



Visibly Vocal Youth Exchange Supplementary Notes

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Visibly Vocal was a youth exchange organised by an informal network of youth theatres in Europe, from the 6th-13th August 2017. It was held in Newbridge in Ireland and coordinated by Crooked House Theatre Company. The project set out to explore ways of making site-specific theatre with young people. It focused on using public spaces in which young people made their concerns and interests visible through performance. The public spaces included on the front steps of a municipal building; in and around the River Liffey; in a neglected car park; on a busy pedestrian street; and in a waste-ground area of the town.

The project, in using these sites, explored how performance relates to a site, and how sites can inspire a performance.

50 young people (aged between 15 and 20) from France, Spain, Ireland, Greece and Denmark worked with expert theatre-makers from these countries to make performances for these spaces in Newbridge. The performances were shown on Saturday, 12th August, moving the local audience from one site to another for the evening. The young people were mixed in different groups and used the opportunity to develop and express themes of importance to them, which they then shared via the performances. Themes such as how we neglect our environment (performed in the shallow depths of the River Liffey); homelessness; finding ways to assist positive mental health; overcoming fear of strangers; and challenging hate-speech, were memorably all explored in unique and exciting performances in the open in these spaces in the town.

A **film** made by some of the participants gives a wonderful flavour of the week-long event (showing the workshops, performances, and many layers of interaction and relationships) can be seen from Crooked House's Vimeo page (linked here: <https://vimeo.com/235032477>).

The project was featured in the local news and was attended by members of the Newbridge Tidy Towns Committee, as well as by local public representatives and politicians. The participants have remained very close, having bonded effectively through the mix of group-work and creative activity throughout the project. As one participant wrote in their evaluation, "I discovered real love, thanks to the people in this project. I wanted that these moments of learning would never stop. I discovered that I can be open with people, and that I can share my opinion without being negatively judged or told to be quiet. We are powerful - six countries became one county. We can change the world."

The participants came from our partner organisations in Europe, Kinitirias, Greece; Cirkus Stjernesrud, Denmark; On-And-Off, Spain; Associazione Ottovolante, Italy; Le Grand Bleu, France. Crooked House was the project organiser.

This youth exchange explored how to make site-specific theatre with young people. It focused on using public spaces in which young people made their concerns and interests visible through performance. It explored how performance relates to a site, and how sites can inspire a performance.

Over the last 5 years we have practised site-specific theatre as a way of bringing our interests to the public in a very visible way. We've performed plays about mental health in parked cars; ones about gender in the rooms of a local hotel; about our love of music festivals in tents in our community park; and plays about abandoned buildings that we could use in closed shops and old buildings around the town. We have found that this type of theatre makes a huge impact on those who see it, resulting in some cases in decisions being made by local politicians in favour of some of the ideas we proposed in our plays.

So, this was a chance for us to share our practice with others, and to learn from their approaches. We made workshops that allowed us to share skills. And we made reflection groups and devising sessions for the young people to learn some of the skills and to become comfortable sharing their thoughts about a theme or themes (chosen by them during the course of the devising process). These objectives were achieved as every group had time and resources to really work out what they wanted to say, and the workshops gave them the tools to say it through performance in public spaces. Indeed, it was the case that there were too many themes in most groups and they had to simplify their projects to focus on just one or two. The young people showed they had a lot to say, especially about the environment.

The objectives of the project were:

- to learn, by doing, about the usefulness of site-specific theatre in bringing our issues to public view

We certainly learned about this, sharing our methods and attracting public attention to the voices of the young people. Because they performed in public spaces many people who would not normally come to the theatre stopped and listened and watched to what they had to 'say'.

- to share with each other our ways of making these kind of plays
- Each country brought a director as one of the leaders - the Greeks brought two. Each director then worked with a group all week, and they also shared their skills and methods during the morning skills-exchange. Everyone got to know about each country's method of making this kind of theatre.

- to meet and befriend young people who have the same passion for theatre as we do

While the fact that they were all theatre people helped them bond a little sooner than normal on exchanges, the conversations and sharings were about their lives and not so much about theatre (one of the main things they had in common).

- to learn about the other countries represented here

They did - we had a cultural night for each partner where they performed something typical from their country and also shared food and dances and music.

- to learn a lot about the interests and concerns of our generation across Europe (as expressed in these plays).

The detailed and slow work on the themes allowed them to achieve this objective. The reflection sessions each day also helped.

The exchange used a mixture of task-based activity, interactive workshop, drama exercise, discussion, dance and movement, performance, sub-group work, research, and presentation to generate the learning.

In broader terms, the project met Erasmus+ priorities by stimulating and supporting youth entrepreneurial abilities by generating critical reflection and problem solving situations. It also encouraged cooperation and understanding between the partner organisations in terms of young people facing very similar economic realities. The project used the young people's creativity as a tool to enhance their skills set. It is about helping them take action themselves to express themselves in their own terms. The project also engaged us with our local areas as active citizens.

-Peter Hussey
Artistic Director