

# INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY THEATRE (ICT)

A GUIDE 

OUT OF THE  
FRAM3

## INTRODUCTION:

# WHAT IS COMMUNITY THEATRE?



Community theatre is not an autonomous genre but rather a comprehensive term encompassing a variety of theatrical experiments. Its defining characteristic lies in its deliberate attempt to engage participants - frequently those belonging to marginalized groups - and to provide them with meaningful communal experiences. By drawing on creativity and fostering collaboration between community members and professional artists, community theatre offers the possibility of collective creation. In contrast to passive spectatorship, it

emphasizes action and participation as vehicles for both artistic expression and social engagement. As a practice, community theatre pursues broader social objectives: it contributes to community building, amplifies marginalized voices, facilitates social dialogue, supports the resolution of conflicts within communities, and fosters the cultural and social organization of communal life<sup>1</sup>.

The core principle of community theatre is that the themes, stories, scenes, and ultimately the performance itself are created by the participants. Unlike other initiatives where project leaders impose a predetermined thematic framework, community theatre deliberately resists such top-down direction. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that an excessively open process can inadvertently stifle creativity. Accordingly, a range of facilitative methods is employed to scaffold participants' ability to formulate and articulate their own ideas and stories.

In conventional theatre practice, the director's vision constitutes the organizing force of the entire production. The director assigns roles, guides actors' interpretations, and collaborates with other professionals – such as set and costume designers, composers, and lighting technicians – to implement the overarching concept. This hierarchical model positions participants primarily as executors of externally defined instructions, thereby limiting their creative agency. The structure bears strong parallels to formal educational systems, where learners are often required to conform to predetermined expectations.

Community theatre consciously diverges from this

<sup>1</sup> The definition can be found in Hungarian on the following site: <https://szinhazineveles.hu/tudastar/ernyofogalmak-alkalmazott-szinhaz-reszveteli-szinhaz-kozossegi-szinhaz/>

paradigm. Within such processes, all participants are regarded as equal creative partners. This orientation rests on the conviction that innovative ideas may emerge from any member of the group and that genuine ownership of the production is fostered when participants play an active role in shaping it. Performative authenticity often arises more readily from spontaneous responses than from rigid adherence to a director's pre-formulated instructions, regardless of their technical precision.



From a developmental perspective, the limitations of the hierarchical theatre model become even more pronounced. Community theatre seeks to enable participants to experience how their own narratives and creative contributions can coalesce into a collective, meaningful whole. Such experiences not only validate individual voices but also cultivate a sense of agency that may extend into other forms of collaboration and civic participation. If the objective of the community theatre performance is to authentically represent the values and lived realities of a given community, the use of pre-written plays should

be avoided, as they may reduce participants to being mere mouthpieces of an external author, preventing the production from reflecting their voices.

The following chapters present two community theatre methodologies developed and applied within the programmes of Independent Theater Hungary (Hungary) and Rampa Prenestina (Italy). This volume emerges from an Erasmus+ project dedicated to advancing inclusive community theatre practices. Within the framework of the project, the participating companies created performances through community theatre methods, which were subsequently presented at the third edition of the Out of the Frame Festival, organized by the Romanian partner, Shoshin Theatre Association.

The overarching aim of the project was to broaden awareness and accessibility of theatrical forms within both Roma and non-Roma communities, while simultaneously providing young people with opportunities for personal growth within a collective, community-based framework. A further objective was to connect talented youth to training initiatives that integrate them into a European Roma artistic network, thereby promoting sustained cultural dialogue and fostering collaborative artistic practices across borders.

As part of this project, the theatre companies engaged with Roma and non-Roma young people over an extended period of time. The programme provided opportunities for personal development through free theatre training led by professional theatre practitioners and experienced facilitators, alongside community-building activities. Participants were directly involved in the creation of a community-based performance and were subsequently offered additional opportunities to take part in other workshops and creative initiatives.



## A METHODOLOGY BY INDEPENDENT THEATER HUNGARY

For 17 years, our theater has been working in the fields of art and education, with a particular focus on empowering disadvantaged Roma and non-Roma youth. Through our multi-year training programs, scholarship participants have not only taken part in professional performances but have also remained active in the fields of theater, culture, and education in the long term. Among our most significant productions are Porrajder (2010), the first work to address the Roma murders of 2009, and Children of Peer Gynt, the only Hungarian production awarded an Ibsen scholarship. Since 2017, we have organized the Roma Heroes International Theatre Festival, from which an educational methodology was also developed. Our workshops, led by both Roma and non-Roma trainers, have since reached thousands of young people. Although the workshops were short, many participants asked us to work with them on a longer-term basis, which led to the launch of our community theatre programs.

Over the past years, we have brought numerous children's and youth programs and performances to villages where cultural events had never been organized before. The level of interest exceeded expectations, and these communities began to consciously develop cultural consumption habits. Several performances also sparked dialogue on sensitive topics with local support professionals. In all of our activities, social issues play a role, addressing challenges that affect us all in life. Our experience shows that communities not only need performances but also the opportunity to share their own stories and values. Our goal is to support them in this: in creating and presenting their own theatrical works.

## LAUNCHING THE ACTIVITIES

The trainers (usually 2-4 people) implementing community theatre programs always form a diverse team: Roma and non-Roma, men and women, with backgrounds in both theatre and non-formal education. Before the process begins, the professional team jointly plans the workshops, defining the schedule and tasks so that by the closing days a complete performance can be created. While prior planning is essential, flexibility during implementation is equally important. Daily evaluation and adjustment are key, taking into account outcomes, experiences, individual and group dynamics, as well as strengths and challenges that emerge during the process. In most projects, the professional team dedicates at least two hours at the end of each day to reviewing progress and refining the next steps.

It is advisable for participants to have some prior theatre experience, as this motivates them to stay engaged in a months-long process. Not all young people are interested in theatre, and not all have the intrinsic motivation to commit to such a long period.. In most cases, the community theatre work is preceded by a joint theatre visit or workshop. The success of these preliminary experiences can awaken in them the desire to create their own community performance, helping them better understand how motivating community theater and the creation of their own production can be.

## OBJECTIVES, GOALS

Our objectives are complex and interconnected. Our primary aim is to empower and support disadvantaged communities, particularly children and young people. Through community theatre, participants discover their own heroes and strengths, experience successes previously missing from their lives, and develop communication, cooperation, concentration, creativity, and artistic skills (such as speech, movement, dexterity, and musical abilities). Shared success builds self-confidence, while feedback strengthens self-awareness and reflective thinking. Our goal is to encourage young people to think more broadly about their opportunities and future aspirations. We do not expect all of them to pursue theatre careers, but we want them to believe it is worth setting ambitious goals.

Strengthening the community is just as important as supporting the individual, since motivation quickly fades if someone is left alone. Since children and young people cannot be separated from their families, another goal was to ensure that these adults recognise the value of the participants, feel proud of them, and gain practical tools for their own work. Another key aim is for the stories and messages of disadvantaged youth to reach a wider audience -other towns, communities, decision-makers, and the middle classes- helping them to recognise the values of Roma and disadvantaged children.

It is also important to us to provide professional development opportunities for theatre practitioners, educators, and young Roma artists working with us. Experimenting with new methods, achieving success, and finding motivation may even inspire them to launch similar programmes. As many disadvantaged communities exist in Hungary, and as there are

fortunately many professionals capable of initiating similar processes, we also see our project as an experiment whose methods and results can be shared and applied elsewhere.



# PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH: CREATING A SAFE, CREATIVE, AND COLLABORATIVE ENVIRONMENT

## ESTABLISHING COMMON FRAMEWORKS

Community theatre – similar to other non-formal educational or artistic methods – differs greatly from formal education, where disadvantaged young people often feel uncomfortable. In this process, the focus is on the participants, not the curriculum: there are no right or wrong answers, every opinion and idea is valuable, and everyone gains as much as they personally contribute.

It is of the utmost importance to clarify from the beginning that the work is based on mutual respect, attentiveness, nonviolent communication, and shared presence. If the emphasis is only on openness and freedom, the framework for productive cooperation is not guaranteed. In collaborative work, we must stress that participants have to take responsibility for each other, because the consequences of not following the rules affect not just the individual participants, but the entire group, as the achievement of a common goal may be jeopardized. While middle-class young people can often be motivated by individual goals, disadvantaged groups tend to be more inspired by collective achievement.

Putting the rules in writing ensures transparency and allows participants and trainers to refer back to them at any time. Beyond the rules, it is also essential to clearly define the goals and structure of the process: the content of sessions, schedules,

breaks, and meals. Operational details should be agreed upon with the participants in advance, in consultation with the local partner, to avoid unpleasant surprises, such as a participant being unable to attend the premiere of the performance.

## SHARED EXPERIENCES AND GAMES

Alongside setting frameworks, it is important that children quickly gain positive experiences. At the very start, a playful icebreaker round – where everyone shares something about themselves – can encourage active participation. During sessions, we sit in a circle, all on the same level, with trainers seated among participants rather than apart, thus signaling partnership.

Even though many participants already knew each other, the games provide opportunities for deeper connection. These could be verbal, movement-based, or skill-development exercises. Often the games serve as preparation for professional work: for example, before character creation, the “walking character game” – where children embody different roles – can prove very effective.

For younger and more energetic children, it is especially important to begin with movement-based, playful activities. These should be simple, confidence-building, and help create a relaxed atmosphere. Even in the first games, negative group behaviors may appear (e.g., teasing, mocking), which should be addressed immediately. If there is no aggression, it is enough to refer to the rules of the game itself rather than the entire framework.

As the process progresses, more complex games can be introduced: competitive or cooperative forms that develop focus,

concentration, teamwork, or creativity. The group's favorite games can be repeated as rewards or stress-relief activities, while revisiting certain exercises highlights visible progress. For instance, the "eyes-closed counting game" (where the group counts together, but if two people speak at once, they must start over) is excellent for training attention and attunement — the same skills needed in stage work.

In the first phase of the process, playful exercises dominate. In the second, when rehearsals take center stage, games serve mainly to refresh the group, provide rewards, and boost motivation.

Games develop a wide range of skills (concentration, imagination, empathy, cooperation, memory) and engage different intelligences (verbal, motor, musical). While radical change cannot be achieved in just a few days, visible progress can be made — for example, in concentration. In several locations, by the end of the process, children could work with focus for up to two hours — even the younger ones. Continuity is key: by providing a consistent, experiential programme, children became committed to the shared goal. Since every child has different strengths, diverse exercises ensure that everyone finds their place and experiences success. Playful exercises also help trainers identify which individual and group strengths to build upon.

During games, it is also worth noting elements that can later be incorporated into the performance. For example, in a "statue game," one child enjoyed creating a house so much that it later became part of the production. On another occasion, a boy unexpectedly performed a somersault during a game, inspiring the group to include acrobatic elements in the show.

## EXPERIENCING SUCCESS TOGETHER

Our goal is that every participant gets involved and takes part in games, storytelling, and scene-building, though not everyone needs to appear in the final performance. Some participants contribute as group performers, choir members, or in silent roles. It is important to acknowledge that not everyone feels comfortable being on stage.

In community theatre, those working behind the scenes are just as vital as those performing. Participants who created costumes, props, or supported the production in other ways play a crucial role in its success. Many people stand out in these supportive tasks, drawing on their own strengths — for example, drawing skills, craftsmanship, or an eye for clothing and accessories. In creative community processes, it is essential to treat the support team as an integral part of the creative team. They should also be involved in discussions, games, evaluation, closure, and celebration of the process. In most cases, these participants work closely with the trainers during the final days, once the structure is finalized and the specific needs of the scenes are clear. It is equally important that background contributors are not reduced to being "servants" of the performance but are given space to develop their own creative ideas. They can design posters, create background projections, select music, do makeup, or style hair.

Conflicts may arise between actors and the support team (for example, when an actor wants a different costume, rejects a suggested hairstyle). Such situations should be handled with sensitivity, ensuring that tasks and creative opportunities are allocated in ways that both highlight the support team's strengths and minimize tension. This approach fosters a positive and collaborative environment for all participants.

## THE PROCESSES AND DYNAMICS OF COMMUNITY THEATRE PROJECTS

Fatigue and tension are natural parts of the creative process. Many participants had never engaged in such intense, focused activity before. In after-school programs, young people are often used to short, individual, or small-group activities, where stepping back or taking breaks is acceptable. In contrast, community theatre prioritizes shared goals: participants must work together intensively for extended periods, where individual challenges cannot receive the same attention as in personalized development. Even so, it is essential for trainers to reward the group with games or playful activities — especially when attention wanes or fatigue sets in.

Group formation itself can also generate tension, sometimes influenced by external factors. Yet collective work often reshapes group dynamics. A participant previously seen as a “leader” may contribute little effort, while someone less prominent at the start may emerge as significant. Such changes influence relationships and the overall functioning of the group, particularly in communities where participants already knew each other.

It is important to keep in mind that our work is both performance- and process-oriented. Children often bring experiences that reinforce an “I can’t, I won’t” mindset, which can lead to abandoned processes. We must believe that the group will succeed, participants are capable and valuable, and with support, they can channel negative emotions toward the collective goal. By holding this belief, trainers can set structured boundaries without being strict or harsh, while participants feel trusted and supported in achieving what once seemed impossible.

Disadvantaged young people rarely encounter inspiring situations, creative community opportunities, or educators who genuinely believe in them while also providing structure. The strict, performance-oriented school system can be balanced by a developmental approach that addresses children’s needs, responds sensitively to emotions, and strengthens relationships and empathy. At the same time, young people require challenges, expectations, tasks outside their comfort zone, constructive feedback, and opportunities for competition and responsibility. These elements are essential for them to grow into active, responsible, and goal-oriented adults.

Achievement and success should be reinforced in multiple ways, sometimes several times a day, depending on individual needs. For children who undervalue themselves, even small steps forward should be praised, thanked, and celebrated. For more experienced teenagers, more complex achievements deserve recognition. Alongside positive reinforcement, identifying areas for improvement is equally important across all target groups.

## OUR METHOD: CREATING STORIES AND CHARACTERS

### STORIES

Building on the methodology of the Roma Heroes workshops, we usually begin the process by discussing with participants what, in their opinion, makes someone a hero. Heroes make active decisions when facing difficulties, take action, and achieve impact — this is true for every hero. Next, participants share – in pairs or small groups – their heroes’ stories and also reflect on times when they themselves were heroes for others.

Before the discussion, trainers also share personal stories, encouraging participants to open up. It is important that these stories are honest and shared at a depth that can also be expected from participants. For example, if we share a very superficial story, participants will respond with similarly shallow experiences. At the same time, care must be taken that the stories are not too far removed from the children’s world or that they do not evoke traumatic experiences we cannot process.

After this, participants share each other’s stories with the whole group, always in the first person – this marks the beginning of the character developing work. Sharing, hearing stories retold, and receiving feedback can have a very strong impact on participants. Together, we select stories that proved meaningful and exciting, and we identify emerging themes. In case there are too many stories or topics to cover, it is worth putting to a vote which ones are of interest to the most participants.

Once the stories are chosen, small groups begin creating related scenes. The story does not need to be followed literally;

the group decides how they want to work with it. In some cases, participants are asked to merge several stories into one scene. It is important that participants have the opportunity to express themselves verbally and actively engage in storytelling. Small-group scene creation is often best prepared through simpler theatrical exercises, such as tableau (statue) games or short, wordless improvisations. The participants’ stories are usually highly diverse, exploring various problems and situations. During the process, some stories may lose the group’s interest, while others can be connected. Trainers facilitate this linking process, by shaping a coherent narrative from the situations and scenes brought by participants.

For example, once, when searching together for a theme, faith and traditions emerged as a central focus. This idea came from the young people themselves, and to explore it further, we organized a rap-writing workshop. To guide the process, we posed a series of reflective questions that participants were asked to address in their texts. Questions included: What does faith mean to you? What is your personal connection to it? How does it appear in your everyday life? Later in the summer, during an intensive five-day camp held in the countryside, we specifically collected information about traditions, focusing especially on Roma-Hungarian traditions. Drawing from their own knowledge, participants also called relatives to ask what traditions they knew or practiced. They also conducted online research. The results of this research – our collective knowledge – were shared, and teams selected certain traditions to work with in the form of scenes. In the following days, these scenes were refined, deepened, rehearsed, and arranged into a sequence, creating a coherent story.

## THEATRE WITHOUT A SCRIPT

In community theatre, there is no pre-written script. The production emerges from scenes and improvisations created by the participants. They know where the scene should lead, as well as their character's main intentions and movements, but they do not need to memorize fixed lines. We can use guiding questions to shape the sketches. These should serve only as a framework - a starting point to help the young participants orient themselves within the flow of the story. Questions can include: Where does the scene begin? Who are the characters? What is the basic situation? What is at stake? Where does it lead? The performance can diverge from the written text on stage - the priority is maintaining the story's arc and coherence.

## AUTHENTIC SCENES

During the rehearsal and refinement of scenes, several aspects are important, but here we highlight two key areas. First, in developing stories and characters, we should pay special attention to avoiding overly stereotypical or negative portrayals. This is equally important during scene development. Through guiding questions, we should encourage participants to move beyond one-dimensional solutions. When rethinking characters, we should highlight positive traits that could shift relationships and make characters more authentic for the audience.

This kind of self-reflection is especially crucial for disadvantaged youth, who often tell stories from a world shaped by prejudice and stereotypes. Many children - including Roma youth - tend to internalize stigmatization. For instance, when facing a camera, some instinctively pose in a boxing

stance. Raising awareness of such patterns and addressing them sensitively is essential to reshaping both young people's self-image and how others perceive them. For this reason, a first draft or surface-level scene is never enough. To avoid reinforcing stereotypes, trainers should not erase them outright, but rather guide participants to recognize and question them independently. Often, participants possess a more nuanced understanding of their community's reality than external creators, and by staging the truth of their characters, they can create genuine artistic value.

In community theatre, the goal is not perfect speech or movement, so memorization and formal techniques take a back seat. Still, it is important that spoken lines remain clear to the audience. To support this, we integrate breathing exercises, voice-development tasks, and articulation games into the process. In terms of movement, tasks must be adapted to the group's abilities and developmental potential. For example, while it is generally advisable for performers not to turn their backs to the audience, certain exceptions can enhance authenticity. If a shy, withdrawn child plays a timid character, it may be more effective for them to speak with downcast eyes than to force direct eye contact. This approach prioritizes authenticity and the comfort of participants. Ultimately, the focus is on building a genuine connection between character and actor, allowing young performers to enjoy the process without being confined by rigid rules.



## A METHODOLOGY BY RAMPA PRENESTINA

“Here, no one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught.  
People teach each other, mediated by the world...”  
Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 2005,  
continuum, New York, London, 80.

The methodology developed by the Rampa Prenestina company is a compendium of exercises and games combined with thematic insights, brainstorming, and research that provides participants with the tools for the creative construction of a personal and collective narrative through the acquisition of new and multiple forms of language, and physical and verbal expression.

Young Roma (as well as their peers from different backgrounds but in similar social situations) often find themselves in a condition of educational poverty, marginalization, and cultural and social isolation. We therefore gave space, during the training, to moments of knowledge and reflection through the viewing of thematic films, documentaries, theatrical performances, collective readings, study, and in-depth analysis of concepts of informal pedagogy, as well as participation in social and citizen events of various kinds that broadened their vision of the world.

In the initial phase of our work, it is essential to create a comfortable and protected atmosphere where participants feel at ease and can express themselves freely according to their nature, in the absence of judgment, in an equal relationship that welcomes diversity and creates dynamics of mutual and collaborative learning that both draws from and gives strength to the group.

## LAUNCHING THE ACTIVITIES

Our outdoor activities were preceded by the open-air presentation of our show *Aspettando Bo* in its original “street” version, adaptable to any context, and open to the improvisational component that allows for greater interaction with the public. The show tells the story of two young Roma and their strenuous search for a better living condition, which proves to be in vain due to the bureaucratic and legislative inconsistencies of modern society. The text is autobiographical and very close to the reality of young Roma in the camps, and in general, of young people in the suburbs. The show was followed by a debate with the audience.

The show had an extraordinary effect on the lives of the Roma settlements, places permeated by isolation, monotony, and abandonment. Our previous experience showed the gratitude and respect that these places and their communities, usually closed in on themselves, express for those who, breaking with stereotypes, enter the settlements to bring beauty and empathy and even more the charm and hold that theatre exerts as a form of narration.

We returned to the communities to start outdoor activities. The first approaches were characterized by collective games accompanied by music to facilitate mutual knowledge, followed shortly by playful theatrical education activities and moments of reflection on history and current events related to the community. Once the group of participants was consolidated, the activities moved to more protected and functional places for the training and creation of new shows.

## PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH: PLAY-BASED LEARNING

The basic pedagogical approach of Rampa Prenestina is play-based learning: we favor play as the basis of the pedagogical structure in both theatre training and educational activities. In the act of playing, the individual returns to the original condition of innocence and spontaneity. Concentration on following the rules and tension towards the goal of the game lead them to a state of readiness and sincere enthusiasm, raising the energy level. Play often induces happiness, cheerfulness, and laughter, stimulating the individual to open up and forget mental structures, rigidity, and defensive attitudes. Group play develops team spirit, creates bonds, complicity and friendships.

The games are mainly of popular origin, often common among different people and cultures. In the first period of a project, they are presented in their traditional form and serve to break the ice, help participants memorize each other's names, break the rhythm in a fun way, raise the group's energy, create complicity and bonds, foster new ways of interaction among participants, and reinforce team play. Following the various games, modifications are introduced and exercises combined to create theatrical games based on themes proposed by the trainers or on narratives suggested by the participants. Through a gradual process, the games and themes merge into small improvisations that, over time, may develop into full dramaturgies and theatrical texts.

## METHOD: USING PLAYING CARDS

Our proposed method is based on the use of Dixit playing cards as a source of inspiration for the development of ideas, the creation of content, and the construction of literary and poetic materials for theatrical improvisation. Dixit-cards feature powerfully suggestive and poetic images. Several editions have been created, and we recommend that you mix as many as possible. Other types of card games can also be used, thus maintaining the random and accidental nature of the distribution of cards to train creative ability.

The use of the cards is playful and creative in nature, but also represents a means for self-knowledge and the knowledge of others. The archetypes represented and revealed through the images help participants to express their inner universe, their thoughts, their reality, dreams, fantasies, aspirations, joys, and fears. The individual interpretation of the images on the cards is shared in the group and discussed collectively, highlighting multiple possibilities of interpretation that open up new ways of thinking and conceiving life.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The Dixit-cards improvisation method has multiple objectives. Firstly, it builds group cohesion through sharing and collective sense-making. The cards can be used to facilitate and promote mutual understanding between participants, investigating and exchanging the personal meaning that we give to the images that we extract from the deck of cards. This step is very effective for

strengthening the group and for forming relationships, affinity, and friendship between participants. Secondly, this method stimulates divergent thinking and poetic imagery. Thirdly, it fosters self-awareness through projection onto archetypal imagery.

Last, but not least, on the creative side, Dixit-cards can be used to generate raw material (stories, characters) for theatrical improvisation. The participants create characters that take inspiration from the images that appear on the cards. In a gradual development, those characters can engage in improvisations in pairs and later in groups, facilitating the development of stories and simple dramaturgies. It is important to leave participants maximum freedom in interpreting the cards and developing characters and stories, without imposing the personal vision of the coaches, limiting the intervention of the latter to gentle guidance and to the subsequent development of the chosen improvisations.

## THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Similar to the principles of narrative therapy, the evocative images on Dixit cards provide a means of accessing unconscious material - dreams, fears, aspirations - by inviting participants to project their inner states onto ambiguous visual stimuli. In line with Jungian psychology, such images can be understood as archetypal symbols that cross temporal and cultural boundaries. They act as mediators between unconscious material and conscious awareness, helping participants bring implicit meanings to the surface.

The playful and intuitive nature of working with images makes them especially effective in community theatre contexts,

where participants explore stories and experiences collectively. By engaging with the cards, individuals not only reflect on personal themes but also connect their experiences to broader cultural narratives, resonating with Jung's notion of the collective unconscious. In this way, the cards function as tools that bridge personal self-expression and shared meaning-making, enriching both the individual and collective creative process.

## THE OUTLINE OF THE SESSION



The session requires one Dixit deck (or high-resolution printouts), along with a table or floor space to display the cards, as well as sticky notes and pens. Optionally, a camera or projector can be used to share the card images with the group. The workshop is structured into seven phases designed to move participants from individual reflection to collective creativity.

1. Warm-up (10 minutes): The facilitator explains the rules, leads a quick ice-breaker, and introduces the Dixit-cards.
2. Individual selection (15 minutes): Each participant chooses one or two cards in response to a simple question/invitation such as “choose a card that...”. Examples of such invitations include: “Select a card that represents your day/your biggest fear!”, “Choose an image that shows how you imagine the future”!; “Pick a card that could be the opening scene of a play about transformation!”; or “Select a card that represents happiness/family/sadness for you!”.
3. Personal reflection (15 minutes): On sticky notes, participants write down why they selected their card(s) and what inner image or story the card evokes.
4. Small-group sharing (20 minutes): In groups of three, each participant shares their card and reflection. The others ask open-ended questions to deepen the exploration.
5. Collective narrative building (20 minutes): Each small group combines their chosen cards into a single story outline or poetic text.
6. Theatrical improvisation (20 minutes): The groups perform short improvised scenes based on the narrative they created together.
7. Debrief and integration (10 minutes): The whole group comes together to reflect on emotional shifts and creative breakthroughs experienced during the session.

The method has multiple variations and can be adapted for different contexts. For example, during the debrief and integration phase, participants may select cards to represent “what went well” and “what didn’t.” Another variation is the past–present–future format, where each participant draws three cards face-down, assigns them to temporal phases (one card represents the past, one the present, and one the future),

then reveals the cards and narrates their sequence. For remote workshops, card images can be shared via screen-sharing, while reflections and story-building are supported on a digital whiteboard.



## EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The method is designed to generate rich narrative material that can later serve as seeds for scenes, monologues, or poetic texts. Beyond creative output, the use of metaphors and projection supports raised self-awareness on the personal level, allowing

individuals to explore aspects of their own identity in a safe and imaginative way. At the group level, the process strengthens team bonds through playful and non-judgmental sharing, fostering an atmosphere of trust and collaboration. Participants are expected to experience heightened empathy as they witness and engage with the diverse inner worlds of others.

To assess these outcomes, a combination of reflective and creative evaluation methods can be applied. Reflective journals can capture shifts in self-perception by inviting participants to record their thoughts before and after the session. Creative artefacts — such as story outlines, poetic texts, or improvised scripts — can be collected as evidence of divergent idea generation and collaborative creativity. Peer feedback provides an additional layer of insight: participants can use a simple rating scale to evaluate their sense of felt safety, creative energy, and the degree of insight gained during the workshop.



## LIST OF MODULAR GAMES

The following list is a compendium of the games we use in their traditional form or in versions adapted as preparatory exercises for the practice of theatre. The list can be constantly updated because the games all have infinite possibilities and variations.

### THE FLOWER

In a circle, closed fists joined together and facing upwards, open your hands one after the other until you complete the circle, then let your fingers vibrate like the petals of a newly opened flower. A symbolic game for opening the workshop, creating a unitary group atmosphere.

### PRESENTATION GAME

In a circle, one at a time, participants enter the center of the circle and say their name. In the second round, a gesture of their choice is added to the name, representing their identity. In the third round, a greeting bow is added to the first two actions, followed by collective applause from the circle. A game of interpersonal knowledge and icebreaking.

### PRESENTATION GAME (DIFFERENT VERSION)

In a circle, one at a time, participants say their name, adding

a gesture and a phrase that represents their personality and rhymes with the name. Following the order of the circle, the other participants, before their name, must repeat the names, phrases and gestures of those who preceded them. An interpersonal knowledge and icebreaker game, useful for memorizing everyone's names.

## OCCUPYING THE SPACE

The whole group walks spread out across the space. The moderator gives orders to change walking speed and to stop suddenly. Possible variations: look into the eyes of the participants you cross paths with. At the stop, hug or look into the eyes of the closest participant. An icebreaker game, raising awareness of the body in space, of sharing space with others, and of the various degrees of closeness with others (public space, intimate space).

## THIS IS A CAT

In a circle, the leader offers an object to the people next to them (standing on their right and left), starting a short dialogue: "Here, this is for you!" / "What is it?" / "It's a cat!" / "What?" / "It's a cat!" / "Ah!" The passing of objects continues in both directions creating funny situations. The leader can add other objects as desired beyond the initial two, giving them names of their choice. An energizing and icebreaking game.

## BALTHAZAR SAYS

The group is walking in a circle, while the leader in the center gives commands (walk fast or slow, stop, scratch your head, etc.). Only the commands preceded by the key words "Balthazar says" must be carried out; the leader will try to mislead the group by occasionally omitting the key words. Anyone who messes up is out of the game. A concentration game.

## MIME GAME

In a circle, the leader silently creates an object with gestures that they offer to the neighbour. The neighbour receives it and with gestures transforms it into another object, offers it to the next neighbour, and so on. A game of body expression and creativity. The moderator can precede it with pantomime motor exercises.

## THE MURDERER

The participants face the wall, the moderator chooses a member who will be the murderer. Their weapon will be the wink, and their task is to kill as many people as possible without being discovered. The victims are not allowed to react or report, but only to fall to the ground pretending to be dead. Whoever discovers the murderer cannot report them publicly but only whisper it in the moderator's ear. If they guess correctly, the game ends; if not, the reporter leaves the game. A game of concentration, observation, and complicity.

## COPS AND ROBBERS

Two groups of chairs are placed in a row facing each other, 2-3 meters apart. The robbers are sitting, the guards are standing behind the chairs. One of the chairs is empty: there is a guard behind the chair, but no robber. The guard of the empty chair uses their gaze and, with a wink, invites a robber from the opposite row to escape and come to their chair. As soon as the robber notices the wink, they try to escape, but the guard behind them has the power to stop them with a touch of their hands. A dynamic, energizing game of complicity and control of physical energy.

## BOATS

The group walks scattered, occupying all the space as if they were swimming in the sea. The leader calls out boats of 3, 4 or 5. The participants must quickly assemble into groups of the given number. An energizing game of complicity, useful for randomly dividing the participants into work groups of the desired number.

## THE STATUES

Divided into two teams, actors and audience, the first participant enters the center of the stage and takes a sculptural pose. In turn, one at a time, the other participants enter and take a pose while maintaining a physical point of contact with the other statues. The team will create a collective statue that can be abstract or representative. A creative game of body expression.

## FAMILY PHOTO

Divided into teams, participants pose to represent a family photo. A creative game of body expression and acting.

## YATZI

Divided into teams, one team acts and the other is the audience. The space is imaginarily divided into a chessboard of a size suitable for the number of participants. One at a time, the team members enter the chessboard moving exclusively forward, backward and sideways. Gradually a repetitive gesture is added to the movement, and then also a sound or a word. When all the members have entered and are in action, the casual and often significant events and interactions that occur on the chessboard are observed. At the closing signal of the moderator, the audience team applauds. A creative game of theatrical improvisation.

## THE GUIDE

Divided into pairs, one participant, holding the hand (or in another way guiding) the other participant blindfolded or with eyes closed, leads them through a sensory path. The path can be random, abstract, or planned to create a significant dramaturgy. A game of creativity, sensitivity and care for others.

## 1-2-3 STAR

A popular game with variations. One participant, who acts as the leader, facing the wall, counts and turns to catch the moving

contestants. The others, in a horizontal line at the other end of the room, can advance until the leader looks at them. When suddenly the leader turns to look, everyone must freeze. Whoever is caught in motion is out of the game. The contestant who first touches the leader's shoulder wins. Significant variations are gradually added: e.g. when freezing, contestants must take a specific pose (monster, grimace, attitude, etc.); in pairs, when freezing, they must take a meaningful pose (hug, fight, statuesque pose, etc.). An energizing game of creativity and complicity.

## SENSORY CORRIDOR

The group is divided into two groups lined up in front of each other to form a corridor. A participant with eyes closed walks slowly along the human corridor. The group, using physical contact (massage, caress, pinches, etc.) and/or sound (wind, rain, forest, animals, etc.), creates a sensory experience or a soundscape. A game of creativity, sensitivity and care for others.

## ZOMBIE

Chairs are distributed in the space, as many as there are participants plus an empty chair. A participant is named Zombie; they start walking from the farthest point of the space imitating the slowness and attitude of a zombie. The contestants, moving quickly from one chair to another, must prevent him from sitting on the empty chair. Everyone can move except the contestants closest to the empty chair. An energizing game, icebreaker, with elements of acting.

## SILENT LEADER

In a circle or, more difficult, scattered around the space. One participant leaves the room. The remaining participants choose someone who will silently lead the actions and movements that will be imitated by the rest of the group. The participant who remained outside returns and must guess who the leader is. An energizing team game.

## THE GAME OF OPINIONS

The space is divided in two, each space assigned to a different opinion on a topic that emerged during a discussion or debate. The participants place themselves in the space corresponding to their opinion. When everyone has taken part, the moderator invites each one to explain their position, avoiding making any judgment and leaving open the possibility for everyone to change their opinion and consequently their position in the space. A game to enhance respect for the opinion of others and non-judgment.

## CREATIVE WRITING

For a larger or entire group. The first participant writes a one-line sentence on a given topic on a sheet of paper, folds it back so it is not visible, and passes the sheet to the next participant that writes their sentence, folds it, passes it, and so on. The result is an accordion-folded sheet that goes back to the first participant, who opens it and reads all the sentences aloud as one complete text. A creative game.

## EYES ON THE SCENE

In a circle, the members of the group memorize the names of the participants. Then a ball is thrown. Everyone must call the name of the person in the circle who was first, while the ball must be passed from hand to hand in the reverse order. A theatrical game to develop focus and concentration skills.

## DIXIT 1 – CARD GAME

The cards are spread out on a table facing down. Each player chooses a card. After a period of reflection, they take turns showing it and explaining its personal symbolic meaning, which can be imaginary or linked to their own experience. The group takes turns sharing their vision of both their own card and that of the other participants in a brainstorming of diverse interpretations. An icebreaker game useful for defining one's own interpretative language in meeting and comparison with that of the other.

## DIXIT 2 – CARD GAME

The cards are facing down and spread out on a table; the team appoints one participant to choose a card. The team brainstorms on the meanings and symbols inspired by the card and uses the inspiration to give a name to their team, compose a short jingle (a song or a slogan) and a theatrical presentation of the team.

## DIXIT 3 – CARD GAME

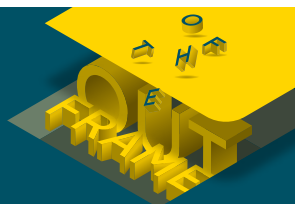
The cards are facing down and spread out on a table. Each player chooses a card. Pairs or groups are created that work separately to build characters and situations suggested or inspired by the cards. After a time of reflection and preparation (10–15 min), the improvisations are presented to the other participants, followed by a collective debate. A creativity development game.

## SNAP JUMP

The leader gives a regular and continuous rhythm with the snap of their fingers. In turns, the participants join in, creating a choral rhythm. Keeping the rhythm, in turns the participants jump on the spot – first one by one, then two by two, three by three, until they all jump together. A collective rhythmic coordination game.

## SOCIAL CLASSES

A sticker is placed on the forehead of each participant with an increasing number proportional to the number of participants. No one knows what their number is (it must not be revealed and no mirrors are used). A party is staged and everyone is given the task of making friends with the highest numbers. Awareness game on roles and social classes in modern society.



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