



Case Study I.

Activities of the Project
*Roma Heroes in Theatre
and Everyday Life -
Trainings and
Non-formal Education
for the Empowerment of
Roma Youth: Training
Courses, Roma Heroes
Workshops, Creation of
Roma Heroes
Publication*

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Activities of the Project Roma Heroes in Theatre and Everyday Life - Trainings and
Non-formal Education for the Empowerment of Roma Youth: Training Courses,
Roma Heroes Workshops, Creation of Roma Heroes Publication

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(Ternipe Association)

Independent Theatre Hungary – Nők a Jövőért Egyesület
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Romániai Magyar Pedagógusok Szövetsége
(Uniunea Cadrelor Didactice Maghiare din Romania / Hungarian Teachers' Association of Romania)



Romániai
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**independent
theater**

Introduction

Three organizations have joined forces to bring attention to the heroes of European Roma dramas and the Roma heroes around us; and to provide a means of shaping young people's attitudes towards the Roma and active citizenship through workshops and publications on the stories of Roma heroes while at the same time giving space and focus to people and their stories who are most often excluded from the focus of culture, education, and youth work.

However, Roma and non-Roma young people were not only the target groups but also the active shapers of the initiative, where they themselves became contemporary trainers and could hold workshops for other young people and present in their own publications individuals whom they consider to be Roma heroes.

On behalf of Independent Theatre Hungary, we presented our methodology on Roma Heroes, developed several years ago, to the civil organization Ternipe in Slovakia, while our partner shared with us how to create a publication about Roma heroes with the participation of young people. Methodologies on both methods were published in the framework of the project. The Hungarian Teachers' Association of Romania undertook the dissemination of the results and impacts with a view to promoting the awareness and activation of young people in formal education as well and to familiarize Hungarian teachers and NGOs in Transylvania with the methods.

In this case study, we have collected the methods, results, difficulties, and successes that have defined the work of the team in Hungary from the moment we gathered active young people around us up to the moment they became trainers, held workshops, and created their own publications.

We are confident that this material will provide a number of useful tools, perspectives, and even dilemmas to share with professionals who are trying to activate young people and shape their attitudes on socially sensitive issues by means of education, culture, or the media.

Enjoy your reading!

Lucia Lakatos

Professional Objectives and Activities from a Bird's-Eye View

Independent Theatre Hungary aims to support the inclusion of disadvantaged young people with fewer opportunities and to highlight the diversity of the European Union by giving prominence to the values of the largest ethnic minority in Europe, the Roma. We also aim to raise awareness of the difficulties faced by many Roma people across Europe. In addition to the characteristics of individual Roma people and groups, an emphasis will also be placed on universal human values and challenges, as we believe that recognizing the similarities between different groups is a fundamental condition for mutual understanding and inclusion.

A further aim of our Roma Heroes workshops is to inspire young Roma and non-Roma people to become active and inclusive citizens through the example of contemporary European Roma dramas and dramatic heroes, as both dramatic heroes and active citizens respond to challenges by making informed decisions and adopt an active approach that leads to change. Non-formal education, built on collaboration, open dialogue and ensuring hands-on experiences, can be very effective in developing and activating disadvantaged young people who are rarely motivated to participate and able to experience a sense of achievement in a frontal system of formal education focused on lexical knowledge.

Our workshops are recommended for groups of young people who are open to learn about Hungarian and different European Roma dramas. Each of the plays features heroism, and we discuss issues related to it and then share our own heroic deeds and stories. Participants will gain an insight into the world of European Roma communities, each other's thoughts, and the joy of creating together.

In the first part of the two 90-minute session, dramatic heroes and heroes in general are analysed. The dramas provide insights into the lives, challenges, and social situations of various Roma communities in Europe, but they also raise difficulties and issues that are not specific to Roma. Participants are shown excerpts from scenes from the performances created based on the dramas and then work with focus scenes in teams under professional guidance, concluding with an oral presentation of the play and a moderated plenary discussion and debate. They then have the opportunity to express their personal opinions, to share the dilemmas that arise, to reflect on each other and on the social or individual problems presented. In the second part, the young people share their personal hero stories, discuss the characteristics of the hero, and raise awareness of the importance of value-based decision-making and taking responsibility in their own lives and environments. Finally, they create a collective artwork related to any story they have learnt and then present it to each other. The sessions are run by trained young Roma and non-Roma co-trainers. The methodology of the Roma Heroes workshop was issued as a publication in the framework project (cf. the list of the project publications).

Our aim was to involve in the training course eight young people living in Hungary, where they would acquire the knowledge to be professionally prepared to present and deliver Roma Heroes workshops to young people. We aimed to reach at least 80 people in four locations, thereby providing young people the opportunity to become successful trainers and to get involved in the activities and work of the Independent Theatre in the future.

We also aimed to create a national publication on Roma heroes and publish it online. By collecting and presenting contemporary young Roma role models, the Roma Heroes publication, which we called *Among Us*, aimed to make the attitude of the majority more open towards the Roma and to collect inspiring role models for Roma and non-Roma young people alike.

The young people involved were thus able to gain knowledge of European Roma dramas and, through them, of the context and historical background of European Roma communities. Besides, they were given the possibility to acquire coaching skills and practice while also gaining interviewing, writing, and editing skills and practice through the production of the publication.

Engaging Young Heroes, Team Building

As is evident from the above, we were looking for both Roma and non-Roma young people for quite a wide-ranging task, individuals who were open to social issues, non-formal education, and various fields of the media. To find them, we published an open call for applications, in which we specifically outlined the planned duration of the project, the expected skills and experiences, and the professional, personal, and material opportunities we offer. It is important to detail the project's timeline so that those whose commitments are incompatible with participation in the programme do not apply and to ensure that following mutual commitment, participants do not take on other obligations that would prevent them from attending a crucial multi-day training session. Among our expectations, we pointed out not only a diverse interest but also that we would like the applicants to have some level of experience working with young people. Becoming a peer trainer is a challenging endeavour, so, according to our experience, a young person can only become a successful trainer during a 60-hour training course if they have previously worked with young people, at least during a camp or another informal occasion. Furthermore, an interest in social, cultural, and educational topics was essential, as without it, they would not have enough motivation to meet the challenges of the training. We also indicated as a prerequisite openness and interest towards Roma origin and Roma communities, as we aimed to create an ethnically diverse group – workshops are generally co-facilitated by a Roma and a non-Roma trainer. A lack of openness among non-Roma participants towards Roma would have posed later on a fundamental obstacle to delving into the topic, collaborative work, and authentically representing the inclusive perspective in the future.

We disseminated the call for applications and the application form – which contained information and experiences concerning the applicants in addition to questions related to their motivations – on our website, social media platforms, and our partners' communication channels. However, in recruiting applicants,

we did not solely rely on open communication platforms; we also specifically reached out to several young people from our own network. Our experience has shown that the most positive group dynamics and the environment that encourages mutual learning can emerge when there are young people in the group with whom we have previously shared work experiences, alongside those who have observed our theatre's work from a distance, as well as complete newcomers. Building upon experiences gained from past collaborations, the work ethic and commitment of certain young people serve as a guarantee that they will not drop out halfway through the programme; also, their examples, such as punctuality, openness, informality, or even criticality, will provide a point of reference for newcomers. Newcomers, on the other hand, always bring freshness, renewal, and reflection to any organization or team.

Interviews were conducted with the applicants by the educational programme leader, and we selected eight out of the ten initially planned participants to include in the programme. Two aspects influenced this decision. First – considering that previously in a number of similar training sessions, some of the young people have had to withdraw due to other commitments or changes in life circumstances during the several months of the programme –, in the event of dropout, we would still be left with a team of eight as a minimum requirement. Second – and we believe this is the more convincing aspect – all ten young people possessed the necessary competencies, experiences, interests, and motivation to create an excellent team.

As we strive for ethnic and gender diversity among the co-trainers of Roma Heroes workshops and fundamentally believe in the power of diverse teams, we also had to consider the composition of participants when forming the group. Ultimately, over 50% of the ten individuals selected were of Roma descent. This is an excellent outcome, as in previous years, recruiting and retaining Roma trainers has posed more of a challenge. Our mission is to empower Roma young people, and the increasing number of applications from Roma youth indicates that more and more are turning to us with trust and see a perspective in collaborating with us. However, the ratio of male to female participants reflected a pattern similar to previous occasions, showing that women are much more active in relation to cultural and social issues. Thus, eventually, only two men joined the group of young people alongside eight women.

Applications were accepted within two weeks of the announcement, and interviews were conducted in late November and early December, allowing the team to be assembled before Christmas. An initial meeting with the team members was scheduled prior to the joint multi-day international training at the end of January, where members of the Slovak team also participated.

The foundational meeting was necessary for multiple reasons. First, it was important for us and the applicants alike to experience a taste of collaboration before making a long-term commitment. Secondly, it was essential to build a team among the recruited young people from the theatre before they would later meet with the Slovak team to create a larger cohesive group. Thirdly, it was crucial for them to arrive at the international training prepared and enriched with experiences.

In early January, we held a one-day training session focusing on the following aspects:

- getting to know each other, team building;
- understanding and discussing the framework of the programme;
- listing of personal motivations, expectations, fears, and commitments;
- establishing the framework: discussing the aspects to be considered regarding the workshops – when setting out the common frameworks for any trainer course, we recommend addressing the organizational criteria for the workshops that trainers will be conducting in the future;
- discussing and establishing the aspects necessary for facilitating games related to team-building and warm-up activities – again, during any trainer course, we suggest that after personally experiencing games and exercises, there should be a shared reflection both on the specific game and on the trainer’s work and its general aspects;
- gaining personal experience from the Roma Heroes workshop – although most participants had previously taken part in workshops, not everyone had, and many had done so a long time ago, so we deemed it important for them to gain fresh personal experience and reflect upon it before they begin to learn how to lead workshops themselves.

During the meeting, we agreed that everyone would prepare for the international training by moderating a discussion with questions regarding a particular Roma drama and leading a short warm-up game, while also reviewing the Roma Heroes publication created by Ternipe, as well as other relevant publications, from which they would gather both positive and negative examples, which would then help determine the criteria for creating our own publication.

The occasion took place in a pleasant atmosphere, with the team quickly bonding. The participants were active and motivated. Following this first day of getting acquainted, we established training contracts with them to ensure that neither they nor we as organizers were engaging in a 'picking a pig in a poke' scenario.

Training for the Young People

Following the initial meeting, the 60-hour training programme for the young participants consisted of two multi-day international trainings and several intensive domestic training days. Part of the 60 hours was covered by homework assignments (e.g. familiarizing themselves with dramas and background materials and preparing for group leading and other tasks for the joint training days).

We have previously held trainings on several occasions for young people intending to conduct Roma Heroes workshops. There were instances when these training sessions were too intensive and overwhelming. An intensive training week leading up to the examination offered little opportunity for home preparation and digestion, and the pressure to perform diminished the potential for a motivating experience. At other times, a series of shorter weekly sessions lasting several months provided numerous experiences for the participants. However, during longer processes, there was a higher dropout rate, and someone was almost always absent in the sporadic half-day sessions. Besides, the half-day training series is unsuitable for international training, and even for domestic levels if participants do not live in the same city.

Based on these experiences, we have decided to organize two three-day intensive training sessions, with a preparatory meeting beforehand and two intensive weekends in between. After the second international training, we would organize only one examination session, where preparation for the workshops took place. This was particularly important because three members of the domestic team lived far from Budapest, making it logistically challenging for them to attend one-day training sessions. We take the view that for any multi-session training process, it is crucial to consider what can be gained and what might be lost when holding several intensive training days together or when scattering the training sessions over a longer period of time. If the process

lasts longer than a few months, the risk of dropout increases, as changes may occur in the young people's lives, or they may lose their motivation during the long training and preparation process. At the same time, overly intense training may take away the motivation for preparation, reflection, and 'waiting for' the upcoming sessions. In this case, we have aimed for the golden mean.

First International Training

At the end of January, we organized a three-day international training session, which included ten local participants and eight from Slovakia. The purpose of this training was for the entire team to get to know each other, understand the project objectives, take a deeper insight into the workshops and the publication, play together, and already start assigning trainer tasks to the young people, allowing them to try themselves out in minor situations, within a safe environment. After a trainer had conducted an exercise, we collectively discussed its lessons and recorded the general aspects of facilitating games/exercises.

Since the focus of the first day was the publication, we discussed during a presentation the aspects and lessons of the publication previously created by the Slovak team. This was followed by a brainstorming session on whom and why the participants would select for inclusion in the publication. Then, small groups worked on the editorial criteria for creating new publications. We defined the following criteria regarding the upcoming publications:

1. Showcase a diverse range of people (in terms of occupation, gender, and age) so that we do not only present older, successful, artistic individuals as role models but also highlight the diversity of Roma heroes living among us, ensuring that everyone can find an inspiring person in the collection.
2. Instead of describing the biography of the featured individual, we should present a story related to that person, which may encompass a

significant part of their life or highlight a particular event. These stories should be created based on interviews conducted with the selected individuals.

3. Include a photo and a brief information section for each person, which should also contain external links so that those interested can access further information if they are intrigued by the respective hero.

On the second day, we continued with the facilitation of exercises prepared by the young people. The aim of this exercise was for the youth to gain proficiency and provide as well as receive feedback from each other on how they could better facilitate a particular game/exercise. Thus, based on the facilitation criteria established together the previous day – adding new considerations –, participants provided each other feedback, followed by the trainers, sharing their thoughts on the positive elements in the specific facilitation and the areas in need of improvement.

Throughout the day, we collectively gathered and determined the aspects of trainer communication and moderation and discussed together what makes someone a good trainer. This was followed by brief moderated discussions led by the young people based on questions raised in relation to a particular Roma drama. After the short, moderated small group discussions, both the young people and the trainers provided feedback on the strengths and the areas for development related to the moderator's work.

On the third day, we modelled and discussed the modules related to the Roma Heroes workshop. We collectively determined what trainers should pay attention to during each module. We did not conduct an experiential workshop for the Slovak team members, only the said analytical version broken down by module, as they had all participated in such a workshop less than a year prior.

For the next meeting, we asked the participants to familiarize themselves with some of the dramas on which the workshops are based, i.e. to read the texts and the related background information. In total, six dramas were chosen for the joint repertoire, and the young people arrived in Slovakia already prepared.

On the weekend before the training in Slovakia, another two days of intensive training with the Hungarian team took place, partly focusing on the adaptation of the dramas. Together with the young people, we worked on the six selected dramas, and then together we identified the relevant information, aspects, and dilemmas that could be addressed in the workshops. Following the exercise, each of them chose a play that, just like we, organizing trainers did, would be developed by them in the international training with the participation of the Slovakian young people.

In the context of the publication, to 'extract' a story suitable to present the hero, we collected together the most appropriate questions to ask an interviewee. Then, the participants interviewed each other, and based on the interviews, they shared a story about their partner in plenary. Together we determined what the best questions to ask might be and what makes a story work well.

Second International Training and Exam

In mid-March, another three-day international training took place in Slovakia.

By this time, all participants had a concrete idea of who they would like to feature in the publication. Possible interview questions were discussed and then used to interview each other for practice. The rules and possible pitfalls of interviewing were also established together. We also finalized the content and format of the publication.

We incorporated the dramas into the training by having the participants in Hungary present a play for half an hour, describe its plot to the others, and lead a discussion about it. Each exercise was followed by a joint discussion and evaluation. As the trainers had facilitated the same module – drama presentation and discussion – with the young people the previous weekend, we followed the same process of providing the participants with a personal

experience first so that they could incorporate their experiences and the points of view gathered from this experience into their own work later on.

As part of this session, we talked about assertive communication and conflict management that may come up over the course of any workshop. We prepared exercises for the participants in connection with the communication module. First, they worked in teams: they were given a conflict situation related to their role as trainers or that might occur during a workshop. The possible ways to deal with a given situation were first discussed by the participants in pairs, then they presented a solution they deemed appropriate in plenary, and then we talked through what we had heard, reflecting on each other. It is important for peer trainers to be able to approach people and situations of tension or conflict in a spirit of partner communication, as this allows them to set an example of cooperative and inclusive behaviour through their own work. However, if such situations make them tense, anxious, or even angry, that can have a negative impact on their relationship with the group and the effectiveness of the workshop in general. Modelling and managing worst-case scenarios in a safe environment prepares young people for later real-life situations so that they can then deal with any subsequent conflict in practice in a much calmer and more prepared manner, situations which in our experience are usually much less extreme than the ones we bring them to the training, written on cards. After such training opportunities, real training challenges will no longer be perceived as being thrown in at the deep end.

This was followed by quick, lightning challenges: they had to reflect individually on potential problems that might arise, in the form of drawing a brief, concrete situation that might happen in a workshop and responding immediately, verbally, on how they would solve the problem, incorporating the assertive communication methods learned beforehand.

On the last day of the training, each participant facilitated a module from the Roma Heroes workshop, during which the others 'acted as' the group members – sometimes taking on the role of more cooperative while some other times that of more provocative group members. Following the facilitation of the module, each young person received feedback on their work. In addition to the technical aspect of the workshops, it was also important to discuss the operational steps involved in preparing for and evaluating the workshops. The workshop-planning

module was discussed, as well as the information to be collected during an interview with the group leader to be hosting the workshop, and how trainers evaluate a workshop on the basis of the feedback forms filled in by the participants and their own perceptions.

In parallel with the training, we launched a call for schools and youth organizations to host a free Roma Heroes workshop. The call that closed in March attracted several applicants, and eventually we were able to organize six workshops, which could be delivered by the new peer trainers – they just had to pass the exam.

The final exam did not include any practical exercises, as the training gave the young people the chance to try their hand in a number of practical situations, and we have formed a sufficiently accurate picture of how they can work with a group. At the same time, all the young people who attend the workshop should have a clear understanding of the six Roma dramas selected and their background, as well as the lexical part of the trainer's work. The exam was therefore written, and all participants demonstrated adequate preparation and were qualified to deliver a workshop. At the time of the exam, the contemporary trainers were allocated who would hold a workshop with whom, when, and where. As six workshops were planned and two trainers were needed per workshop, one peer trainer was assigned to an older trainer at each of the two locations.

Summary of the Main Aspects of the Training

- Creating an inclusive, welcoming, friendly team is the first condition so that everyone be willing to be together, dare to ask questions, formulate critical observations, or even make mistakes – these are essential for development.
- Ensuring personal experiences where they can play in a game as participants in a workshop or receive stories from a publication as recipients. By sharing personal experiences, the related feelings and thoughts, we were able to collect together the aspects of the specific workshop, game, or material that they could later put into practice when they themselves were leading an exercise or conducting an interview.
- Regular mutual feedback is absolutely essential. The greatest gift we can get from each other is honest feedback, and we can often learn the most from observing how a partner handles a situation or what feelings or points of view they have about an exercise or material. As a matter of course, professional feedback from trainers is also important, always alternating between elements of reinforcement and improvement, but feedback received and given is also very important in the spirit of horizontal learning.
- We made progress step by step, each time giving participants the opportunity to gain new knowledge, but also to acquire practical experience and have a sense of achievement. These are the very fuel of motivation for further learning and development.
- Know how to play but take matters seriously – for a peer trainer, it is equally important to find a common voice with young people, be able to share an occasional wink with them, laugh together at a joke, or become absorbed in a game, just as to comply with the established framework and achieve the objectives. We therefore expected punctuality and preparedness from participants throughout and dared to give them

inconvenient feedback as well. Thanks to this approach, they were fun and playful, but also active and engaged throughout the process.

Feedback on the Training from the Trainers

All participating peer trainers found the training useful, and their feedback was that the training met and in many ways even exceeded their prior expectations. Below are some quotes from their feedback interviews:

- *'I wanted to learn methodology and tools to be a successful trainer, but I ended up getting a lot more than that. As a human being, a young Roma woman, I finished the training with pride and great determination.'*
- *'I applied because I thought it was very important to strengthen the self-image of the Roma and help young people find heroes related to their identity. It is regarding these aspects that I intended to extend the range of my skillset, in which, thanks to the excellent training, I succeeded.'*
- *'The training is extremely well structured – I would recommend it to those, too, who have not been to a Roma Heroes workshop before, as most of the training is based on personal experiences. I had the opportunity to try everything we learned about, and if I was unsure or uncomfortable about something, I could have a go at it several times over in a safe environment.'*
- *'Thanks to the way the training was structured, there was not too much home learning required, and the material was easily absorbed thanks to the exercises and games on the training days. The trainers paid due attention to each of us individually and helped us to improve in what we needed.'*
- *'I have run sessions for other types of groups before, and I wanted to sign up to get some structure on how to work as a trainer. The training fulfilled this to the maximum; it gave me a lot of reinforcement and also highlighted areas*

that I should put more focus on and improve on. This training was also important for me because it approached key social problems through the arts, and I am very happy to have been able to deepen the possibilities of this through such a thoughtful and well-tested workshop.'

Creating the Publication

As mentioned above, by studying and discussing materials about Roma heroes during the training, the young people formulated their own ideas about the kind of publication they would like to create. What kind of material would they themselves like to read, and what could attract the attention of other young people? What the publication should look like, and who it should feature and how. As everyone set great store by the power of personal stories, as well as meeting and talking to the person to be featured, preparing for the interview by recording their own experiences, shared discussions, established considerations and questions was a major focus. Also through joint brainstorming, we collected potential people who could be featured in the publication and with whom we could make contact – since a face-to-face meeting and interview became a jointly established expectation. We defined as a goal to present in the publication a diverse range of people across professions, ages, genders, and other characteristics, so when selecting the final list of people, we were careful not to include too many musicians, for example, or to include everyday heroes alongside celebrities. However, the most vital aspect was that everyone interviewed and wrote a story about someone they found interesting, sympathetic and whom they saw as a hero for some reason.

Eight out of the ten young people agreed to interview two or three people each and write a one-page story about them, as well as gather basic information (profession, awards, studies, links) that they wanted to highlight about the person. The other two participants undertook the editing and proofreading of the material to be produced.

Of the sixteen interviews planned initially, eventually only fourteen made their way into the publication. The reason was that one of the interviewees' employer did not contribute to the publication and another interviewee had since become

politician, so we as organizers did not think that it would be fitting to include him in an independent youth publication. We prepared from the beginning for the dropout of the people to be presented, and in order to prevent this, we gave each of them detailed information about the publication they would be included in and the purpose of their inclusion. We also had them approve the texts so that they would not later formulate any objection to the material published about them.

We also involved a photographer in the production of the publication, as the young people wanted to have a nice portrait of each person in the publication. However, we were soon able to identify that there were no young people within the group who were seriously interested in photography, unlike in the Slovakian team. We thought we should organize this task so that they would not have to undertake any assignment that would not motivate them and so that their texts could be accompanied by decent, high-quality photography. We believe that for any participatory initiative, it is important to consider what a group is really capable of and motivated to do and what would be a burden on their shoulders in the name of participation. We therefore asked a long-time colleague, who is a professional photographer, to take the photos. He was only connected with people who had already been interviewed and had contributed to the text so that he would not have to photograph people who might end up being left out of the publication.

The other perennial dilemma regarding participation is the extent to which we should influence young people's decisions either about who to include in a publication or about the focus of the story and the treatment of the text. As mentioned earlier, the person pursuing a career in politics could not be included in the publication, and we also talked them out of choosing people working in our organization. However, beyond that, we did not want to tie the hands of the young people in any way, we merely drew their attention to certain aspects and asked them specific questions. Why is he or she interesting to you? To what extent does this text present them as a hero? These questions and points of view either influenced them and made them think about whom and how to present, or they followed their own perceptions – which is also a very important learning process –, and just as no two heroes are the same, everyone's heart is drawn to a different story. But what worked here, just as with the training, was

the feedback received from others. And even though interviewing, writing, and editing is a more solitary work than holding a workshop, the two-person editorial team helped their peers with many questions and suggestions, they themselves also making some editorial decisions about rewriting or omitting certain parts of the text.

Although photography was not popular in the group, the editors showed interest in the graphic design work, so they created the layout and design of the publication with the help of user-friendly, easy-to-access programs and applications, with final proofreading and translation done by the Romanian partner's staff.

Implementation of the Workshops

A total of five workshops were carried out over the six months following the end of the training course. The venues were selected based on a call for proposals, as mentioned above, announcing the possibility of a free Roma Heroes workshop. In the call, we asked applicants to introduce their group, explain why they would welcome the workshop into their group and what they expected from it. Each session was led by one or two peer trainers, accompanied by an experienced trainer monitoring and supporting them from the background. Where there was only one young trainer delivering the session, they paired up as a co-trainer with an experienced professional, but where two young people were facilitating, the helping trainer played a much lesser role, as our aim was for them to truly experience what it was like to deliver a workshop in a real-life situation from start to finish.

The preparation phase took place by all the six applicant organizations indicating at first when they could host the programme and then the trainers selecting the venue they would like to go to according to their availability. We also took into account having a Roma and a non-Roma as well as a male and a female trainer in each workshop as far as this was possible. Once the sites were allocated, the trainers received an application form filled in by the applicants, which in itself provided a wealth of information about the group. Then, about two weeks prior to the session, the young trainers interviewed – over the phone or via video call – the local leaders of the group, who knew the participants well and who would also be attending the workshop. The interview allowed the trainers to gain prior knowledge about the group. This allowed them to find out what topics they were interested in, how many participants they could expect, how long the group had been together, whether they had already participated in a similar or interactive session, etc. On the basis of this information, they prepared a thematic plan and selected three or four dramas that they found interesting and useful for the group members and would incorporate into the

workshop. The themes and the programme were checked and approved by the trainers delivering the training course. The co-trainers were then able to practise for the workshop with a concrete, final theme in hand, so they divided up the modules among themselves, having a sufficient amount of information about the group.

The first such venue was Pázmány Péter Catholic University in Budapest, where a group of students learning the fundamentals of Roma studies were delivered a session by a pair of young trainers. The students, aged 18–24, were highly enthusiastic and curious about the programme, as Roma culture was of great importance to them, and the methodology of the workshop also attracted their interest. Based on their feedback, we can confidently say that the trainers were able to provide them with new and valuable knowledge.

The next venue was the Roma College of Eszterházy Károly Catholic University in Eger, where we conducted a workshop for Roma/disadvantaged students aged 18–28. This session was led by a peer trainer in the company of an experienced professional. The feedback from the students and the team leader was that the programme brought several new perspectives into the life of the organization and, as the students had never participated in a similar programme before, they were particularly enthusiastic about it, highlighting its team-building qualities and that it helped them get to know each other better. This was yet another occasion when participants reported that the session had been very informative and that they had learnt many interesting new facts about Roma communities in Europe, not only about the Roma in Hungary.

We also took the programme to the Belvárosi Tanoda Foundation High School, a second chance high school that offers a baccalaureate. Most of the students aged 16–25 have a difficult family/social situation and are mostly Roma. Social activism is given prominence at the institution, as well as approaching social issues through art, which is close to the students' hearts, so they were looking forward to this programme and found it useful.

The workshop was also hosted by Udvar Festival – Szimfolk Music Workshop in Arló, led by two peer trainers. The event is a recent initiative, first organized a few years ago for families and residents of the area who find it difficult to attend cultural events due to their financial and geographical situation. In order to give

them the opportunity to participate in artistic programmes, it was started with the intention of 'culture being brought to their doorstep'. The Roma Heroes workshop was realized in the framework of the festival, which was attended by festivalgoers showing interest in the programme, as well as a group of talented young people who participated in the workshop. They were mostly young people of Roma origin learning music and dance. The Roma dramas were received with great interest, as they had never even heard of their existence before. They were inspired by the life and traditions of European Roma communities, something that also reflected in the fact that they drew on these dramas in their creative work and used musical instruments during the session. By virtue of their artistic orientation, they highlighted the theatrical presentation as one of the best experiences of the workshop.

During the summer, we held a session in Soltvadkert for members of Kacsakő Association, which was attended by Roma and non-Roma children aged 13–14, living in children's homes, coming from minority and majority groups and from different family backgrounds. Their programmes are run using non-formal, experiential, and outdoor learning methods, so the workshop came as a perfect addition to the organization's core activity of reducing prejudice between Roma and non-Roma children. The waterfront camp venue and the diversity of the young people created the open and inclusive atmosphere that characterized the entire session. Here again, a young trainer led the session with an experienced professional.

There was a common group leader in several locations. His feedback was that the young people were still talking about the experience weeks later, as well as about topics raised at the workshop, the community-building effect also being highlighted by many.

Impact, Results, Feedback

The peer trainers learned a lot from the trainer course and the subsequent workshops. Most of them reported having gained new knowledge and perspectives and improved communication skills. Many mentioned the acquisition of new knowledge from a professional perspective:

- *'It's useful to know how to work with different groups, what to pay attention to, how to tailor a theme to a group when I visit a community to deliver a programme.'*
- *'Learning about Roma drama literature and acquiring facilitation skills were my basic goals, which I have achieved.'*
- *'It provided me with absolutely valuable knowledge. I also teach workshops based on experiential pedagogy, and I can make use of this knowledge there as well. Even though the subject matter is different, the knowledge, the preparation, the basics are there for me to work from.'*

In addition, some of the participants pointed out that they had gained more than just professional knowledge:

- *'The training course has given me knowledge that I can put to use not only as a trainer, when conducting workshops, but also in my daily life. I have integrated the unbroken attention that participants deserve and the careful planning that precedes a workshop into my everyday life as well.'*
- *'A confident stance, improvement in communication. Besides knowledge, a positive social experience, of course.'*

Some of them also stressed that Roma dramas brought them closer to getting to know and understanding Roma culture:

- *'The training course gave me a workshop made up of well-defined panels, the mastery of which helped me a lot in developing and improving my role as*

a trainer; as well as familiarizing with the fantastic stories of the Roma Heroes dramas.'

- *'The training provided me with plenty of information and knowledge about modern and historical Roma drama and the place of Roma communities in the cultural sector. I was unaware of the fact that Roma Theatre existed more than a century ago.'*
- *'The training course and holding the workshop gave me much more than I could first imagine: besides acquiring specific competences and skills, I also got to meet a super community, gained a closer insight into Roma culture, and came across great theatre scripts and performances.'*

It was not only the trainers who echoed these sentiments, but many of the young people taking part in the workshop shared similar views:

- *'I had no idea of the existence of Roma dramas, but I'm very glad they showed them to us!'*
- *'It was nice to see how diverse the Roma community is across Europe, to get a glimpse into their traditions and culture.'*

In each of the venues, we received several written and/or verbal feedback from participants that the sessions also had a team-building, community-forging power.

- *'I was surprised to learn new things about my classmates, as we have known each other quite well. I had no idea that so deep conversations would take place today.'*
- *'What I liked most about the workshop was the great atmosphere and that we got to talk about our own hero stories.'*
- *'This was the best programme we had participated in as a class community. And I can truly call it a community!'*

To wrap it up, we can say that from the perspective of both trainers and participants, an important impact of the workshop was to acquire new perspectives, absorb new knowledge, build communities, and get closer to Roma culture, and thereby to take a more open attitude to different communities and groups.

Concluding Thoughts

The past year has seen the addition of new peer trainers to the Roma Heroes training team, many of whom have already been involved in some of our other activities, undertaking acting and directing, among others, and supporting our management team. In addition to the workshops, the publication has provided a novel experience – not only for the young people involved but also for our organization as a whole. We are confident that after all the shared experiences, progress, and successes, we will be able to work with them in the future, but we are also confident that should their paths take them elsewhere, they will be able to benefit from the knowledge, contacts, and work experiences acquired over the course of our collaboration, and from living the joy of working in a diverse and inclusive group. Besides the project activities, the young people also regularly seek each other out in their free time. The messenger group set up during the project is still active today, serving as a platform where they now organize joint film screenings or going to the circus together.

We can only encourage all civil society actors, cultural and educational professionals willing to promote social inclusion to invite young people from different backgrounds to work in partnership. Provide them with impulses and experiences, ask for their opinions, and give them motivating and personalized tasks that can give young people a sense of achievement. If we set expectations in a safe environment while giving them the opportunity to enjoy and succeed, encouraging them that it is all right to make mistakes, just give it a try, and if we give them feedback on their strengths while always asking what they can improve on, they can become real heroes who can make the world we live in a better place.