legacy in the community reduced its ongoing impact.

In conclusion, the evaluations of this project demonstrate its potential as a model for future initiatives: by embracing flexibility, valuing diverse contributions, and maintaining a focus on community-driven narratives, participatory arts can achieve both artistic excellence and social impact. This experience in Ílhavo, though not without its challenges, stands as a testament to the power of collaboration and the transformative potential of participatory approaches in contemporary art. As the participants and organisers look to the future, this project will undoubtedly serve as a source of inspiration and a foundation for continued innovation in the field.











5.

**Conclusions and
best practices:
insights for
participatory
circus arts**

The BETA CIRCUS project provided a profound platform to explore the complexities and opportunities inherent in participatory art processes, particularly highlighting the roles of mentorship and the matchmaking of artists from diverse backgrounds. These elements, when thoughtfully structured and implemented, emerged as key drivers of innovation, growth, and impact. However, they also revealed challenges that underscore the need for clear methodologies, mutual understanding, and structured facilitation in future projects.

Mentorship proved to be a cornerstone of the participatory process, offering a finely balanced combination of guidance, reflection, and support. The mentor's capacity to foster trust, mediate challenges, and uphold participatory principles was crucial in ensuring both artistic cohesion and ethical engagement. Acting as mediators during conflicts and as external observers providing clarity and direction without imposing their vision, mentors underscored the importance of early involvement to help shape collaboration and define roles, ensuring alignment and shared purpose from the outset. Similarly, the matchmaking of artists from diverse disciplines - circus, theatre, sound design, and participatory arts - served as both a catalyst for innovation and a challenge demanding sensitive navigation. Cross-disciplinary collaborations enriched the creative process by merging unique methodologies and fostering mutual learning. However, the process also revealed significant challenges, such as balancing differing artistic languages and methodologies, navigating power dynamics, and addressing ambiguities in leadership and decision-making. For example, the absence of preliminary relationship-building among artists occasionally led to friction, highlighting the need for structured "getting to know you" phases to establish trust and shared objectives at the start of the project.

As we look towards the future, participatory circus arts are poised to become a prominent cultural force across Europe. The experiences and evaluations from four diverse artistic projects conducted across European countries have provided us with invaluable insights into the transformative power of these projects. Through their ability to engage diverse



communities, foster social cohesion, and address pressing societal issues, participatory circus arts offer a unique platform for social engagement and active citizenship. By empowering individuals and encouraging innovation, these projects have the potential to significantly enrich the cultural landscape and drive positive social change.

Cultural inclusivity and diversity

Participatory circus arts excel in promoting inclusivity and celebrating diversity. By bringing together individuals from various backgrounds, these projects create shared cultural experiences that break down social barriers and enhance understanding across different communities. Through physical movement, storytelling, and co-creation, participants are empowered to express their unique perspectives, while artists integrate diverse voices into multi-layered works. These experiences demonstrate how participatory circus arts facilitate dialogue, mutual respect, and the celebration of cultural diversity. In increasingly multicultural societies, this practice serves as a vital platform for fostering social cohesion and cultural exchange, strengthening connections within and across communities.

Empowerment and skill development

One of the core strengths of participatory circus projects is their capacity to empower participants and foster personal growth. These projects provide opportunities for individuals to learn new physical and creative skills in a safe and inclusive environment, build confidence, trust, and a sense of achievement through group collaboration, and develop valuable life skills such as teamwork, communication, and problem-solving. The emphasis on skill-sharing ensures that participants gain both artistic experience and practical tools for their personal development. Encouraging creative expression and active participation fosters self-worth, leaving participants more confident and engaged as individuals and members of their communities.



Social engagement and community building

The collaborative nature of participatory circus arts significantly enhances social engagement and community building. By involving local communities in the creative process, these projects strengthen social ties and foster a sense of belonging. This increased engagement often translates into greater civic participation, as individuals become more invested in their communities and motivated to contribute to positive social change. The sense of ownership and pride that emerges from active involvement in these projects supports the development of more cohesive and resilient communities.

Addressing social issues

Participatory circus arts have proven to be a powerful tool for addressing and raising awareness about critical social issues. Projects that explore themes such as inequality, mental health, and environmental sustainability engage audiences in meaningful conversations and inspire action. This approach aligns with the broader European Union emphasis on using culture and the arts to tackle societal challenges. By integrating social issues into their work, participatory circus artists contribute to public discourse and advocate for positive change.

Innovation and experimentation

The field of participatory circus arts is marked by its emphasis on innovation and experimentation. Artists may explore new ways to engage with audiences and communities, incorporating digital technologies, interdisciplinary approaches, and novel formats to expand their reach and impact. This spirit of experimentation fosters fresh and exciting forms of artistic expression that resonate with contemporary audiences. The ongoing evolution of participatory circus arts highlights the field's adaptability and its potential for pioneering new artistic practices.





Supportive policy environment

The recognition of participatory arts within European cultural policies underscores their value in promoting social inclusion and active citizenship. Funding bodies and cultural institutions play a key role by providing essential resources and support for artists to develop ambitious and meaningful projects. Ensuring long-term sustainability requires an ongoing commitment to policy frameworks that support participatory arts. Partnerships with local organisations, funding for research and development, and opportunities for international collaboration are crucial for fostering the growth of participatory circus arts.

Cross-border collaboration

Participatory circus arts thrive on cross-border collaboration, offering opportunities for cultural exchange and knowledge sharing. Artists from different disciplines and backgrounds come together to co-create, enriching projects with diverse perspectives and methodologies. This collaborative approach fosters innovation and reflects a pan-European spirit of unity, cooperation, and cultural dialogue. By transcending national boundaries, these projects demonstrate the power of art to connect people across borders, promoting shared cultural understanding and solidarity.

Toolkit for future projects

The insights and best practices outlined here serve as a comprehensive toolkit for developing participatory circus projects that entertain, educate, empower, and inspire. As artists and organisers continue to explore and expand the possibilities of participatory circus, they can contribute to building more inclusive and vibrant communities across Europe. By embracing these principles, future projects can harness the transformative power of the arts to create meaningful connections and achieve lasting impacts.

In conclusion, participatory circus arts represent a profound and evolving cultural force that holds significant promise for fostering inclusivity, empowerment, and social change. The insights derived from the evaluations of four diverse artistic projects across Europe highlight the transformative potential of these practices in engaging communities and addressing pressing social issues. As demonstrated, participatory circus arts not only serve as a platform for creative expression but also play a crucial role in breaking down social barriers, enhancing cultural understanding, and promoting active citizenship.

The application of best practices, as outlined in this chapter, is essential for maximising the impact of future participatory circus projects. The emphasis on flexible planning, enhanced communication, and inclusive engagement ensures that projects are adaptable and responsive to the needs of diverse participants. Logistical planning and integrated reflection contribute to the smooth execution and continuous improvement of projects, while site-specific adaptation and cultural sensitivity ensure that initiatives are relevant and respectful to local contexts. Moreover, the collaborative nature of participatory circus arts fosters strong community ties and encourages active participation, leading to a more cohesive and engaged society. The focus on addressing social issues through creative means aligns with broader societal goals, such as promoting social justice and environmental sustainability. Innovation and experimentation within the field drive the development of new artistic forms and methodologies, keeping the practice relevant and resonant with contemporary audiences.

In essence, the principles and practices outlined in this chapter offer a robust framework for the future development of participatory circus arts. By building on the successes of previous projects and embracing these best practices, future initiatives can not only entertain and inspire but also contribute to the creation of more inclusive, vibrant, and resilient communities across Europe. The ongoing exploration and expansion of participatory circus arts will continue to offer valuable opportunities for personal and collective transformation, driving meaningful and lasting impacts within diverse cultural contexts. Through their ability to engage, empower, and effect positive social change, participatory circus arts stand poised to make a significant contribution to the cultural and social fabric of Europe.





6.

**Shaping the future:
recommendations
for participatory
circus arts**

The landscape of participatory circus arts is continually evolving, driven by the need to adapt and respond to the shifting dynamics of community engagement and artistic practice. Drawing from extensive evaluations of four distinct artistic experiences, this chapter provides a comprehensive set of recommendations aimed at enhancing the effectiveness and impact of participatory circus projects. By integrating insights from mentors, circus artists, and local participants, we aim to establish best practices that can guide future initiatives, ensuring they are engaging, inclusive, and sustainable.

The collective experiences and evaluations from these projects reveal critical lessons and strategies that are vital for the future of participatory circus arts. From initial planning to execution and reflection, each stage offers valuable insights into what works and what could be improved. This chapter synthesises these lessons into actionable recommendations, providing a roadmap for practitioners seeking to maximise their impact and effectiveness in the field. The recommendations presented here are designed to support practitioners in refining their approaches, building stronger community connections, and creating more impactful artistic experiences. By embracing these insights, future participatory circus projects can enhance their relevance, inclusivity, and overall success.

By adhering to these recommendations, practitioners can shape the future of participatory circus arts, ensuring that projects are not only creative and engaging but also inclusive, sustainable, and impactful. Embracing these best practices will contribute to the ongoing development of participatory arts, fostering meaningful connections and driving positive social change within communities.



**“The connections we made,
the challenges we faced, and the
stories we uncovered are the
real legacy of this experience,
and they will continue to inform
my work for years to come.”**

Caterina Moroni (IT)





Flexible planning

Adaptation: emphasise the necessity for planning processes that are adaptable to accommodate unforeseen changes and the evolving needs of participants. This flexibility ensures that projects can respond effectively to real-time feedback and shifting dynamics.

Iterative approach: employ a phased approach where initial concepts are tested and refined based on ongoing feedback. This method allows for continuous adjustment and improvement, maintaining the project's responsiveness and relevance.

Participant-led adjustments: allow participant input to guide parts of the process, ensuring the outcomes reflect their voices and lived experiences, while remaining aligned with artistic goals.

Enhanced communication

Pre-project briefing: establish clear and detailed communication protocols and expectations before the project begins. Ensuring that all stakeholders are aligned helps prevent misunderstandings and fosters a collaborative environment.

Ongoing dialogue: maintain open and continuous communication throughout the project's duration. Regular updates and discussions help address issues promptly and support effective teamwork.

Shared understanding: take extra care in cross-disciplinary projects to ensure clarity of methods, objectives, and language, particularly when artists come from diverse practices or cultural contexts.

Inclusive engagement

Diverse participation: involve a broad spectrum of participants from the outset to capture diverse perspectives and broaden the project's impact. This inclusivity enriches the creative process and enhances the overall outcome.

Voluntary involvement: allow participants to choose their level of involvement, whether as performers or contributors behind the scenes. This choice fosters a sense of ownership and commitment, increasing engagement and satisfaction.

Language sensitivity: address barriers to participation, including language differences, and consider support tools such as translators or visual methods for clearer communication.

Logistical planning

Resource management: ensure that resources and facilities are adequate and well-suited to the project's needs. Effective management of these elements supports smooth operations and reduces the risk of disruptions.

Contingency planning: develop comprehensive backup plans to address potential challenges such as participant dropouts or logistical issues. Preparing for these scenarios helps maintain project momentum and flexibility.

Technical preparation: provide sufficient time and resources for testing installations, sound, lighting, or other technical components to avoid disruptions during rehearsals or performances.

Integrated reflection

Daily reflections: incorporate regular reflection sessions to evaluate progress and address any challenges. This practice allows for early identification of issues and facilitates necessary adjustments.

Feedback loops: implement mechanisms to gather and utilise feedback from participants and team members. This iterative approach enables ongoing refinement and adaptation of the project.

Documenting processes: capture reflections, challenges, and successes to preserve learning for future projects, enhancing transparency and supporting long-term capacity building.

Participant engagement

Early involvement: engage participants in the planning stages to build commitment and ownership. Early involvement ensures that the project aligns with participants' expectations and enhances their investment in the project.

Flexible scheduling: accommodate the schedules and needs of participants to ensure consistent engagement. Flexibility in scheduling supports inclusivity and accessibility, fostering sustained participation.

Safe working environments: foster non-judgmental, supportive spaces that allow participants to experiment, share, and contribute without fear or pressure.

Site-specific adaptation

Contextual design: tailor the project to fit the specific environment and community. Leveraging local characteristics and resources enhances the project's relevance and impact.

Dynamic spaces: utilise existing spaces creatively, adapting them to fit the project's themes and objectives. Innovative use of space can enrich audience engagement and create a unique experience.

Respect for local dynamics: acknowledge and adapt to the social rhythms, cultural values, and practical realities of the spaces being activated.

Cultural sensitivity

Context awareness: be aware of and respect the cultural and institutional context in which the project operates. Adapting approaches to local norms and values ensures that the project is culturally sensitive and appropriate.

Local insights: seek input from local communities to understand their dynamics and address any specific sensitivities. This approach ensures that the project is respectful and well-informed.

Avoid assumptions: avoid imposing external narratives or preconceptions; instead, allow communities to lead in defining themes and stories that resonate with their lived experiences.

Collaborative mentorship

Mentor collaboration: build strong, collaborative relationships between mentors and artists based on mutual respect and open communication. Effective mentorship provides valuable support and guidance throughout the project.

Shared learning: encourage mentors to actively engage with the artistic process, fostering a culture of mutual learning. This collaboration enriches the project and supports the development of all involved.

Mediation role: mentors can provide neutral facilitation to help resolve conflicts or differences in working methods, particularly in cross-disciplinary collaborations.

Evaluation and feedback

Comprehensive assessment: conduct thorough evaluations at various stages of the project to gather insights and measure effectiveness. Detailed assessments help identify strengths and areas for improvement.

Actionable feedback: use feedback to make practical adjustments and enhance future projects. Focusing on actionable insights ensures continuous improvement and greater impact.

Sustainability

Long-term impact: design projects with sustainability in mind, considering how the outcomes can benefit the community beyond the project's duration. This approach enhances the lasting value of the process.

Continued engagement: explore ways to maintain relationships with participants and local partners after the project's conclusion, ensuring ongoing community benefit.

Resource utilisation: efficiently manage and utilise resources to minimise waste and maximise the project's impact. Sustainable practices contribute to the project's overall success and longevity.

Cross-disciplinary integration

Diverse approaches: integrate a variety of artistic and disciplinary approaches to explore new creative possibilities and enrich the project. Cross-disciplinary integration can lead to innovative outcomes and broaden the project's appeal.

Collaboration with other fields: engage with professionals from other fields, such as social sciences or community development, to enhance the project's effectiveness. Interdisciplinary collaboration provides new perspectives and solutions.

Empowerment and capacity building

Skill development: focus on empowering participants through skill development and capacity building. Providing opportunities for learning and growth supports personal and artistic development, enhancing the project's impact.

Leadership opportunities: encourage participants to assume leadership roles within the project. Empowering individuals to lead aspects of the work fosters ownership and builds confidence.





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