



Photo: Luca Bonaventura

Case Study: Community Theatre Inclusive (ICT)

"Inclusive Community Theater" An Erasmus+ Project KA210-YOU – Project ID: 25FA9573



Funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

2024-1-IT03-KA210-YOU-000251735

Lead partner: Rampa Prenestina (Italy)

Partner: Independent Theater Hungary (Hungary)
Shoshin Theatre (Romania)

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Synthesis

"Art, if made accessible and practicable by all, can contribute to a better world" - Moholy-Nagy

The Inclusive Community Theater project was born from the collaboration of three European organizations engaged in community theater and non-formal education: Rampa Prenestina, Shoshin Theatre, and Independent Theatre Hungary, operating respectively in Italy, Romania, and Hungary. The activities lasted a total of 15 months, from September 1st 2024, to December 1st 2025.

The shared goal was to design an artistic space, capable of connecting young people from profoundly diverse backgrounds, fostering processes of self-expression, active participation, and personal growth through theater. This case study illustrates how, starting with an initial methodological meeting in Rome, the project expanded to streets, Roma camps, rehearsal rooms, international stages, and ultimately European festivals, transforming those who participated.

Introduction and context

At the heart of the project is a simple yet pressing question: how can we make art and theater accessible to young people living on the margins, often deprived of tools for expression and cultural opportunities?

In Rome, as in many European cities, the gap between those with access to cultural offerings and those living in educational poverty remains stark. In suburban neighborhoods and areas inhabited by Roma communities, the opportunity to experience theater is virtually nonexistent. At the same time, many middle-class young people desire more inclusive artistic experiences, capable of addressing identity and belonging.

Rampa Prenestina, Independent Theater Hungary, and Shoshin Theatre found common ground in this challenge. The three entities share the belief that theatre, when participatory, can become a place of connection and transformation, where personal stories intertwine with collective ones. Indeed, theatrical grammar exercises have created fertile ground for sharing personal journeys and experiences, and contemporary theatre practices have been effective tools for staging these stories.

Project objectives

The project's goals were neither purely artistic nor purely social: they resided in the meeting point between these two worlds. On the one hand, it aimed to strengthen the organizations' skills in outdoor practices and cooperative community theater; on the other, it aimed to engage young people who would otherwise have had limited access to artistic activities, offering them the opportunity to discover and share their experiences. All this through a process of shared creation that culminated in an original performance, built on their stories.

The kick-off meeting in Rome

The project's first concrete step was the kick-off meeting in Rome, hosted by Rampa Prenestina. For three days, the theater space became an international laboratory: tables filled with notes, exercises demonstrated on the floor, stories of experiences conducted in other countries, discussions on what it truly means to build an inclusive theater.

The practitioners shared their practices: Shoshin's image theatre and Forum Theatre approach, Independent Theater's storytelling and community production techniques, and the experiences working with young people of Rampa Prenestina. It was in those moments that the shared methodology took shape, a set of tools to be used not as a rigid formula, but as a compass to guide a participatory process. The methodology, along with this study, are available in bilingual version and *open source* on the Rampa Prenestina's and the partner's websites.



Photo: Rampa Prenestina

participant group

The first real step was organizing a live meeting with young people from the Roma community in the places where they live. Even before launching a call on social media, the working team decided to bring theater to places it rarely reaches: the suburbs, Roma camps, and informal spaces across the city. Thus began a small tour of Rome's vulnerable areas, with the aim of establishing a direct dialogue with the communities.

The show they brought with them was *Aspettando Bo*, a contemporary rewriting of *Waiting for Godot* (Beckett, 1953), performed by two young Roma actors. The story takes place in a Roma camp in Villa Gordiani, one of the places where the play was actually performed, and recounts the wait, hopes, and daily ironies of two young people who imagine a possible future while dealing with the immobility of the present. For those who lived in those places, seeing parts of themselves, their dialect, their routines on stage became something immediately recognizable, emotionally close. It wasn't theater "on" the territory: it was theater with the territory.



Photo: Alice Bella

Each performance of *Aspettando Bo* became a small community event: people leaned out of their windows, children ran around the actors, and adults listened in silence, sitting on chairs they'd brought from home. At the end of the show, formal speeches weren't necessary: the invitation to the workshop arose spontaneously, from light but sincere conversations.

"If you want, you can come too. We'll do theater together. We'll tell stories, your stories."

Many of the future participants began this way: not through a form to fill out, but through a look, a smile, a joke said at the end of the show. They decided to join because someone had entered their everyday space and brought with them a theater capable of listening.

Only after this deeply relational tour did the online call arrive: a message spread on social media to reach other young people interested in a free program on theater and identity. Here too, some applications quickly arrived, attracted by the theme and the creative proposal.

It was the union of these two streams: those met in the neighborhoods and those who arrived through digital channels, that gave rise to the group that would then lead the workshops. A diverse group of people, diverse in age, background, and languages, yet united by the desire to share their experiences and better understand who they are, or who they can become, through theater.



Photo: Rampa Prenestina

The theater workshop: a journey of shared discovery and construction

The theater workshop didn't emerge suddenly, but developed slowly, like a house built brick by brick. Almost none of the participants had ever participated in a theater workshop before. There were young people of different ages, different origins, languages, and very different backgrounds. At the beginning, diversity and cultural differences posed a challenge even for the peer educators, young Roma and non-Roma facilitators who were already collaborating with Rampa Prenestina. Despite being a bridge between worlds, they had to work hard to find a common and shared working method.



Photo: Luca Bonaventura

The beginning was a series of small steps: simple theater games, exercises in theater grammar, to learn how to look each other in the eye, to trust those around them, to recognize their own emotions and those of others. It was new ground for many, especially those who weren't used to express themselves, or even those who thought they had nothing to say. Many came shyly, others warily, some skipped rehearsals, others only showed up occasionally. In these early stages, participation levels fluctuated.

The process was long and winding: many people lost their way, others remained untouched, but little by little something different was created, a place where people could be themselves without fear of judgment.

A true safe (r)space where they could begin to explore their identities, confront their differences, and above all, open themselves to mutual acceptance.



Photo: Luca Bonaventura

As time passed, the activities were enriched. Creative tools such as collage, drawing, free writing, and improvised dance were added to the theatrical games. These methods allowed each child to express themselves through different languages, revealing parts of themselves: an image torn from a magazine, a word in Romani, a movement that revealed hidden emotions. Every gesture, every choice became a way to tell their own story and recognize that of others.

The peer educators, initially struggling with their own personal growth, found their way, becoming true reference points. They were living proof that differences could be transformed into resources, and that trust is built over time, step by step.

Over time, the group transformed: from a group of cautious and distant individuals, it became a cohesive community, a place where people not only worked together but also began to love one another, bound by mutual recognition. That sense of belonging, respect, and care made possible the birth of something greater: a shared artistic project that would explore identity, in its many nuances, its lights and shadows.

The Birth of the Theater Performance *Ko sem me?*



Photo: Luca Bonaventura

The title came almost out of the blue: "Ko sem me?", which in Romani means "Who am I?" It was the question that had been echoing in work circles for months, finally finding a concrete and shared form.

The performance unfolded like a living mosaic, where each scene arose from an exercise, a memory, or an improvisation. Personal stories, initially timid and barely whispered, became the beating heart of a collective narrative. Some participants brought fragments of their native language, others powerfully and sensitively reinterpreted Shakespeare's famous dilemma "To be or not to be?", transforming it into a common thread capable of exploring each participant's identities, cultures, and aspirations.

The creative journey was neither linear nor free of obstacles. Moments of difficulty, hesitation, and changes in direction intertwined with the building of trust and collaboration. No one was pressured to share more than they felt ready to share, and everyone found their space and role, both on stage and behind the scenes, whether as an actor, musician, author, or technician.

This authenticity was precisely the strength of *Ko sem me*: a show born from the interaction between collective writing, dance, music and improvisation, capable of telling an intimate and choral journey inside and outside the identities of the participants.



Photo: Helga Toth

Public presentations

The first performance took place in Rome, in an open general rehearsal that deeply touched the audience. The show then traveled to Cluj-Napoca, where it was a guest of the international festival Out of the Frame organized by the Romenian partner Shoshin. Meeting other European artists broadened the young creators' horizons and network. Finally, *Ko sem me* returned to Rome to be performed on stage as part of the 2nd international Roma theater festival *Roma Heroes – Rewritten*, held in Rome in November 2025, confirming the value and impact of a work that has transformed personal experiences into a powerful and shared collective narrative.

Mobility in Cluj-Napoca

For many participants, the trip to Cluj-Napoca was their first travel experience outside of Italy.

The preparation was intense: intense rehearsals, in-depth discussions, and moments of sharing allowed the group to consolidate. Upon arriving at the *Out of the Frame* festival, the young people had the opportunity to meet peers from Romania, Hungary, and other European countries, discovering with surprise and enthusiasm how many commonalities and similarities they shared. It was a wonderful experience for them to engage with other young artists, identify with the same questions and passions, and build new bonds beyond cultural differences.

The experience was further enriched by a visit to a local Roma community, an emotional moment that deepened the sense of belonging and connection to the reality from which many came.



Photo: Helga Toth

Performing in front of an international audience for the first time was an intense challenge but also a great source of pride and growth.

Ko sem me's reply was received with great attention and participation.

After the show, there was a dialogue with the audience to delve deeper into the stories told on stage, acknowledging the value and authenticity of their journey. It became clear that this project had given them not only artistic tools, but also a strong and recognized voice.

The most significant aspect of all this was the journey itself, shared by the entire group. This collective experience further strengthened the bonds between participants, making the group more close-knit, aware, and motivated—a true team-building experience. The festival left an indelible mark: for the first time, many people felt part of a European artistic community, an experience that opened new perspectives and possibilities for the future. It was not only a moment of artistic visibility, but also a decisive step in building a solid community, capable of supporting, collaborating, and growing together.



Photo: Helga Toth

Project results and challenges faced

The project's numbers reveal 100 young people reached through outdoor activities, 15 permanently involved, and 6 actively engaged in the performance's staging. But behind these figures there are faces, discoveries, and relationships that have profoundly impacted each person's journey.

For many participants, the workshop was the first space where they felt free to speak openly about their Roma identity, a place where they could explore who they truly are without judgment. For others, it was an encounter with a theater that proved to be an accessible and welcoming language, capable of bringing out fragilities, desires, and dreams.

The project also produced a methodological guide, a tool designed to help other organizations replicate these practices and carry out similar work in their own contexts.

But the journey wasn't without its challenges. The lack of continuity in participation, often due to unstable living conditions, meant that each meeting required the ability to start over, continually adapt the proposals, and rethink group dynamics.

However, these very difficulties have become an integral part of the creative and pedagogical process.

The challenge of discontinuity encouraged the team to develop a flexible approach, capable of accommodating even intermittent staffing without compromising the quality and depth of the work.

The outdoor activities of the first workshop period, with their unpredictability, taught us to accept the environment as a co-protagonist of the process: background noises, curious glances, rain, and wind became props that enriched the experience. Working in complex neighborhoods, where mistrust and fatigue often prevail, highlighted how delicate it is to build authentic bonds and how precious they are when they finally form.

Perhaps the greatest lesson concerns the value of time: time to get to know one another, to make mistakes, to try again, and to allow personal stories to emerge delicately. Without the pressure of a quick final product, participants were able to freely explore their artistic voice and identity, finally finding a truly protected environment.

Furthermore, the project confirmed the importance of teamwork: we learned to support each other, negotiate decisions, and share responsibilities. It was a journey of collective growth, in which every voice and perspective enriched the shared method.

Ultimately, the challenges weren't obstacles to overcome, but an integral part of the journey. They taught us that non-exclusion is never a definitive goal, but a dynamic, fragile, and powerful process that is renewed every time someone finds the courage to say: "This is my story. And I want to share it."

Conclusions: Legacy, Transformations, and Possible Futures

At the end of the journey, Inclusive Community Theater presents itself as something more than an Erasmus+ project: it has become a relational ecosystem, a laboratory of active citizenship, and a transformative experience for both those who participated and those who supported them. What emerged was not just a performance, nor a simple succession of activities, but a shared journey in which each encounter left its mark, each stage generated new questions, each voice expanded the scope of possibility.

The group of young people, with diverse backgrounds but eager to share their experiences, demonstrated how theater can be a place for reconstructing identity, a fertile ground for experimenting with trust, vulnerability, and courage. Through theatrical games, writing, dance, singing, collage, and improvisation, they explored the boundaries of their own stories and transformed them into poetic material. *Ko sem me?* is, ultimately, the question that has accompanied them from the beginning: who am I? But after months of work, the project also raised another, more collective question: who are we when we recognize ourselves as part of a common process?

The value of this experience lies above all in its ability to generate continuity. Partner organizations have enriched their skills and strengthened international collaboration; facilitators have developed new tools to support diverse groups; the communities involved have discovered that their stories deserve a public space. The project has created paths that will continue to expand, fueled by the motivation of the young people, teachers, artists, and local communities that contributed to its realization.

Looking back, it's clear that the strength of community theatre lies in its radical simplicity: putting people at the center, starting with their stories, creating conditions for authentic listening.

Looking ahead, however, we glimpse even greater potential: replicating the model in other territories, training new peer creators, generating networks that connect art, education and social inclusion.

If there's a legacy the project leaves, it's perhaps this: the awareness that change doesn't come from above, but grows in places where people meet, look at each other, recognize each other, and decide to build something together. Theater, in this sense, remains one of the few tools capable of uniting imagination and reality, dialogue and action, dreams and politics. Inclusive Community Theater has demonstrated that when marginalized voices are given space, the community not only takes shape, but transforms.

KO SEM ME?

Who am I?



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Performance created as part of
the ICT project
in collaboration with:

