

Be Part!

2022–2023

Case Study

Lenka Flory

Michaela Kessler

30. 6. 2023

BPART z. s.

BPART specialises in the implementation of artistic community projects, especially in an international and interdisciplinary context.

The BPART initiative was created in response to the absence of similar projects in the Czech Republic. BPART builds on the Society of Dance and Musical Education (est. 1990), but goes further with its activities, moving from cultural education and production with the general public to work with excluded groups. Inclusive and interdisciplinary, BPART creates artistic project for the 21st century.

BPART aims to make art available as a tool of communication, mutual knowledge and understanding of the full spectrum of target groups, thus moving beyond the simple appreciation of live art towards it's a real existence.

Starting points

Community arts projects are an effective tool for connecting with the public.

They are one of the important pillars of civil society and a recognized tool for supporting its development. They have the potential to activate groups of citizens subject to discrimination, prevent psychological problems in people at risk of social exclusion, help prevent addictions and crime and can be used as a tool for communication, inclusion and fostering a sense of belonging.

The positive impact of art on the physical and mental health of society, specific target groups or child development is the subject of a number of studies and is gaining ever greater importance in the Western world.

In their report on the UK The Arts for Health and Wellbeing, the British cite the under-utilization of the arts as a tool to improve the health and well-being of society:

“After engaging with the arts 79 % of people in deprived communities in London ate more healthy, 77 % engaged in more physical activity and 82 % enjoyed greater wellbeing.”

“Visual and performing arts in healthcare environments help to reduce sickness anxiety and stress.”

“The arts can help save money in the health service and social care.”

The performing arts have undergone great development in the Czech Republic since the revolution. A number of educational institutions for movement-based arts have been established, contemporary dance genres have expanded, Czech artists have found a place on the international scene and several festivals have been established, which attract thousands of visitors every year. However, as in several other European countries, the world of dance and movement theater is gradually closing in on itself. The performances are attended only by spectators who are professionally interested. This relatively small and closed group loses its connection with society, is incapable of objective reflection, its work ceases to be legible to the average viewer and struggles to address the general public.

...I have a long-standing interest in art that has a stronger social angle and engages with different groups of society. At the same time, I was afraid to just create such a project for the fear of doing something wrong or not being fully equipped to meet a marginalised community. I was expecting that this would need some certain set of tools..."

LEVIN EICHERT, PROFESSIONAL PERFORMER PARTICIPATING IN THE PROJECT

Be Part! 2022–2023

In 2021, we have developed an international project with the following objective:

01

To support the social inclusion of 3 marginalised groups in 3 different contexts and to raise the visibility of related issues.

02

To train professional performers in artistic community work.

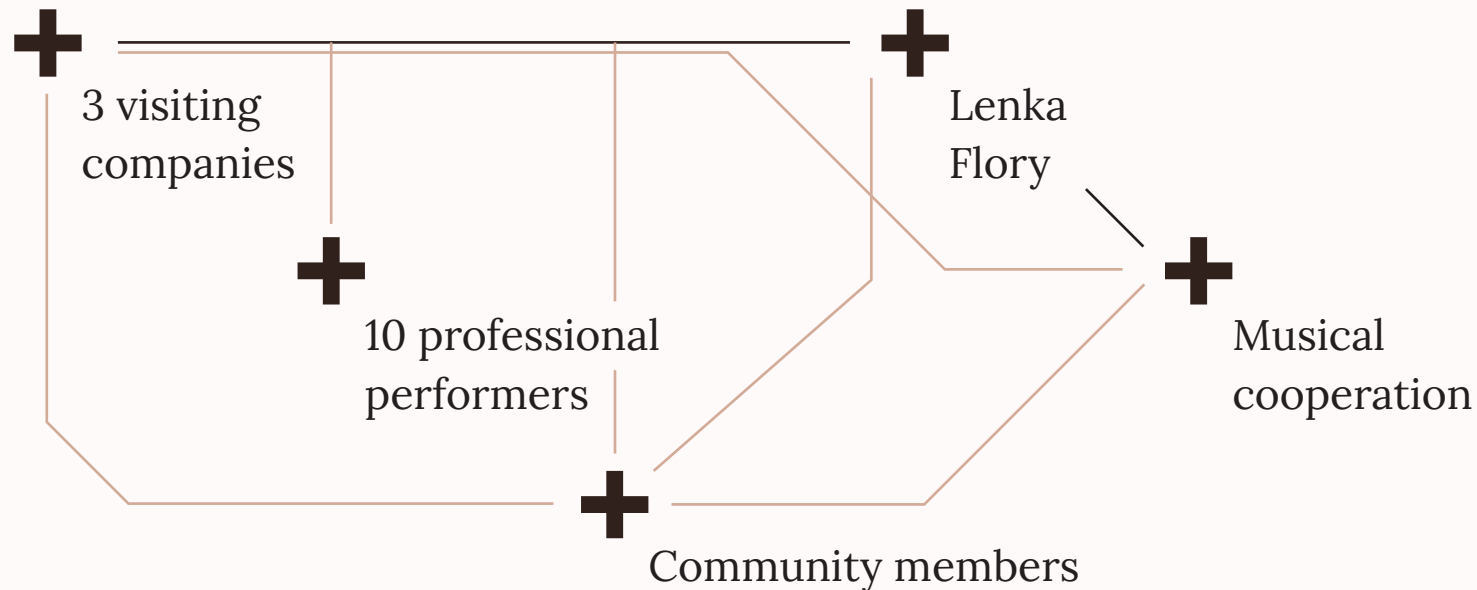
03

To map the entire course of the project in collaboration with professionals in their fields and to produce materials that will provide theoretical and factual arguments for the further development of artistic community work.

The method of work

- | **Mature choreographic material as a basis for artistic community work.**
- | **A large group of professional performers.**
- | **Reaching out to the community through local or targeted organisations and using their know-how.**
- | **A fixed, relatively short time frame.**
- | **Culmination of the project in a joint performance.**
- | **Film documentation in collaboration with a professional crew.**
- | **Qualitative scientific research.**

Art management scheme



Artistic direction + 5 members of visiting company.

10 professional performers from Czechia and Iceland chosen by audition.

Lenka Flory as dramaturg.

Live music arranged in cooperation with professional musicians.



Three chapters

I. Be Part of LOStheULTRAMAR

II. Be Part of Elegía delle cose perdute

III. Be Part of The River's Course





I. Be Part of LOStheULTRAMAR

WHEN

July 11–29, 2022

WHERE

Brno – an excluded location,
the so-called “Brno Bronx”

VISITING COMPANY

Foco alAire (MX)

focoalair.com.mx

TARGET GROUP

Roma community

LOCAL PARTNERS

Jiří Mahen's Library, FaVU, Jamu,

Tripitaka, Museum of Romani

Culture, Nadaras, MAČ, DROM,

Dživipen, IQ Roma Servis

Be Part of LOStheULTRAMAR, inspired by a performance by Mexican ensemble Foco alAire, focused on the work being carried out in an excluded location around the Bratislavská street, which is mainly inhabited by Roma. Many institutions which work with the Roma community are also based there and acted as partners in the project.

The rehearsals were held in 5 working groups, in total 88 participants attended the movement seminars.

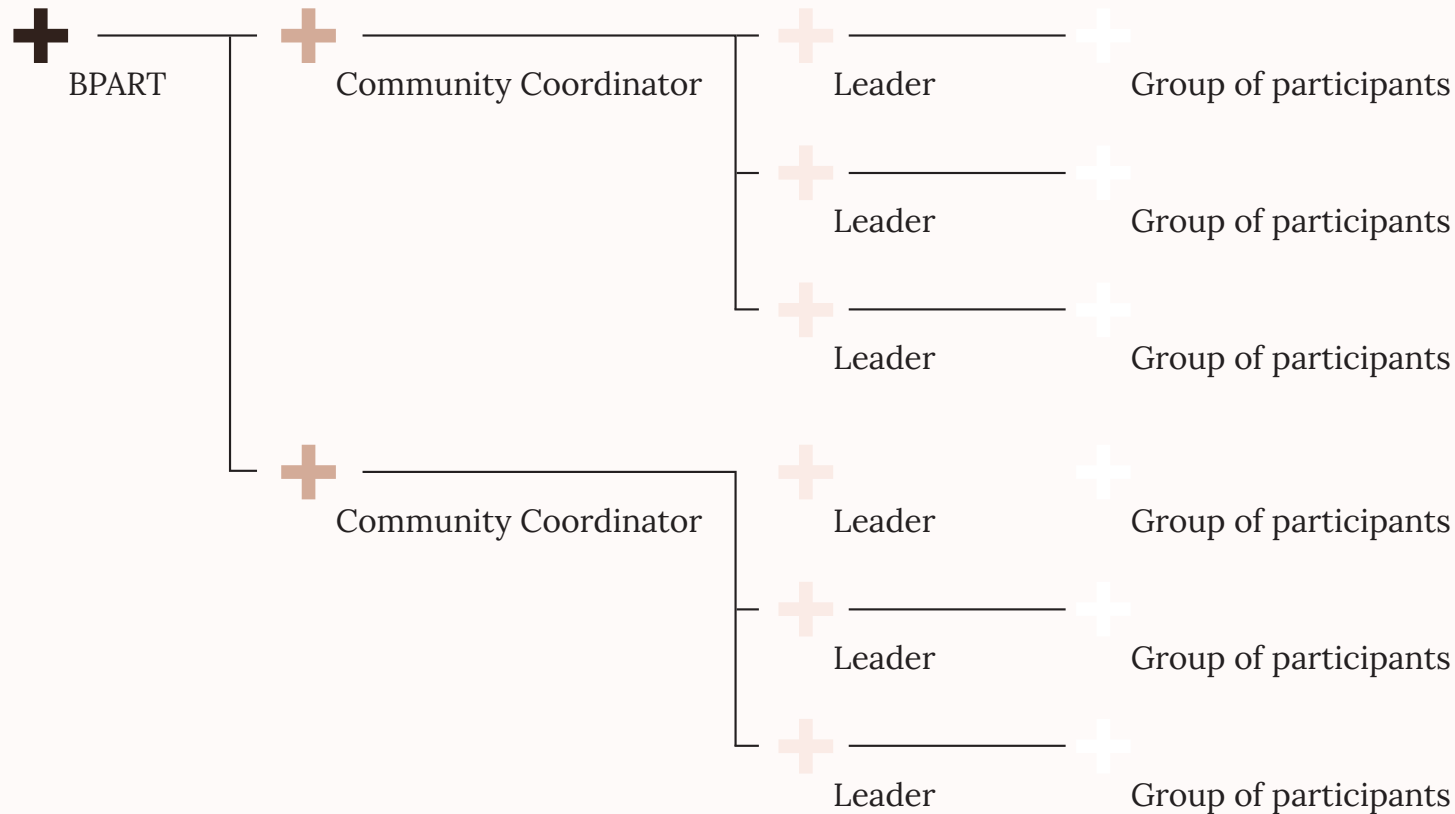
Musical dramaturgy was delegated to Vojtěch Lavička.

The meetings were primarily intended for the Roma community, but students from Brno's art schools, FAVU and JAMU, also took part, as well as other Brno residents with various non-artistic professional backgrounds.

The final performance took the form of a parade from the centre of the Brno Bronx into the city centre, entitled *Brno will walk through Brno* (Brno projde Brnem).



The scheme for reaching the target group



The Roma community from excluded location we approached based on a method recommended by local organisations, when we were in direct contact with the main coordinators who then had what we called 'leaders', who themselves were to connect with groups of people – the participants.



In the project, I was a professional performer, but I will now speak as a human being.

In 2022, I was having a tough time and I started acting like a robot in order to get through it, to somehow survive. I arrived in Brno with this mindset. I was just doing what was expected of me. I was told to ‘work with emotions’, so I worked with emotions – I laughed, I cried...

Then we did an exercise where we danced in pairs using very minimalist movements and we had to look into each other’s eyes and share our emotions. Everyone was in a pair with someone who they didn’t know at all. I danced with a Roma girl. She really wasn’t enjoying herself, she was insecure, shy, she just didn’t want to be there. So she was like that and I was in my robot mode. Then, suddenly, I saw something in her eyes that made me start to trust her (...) She wasn’t OK, and I wasn’t OK, a sense of trust had formed between us and I started to cry (...)

The way that the girl reacted calmed me down. She literally held me. I felt that I wasn’t really holding her, that she was holding me. That was the moment when I left my robot mode behind for good, I became aware of my own vulnerability and really saw the people around me for the first time. And from that moment on (July 2023) my situation has steadily improved.



The documentary film

Dancing Through the Ghetto

We gained the co-production of Czech Television for the documentary film.

The film premiered on CT on 8 March 2023 and since then it has been available on streaming in both Czech and English versions.

In February 2023, the film was presented at the Berlin exhibition Avant Première.

On 3 June 2023, a public screening took place at the Museum of Romani Culture in Brno as part of the Ghettofest festival.

In September 2023, the film was part of the Golden Prague festival, where it was included in the competition section.

CZ: <https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/14805846332-protancovat-cejlem/>

EN: <https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/14805846332-protancovat-cejlem/bonus/43628/>



Anthropological study

Which factors influence participants of creative process on the level of self-development and development of community?

When we conclude the factors influencing final experience from the project Be Part of LOS-theULTRAMAR, we can follow two levels, which were addressed in the research question.

On the level of self-development we can state that the method LOStheULTRAMAR works from the perspective of participants as well as researchers as an approach with transformative potential. Its strong aspect is the way, how it brings participants into contact with themselves, which is perceived as a crucial aspect of self-development in other theoretical concepts based on working with deep reflection of own experience (Dilts and Giligan, 2009). It happens by means of combination of strong interpersonal experienced based on concentrated eye-contact, ritualised dancing and sufficient amount time without stress.

It seems that the method provokes relatively quickly experience of flow, which helps to reach this kind of deep concentration (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991).

This combination of factors provokes special quality of contact among participants, which is extraordinary deep and reflected as something, what goes beyond normal experiences of participants.



II. Be Part of Elegia delle cose perdute

WHEN

January 31– February 12, 2023

WHERE

Island – Reykjavík,
Reykjanesbaer,
Hafnarfjordur, Kópavogur

HOSTUJÍCÍ SOUBOR

Zerogrammi (IT),
foczerogrammi.org

TARGET GROUP

refugees and asylum seekers

LOCAL PARTNERS

Red Cross Iceland, Reykjavík City
Library, Gerðarsafn Kópavogur
Art Museum, Iðnó Theatre
Reykjavík, The Icelandic Film
School, Hamarinn youth centre
for refugees, Municipality of
Reykjanesbaer – cultural affairs
dpt., Hafnarhus Art Museum,
Reykjavík, Vitatorg and Arskogar
social centres

Be Part of Elegia delle cose perdute inspired by a performance of the Italian ensemble Zerogrammi, focused on working with a community of refugees and asylum seekers. More than 130 people of fifteen different nationalities expressed an interest in taking part. The most represented groups were from Ukraine and Venezuela, followed by countries from the Middle East.

Rehearsals took place in three working groups in Reykjavík and Reykjanesbær and in two musical groups in Reykjavík and Hafnarfjordur. In total, 97 people attended the movement and musical seminars. Musical dramaturgy was delegated to Linus Orri.

Halfway through the process, the participants put on a public performance at the *Kópavogur Art Museum's Winter Light Festival*.

The final performance then took place at Keflavík international airport in the town of Reykjanesbær near from old US military base Ásbrú, which is currently home to a temporary residence for hundreds of refugees. Staging the performance in this particular place was an opportunity to bring the original residents of the town and the newcomers together.



The scheme for reaching the target group



The main partners for reaching refugees and asylum seekers in Iceland were the Red Cross and the Reykjanesbaer municipality.

This time partners acted mainly as amplifiers of the open call to get involved in the project, BPART team then immediately took charge of communication with the registered participants.



When your life is very uncertain, and you are like a hedgehog, like, you're gather yourself together to find another job, to make new projects, you need to survive. And when you are in this mode of survival, you forget to get satisfaction and joy from life. And that was like this drop of joy, uh, that, that is returning me to life. Because now I have more forces, even physical, I'm more productive. Because, when I'm happy, I can do much more than when I'm upset.

For me this project is really great for adaptation of people in a foreign land. Because we all here are foreigners. We are not at home. Lots of people do not speak any English or Icelandic and they feel isolated. So, this is a great example how through our bodies, without communicating with our tongue, we can communicate with other people. How we can open, how we can make friends and so on. Uh, this is really great example of how you help, you can help people in other countries feel more like at home. And to not feel like, the hostile environment. Because you can feel safe, and this is like, I think the most important thing for all of us here.

PARTICIPANT OF THE PROJECT MEMBER OF THE COMMUNITY



Sociological study

Understanding the effects of community arts projects

| Community arts project can have positive impact on forced migrants.

| Be Part project enabled:

- creating strong interpersonal bonds
- overcoming cultural and language barriers through movement
- gaining confidence and psychological release

| Project confirms previous findings regarding the potential of dance to evoke empathy (Catalano & Morales 2022) and confirms that community art project can be used for building primary relationships and social networks essential for social integration of migrants (Bosswick & Heckmann 2006) and it bolsters the argument that leisure activities engaging both migrants and mainstream society can build ties between the two groups (Fong & Berry 2017).

| Providing opportunities for forced migrants to express themselves creatively can be a good starting point for addressing their social needs and a tool for social integration.



III. Be Part of The River's Course

WHEN

May 14–27, 2023

WHERE

Prague – Bohnice Psychiatric
Hospital

VISITING COMPANY

44 Arts Productive & NCDC
(UK, CA), 44artsproductive.com
nicholecanusodance.org

TARGET GROUP

people suffering with mental
illness

LOCAL PARTNERS

Bohnice Psychiatric Hospital,
Fokus Prague, Bohnice Theatre
Company

Be Part of The River's Course was the process of Canadian-American team, led by Michèle Steinwald, which focused on working with a community of people suffering with mental illness.

Rehearsals took place in five working groups (3 in BPH and 2 external groups). In total, 65 people attended the movement seminars.

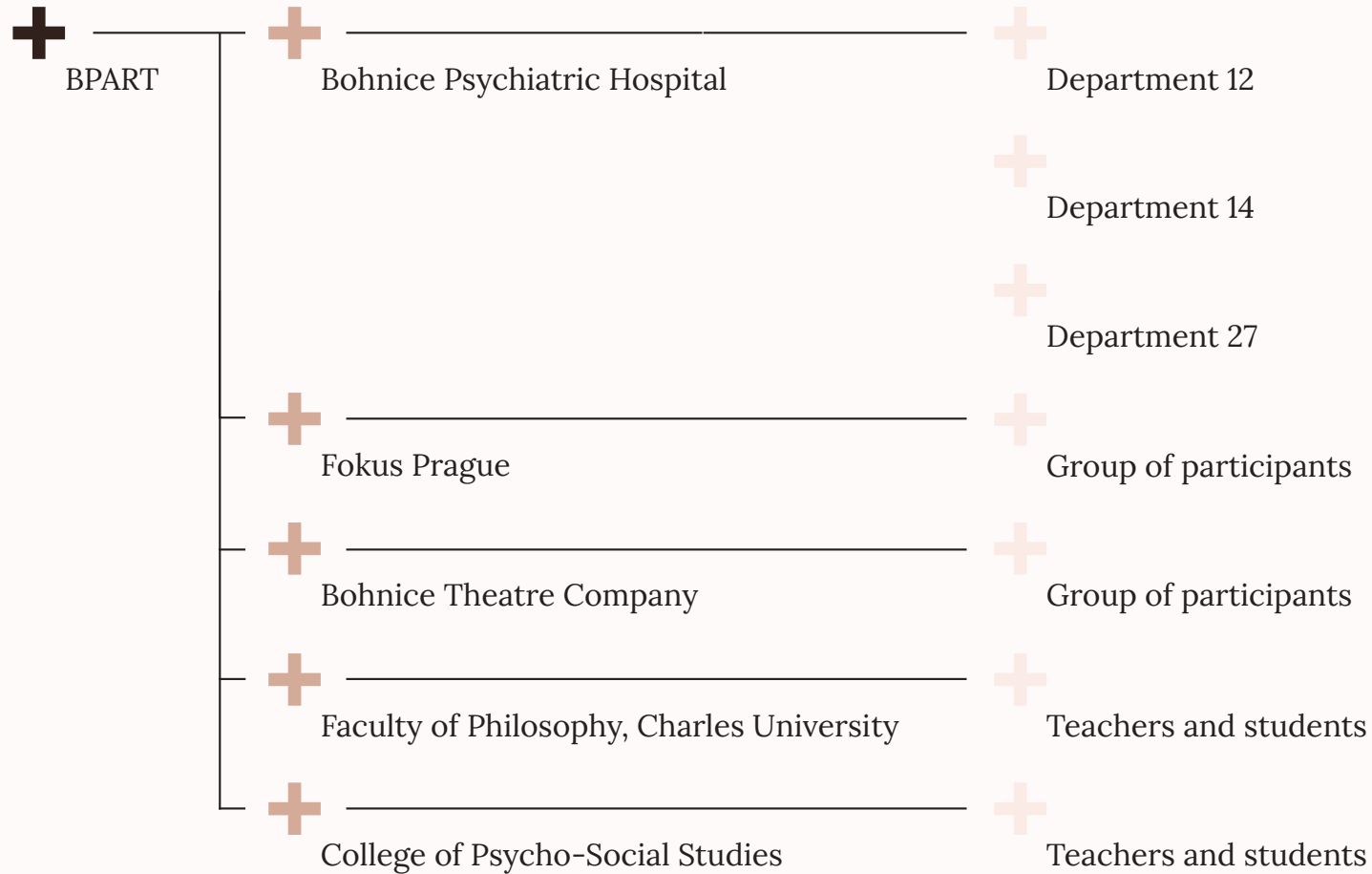
Meetings that took place outside of the medical facility were also primarily targeted at people with mental illnesses, however university students preparing to begin work in the social care sector and their course leaders also took part.

Musical dramaturgy was delegated to Vojtěch Havel.

The final performance of *The River's Course* was presented in the area of BPH at the Mezi Ploty festival.



The scheme for reaching the target group





The scheme for reaching the target group

We primarily approached the Bohnice Psychiatric Hospital for cooperation and the project was implemented across its three departments: 12 – Women’s Resocialization, 14 – Women with a Psychiatric Disorder Combined with Mental Illness, and 27 – Men’s Resocialization.

All other patients were invited to the open rehearsals which were held every Friday on hospital grounds.

Other participants suffering from mental illnesses were approached via the organisation Fokus Praha – Klub Mosty a Dům u Libuše. The project was presented in person to Fokus Praha’s clients by BPART representatives, who had been working to build a personal level of trust from the very first meeting.



For me, there are several layers. There's the willingness to step out of your comfort zone and be part of something bigger. This was the first opportunity for our club to do so. And then there is a certain level of trust. I discovered that for all of us who worked on the project there was a shift, a certain confidence within our relationships, a willingness to seek joy and try new things.

BLANKA DUŠKOVÁ

PARTICIPANT

LEADER AND PEER CONSULTANT IN KLUB MOSTY

I have spoken to staff in the departments concerned and they have welcomed the project as beneficial. We are very happy for the human potential, it has a huge benefit in hospitalism.

LUBOŠ CHLAD

VOLUNTEER CENTRE

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION DEPARTMENT

What this proves...and what it doesn't...

Community projects must strive to not segregate.

At first, it was assumed that only the chosen groups would take part, for example in the case of Brno, the Roma residents living in the excluded location. However, during the preparations and in discussion with partners, it became clear that it made no sense to engage exclusively with the target community, as this only leads to further segregation. On the contrary, it is important to address the majority group and include everyone in the collective process. From the outset, the project did not have a developed system of reaching the majority group. In Brno and Iceland, the production team leaned particularly on their partners' employees or delegated the task of connecting with the majority to them. In the final part, in Prague, BPART discovered the secret to involving representatives from the majority group. They selected a target group who may, for whatever reason, have an interest in the target group and be keen to work with them, in this case university students and lecturers from the social care department. As a result, it became possible to involve the majority.

Building trust cannot be delegated.

Encouraging the target communities and individuals to take part only begins to work when project representatives communicate with them on a direct and personal level. The method of working through intermediaries does not have sufficient potential to build the trust necessary to encourage participation in the project. After the experience in Brno where BPART trialled a leader system to eventually take over all communications, in Iceland they utilised partners solely to mediate contact. BPART communicated with refugees and asylum seekers over email and WhatsApp, meaning that a relationship was already established before the first in-person meeting. Communicating with potential participants directly and personally takes up a large amount of time, but the results are really worth it.

Larger group of professionals inspires confidence.

A large group of artists – in this case sixteen to eighteen members, helps elicit trust in the target group. Representatives of the community don't feel isolated, they have the opportunity to “hide” within the group from the outset whilst also witnessing many examples of the task being performed and can become more familiar with what is being asked of them. When working in pairs or smaller groups, they are always able to work with a professional who acts with confidence and imparts this confidence to their fellow group members.

A familiar environment helps

One of the intentions at the very beginning was to “remove” the target community from their environment and facilitate access to places and buildings where they don’t usually spend time. As it turned out, there were so many new elements at play that also changing the environment would in fact be detrimental. The best approach placed the work in a setting that the community knew well and felt at home in. Operating directly where the community was located also helped give the project a halo effect and the opportunity to raise more awareness of its existence.

The exchange is not only reciprocal but equal

From the outset, the project was designed to train professional artists in community art work, the assumption being that the performers would take away both professional and personal experiences from the project and that would constitute a key benefit. During the implementation of the project, it quickly became clear that the exchange between professionals and the community not only took place, but was completely mutual. After the completion of the project, it is evident that the artists came away with just as many positives as the community.

In my “backpack” I carry with me an openness and kindness to people I meet every day. I carry with me a greater humility in my own work and an affirmation that it makes sense to meet people through art who may never have been to the theatre. I carry with me a great admiration and closeness to all those who initiated the project and gave it the form it was meant to take... Gratitude that I was able to be a part of it. But I still leave some pockets of my backpack open - and there is a wish to continue this kind of work...

MARIE SVOBODOVÁ PROFESSIONAL PERFORMER PARTICIPATING IN THE PROJECT

Fee yes or no?

Throughout the project cycle, we repeatedly faced pressure to pay honoraria to community participants. The whole project was conceived as a project that community representatives would participate in out of interest, boredom or curiosity. In none of the three chapters did we agree to pay an honorarium, (you want to mention the leaders in Brno and that it didn't work anyway?) but it is an issue that remains. We don't consider it workable to pay honoraria as a form of incentive for participation, but it is something to consider in the future whether, especially for some groups, the absence of honoraria is a barrier to participation. We anticipate that we would have to approach the substance of the project differently from the outset: as an activity that also motivates participants with an honorarium and that allows them to participate in the project because it temporarily replaces their employment. A discussion on this topic among the organisers of similar projects would certainly be useful.

Short shock and leaving

One of the characteristics of the project was the relatively short time that we had to work with the community. The international character and large cast would not allow anything else. We were often asked what would come next, in what sense will the project continue – with no straightforward answer. The short timeframe has its plus points – it creates a sense of exclusivity, facilitates intensive meetings, and supports accelerated trust building. On the other hand however, there is a strong feeling of something missing when it essentially all comes to a sudden stop after the performance. The ideal would be for the partners, participants, or coworkers to find someone amongst themselves who could continue the community art work for the given area, utilising their own methods and working at their own tempo. This is the ideal role for this kind of project – it delivers a short, sharp ‘shock’, provokes discussion, sets the organisation in motion, and demonstrates that it is possible to implement this way of working quite quickly.

The community doesn't usually generate musicians

In every part of the project we counted on the involvement of musicians from the beginning. Live music has great potential to bring people together and is clearly a great asset for projects of our type. We hoped to find amateur musicians in each community who could become part of the project and, under the guidance of

professional musicians, create a live musical accompaniment to the performance. This was only possible in Iceland, where we found some excellent musicians among the refugees and asylum seekers. Otherwise, such collaboration is very complicated. Amateur musicians have very different skills, often playing instruments that do not combine well, and collaboration requires either a simple improvisational concept that the musicians can undergo or a long rehearsal and score, which in our case was out of the question. If the musicians approach the collaboration professionally, they require a fee and the communal nature of the collaboration disappears. So it turned out to be a good idea to budget for the musical component of the project.

Be Part! 2022–2023

88

members of Roma
community involved

97

refugees and asylum
seekers involved

51

people suffering with
mental illness involved

35

trained professional artists
from Mexico, Italy, Canada,
The United States, Iceland
and the Czech Republic

32

partners involved

3 200

visitors

- + Documentary film
- + Sociological study
- + Anthropological study

Having seen the project and the film that depicts its implementation in Brno, I can say that it has the potential and power to help marginalized groups and people feel like human beings. It will enable them to feel like someone who is seen, heard and perceived by others. It's not just an integration project, it's a way to really save the life of anyone who is marginalized in any way.

HEMN HUSSEIN

HAMMARIN YOUTH CENTRE

KURD LIVING ON ICELAND,

UNTIL RECENTLY A REFUGEE

Thanks for financial support

Iceland 
Liechtenstein
Norway grants



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