

# ACT FOR WORDS

## \* TRAINING COURSE \*

From October 1st to 11th 2019  
Bèdeille, France



Booklet addressed to anyone interested in theater forum  
and wanting to spread awareness through informal education.



Erasmus+





In October 2019, 24 people from 8 European countries gathered to get trained in theater forum techniques. This booklet has been written by the participants of the training course with some help of Solafrika's Team. It is a result of the work and exchanges which occurred during the training course between the participants, the trainers, the facilitators the local community and each person that we met along this adventure.

Of course, no booklet can tell about the emotions that were experienced, or the inner transformations some of us went through. Still, herein you will find a selection of reflexions that we went across, as well as detailed explanations of workshops in order to successfully offer them to other Lovely Souls. We hope you will get inspired and who knows, maybe one day you will reuse and improve those activities !

Happy reading !

For further information, please contact [solafrika@yahoo.fr](mailto:solafrika@yahoo.fr)

# Our European partners

Act For Words has been implemented by the following European organisations through the Erasmus+ Programme :

Rooftop Theatre, CYPRUS  
GEYC, ROMANIA  
La Baraka, BELGIUM  
KRIK, MACEDONIA  
Continuous Action, ESTONIA  
Alter Ego, GREECE  
Break the Borders, GREECE

## Solafrika : Hosting Organisation

Solafrika is a non-profit organization which aims to create meetings between European youth in order to share, understand better each other and create solidarity, as well as revealing the potential of each person. Since 2010, the organization implements a lot of environmental, social and cultural projects in the region of Ariège (France).

Through the Erasmus + program, the organization gives young people the chance to live international mobilities, all expenses paid.



# Life at Solafrika

Life here is based on ecological lifestyle. Unusual at first, but participants got used to it, and finally got fond of it. The atmosphere was really relaxing and people felt home. The environment was healthy, and people felt like they wanted to take care of it, keeping it clean and comfortable. A cleaning schedule was organized, for the different spaces of the venue, changing every day.

The water is saved through 2 tools : dry toilets, and a special spot to wash dishes in 3 basins. The garbage is sorted, so that it can be recycled easier. The food was healthy and tasty, the receipts creative. The facilitators were very present, caring about the participants and made sure everybody had enough good food.

Participants learnt to enjoy the small things and live the moment, and spent time together in the breaks, as there was nowhere else to go, because the place is very remote. Participants were from different countries and shared their cultural differences and their traditional food and drinks. The intercultural nights were the perfect example to share and learn from others. Everybody showed their traditional dances. Through the quizzes everyone learnt new words, places, famous people or facts about the other countries.

## Collective life

People taking on the responsibility of themselves and the group is a learning process that relies a lot on the personalities and the background of the group members. So it is always interesting and there are always things to learn, no matter the previous experiences.

Acquiring a perspective of an ecological point of view for every action participants take, having time to reflect about their imprint on the environment, is a helpful learning process as well, that can even be used after the project.

Last but not least, small tasks like cleaning a dry toilet or a common space during the informal time as a connecting and meeting process, where people can mix, learn about each other, try roles and behaviours they are not used to, and finally show parts of their personalities and backgrounds. Thus the group dynamic becomes stronger, and the group gives more space for the members to be who they want to be, accepts mistakes, and acquires common goals.

# THE PROJECT

## Act For Words

Everyday with the youth we are working with, or the people we are living with, we can observe discriminations. Everyday on the news we can see how dangerous discrimination can be, how far the acts can go. As youth workers, it is our duty to make young people aware about this, to avoid them to get into the other's aversion and fear. Non formal education is our weapon, and this time forum theater (also called theater of the oppressed) was our tool. Let's build a better society together! The objectives of this training course were:

- Initiate youth workers to forum theater as a tool to fight discriminations
- Fight against any discriminations on a European level.

As always in Solafrika, one of our aims was also to promote a more ecological lifestyle. The food we buy is organic and produced locally, and we use dry toilets. We also create a healthy daily life, with practice of yoga, singing, meditating etc., because peace of mind is important. Last but not least, we also create a kind, safe and enjoyable environment together with the participants, where everyone can express freely and be respected.

## Main activities

There were three big steps during the training course:

- Workshops to understand discrimination.

- Theater forum workshops as personal and collective development as well as to fight discrimination.

- Theater forum performances, to bring this knowledge to others and test ourselves.

There were three performances. First, image theater in a primary school; second, a forum theater performance on a local market; third, a performance at Solafrika's headquarters. Those 3 experiences comforted us in our newly acquired abilities, and gave us very different perspectives about the theater of the oppressed.

# Communication skills

In Erasmus+ projects, it is of great importance to create a safe space, even more when the techniques and methods used bring up intensive emotions and personal stories, like in the Theater of the Oppressed. The acceptance of mistakes becomes a crucial need for the group to build on its learning process. Therefore, communication tools like active listening or non violent communication are very helpful in the beginning of the project, to build this group identity and to create respect between its members. Then, the learning process becomes smoother. People learn from each other and support each other, and gain common objectives and motivation. Furthermore, community living and discussing the issues becomes more constructive, as people trust each other, but also the process.



# GAMES

## Energizers , Ice breakers, Theatrical games

To start a good day a good energizer is needed! Ice breakers, energizers and other games are good ways to create a group dynamic, get to know each other and break the barriers on the first meetings. But also to wake up and get us ready to start the activity in a good mood and energy!

### Ice breakers

#### **A Name And A Movement**

An easy game to learn names. It can also be used with hearing impaired people. Everyone, in a circle, starting by one person, say their name, and make a personal gesture with it. Then the next person has to repeat it, with the gesture.

#### **Time Lapse**

The room is divided by time periods (80's, 90's, 2000's, etc.). Everyone has to choose one of them, that somehow affected or changed them. Once the people gather in the different corners of the room, they share their stories of that time. It's a good start to build connection between people.

### Energizers

#### **Bonanza !**

The group is in a circle. One person stretches both hands and arms in front of him/her, and starts saying « Boooooo..... ». The next person joins him/her, doing the same, and so on until the circle is complete, everybody saying « Booooo.... » all together. And then everyone will shout « ...Nanza ! », throwing their arms in the air. Keep the movement going and feel the group power !

#### **The Chicken**

The group is in a circle. Players have to be very serious, as it is a very serious game :) One player is the chicken. He/she has to turn someone else into the chicken, by staring at that person in a funny way and making funny chicken noises. If the person laughs, she becomes the new chicken. Whoever else starting to laugh, has to go in the middle and act like a chicken for some seconds before going back to their place. Play for 5 minutes, no winner.

### **The Fight Club**

The group is in a circle made of rope. Everyone gets 2 clothespins, no one can leave the circle. Using or touching the private parts of the body is not allowed.

Round 1 : the goal is to get rid of your pins, by attaching them to other player's clothes.

Round 2 : everyone starts with 2 clothespins again. The goal is to collect as many clothespins as possible, by stealing them from other players, and attaching them to your own clothes. It's not allowed to keep them in your palms/pockets.

### **How Many Hands and Legs**

Participants split in small groups (4-5 persons). The game leader says how many hands and legs he wants to see on the ground. Each group has to put on the ground the same amount of hands and legs, no more, no less. Every round becomes more difficult, and the groups have to become very creative to succeed. They are encouraged to find fun and original ways to achieve the objective.



### **We Are Pasta**

The group is in a circle. The game leader starts cooking pasta, and encourages people to make the gestures as he/she shows, according to his/her story. Then the 'cook' tells aloud how he/she cooks the pasta : « Imagine we are spaghetti », « Now we jump into the boiling water », « Now we're adding some salt », « Now we're swimming in the water », « And now someone wants to eat us ! Run away ! »

### **The Order**

We are in a restaurant. The group is in the center, except for 2 people who are each at one opposite side of the group, separated by a distance of  $\pm 10m$ . One of these people is a customer, and tries to shout an order to the waiter (who is the other person). All the other people in the group are customers, and are trying to make a maximum of noise, to prevent the customer to place his/her order. Nobody can move from their original place. This game is an introduction for a workshop about communication.



# Theatrical games

## **Pass the Mime**

Participants split in groups of 4-5 persons. The leader gathers one person from every team. He/she explains them something they will have to mime (for example, « looking for something to eat in the fridge »). After that each one of those participants go to different spots, where others can not see them from afar.

Once they are in their spot they wait for the other people of their teams to come. Ten seconds after they are in their spots, one person from each team runs to them (they know where to find them). When the person arrives, the person already there shows the mime through a moving picture (not a still picture). After finishing the mime, the person miming runs back to the team, tags the next person and the same procedure happens again, until everyone has played. The last person to mime comes back when every person of his/her team has seen the mime. At the end, the teams are gathered. Each team plays the first, then the last mime again, and observe how it has changed. Then everyone can guess what they were supposed to mime.

## **This Is Not...**

Participants join in a circle. There is an object placed in the middle of the circle. The moment the leader places the object, he/she says that this is not the object we see. For example, he/she puts a wire and says « this is not a wire ». Participants are to imagine what this object could be. When someone has an idea, he/she comes in the middle, takes the object and tries to make the other participants guess what he/she has in mind through mime. The game goes on for 5-10 minutes, until it's not funny anymore.

## **Imaginary Objects**

Participants are in a circle, and the game leader pretends to hold an imaginary object, and then passes it on to the next person, and so on. This is the moment to make funny faces and gestures, imagining the weight, the size or the nature of the object.

## **The Scenery**

Participants are given a theme of a scenery, e.g. : at the beach, a living room, a pyjama party. The goal is to make a still picture with our bodies, representing the scene. There is a space defined as 'the stage'. When the theme is given, participants are to step in, one by one, on the stage. They are to shape a collective image. They can be anything : people, natural elements, furniture, whatever. But when they take their position, they are to be still, like a photo. When everyone is in their position, the game leader claps, then participants have like 10 seconds to look at each other, trying not to move, then everybody leaves the stage to be ready for the next picture.

## **Clown Face**

The group is in a circle. One person makes a funny clown face, then slowly turns to the next one. While he/she does this, he/she changes her face, and creates a new one for the neighbour. The neighbour will then imitate this face, and change it while turning to the next one. Good laughs for sure !

## **Different Ways of Walking**

Participants walk in the space, and the game leader suggests various spaces and situations, where they have to adapt their way of walking, e.g. in the train, in the nature, meeting your crush when you are shy, etc...

# Other games

## World Café

This game is a good way to start talking about discrimination. Installation: tables and chairs, like in a café. The facilitators can act as waiters and serve tea, coffee and snacks. On the order board, a (tricky) question, like « Should Europe open its borders to any kind of migrants? »

- 1st phase : 20 minutes to discuss and analyze in small groups of 4-5 persons. In the end the group had to create another question related to the topic : a question that actually identifies the real problem.
- 2nd phase : the questions made up in phase 1 are hand picked by the groups and discussed/analyzed for 20 minutes with the purpose of finding solutions. Then the groups write down these solutions.
- 3rd phase : each group, during 5 minutes, presents their solutions to the other groups.

## Taxi Taxi

This game can be used to introduce the topic of discrimination, that can be used to create empathy on a deep level regarding victims of discrimination.

People split in 2 teams : drivers and passengers. The game leader gives instructions, secretly, to the drivers : they are to select, together, one specific characteristic that could discriminate some passengers from the others. So they will refuse to take passengers with these characteristics. It could be people wearing a winter jacket, or people with dark hair... During the game, the leader can add some characteristics, that he/she will discretely tell drivers about.

The instructions to the passengers are that they should be calling taxis all the time in order to arrive to their destinations.

At the end of the game the leader asks the participants how they felt. He/she can also ask the passengers their thoughts about the secret instructions to the drivers, but at the end the leader should explain clearly what it was about.

*Observations : « As a passenger who was excluded, I felt very bad. I didn't understand why drivers didn't want to take me. At the beginning I thought it was from personal reasons, but after I found out the rules, and I understood how discriminated people are feeling in real life. »*

## Columbian Hypnosis

This is a game about power. Participants start in couples. One raises the hand, and moves it into space. The other, hypnotized by this hand, follows it with their whole bodies, trying to stick close to it. All the couples move simultaneously. Then the roles switch.

In the second phase, the game leader will tell some couples to only follow another hand, so there will be less and less teams, until everyone follows the same hand. A variation could be that the people weaving their hand have to follow themselves another hand, while continuing to move their own hand, also until everyone is connected to the same hand, even undirectly.

Suggestions : What if one by one, people stop following the hand ?

*Observations :*

- *There is a responsibility to lead : the more people the more responsibility.*
- *Feelings emerged, about the trust to follow, about making connections, about staying in the game to support the others even if it felt weird or wrong, about the intimacy...*

# THEATER FORUM

## Introducing the Theater of the Oppressed

### The Great Game of Power

First, participants split in two groups. There are two tables, and on each one a paper with the definition of the words « oppression » and « privilege ». Each group is to discuss each definition, one after the other, for 10 minutes.

Then the space is divided into a scene and a space for the audience. On the scene there is a table and four chairs : one chair is on one side of the table, the 3 others on the opposite side. Then the leader asks : « What do you see ? » ; then « Where do you think the power is concentrated in this scene ? » ; and infally « How can you create a scene with an even more unbalanced power or stronger power position, with these elements only ? ».

Participants are invited to change the picture as they feel, and after each change they discuss what they see now. Then the leader asks « How can we change the scene to get a balance of power, so that it is equally shared ? ». Again, participants are invited to change the picture and discuss it. The leader's role is to repeat what the participants are saying, so that everyone can understand clearly. He/she has to accept all the opinions with no judgement.

*Observations : it was interesting that people had different views and visions about the pictures. The leader's behaviour is a good introduction to understand the role of the joker, in theater forum.*

The game was followed by a brief history of the background of the Theater of the Oppressed, mentioning its various forms : image theater, forum theater, legislative theater, invisible theater, newspaper theater.



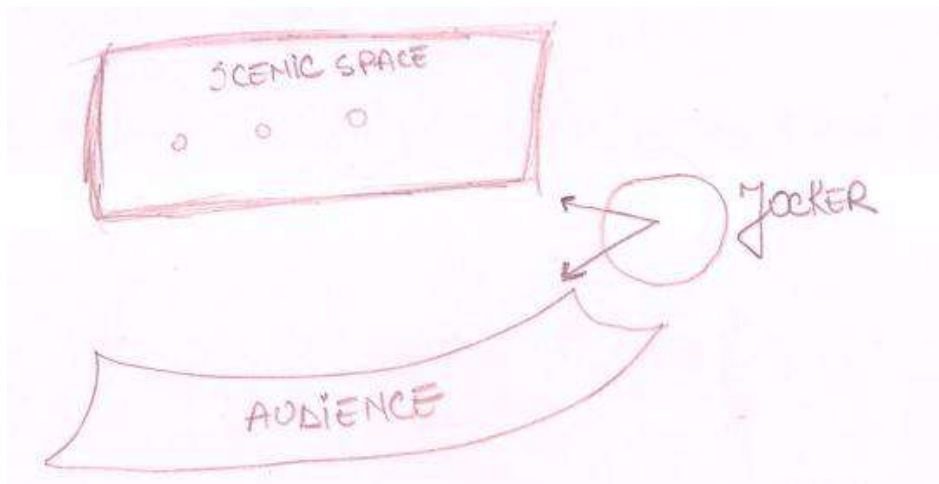
# Learning to act

## Preparation Phase

Choose a target group : first meet the local community, to identify social issues that occur in this specific region. Then zoom in, to identify the needs of the community where the performance will take place (Who ? When ? Why?), to chose a pertinent topic.

## General Atmosphere

- First of all, create and maintain a safe environment for all the people involved in the process (actors, spectactors and joker). Physically speaking, of course, but also emotionnally : during the play, accept suggestions from the audience keeping a neutral position, stay inside your role and avoid judgemental behaviour. These are key elements for the Theater of the Oppressed to be a success.
- Put some chairs on the side of the scene, for the actors who will be replaced.
- Keep a clear and free area for the joker.



## Involving The Audience

- Calling people to join the audience can be a tricky process : it's always helpful to use creative ways matching your personality (using music, dance, flash mob and so on).
- Before the scene(s), it's useful to use some icebreaking activities for all the people to feel more comfortable. Depending on the target group (age, background and so on), and the energy of the moment, it can be useful to play an energizer (always very nice with children).
- At the end of the scene(s), in order to stimulate the energy, closing activities can et should be used, as this is one of the most important parts of the tools of the Theater of the Oppressed. We can use connecting activities, distressing activities, calming down activities, and/or informal time together.

**The Spect-actor is an active spectator, that will suggest alternatives to the actors, or even replace them him/herself to play the alternative scene.**

### **Technical Overview**

- Set a close distance between the stage and the audience, in order for the people of the audience (spectators) to feel comfortable to come on stage.
- Keep in mind the positioning on the stage, in order for everybody to be visible, not turning their back to the audience.
- It is also important to check the « positioning » of the voice : powerful, clear, well-paced, active listening).
- Respect the space of the others.

### **Overcoming Language Barriers**

Simultaneous translation is very helpful, ideally two translators : one for the audience (placed in the middle of the audience), and one for the actors (placed behind the actors).

**The Joker is the person between the actors and the spectators.  
He/she's the one leading the discussion.**

### **First Practice**

A scene is given as an example. The topic is always a discrimination of some sort. A small group (3-5 people) will play it. The joker introduces the characters, then the scene begins. It's short, and has to be clear for the audience to understand the issue. When the scene reaches the climax, the actors freeze. Then the forum starts under guidance of the joker, who will ask the audience some questions to make sure they understood the situation. Proposals are made from the spectators, and the actors will play the scene again, respecting these propositions (e.g. « Maybe the cop could make an effort to understand these guys? »). The audience tries to find solutions to solve the situation. They have been informed by the joker that there is not one right solutions, but many possible proposals. Then, the spectators can start replacing the actors themselves, and play their part the way they want it.

### **Building Scenes**

Participants had a time to write down some discriminating situations they experiences or heard of. Then people with similar topics were asked to form small groups (max 4 or 5). After sharing experiences on the topic, they had to choose one of them, and make a scene out of it. E.g. : job criteria discrimination, racism, sexism, LGBTQI+ discrimination, ...

To make the scene, following questions had to be answered :

- What is the title ?
- Who are the characters ? What are their names ?
- Which general topic of discrimination was chosen ?
- What is the specific problem depicted in the scene ?

Each scene had to have a very clear beginning and a very clear end. This end would be a climax, representing the most intense moment of the situation, and there, actors had to freeze, so that the exchange with the the audience could begin.

Forum theater is not general : it's a concrete scene, with people living specific situations.

The scenes were recorded, so that everyone could remember them when they would have to rehearse them the next day or the day after.

At some point, the small groups would show their scenes to the big group, so they could verify the clarity of the scenes. Then they would make the necessary adjustments.



### **Characters**

Some time was spent in small groups to develop the characters, following these guidelines :

- Who are they ?
- How are they connected ?
- What do they want (in the scene) ?
- Do they change (through the scene) ? How ?

Forum theater is meant to be realistic. Actors are to act as their character would act.

During the performance, the actors will have to repeat the same scene a lot. Their job will be to keep the emotion strong as time goes by.

### **Performances**

As we had 4 opportunities to make a performance, and we were a big group, we decided to split the group in 4, so that each group would only make one performance, each one with a different joker.

On the « D » days, participants started with an ice breaker game with the audience, then everybody was installed in the space for the audience. The joker explained about forum theater and that it was an interactive show ; the fact that the audience were spectactors, and could cut the scene any time (after the first play). Then the joker introduced the scene (title, characters), and the actors played the scene. After that, discussions started between the audience and the joker about the theme and the issue of the scene, and about who was the oppressed and the oppressor. Some proposals were made, and the audience was given some chances to replace the actor themselves in order to change the situation, hopefully for the better. At the end, everybody took part in a quick and informal debriefing.

## Some views on our performances

### **Forum theater performance at the local market :**

*« At first, we were concerned that people would not come, yet they did. That was a pleasant surprise for all of us : there was no free chair for our play. Even though they were old people, they had the courage to stand up and come on stage to change the situation. The language barrier was no obstacle for these people. To our surprise, old French people are more open-minded and daring than people in our countries. We felt appreciated as we could get some interaction, but also welcome. We also felt surprised that people from the audience, after the show, wanted to integrate in our group and to know more about us and our activities. This gave us a warm feeling inside. »*



### **Forum theater performance at Solafrika with local people :**

*« There were two shows in two different rooms : one for english speaking people, and one for french speaking people. Even so, there were only 15 guests. We would have liked more, but even so we were nervous. Though, the audience interacted with us and was really involved in what was happening in the scenes. We had fun playing the roles many times but each time from a different point of view. After the show, we had a gathering meeting with everone, were we could share our feelings and thoughts but also talk with the locals and find out more about the french lifestyle. »*

# THE JOKER

## Some techniques

- Announce that you are no professional actors, and that nobody is in forum theater, so people can feel comfortable in joining you.
- Also announce there are no proposals.
- Cut the scene before it's too long, or if it doesn't lead to a climax.
- Keep neutral, whatever the proposal or the discussions.
- Observe the facts, don't imagine or assume.
- Don't go too psychological.
- Repeat and rephrase what the audience says, to make sure everybody heard it and to make sure the point of the spectactor is clear.
- Ask questions like « *How can we help the oppressed here?* », but don't accept spoken situations: ask people to come on stage and play it.



- If there are many suggestions from the audience, a way to deal with it is to say « *Let's keep your idea in mind, we'll come back to it if we have time* ».
- Make sure you all can always come back to the original scene, so that the audience doesn't get confused ; as with time, the audience will make more and more changes, and more replacements. E .g. : « *Would you like to interact with the characters from the original scene, or with the new ones?* »
- After a replacement, check with the person if she did what she really intended to do. If not, clarify with him/her.
- After each replacement, the joker starts to talk with the audience again : « *Did something change ? What ?* »
- Always thank and applause the replacement actors.
- Always pay attention to the audience and be reactive !
- Don't wait too long before the first replacements.
- Make a closure and invite people to debrief shortly (« *If you observe situations like this in the future, what will you do ?* »)



# The magic questions

The joker uses these questions to make the audience participate, to be interactive.

- The first question to the audience is always for them to understand the situation and the issue in it. E.g. : «*What do you see ? What's happening in this scene ? What's the issue ?*» Etc.
- The goal of the joker is to make the audience participate in the scene, and replace one of the characters. To do this there are questions like : «*Do you want to do something about it ?*», «*I see you are reacting, do you want to come on stage ?*», «*Could this happen in real life ?*»
- There are some questions to guide the audience in a soft way. «*If this character acts like this, would every character react the same way as in the beginning ?*»
- To push things further, if someone in the audience finds a solution to the issue, the joker might ask : «*Is this realistic ?*» or «*Could it get worse ?*» It's a way for the audience to understand 'magic' solutions are hard to find.

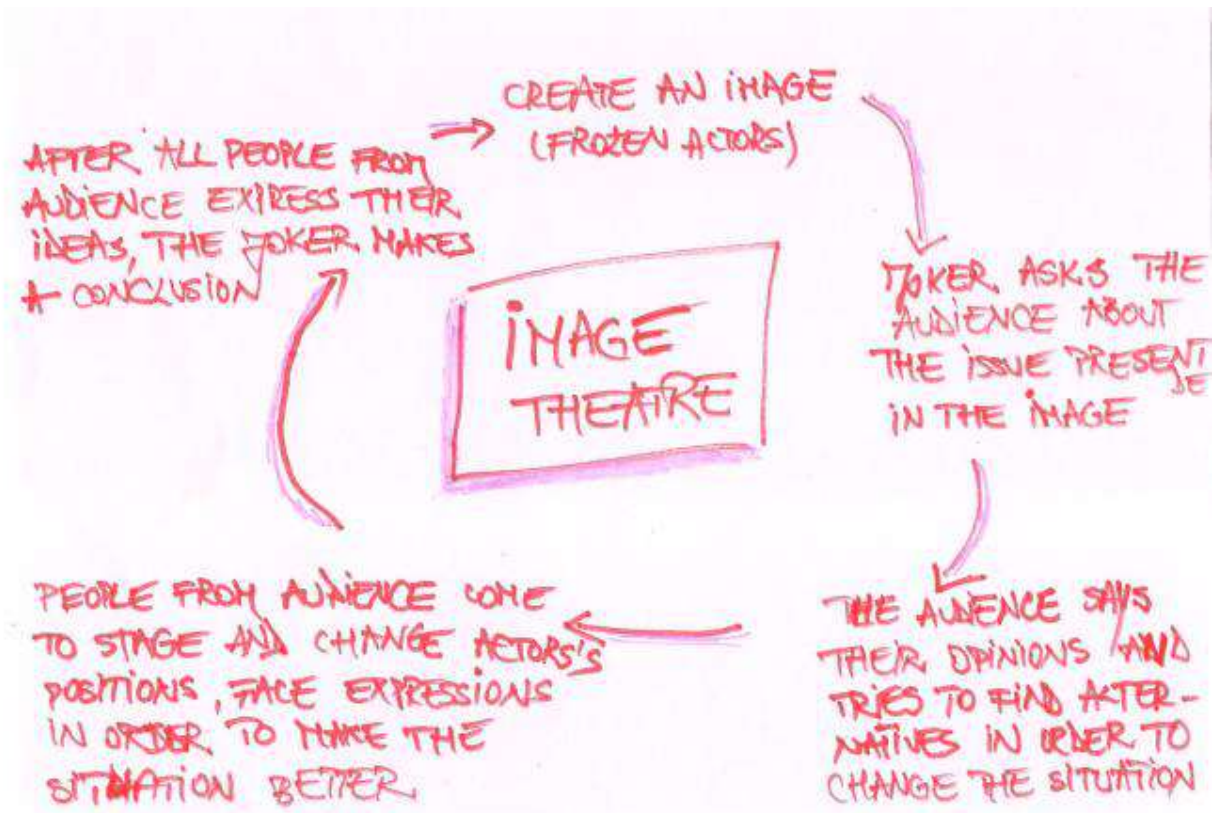
## IMAGE THEATER

Image theater is a social invention tool, and, like theater forum, is an interactive theater technique. Useful for education, to boost creative processes, to integrate different cultures, and to make people aware of social issues in a very clear, very immediate way.

The idea is to create a short scene, highlighting an issue. At the climax of the play, like in forum theater, they freeze, making the problem much clearer. At that moment, the joker asks if there is any problem in the image.

If yes, the audience has to identify it, and then try to solve it. They will do this not by replacing the actors, but by moving them, like they would be mannequins. They can change the body position, the body parts or even the facial expression. The joker has to tell the audience to be gentle and careful when they move the actors, and always ask for their consent before.





## A view on our performance

### Image theater performance at the local school :

« We played image theater as it was the easiest form of forum theater, for us and for the 9 years old kids of the local school. It was difficult at first, because of the language barrier, but we managed to do it with some help from the French and Belgian people. We felt happy and enthusiastic while we were waiting for them to react and moreover, they got a solution pretty fast. At the end, we got hugs from the little humans and that melted down our hearts. Even more, this made us think that language barrier can't stop people from cooperating. »

Who says: "In Europe, there are no oppressed people" is an oppressor.

Here also, there are women, black people, immigrants, workers, peasants - and they are not saying that oppression doesn't exist.

Augusto Boal, Paris, 1982

# Many thanks to ...

The Erasmus+ Program  
The French National Agency

Rooftop Theatre, CYPRUS  
GEYC, ROMANIA  
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KRIK, MACEDONIA  
Continuous Action, ESTONIA  
Alter Ego, GREECE  
Break the Borders, GREECE

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The Market Committee of Sainte Croix Volvestre

And all the other people who made this project possible!



Cheers from Ophélie,  
Maëva, Laurent and Gopal  
Organizers and facilitators  
from Solafrika

Can we sit above the hills ?  
All in one looking around  
Get in places  
Never remembering faces

Cheese and wines may be the roots  
Music, concerts and all french goods  
Kids show feelings, people play  
Hide and seek around the way

We go inside  
We go outside  
Switch the places in the dance  
This is La vie en France

(Adela T.)

