



## Social Theatre (Romania)

### Summary

Social Theatre works as a trigger for increasing tolerance, developing active citizenship amongst young people and promoting non-discriminative attitudes and behaviours. Social theatre is a powerful non-formal learning method in which participants engage directly with each other and work together with a view to finding solutions to achieving social cohesion and mutual understanding.

### The project

Social Theatre aims at increasing the level of tolerance, the social involvement and the ability to be an active actor within the framework of social initiatives. It helps develop active citizenship responsibilities and it promotes non-discriminative attitudes and behaviour amongst young people.

The social theatre projects mainly target young people (aged 16-35), however the social theatre was also highly successful with very young children (7-year-olds) and there is no upper age limit to the target group.

A social theatre play usually lasts 10-30 minutes and typically involves 4-8 volunteering actors, a facilitator ("joker") who interacts with the public, a psychologist and a team leader. In social theatre, conflicts are expressed as dynamic monologues rather than dialogues. The conflicts are analysed and discussed by the team to enable actors to identify and understand the roots of conflicts. The next stage involves the organisation of a public event. Having a small audience (10-30 people) is crucial, as each person must be involved in the process and intervene during the play to identify solutions.

#### Sector(s) covered

##### Main Sector

Arts and Creative Industry: conflict resolutions

##### Other Sectors

Society: active citizenship  
Education/Training/Lifelong learning

### Approach

Social theatre is derived from forum theatre, which is a form of interactive theatre created by the Brazilian theatre director and writer Augusto Boal in the 1970s. Forum theatre was designed as a creative and alternative method to encourage people to stand up for their values and find realistic solutions when confronted with a discrimination/oppression situation.

The difference between the original "forum theatre" and social theatre is that the latter allows the audience to intervene and to replace the oppressed person as well as the neutral or semi-neutral characters in the play. Moreover, participants are encouraged to seek realistic and non-violent solutions throughout the play. In doing so, not only are participants empowered to build their inner strength and discover means to address an oppressive situation (should they find themselves in the situation of the victim one day), but they are also encouraged to take on the responsibility and act as active citizens.



## Element of innovation – the process

Innovation and creativity are at the core of this practice, as creative approaches and solutions are required from all participants. The social theatre team creates and gives “flesh” to a hypothetical situation of oppression. The creative process continues during the public play, where the audience is invited to come onto the stage and to replace the actors, thus changing behaviours and attitudes in order to improve the oppressive situation. There is no pre-determined rigid script for such a play. Instead, all participants bring their own personal experience, values and opinions, with the aim of finding realistic solutions to a social problem.

## Key successes

### (outcomes, results, impacts)

The social theatre projects of “Chance for Life” Foundation have reached over 15,000 direct beneficiaries since 2004. The feedback received immediately after the end of the project as well as six months or one year later, emphasises the positive impact of social theatre on participants’ lives and on other people around them.

One of the most interesting aspects of this method is that it operates both ways: the audience or “beneficiaries” learn to identify and take a stance against discrimination, thus becoming more involved and supporting human rights values. By giving real life examples of actions against discrimination or social exclusion, the volunteering actors become promoters of human rights, thus progressively instilling social inclusion attitudes in the mindset of other people they interact with. At the same time, volunteers involved in designing the play generally come from different educational, social and economic backgrounds. They also learn to become active citizens by working together towards achieving social cohesion, mutual understanding and cooperation.

## Challenges

Even though school administrations have almost always been open to this practice, some schools are unwilling to accept open discussions on “sensitive” topics such as drug abuse or the discrimination of HIV-positive children. This is mostly due to the fact that such problems were observed or are still an issue for the respective schools. In other schools, the topic of the play had to be changed so that the event could take place for the benefit of pupils and students. However, an open discussion with the school boards was possible and the events were allowed to take place in other schools.

## Transferability and sustainability

The sustainability of the practice is very high. The main strength of social theatre is its adaptability and openness, as it has been successfully adapted to suit a wide variety of environments, cultures, themes, situations and age groups. Social theatre has been running for the past four years, with topics ranging from discrimination against HIV-positive children to the promotion of responsible use of natural resources.

The flexibility of social theatre creates exceptionally wide arrays of possible partnerships. Partnerships between NGOs and public bodies (e.g. schools) are extremely beneficial as they allow educational projects to tackle any topic (e.g. human rights, active citizenship, responsible use of natural resources, violence at home/in schools) through an alternative, non-formal learning method. Many public education institutions have shown a genuine interest in opening up to other non-formal/alternative education methods, inviting NGOs to further develop and extend such practices, and perpetuate existing partnerships.



## Special Highlights

Social Theatre aims at working with young people with a view to increasing their social involvement and their ability to stand up for human rights and tolerance.

By crossing the borders between actors (e.g. volunteering performing the play) and spectators (i.e. the audience), social theatre creates “spect-actors” who have the opportunity to directly engage with a situation of oppression and change it for the better.

## Key characteristics

<b>General purpose of the practice</b>	Stimulate innovative/creative behaviours in people and implement an innovative/creative solution to society problems
<b>Target group</b>	Young people (aged 16-35), however can be applied to all age groups
<b>Type of learning</b>	Non-formal
<b>Level of implementation</b>	National & International
<b>Funding</b>	Private
<b>Time frame</b>	Since 2004 - ongoing
<b>Leading organisations</b>	“Chance for Life” Foundation

## Further information

### Website of the project

<http://www.chanceforlife.ro>

### Contact details

Irina Jarrett-Thorpe, [irina.jarrett-thorpe@chanceforlife.ro](mailto:irina.jarrett-thorpe@chanceforlife.ro)

### Additional information

[http://www.sighisoaraonline.com/28022007\\_43545435435\\_eveniment\\_asta.html](http://www.sighisoaraonline.com/28022007_43545435435_eveniment_asta.html)

<http://www.responsabilitatesociala.ro/stiri-csr/s-a-finalizat-prima-parte-a-proiectului-teatru-social-spect-actori-pentru-nondiscriminare.html>