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# Preventing Marginalization and Radicalization through Theatre and the Expressive Arts: Empowering Intercultural Dialogue

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## *Abstract*

Marginalization, radicalization, and encountering the *Other* are undoubtedly some of the topics on top of the agenda for social growth in our society. The roles that women, in general, and mothers, in particular, can play in prevention and inclusion strategies are certainly of great importance for an approach that goes beyond a simple intervention on effects, working on causes and facilitating intercultural dialogue. theatre and art have always been used as forms of storytelling, to generate emotions and make the audience identify with the stories they hear or watch. For this reason, in the field of methodologies and tools for the inclusion of people and the prevention of marginalization, over time excellent examples of the application of artistic approaches to facilitate the processes of growth and empowerment have emerged. Theatre and storytelling workshops, especially those for migrant women, represent good cases of facilitating the process of discovering and defining one's own identity in a healthy way. This represents the basis for a path of integration through art, giving awareness and inclusion to participants and at the same time making them "ambassadors" of the intercultural dialogue.

*Keywords:* interculturality, theatre methodologies, prevention of marginalization and radicalization, non-formal education.

## *Abstract*

Marginalizzazione, radicalizzazione e incontro con l'*Altro* sono senza dubbio alcuni dei temi all'ordine del giorno del dibattito sulla crescita sociale nella società moderna. Il ruolo che possono ricoprire nelle strategie di prevenzione e inclusione le donne in generale e le madri nello specifico sono sicuramente di grande rilievo per un approccio che vada oltre il semplice intervento sugli effetti, lavorando sulle cause e facilitando il dialogo interculturale. Il teatro e l'arte sono da sempre usati come forme di racconto, per generare emozioni e far

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immedesimare il pubblico nelle storie che sente o alle quali assiste. Per questa ragione, nell'ambito delle metodologie e degli strumenti di inclusione e prevenzione della marginalizzazione, nel tempo si sono andati delineando ottimi esempi di applicazione di approcci artistici per facilitare i processi di crescita ed empowerment. I laboratori teatrali e di racconto, specialmente quelli per donne migranti, rappresentano ottimi casi di facilitazione del processo di scoperta e definizione della propria identità in modo sano, base per un percorso di integrazione tramite l'arte, dando consapevolezza e inclusione ai partecipanti, rendendoli al contempo "ambasciatori" del dialogo interculturale.

*Parole chiave:* intercultura, metodologie teatrali, prevenzione di marginalizzazione e radicalizzazione, educazione non formale.

### 1. *Marginalization, Radicalization and Encounter with the Other*

The aim of this research is to analyze some theatre and expressive art workshop methodologies, placing them in the framework of institutional and civil society actions used to recover people at risk of violent radicalization. Doing this, we will examine how it can be meaningful to also include workshops or women. Mothers, in particular (but not exclusively) can act as bridge figures for dialogue, in order to support their growth process and give them useful tools to become ambassadors of a positive encounter between cultures. Marginalization and radicalization are, of course, two issues of primary importance for the European society, and the Council of Europe has defined three approaches of action: prevention, repression, solidarity (1992, *passim*). If the repression intervenes on the symptoms, and is entrusted to law enforcement and intelligence services, prevention and solidarity have been evaluated as more effective to act on the underlying causes of these phenomena, as they are more sustainable and profitable in the medium and long term, consequently, since the early 2000s, policies have been oriented in this direction. That said, it is clear that the causes of crime and violence are different and multiple. It therefore becomes necessary to keep in mind how the strategies must be various and specific, but in any case, coordinated and aimed at the same purpose: to facilitate the inclusion and recovery of those who, for some reason, end up being identified as "different" and, because of this, marginalized.

Continuing in this sense, the entire institutional and civil fabric must contribute to prevention. The development of strategic partnerships, targeted funding and the promotion of initiatives in line with the wider and local strategy become vital for any intervention or action plan. These must, of course, be accompanied by an education system, a support one and a solidarity scheme, which work together in a modular way. Also developing plans knowing how to adapt to the specific needs of the territory, while remaining connected to national and international guidelines.

With this in mind, as mentioned, we want to address the type of approach that adopts non-formal education methodologies by relying on theatrical and expressive arts practices. These workshops make it possible to work directly on the self-analysis of the participants, helping self-understanding and personal growth. These artistic and storytelling exercises consequently become prevention tools that reduce the risk of communication and social blackouts that could lead to spirals of violent radicalization, as they make personal problems more manageable and help to understand the interpersonal ones that may emerge. Let's make clear that when we talk about radicalization we are not referring only to violent Islam or the manifestations of violence related to the black caliphate, but rather to a broader perspective, which includes various degrees of misunderstanding and intercultural violence.

Anyway, what we are proposing are useful strategies to tackle all forms of violent extremism, regardless of the ideology on which they are based. This is in line with the European Commission's programmatic plans, which state that they do not focus on radical thought or discourse, but mainly on the prevention of violent aggression in general. The types of actions we are going to talk about, and of which a more extensive analysis will be proposed in the next paragraph, are intended to encourage the development of a sense of community and inclusion through art, as anticipated.

This is done to give participants from different backgrounds or situations of social discomfort the space to acquire language skills and to undermine the onset of a sense of alienation that could lead to isolation, marginalization and, in the worst cases, radicalization. Institutions can act on many levels of prevention: primary, focusing on entire societies, secondary, targeting vulnerable groups and tertiary prevention, targeting those groups or individuals who are at risk of radicalization or who have been reported for violent behaviour.

This document will not focus on the direct prevention process, the "artistic" methodological approach coordinated within the strategies at the territorial level must be considered in the context of prevention by third sector bodies that act upstream, reducing the risk of certain dynamics arising.

Wanting to get a broader picture, the good practices that are supported by the European institutions by programmatic documents are:

- A. Awareness of frontline operators;
- B. support strategies to facilitate the abandonment of extremism: de-radicalization and disengagement programs;
- C. overcome gaps through dialogue;
- D. community involvement and empowerment;
- E. education of young people;
- F. support for families and their empowerment;
- G. provide material to counter certain claims in conversations;
- H. create an institutional infrastructure (Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, 2016)<sup>2</sup>.

Specifically, the theatrical and artistic expression methodologies (storytelling, poetry, etc.) fall under points c, d, and f, which are the closest to the approaches of workshops and laboratories at the local level. In fact, these intervene by bringing an element of non-formal communication (beyond any linguistic barriers, for example) that allows intercultural dialogue thanks to a new communication plan resulting from a shared exploration of the participants. By acting on a local level and in small communities, where the dynamics and relationships are more personal and strong, and finally by allowing greater awareness through a bottom-up approach, ambassadors for dialogue can be created within families and sub-communities.

Breaking through the echo chambers of hate speech that could otherwise arise, especially in terms of situations of great diversity and isolation from the point of view of socio-cultural backgrounds (think both of the peripheral or degraded areas of large urban centers, but also of historic centers in a state of semi-neglect of rural areas) you can really make an important difference.

<sup>2</sup> For further info, see References, Editor's Note).

A significant text to better understand this type of encounter with diversity is the one by Professor and semiologist of international level Massimo Leone, entitled: *Otherness, Extraneousness and Unawareness in Intercultural Semiotics* (in Leone, Surace, Zeng, 2019). The volume is enlightening and offers a reading of what are three levels of encounter between cultures and how these help to understand the gradations of distrust, anger, interaction, etc. between different groups. The first level is the unawareness of the existence of something else, compared to what is already known and taken for granted (and often as orthodox), consequently it is not even perceived. Then one encounters extraneousness, or the awareness of the existence of something foreign, with a potential clash with a reality that diverges from the first one, labelling those who do not share our culture as incomprehensible and wrong.

This obviously happens by taking our normality as a privileged judgment point, generating conflict or fear, but it can be resolved by working on the passage that leads the different to become “the Other”. In fact, *Otherness* is, in other words, knowledge and recognition of diversity: not necessarily by hierarchizing another culture as superior or inferior, and not judging wrong an approach different from the one with which we have developed our grammars of thought (and that of consequently we internalized). In Leone’s publication, influenced by the work of Juri Lotman (Lotman, Grishakova, 2009, Eng. Transl. 2009), he gives an example: one reads a Chinese poem that is “incomprehensible” to those who do not speak the language of the Celestial Empire. The logical consequence is to think that this can be overcome with a good translation, however, it is not sufficient to understand the whole text thoroughly. In addition to a first loss of translation, in fact, there would be a much deeper loss due to the lack of knowledge of Chinese culture, its history, social dynamics, idioms, etc.

Only study, the refined sensitivity and constant frequentation of history and literature (as well as a good dose of hermeneutics) would allow the bridge between the reality of the reader and that of the ancient Chinese poet. This metaphor helps to understand how the encounter with the different is only a first step towards the creation of a new truly inclusive and interconnected community. By experimenting and identifying with the Other, a true appreciation of the “different” can be achieved when the technicality of analysis is overcome and a new emotional and expression paradigm is created. Cultural differences, even if partially smoothed out by global elements such as media, translations, etc. – again in the example of poetry – but they sometimes appear insurmountable in their differences. This at least when the differences seem to become insurmountable, you are less likely to attempt further proactive investigation or broader reflection on the Other, therefore falling into misunderstanding.

Returning to the metaphor, in the Chinese poetry we speak of, it talks about cicadas. This is an insect that, for Italians, is notoriously considered lazy. For the Chinese culture, on the other hand, they are considered very clean (in some folkloristic stories they eat wind), the distance between cultures and the need for a more complex explanation than a simple translation is evident. If there had not been dialogue, encounter and a proactive search for understanding, an Italian would not have been able to understand the poetry when it refers to cicadas: thanks to knowledge it is possible to move on to the construction of common grammars that allow to avoid division and isolation. By giving a communication and meeting tool (whether between participants from different cultures or with the trainer to represent an element of Otherness), people are helped to make the transition from being “foreign and incommunicable” to something else (in the terminology of Leone).

In environments where the difference exists, it cannot be expected to disappear, but rather, it can be embraced and deconstructed through non-formal education exercises (theatrical and otherwise), starting from those, knowledge is created and fear and mistrust are weakened, creating inclusion, projecting it also in everyday life.

## *2. Women, Mothers, Women's Networks: Framing Social Roles*

In addition to underlining the role of the theatre workshop as an opportunity of interculturality, we also want to give space to how these methodologies, if applied to groups of women, can have a strong cascade impact on the sub-community and domestic environments of the participants. Another first level actor is in fact the family, which covers an important step in the prevention process of the youngsters: this represents the “home” environment and the cultural reference (parents and adults already grown) that every person has while growing.

In addition to this, it is good to take into account how much this can influence the social role that is perceived as proper at the level of young men and young women. Taking for example what is conventionally assigned to women in some communities (as “housewife” and children’s main educator) and generalizing while taking into account the great differences and how variable certain phenomena may be, we can propose a further reflection. Working with migrant mothers and women leading them to personal growth and to become ambassadors of intercultural dialogue, facilitating their process of integration and inclusion in the new community through narrative and artistic workshops, can represent one of the keys to action for the proactive prevention of marginalization and radicalization. By analyzing the problems and channelling the efforts of the third sector and investments, in fact, it becomes important to understand how to act on women, mothers, wives, assumes a vital role and can actively contribute to make a difference, given the influence that these can have on the new generations in formation. If one encounters the said paradigm, according to which the husband has the role of guaranteeing financial support, what belongs to the woman is (I want to emphasize the fact that this verb is finally changing into “was”, since more and more people are starting to have the opportunity to build their social role by freeing themselves from the superstructures) usually composed of looking after the house, maintaining contact with the family and taking care of the domestic side of the education of children.

Acting on those sub-communities that adhere to this family stereotype, allows to work with women who have an hegemonic role in the education of the new generations, allowing (coordinating the action with initiatives on the territory, in schools, etc. in a real prevention ecosystem) to build and positively influence the development of shared sustainable ideals with respect to the culture that welcomed the migrant family (when we are talking about migrants, but also the local population can get enriched thanks to these practices, even just by meeting someone different). It must be said that sometimes those who emigrate, or in general, leave, indirectly avoid the responsibilities imposed by the family of origin to assert their identity beyond this role, although they often fall into the same dynamic once they arrive and or by entering a new nucleus or by moving directly with the entire family.

However, the affirmation of oneself cannot take place organically during the migration process as this is by definition traumatic, alienating and shocking (obviously with all the distinctions and gradations of the case). It is much healthier to try to develop the personality of the individual by giving the opportunity to “choose”, constructing it, one’s role: by providing the tools for storytelling and self-analysis that are part of theatrical and self-narrative workshops. If you meet young people, you can intervene with relative ease as their personality is not yet fully formed, so it is advisable to encourage this type of approach as well. In cases where, on the other hand, women (or people in general) are already mature and “trained”, the process put in place must be one that helps their minds (Lumer, Zeki, 2011; Pizzo Russo, 2011; Sofia, 2009) to explore the preconceptions inherent in them, with the social superstructures that regulate their personality and the social role that they have found imposed and which are now part of

their identity. This allows these things to be questioned, or at least doubted, given that once these factors of cultural influence have been identified, if the path developed is sustainable and guided, the person can decide whether to “change their life” or not: by modifying or maintaining their role, but with a different awareness. This self-awareness developed through storytelling, art, confrontation and mutual support, is significantly healthier and allows for the integration process, making the possibility of a violent radicalization less likely to happen, which in most cases has as its recipients the *Others*, who, however, are no longer such if the subjects at risk have had contact with them (for example the trainers themselves or even some “peers”, in mixed workshops also as regards origins and social environments).

Returning to the main topic, we talked about the social role and how this affects self-perception, but how can a process of growth and self-understanding be implemented through art? The factors and methods are obviously multiple and they will be taken into consideration in the following paragraph on methodologies. Before moving on, it is necessary to reflect on another important element in the dynamics of encounter and dialogue: social networks.

From the family, we move on to analyze the role of the community and those that individuals can perceive as equals and how interactions develop. It should always be clear in mind that the perspective of this research is to point out the effectiveness of the implementation of workshops that provide a storytelling/artistic/theatrical approach to support migrant women emancipation and awareness, allowing them to assume a position of informal ambassadors of inclusion and integration, weakening social marginalization and preventing the emergence of violent radicalization. These women are all part of complex networks (Del Re, 2000) that hold entire communities together with their dynamics and information flows. Consequently, a good practice can be spread via word of mouth through these informal networks that the women hold. It must be said that nowadays we are witnessing an evolution of women’s networks, compared to the past, but this can be a positive factor. The path seems to be heading towards a more modern and inclusive dynamic which potentially, looking to the near future, could lead us to the creation of networks free from gender and social roles and from superstructures and cultural divisions (it could be interesting to research the sociological dynamics in WhatsApp groups, for instance). While in the past a network of women was necessary to keep the community cohesed, in times in which we live with increasing fluidity in roles (although as we have seen not always) it becomes almost limiting to refer to this kind of structure, especially wanting to move towards a more horizontal paradigm shift that goes beyond patriarchal models.

In *Generative Communication*<sup>3</sup>, Luca Toschi describes our society as scripted in its rules, as if it lived entirely with a “script”, which acts as a superstructure to all our behaviors and normative grammar for all our networks (and how to manage them). Our *world* (we could reflect on cultural variation area by area, but if we want to generalize up to this macro term it can be accepted) and its communication have precise and well-defined paths along which we are all led to move. This is then projected, in the analysis that is found in the book, on the way in which these “preconceptions” (and prejudices) can be overcome, in order to understand and use the generative power that is innate in us, therefore that of always interconnected communication, and that takes into account a permeating community dimension.

<sup>3</sup> *Original Italian title*, La comunicazione generativa (see References, Editor’s Note).

Having in mind the concept of generativity<sup>4</sup>, a desire for an outcome can be seen that appears beyond the process, but also beyond one's own interest (utilitarian, or not). There is no doubt that this aspect can be found in the tools and in the pedagogical approach of theatrical storytelling projects, which aim to develop an open and free environment, giving tools for storytelling and empowerment, to make all participants overcome these preconceptions and create sharing, security and, potentially but not necessarily, art. All this has to be integrated in the programmatic choices of prevention.

### 3. *Storytelling: A Tool to Research Identity*

When we accept that the concept of identity is dynamic, we must also understand that it does not come before history, but passes through it, evolving. In conclusion, it is necessary to underline once again the importance of the implementation of this type of practice in an organized and planned structure of social inclusion and intercultural dialogue, both to prevent radicalization and not. Building strategies aimed at reaching the paradigm of social inclusion is a requirement of contemporary societies, in order to achieve the cultural transition towards sustainability and equality. Critical thinking, storytelling, art, are just tools that allow this to happen, bringing a healthier relationship with others and with oneself. Undermining marginalization and violence through the encounter with the other also passes through these tools.

These intercultural methodologies act in order to achieve a more positive and personal (and adaptive) reconfiguration of social roles, of gender roles and social constructs in general. Paul Ricoeur addressed the theme of narrative identities and what he says can also be analyzed semiotically (obviously referring to narrative semiotics within the generative semiotics theorized by Greimas, of which Ricoeur was a profound and at the same time critical connoisseur). He talks about openness: how by sharing a story the individuals bring out who they are. In addition to this, he also dwells on the importance of this process, given that the analysis of oneself also leads to a description and construction of identity: defining the identity of an individual or of a community means responding to the question: who did this action? Naming an agent, an author. He concludes that the answer can only be narrative. Moreover, referring to Arendt ([1958], 1998) he points out that answering the question “*who*”?, is to tell the story of a lifetime, the same story that tells the “*who*” of the action (Ricoeur, 1990, It. Transl. 1993).

This leads to the definition of the concept of *narrative identity*. The interpretation, the choice of terms, of the accents, on what one focuses on, are all factors that make the story a very strong tool for sharing (and understanding, and building) oneself, and consequently, when it is found in the other person, to meet and discover, listening. In reliving past moments, we regain possession of those experiences, we decide what to give meaning along the way: whether this is for positive or traumatic events. Assigning “weight” and systematizing the factors involved, in the perspective of hard experiences such as migration, becomes a burden that we can risk passing on to the family and the circle of people who accompany us along the path of life: it is not just a matter of chronological compilation, but of structuring the flow of events, which

<sup>4</sup> “*Generative communication*” is a communicative paradigm developed by Luca Toschi and experimented from years before by C.R.A.I.A.T., by the Communication Strategies Lab (CSL) and the Center for Generative Communication of the University of Florence. The basis of the generative paradigm are: community building, enhancement of the skills and knowledge of each of the parties involved in the generative process and the participatory and shared construction of knowledge, which becomes a common heritage of the whole community. Supporting the empowerment and the expression of the potential in every living system (Toschi, 2011), Author's Note.

would otherwise be confused and potentially dangerous for the stability of the individual. Bruner (1990) said that *narration* is a way to organize experience. It's needed to build the world. This structuring is social, aimed at sharing memories within a culture, rather than simply ensuring individual storage, and in the context of a theatrical workshop, all this has an important role, which directs the choice of exercises and methodologies towards those methods that allow a wider expression. This is because while guiding it and not limiting it, the aim is to facilitate the opening of all elements of the group as a community but also as individuals.

Working with participants who are not professional artists (these workshops are also used by established artists for their research and experimentation), the artistic/creative dimension provides a safe space thanks to the dynamic of thought that justifies the lack of knowledge of the subject, as they are not experienced with arts. Not being artists, the participants can experiment and they are not particularly afraid of error, since there is hardly anything unquestionably wrong (speaking of oneself and guided to listen to others, without judging so as not to be judged themselves).

The opportunity to build a cultural, aesthetic act is the obvious corollary of this process. It is now clear how the story is important not only to build a personal narrative but also a community, through the simple act of sharing, building a group story. Before moving on to methodological factors more closely related to the performance of theatrical workshops (the role of the trainer, the choice of participants, etc.) we will focus more deeply on the elements of narration as self-discovery.

When addressing culturally mixed environments and groups, as well as various sociocultural backgrounds, storytelling and artistic exercises can really help build community values, especially in difficult situations. Biagioli (2015) underlines how stories set the inner life in motion, and this is particularly important where the inner life is frightened, stuck or cornered. The theatre works as an excuse and as a hub to develop and share our history, reliving, re-analyzing, reorganizing the experiences we have lived. Rebuild a more secure memory, with a reciprocal influence between past and present and face the prospect of the future. As had been anticipated in a previous quote from Toschi, we face the encounter between continuity and discontinuity, which Biagioli described as the act of reconstruction. This foresees that present and past influence each other, so that the unity that we try to give to individual existence becomes the ability to connect the 3 times: past, present, future.

All of these, while composing themselves in a continuum, produce comparison. In the narrative plot, temporal continuity takes shape, in the story a story is produced, identity is defined, through the search for coherence between the past and the present, but in this way also the cognitive tools to plan the future are created. Consequently, this gives even greater importance to the process of creating art collectively through laboratory and narrative processes, passing from the logical development beginning, development, conclusion, also to give mental organization, collective writing and the shared construction of a story (and of a performance) are very useful elements for growth.

#### 4. *Theatre, Expression, Dialogue*

The power of inclusion of theatre (and the broadening of expressive art in general) is due to the fact that it provides a tool for intercultural dialogue. This is thanks to the process of sharing and having emotional confrontation, which help overcome diversity in safe and guided environments. There's been a few words over the concept of cultural diversity, and personal differences must also be taken into account, obviously, to avoid a communication blackout (and therefore



a misunderstanding that can be the basis for the development of a conflict or fear), that is why it is important to investigate the different dynamics that exist between the sending of a message and its correct reception. This is also in line with the way in which art (in this case storytelling and theatre) represents a way to express, analyze and understand feelings and emotions that the workshop participants would otherwise have rationalized with difficulty. These are processes that also take place in a more individual dimension, but certainly the aforementioned peer learning and the paths that are activated by participating in group artistic activities, provide a sense of protection and security (if correctly directed by experts with adequate sensitivity and training) such as to allow the exit and opening of the baggage. These are the so-called “community exchanges” to which Eugenio Barba referred in his book of theatrical anthropology *La canoa di carta*, talking about how the artist and leader is not only a performer, as the practice of artistic creation also involves the physicist, psychological, emotional and relational skills, which must be trained to provide a competent laboratory experience.

Another important element, quoting Barba, is the full involvement of the workshop facilitator. The latter must act with a horizontal, non-formal approach and avoid the more traditional top-down approach. The immersion and openness of this figure are as important as the openness of the participants, and it can also be achieved by using the personal side to bring something to the work one is doing, exposing (with awareness and thoughtfulness) one’s human side. This must be the role of the facilitator, who in addition to keeping the ranks and planning the workshop, must also be able to perceive the personalities and modes of expression that is in front of them (someone with a stronger ego will be guided in letting others speak, someone with a story of silence and introversion will have to be helped to take space and words). Taking into account that sometimes it is the social superstructures themselves that create barriers to intercultural dialogue, the work that is done with art leads to a wider and more far-reaching development of networks and relationships, which allows us to open potentially unexplored possibilities by the people who travel that path of artistic discovery. Thanks to encounter of diversity, comparison and contamination in a safe and flourishing environment with other people, we can see both a growth in expressive capacity, but also and above all an openness to listening, waiting, searching for meaning in the motivations of others (and the way they may act) beyond preconceptions and prejudices.

All this, looking for a common artistic way of expression, whether it is with theatre exercises or otherwise. This type of theatrical process (identifiable as social theatre, community theatre, and many other forms, given the extent of the phenomenon) does not impose precise rules or styles, but is limited to facilitating the development of self-analysis and community research. Through self-narration and sharing, for example, first with the group and then with an audience, or with the reference domestic environment, we support the construction of common grammars and the creation of a shared path that creates a phenomenon of cascade growth for those who come into contact with a node in the network. This makes the participants interconnected and at the same time involved independently, providing the tools to generate empowerment, critical thinking and personal change (but also new rules, approaches, ideas, projects).

Another feature that can contribute to the success of these paths by increasing the inclusive strength of the project is the inclusion of participants from various cultural groups (and not just from a subculture). This factor is full of humanizing power for the different: the one who as the “master of the house”, for example, who is actually “in his country”, gets involved, and enters the workshop offers an excellent humanizing channel for the different (Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, 2016). The theatrical/artistic/expressive process leads to shift the attention from oneself to the outside, with the structuring

of a methodology that allows an action plan towards something that will create and start a new movement, new situations, both in reference to a performance/sharing that is not the story of what was done during the workshop. This can not only lead to an improvement in the relationship with family members, but also to reduce the risk of antisocial behaviors or drifts that lead to the radicalization of fragile individuals. If the mother is the first to get involved, maybe the child can in turn be supported in starting artistic, musical and sporting workshops, by doing so it would be possible to put into practice the integration of the family unit beyond the institutional “basic”<sup>5</sup> school path (Silva, 2004, 2011).

The key word, as Luca Toschi underlines when speaking of non-places, becomes process, as a key to generating spaces and environments, addressing the fact that in contemporary societies we are faced with a division between continuity (analogue, linear, system based on cause effect) and discontinuity (digital, non-centralized, plural, complex) of modernity: A continuity that becomes discontinuity and vice versa, in a continuous turn that transforms everything, generating a new world (Sbardella, 2019; Toschi, 2011). A new world that lays its foundations on the shared nature of construction, on the process, not on appearance or performance. Affirming one’s identity, sharing it with a group of peers is one of the fundamental steps of non-formal education and peer-education, in fact by telling one’s life path, one’s feelings, one’s points of view there’s an allowance (and it is clearly the modality adopted in theatrical workshops and not for expressive artistic research) that makes people understand who one is and why one is who one is. Through a method that releases a significant communicative (and generative) power, theatre and in general the artistic and narrative practices are already linked to the theme of personal growth and development, without too many needs for adaptation. The element of care and attention paid to the sensitivity of the topics the participants would be sharing is very personal and emotional.

A factor not to be underestimated is the choice in the preparation phase about the presence or not of a performance. The non-performative dimension remains preferable, but the opening and sharing of what has been done can be a good way to mediate between the intimate dimension of the workshop and the opening that one wants to promote (towards the community, families, friends of those who participate). If you choose to go down the path of representation, you can either take a known text and provide a role written by others, or take advantage of collective writing exercises, guided by the trainer, who then collects and renders text, script, and what is told by the participants. The “character” thus becomes the story they made for themselves, when they have told their story, their journey, the path to choose a new home, etc. (Nicholson, 2005). Very personal themes, which artistic expression has allowed both deepening and universalizing: becoming stories, they become in fact something beyond the control of the person.

The participants who metaphorically free themselves from the “superstructures” of society and from the cultural background to become a community message of the whole working group. The growth of the group is clearly visible in the more classic structure of these workshops, which start from preparatory and “external” exercises where there is usually no contact, but one becomes aware of the body in space, without interactions. The team building then goes on to increase the meetings, the words, the stories and the desire to share, creating pretexts and providing safe ways to do it, without too much concern for a “show” that remains secondary

<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, in some cases it is reported that mothers start the paths after their children have started them at the suggestion of friends and schoolmates. In fact, denoting that the process under consideration is bidirectional and fluid, Author’s Note.

to the process. In Social theatre, art and social change are equally important goals to pursue. As Rossi Ghiglione (2019) says, they combine professional theatre, which has an aesthetic purpose, applied theatre, which is committed to social and personal change, and dramatic therapy, which has healing as its goal. That's why educators need to have a massive and diverse background. They are not just tutors who lead the group, they are members, dynamic leaders with broader experience and vision on the subject, as well as someone who is ready to pass the initiative on to someone else when the group has something to propose or share, adapting the work to the group, not vice versa. Balancing neutral and intimate topics, using gamification processes that allow the slowdown of the flows of thoughts and embarrassment deriving from the aforementioned inexperience of the participants (Thompson, 2009). This allows the latter to focus only on recreational/educational activities, so that opening and sharing are an organic evolution of the process, which can therefore be unforced and free.

Wanting to digress on the role of the artists who choose to direct these experiences of inclusive artistic research, it is necessary not only to find someone who has a preparation and an education (communicative, pedagogical, multiculturalism, etc.), but also a significant artistic sensitivity. Robert Golden, internationally known award-winning director and photographer, wrote about the role of artists in today's society: «Artists must involve their community; they must represent the needs and desires of that community so that their work is relevant» (2018, pp. 156-158), this is true for the artists who decide to take on this vitally important load: passing from performer to real promoters of integration.

Working for social change and inclusion, in areas of migration, violence (gender and non-gender based), etc. and exploring these themes using art requires a very wide and varied preparation, it is therefore vital that the choice of trainers is made with great attention.

#### 4. *The Future Passes through a Coordinated Approach*

It is becoming increasingly evident that art makes it possible to overcome any linguistic and cultural barriers, becoming a bridge that allows different points of sharing and meeting. As said in the first paragraph, the strategies implemented are going in the direction of creating a safe system of guided self-development and arts are playing a major role in the process.

Let's think of examples of open expressive experiments: from the extreme case, where there is a total absence of synchronic sharing of the artistic experience (for example a drawing to which each passer-by can add an element, creating a collective work of art and shared, in which everyone has an individual experience, without interaction) up to more classic examples of workshops of artistic experimentation, such as those we are analyzing, where art is not only a vehicle for expression but also an element that provides a "common language". With theatre we also need to keep in mind that people need to feel safe, not too exposed, but also to be seen. *Gamification* and fun are therefore necessary to start a moment of sharing. During the structuring and preparation phase, it will also be important to take care of the playful side (Romano, 2000). Expanding, and bringing Rossi Ghiglione back to the role that the theatre must take underlines the way people perceive themselves. As awareness of the body and its resources, being there and seeing oneself at the same time), as a dynamism (availability to physical movement but also from an emotional and cognitive point of view) and as a different vitality (balance between sympathetic and parasympathetic system), the will to manifest one's inner world in actions, seeking connection and resonance with the other.

From this change of self, in which the theatre is maieutic rather than didactic, everyone works his own transformation and lays the foundations for being and learning, for his own

well-being and for his own professional relationships. As an example of what has just been said, the case of the “Laboratorio di Autonarrazione”, held by Laura Fatini in Tuscany. Starting from two theatre and collective storytelling workshops, two shows *Io non sono di qui* (2011) and *ViolentaViolante* (2013) were born, both developed in the workshops. The participants were only women and all with migration backgrounds (internal and from abroad), and the effectiveness of the project is evidenced by the fact that the shows were not planned, but that the confidence and growth of the participants led them to want to open up their stories (of migration, violence, discrimination, etc.) to an audience. This can be translated with an organic understanding, rationalization and acceptance of one’s own path, with a recognized and future-oriented identity with openness and understanding towards the past. An organic process is essential for the success of this kind of practice.

The storytelling tool can be an excellent way to facilitate self-analysis and the development of awareness, fundamental keys for a healthy relationship between people of different cultural backgrounds, and for an individual with him/herself, even in the evaluation phase (Jennings, Baldwin, 2010). Migration is a very particular and often painful event, it involves leaving a place identified as one’s own, to go to another place driven by necessity, in the same way, social marginalization can lead to feelings of inadequacy, loneliness, non-belonging to a larger community and consequently, in both cases to a spiral of violence and radicalization, and that is why, we need to act and to know all the cards we can play to facilitate the paradigm of real inclusion to become more concrete.

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