

IETM MAPPING

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EVERYBODY WANTS A REFUGEE ON STAGE

*Conversations around
contemporary artistic engagement
with migration*

By Daniel Gorman and Rana Yazaji



Exodus group, "L'Eredità di Babele" (The Legacy of Babel, Teatro dell'Argine) (Photo © TLucio Summa)

IETM - International network for contemporary performing arts

June 2019

ISBN: 9782930897417



IETM is supported by:



Co-funded by the
Creative Europe Programme
of the European Union

The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Everybody Wants a Refugee on Stage¹

Conversations around contemporary artistic engagement with migration

IETM Mapping

by Daniel Gorman (Shubbak: A Window on Contemporary Arab Culture) and Rana Yazaji

Published by IETM - International network for contemporary performing arts,
Brussels June 2019

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Layout: Milton Pereira on a template by JosWorld



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This publication should be mentioned as follows:

D. Gorman, R. Yazaji, 'Everybody Wants a Refugee on Stage. Conversations around Contemporary Artistic Engagement with Migration', IETM, June 2019.
Link: <https://www.ietm.org/en/publications>

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¹ | "Everybody Wants a Refugee on Stage" - Els Rochette, Globe Aroma, interviewed for this publication, October 2018

About the Authors

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Shubbak: A Window on Contemporary Arab Culture

Shubbak: A Window on Contemporary Arab Culture is Europe's largest festival of contemporary Arab culture. Founded in 2011, the Shubbak festival takes place every two years connecting London and the United Kingdom to the best of contemporary Arab culture through ambitious programmes that span the visual arts, film, music, theatre, dance, literature, installations and debates. It promotes the innovation and creativity of Arab artists to inform and inspire the widest possible audiences in the UK and around the world. Shubbak 2019 takes place in venues across London and the UK from 28 June – 14 July. www.shubbak.co.uk

IETM

IETM is a network of almost 500 performing arts organisations and individual members working in the contemporary performing arts worldwide: theatre, dance, circus, interdisciplinary live art forms, new media. IETM advocates for the value of the arts and culture in a changing world and empowers performing arts professionals through access to international connections, knowledge and a dynamic forum for exchange.

01.

FORWARD

'Everywhere across Europe and beyond, contemporary performing artists are showing their role as an immediate reaction task-force to help in humanitarian crises, and use their skills to help bring relief or even heal wounds and help newcomers integrate into society.'² It was 2015 when IETM, like other European and international networks and organisations, felt the urge to look at what the arts and culture were doing to face one of the main challenges of our times.

Through open calls and direct contacts within and beyond its membership, IETM pulled together information about over 140 projects and initiatives, that fed into the mapping 'Creation and displacement. Developing new narratives about migration' and its hefty Annex (while many more initiatives were certainly happening on the ground, and just did not reach us). The report helped practitioners to find inspiration and contacts to develop similar work, and the policy recommendations contributed to the discussion happening in Europe. The European Commission and some national Ministries of Culture launched special calls for projects supporting refugee inclusion through the arts and culture, projects were promising and expectations were high.

Fast forward to 2019, when 'much of the world is increasingly focused on limiting the free movement of people'.³ EU Member States have put much more energy sealing their borders than fostering the inclusion of newcomers, and fear has proved a powerful political tool. But citizens (and) artists have not lowered

the guard, and social inclusion is now part of major funding programmes for culture, including Creative Europe. The role of arts and culture to develop more inclusive societies is widely recognised and plays against the (political) odds.

Three years after the first edition of 'Creation and displacement', with this update we decided to go back to some of the projects considered as good examples of initiatives engaging creatively with displacement. We aim to look critically at the way such initiatives developed and sustained themselves, and at the impacts on the participants and on the artists and creators, without shying away from challenges and failures. Above all, we aim to give a voice to the people who were involved directly in the organisation and management of the projects, who have dedicated years of their personal and professional life to use the power of the arts and culture to build bridges between newcomers and locals, often in a hostile political environment.

Besides the original edition of 'Creation and displacement', the other key tool for this publication is 'The role of culture for inclusion in the context of migration', the final report produced by the Voices of Culture⁴ dealing with this topic in which IETM was participating in 2016. Its chapter on 'impact' forms the basis for the interviews with projects' representatives included in the following pages.

While we acknowledge the importance of evaluation for any artistic and cultural project, we reckon that projects dealing

with inclusion will mostly produce results in the mid and long term - it will take a couple of generations at least to gauge whether a community has become more 'inclusive'. Moreover, arts and culture are tiles of a complex puzzle: such projects alone cannot achieve inclusion, without consistent social and economic policies. Still, we remain deeply convinced of the special role of artists in these challenging times, and we hope this new IETM publication will inspire practitioners, policy-makers and citizens at all levels to do their share.

The original 'Creation and Displacement' mapping was written for IETM throughout 2015 by Yasmin Fedda, Tory Davidson and Daniel Gorman, and published in March 2016. Since then, there have been many changes - on a political, social and economic level. Many of the organisations we spoke to in 2015 have changed significantly, and indeed a number have closed down. In this changed context, IETM commissioned Daniel Gorman, executive director of Shubbak: A Window on Contemporary Arab Culture and Rana Yazigi, freelance arts consultant, to update the report for 2019, with a specific focus on questions of longevity, evaluation and impact, with the aim on providing some useful starting points for organisations looking to engage with individuals in times of displacement.

With many thanks to Eugenia Tzirtzilaki and Elena Di Federico for their help and support.

2 | D. Gorman; Y. Fedda, T. Davidson, 'Creation and displacement. Developing new narratives around migration'. IETM, 2015)

3 | Reece Jones, 'Violent borders: Refugees and the Right to Move', Verso, 2016

4 | The Voices of Culture is the framework for structured dialogue between the European Commission and civil society - <http://www.voicesofculture.eu/about/>

02.

ANALYTIC REPORT

Current Context

Since 2015, the situation in Europe regarding refugees has developed and changed, most significantly in terms of the numbers arriving in Europe across the Mediterranean. In 2015 over 1 million people tried to cross the Mediterranean. By 2018 this number was down to 141,472 as recorded by the UNHCR⁵, but with a huge proportional increase in the numbers of those dead or missing⁶.

Concurrently, the wider European political context appears increasingly fractured, with migrants frequently being scapegoated for societal issues. As a result, artistic and cultural projects engaging with topics around migration can be fraught microcosms of wider societal debates, occasionally with violent outcomes, such as the incident in 2016 when Austrian far-right activists stormed a performance of *Die Schutzbefohlenen* by Elfriede Jelinek, fighting with attendees whilst the play was being performed by refugee actors from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq.⁷

This report aims to look into some of the organisations working in the field of arts and migration in very different contexts, as follows:

- **Counterpoints Arts (UK)**
Estimated number of refugees in country in 2017: 121,766
- **Globe Aroma (Belgium)**
Estimated number of refugees in country in 2017: 42,128
- **Jiwar Creation and Society (Spain)**
Estimated number of refugees in country in 2017: 17,526
- **Teatro dell'Argine (Italy)**

Estimated number of refugees in country in 2017: 167,260

- **Zoukak Theatre Company and Cultural Association (Lebanon)**
Estimated number of refugees in country in 2017: 1.5 million
- **Ad.dar (Turkey)**
Estimated number of refugees in country in 2017: 3.5 million
- **Good Chance Theatre (UK/France)**
Estimated number of refugees in country in 2017: 337,143 (in France)
- **Clowns without Borders (International/USA)**
Estimated number of refugees in country in 2017: 287,065 (in USA)⁸

These discussions have provided some vital topics for exploration, as detailed below.

Terminology

As in 2016, the issue of labelling has not gone away. As a general point we wish to once again highlight that the concept of 'refugeeness', or a 'refugee community' must be approached with caution, as this can give rise to a notion of 'otherness', a concept that there is one homogenous community of refugees who all think and act the same, a group whose culture is somehow separate from that of the hosting community and have a parallel existence. We would also argue that trying to draw a strict delineation between 'migrants' and 'refugees' is not a useful exercise. Many migrants have fled times of extreme economic hardship and scarcity, and have had many similar experiences to those faced by refugees during their displacement and journey. The issue of migration is clearly one which is defined on economic and political sensibilities. Therefore, we suggest it is useful to recognise the intersectionality of refugee and migrant with every other label we may encounter on a daily basis, with an aim of reducing or removing labelling more

generally. Whilst this report focuses on artistic responses to refugee movements, many of the case studies highlighted work with individuals from many different backgrounds, in support of creating varied forms of 'encounter' with new arrivals.

For the purposes of this report, we use the terms 'refugee' and 'asylum seeker' to denote the legal status of those being referenced, and 'migrant', 'displaced person' and 'new arrival' depending on the terminology employed by the organisation in question, and in general would suggest that organisations ask the individuals in question what term (if any) they would like applied.

Methodology

This report aimed to be an in-depth exploration of topics with a limited number of arts organisations working with or on the topic of refugees, migration and displaced populations, building on the 2016 IETM mapping 'Creation and Displacement'. It is by no means an exhaustive list of organisations or projects working with or on the topic of refugees and displaced populations. The majority of examples were selected from those in the original study, with the aim to provide a dispersed group both geographically and in terms of practice. This shortlisting was done by the authors in collaboration with IETM.

Following shortlisting, interviews were conducted over Skype or email. These interviews were then transcribed, and these transcriptions are summarised below. The information from within these interviews provides the body of this report.

⁵ | [Operational Portal Refugee Situations: Mediterranean Situation](#)

⁶ | ['Mediterranean Death Rate Is Highest Since 2015 Migration Crisis', The New York Times, Sept. 3, 2018.](#)

⁷ | ['Identitarians Storm Stage in Vienna during Refugee Play', The Local, Apr. 16, 2019.](#)

⁸ | [All refugee figures from 'Refugee population by country or territory of asylum' accessed 11 February 2019](#)

Limitations

As noted above, this report cannot be comprehensive. It instead aims to be a snapshot of several organisations working at the intersection between art and migration, utilising vastly different methodologies and operating in vastly different contexts. The report does not have the scope or capacity to delve into how these different contexts have affected the organisations, except where this has been remarked on during interviews. Furthermore, there is a huge number of organisations who also work at this intersection, who are not featured in this report, including many who were in the original report. This is due to both the capacity of the report authors, and the aim to focus on a smaller number of organisations in an in-depth manner.

Executive Summary

The organisations highlighted in this report use a variety of approaches and art forms. Some are theatre based, some are networks, and others run arts workshops. Through conversations the following topics emerged as those being repeatedly explored by a number of these organisations:

- **Think about the 'Why'**
- **Think about the 'Who'**
- **Think about the 'What'**
- **Measure your impact**
- **Think about Sustainability and Long termism from the start**
- **Use your Influence**



Ad.dar (Photo © Ad.dar)

These issues and questions are explored in the next pages, followed by summaries of the interviews conducted with all organisations.

Think about the 'Why'

Understandably, in 2015/2016 when migration was a huge story on the international stage, people from all backgrounds looked to try and see what they could do to help those seeking safety and security. Those in the arts were no different, and as noted in the 2016 IETM report, huge numbers of arts projects working with migrants, or on topics related to migration, were initiated. However, many of these were short term projects. Occasionally, and recognising the importance of allowing a project to stop when its usefulness has ended, the completion was intentional, but more often it was as a result of a lack of further funding, or changing interests and focus of those involved.

A key point which came up in many of the interviews and case studies we conducted was that when deciding to organise a project relating to migration, a starting point must be to deeply consider the 'why'. Why this project, and why you as an organisation to coordinate it. As

interviewee Teatro dell'Argine emphasise, it can 'become a fashion for theatre companies to work with refugees, and this can be dangerous (... in order to not) exploit people and their stories, we have to be very much aware and delicate.'⁹

Zoukak Theatre, a company based in Lebanon, with a long experience in socially engaged practice, stated in our interview 'anyone working in this field has to know that they are not helping people. It is not about helping and saving. It is about existing in this context and using your tools to create a space where a group of people who have been through a difficult time are able to communicate in ways that they are not used to, in ways that are not set by the social norms. It is not about assistance, otherwise you could just distribute sandwiches and give free food.'¹⁰

This point was further echoed by Clowns Without Borders, who ask that we 'listen for a NO (...) be open to be told that your work is not wanted. Many artists are inspired to make change and to respond to the refugee crisis and displacement. The most difficult and important thing to do is ask yourself if this is wanted, appropriate, (or) am I putting burden on the people I am trying to help.'¹¹

⁹ | Micaela Casalboni, Teatro dell'Argine, interviewed for this publication, October 2018

¹⁰ | Maya Zbib, Zoukak Theatre Company and Cultural Association, interviewed for this publication, October 2018

¹¹ | Naomi Shafer, Clowns Without Borders, interviewed for this publication, October 2018

Think about the 'Who'

The concept of 'who is in the room' has become increasingly recognised as a key question to ask across all elements of society, and came up repeatedly in interviews in the course of this mapping. For those working at the intersection between arts and migration, we would suggest a starting point for this as follows:

Refugees/those in displacement must be part of the decision-making process, either artistically or organisationally, or (ideally) both.

There can be no separation between the political and the artistic in this regard. This was emphasised by almost all the organisations we spoke to. For example: Ad.dar in Turkey is a Syrian run organisation, with over 50% of their volunteers of Syrian origin, who encourage that we must 'make sure that refugees are part of the team running the Project and making decisions.'¹² As such they can rightfully claim to be 'of the community that we serve, which builds trust and dedication.'¹³ This trust and dedication feeds into the discussions around long-termism and sustainability which are tackled below.

At the same time, it is vital to let artists be artists. The people you are working with may temporarily have the legal status of 'refugee' or 'migrant', but if they are an artist it's important to forefront this, and allow them to determine their own framing. Jivar Creation and Society in Spain found that many of their participants want 'to go further than the condition of migrant or refugee. (saying) I don't want to be a refugee artist, I just want to be considered as an artist.'¹⁴ This point is reinforced by

Counterpoints Arts in the UK, who state: 'We want to help artists, we don't try to tell them what to say, we are not trying to tailor a message particularly – we want to support diverse artists to express whatever they want to express and we feel that that at the end has a greater power.'¹⁵ This clear positioning, for example, as an arts organisation, or as a support organisation utilizing the arts, can help define projects and desired outcomes more easily, and was noted by a number of our interviewees.

Beyond the starting point mentioned above, there are a number of other considerations which came up in discussions with organisations. A number of organisations we spoke to emphasised the need for diverse groups of participants, for example, Good Chance Theatre, Globe Aroma and Teatro dell'Argine all mentioned the need to involve both 'newcomers' and those who are long term residents of the local area. This can help to begin to remove the potentially stigmatising label of 'refugee' – 'We like very much to take away all possible reasons for categorising people or labeling people.'¹⁶

Ad.dar in Turkey also have a strong focus on diversity of groups, specifically aiming to engage the more marginalised groups, in their case young men aged 16 – 30. This is reportedly the largest population of Syrians in Istanbul, yet generally underprovided for ('Young males are never the interest of large NGO's'¹⁷). This approach to diversity can also be seen in Zoukak's practice, whose recent projects have included working with migrant domestic workers in Lebanon, a highly marginalised group in the country.

Recognise the power imbalances and fragility

Within all relationships there are power imbalances, and this is perhaps nowhere more prominent than the imbalance between those who have legal rights of full citizenship in the country in which they live, and those who do not, or who have recently attained these rights. The recognition of this power imbalance, and the fragility which it entails for those participating from migrant or refugee backgrounds, needs to be embedded into the starting process of any project. For example, Globe Aroma in Belgium, were subjected to a police raid in 2018, with various governmental services present, including migration controls. This resulted in the detention of a number of individuals using the space who were found not to be carrying the correct papers, 'some of them stayed detained for four months but luckily they were not deported.'¹⁸ Along with the rewards of participation, there is a real risk for those participating in these artistic activities, which must be recognised and minimised as much as possible.

¹² | Elizabeth Hewitt, *Ad.dar*, email interview, November 2018

¹³ | Elizabeth Hewitt, *Ad.dar*, email interview, November 2018

¹⁴ | Mireia Estrada, *Jivar Creation and Society* interviewed for this publication, October 2018

¹⁵ | Tom Green, *Counterpoints Arts*, interviewed for this publication, November 2018

¹⁶ | Micaela Casalboni, *Teatro dell'Argine*, interviewed for this publication, October 2018

¹⁷ | Elizabeth Hewitt, *Ad.dar*, email interview, November 2018

¹⁸ | Els Rochette, *Globe Aroma*, interviewed for this publication, October 2018

Think about the 'What'

Once the 'Why' and the 'Who' have been established, we can then move onto the 'What'. The topic selected for a piece of work relating to refugee and migration stories is of course of key importance. It may be tempting for an arts organisation to focus on the trauma and pain of separation and the story of the migration journey itself. And indeed, these can be valid and vital elements to share, in the right setting and with the right motivation, such as in the hugely successful example of 'The Jungle', produced by Good Chance Theatre. But it is critical to reflect on the motivation behind the sharing of painful stories, and to avoid those that exist just to make an audience be able to pat themselves on the back for sitting through an hour of trauma, and then for the situation that created the trauma to proceed as usual.

This call to work against reductive narratives has been echoed by arts manager and cultural thinker Jumana Yasiri, in her piece 'The Day My Syrian Friend Wished She Were Chinese' where she states 'I wish no one asked me anymore about Syria, because it's too complicated and painful, and also because I don't live in Syria anymore and my imagination had to leave with me. I wish I were just an artist beyond any national belonging, and that my art and creation could be totally free from any prior expectation or prejudice'.¹⁹

Many interviews stressed that the work being produced doesn't have to focus directly on migration, or the 'journey story', and that one of the key services which can be provided is the giving of space, such as in the case of Globe Aroma,

who aim to provide 'a place where they can come every day and use internet or have a meeting without being obliged to go to a café'.²⁰

A number of interviewees also were clear that rather than just presenting the story of migration and refugeedom as an existential issue, artists and theatre makers need to engage in an examination of the underlying causes – why is this happening and what sort of systematic change is needed. This was strongly emphasised by Zoukak and Counterpoints Arts, among others. Teatro dell'Argine also highlighted the need for diversity of topics, including those focusing on the positive elements of migration.



Globe Aroma (Photo © Marie Lhoir)

¹⁹ | Jumana Yasiri, 'The Day My Syrian Friend Wished She Were Chinese', [Medium.com LINK](#)

²⁰ | Els Rochette, *Globe Aroma*, interviewed for this publication, October 2018

Measure your impact

We now turn to one of the key findings of this report – the need to measure impact. Much could be written on the diverse methodologies implemented by various arts organisations to measure their impact, and that of the arts in general, on wider society. For the purposes of this report, however, the findings were clear: evaluation is a critical element of a successful project, and the resources need to be provided by funders to ensure it is integrated into projects from their initiation.

Capacity is a critical issue for small arts organisations – and in general the majority of those doing frontline arts work on migration and refugeedom are small organisations. As such evaluation strategies and the measuring of impact can often take a back seat. ‘We don’t do enough in that matter, sometimes this is a frustration because we can’t always show what we do.’²¹

Given these limited capacities, routes for collaboration are vital. Organisations need to be supported to be able to share evaluation strategies, whether through the publication of toolkits, and/or the direct collaboration with external evaluation partners, such as universities or freelance evaluation specialists. For example, Teatro dell’Argine, ‘collaborate with Bologna University to have their help measuring the impact.’²²

Evaluation of the arts is an incredibly complex task. It is of course possible to count audience numbers, or measure demographics, but anyone who has ever been affected by an arts performance knows that there is a bigger (and almost



Zoukak - The Jokers (Photo © Randa Mirz)

immeasurable) impact on an emotional level. Trying to demonstrate perception change on an individual or societal level as a result of engaging with the arts is incredibly challenging, not least because it often takes time for an art piece to have its impact. This is emphasised by Counterpoints Arts: ‘When it comes to changing attitudes, and detecting a change of attitude, that is very difficult.’

Measuring impact does not have to be about completing surveys. ‘We are always interested in new ways of evaluating and we are aware that there is not a single answer to that question of evaluation. It will never be a simple or a complicated survey that will come with the answers, you need to approach it in many different ways.’²³ A number of organisations seconded this, such as Good Chance who ‘don’t do surveys and questionnaires for participants, it wouldn’t be appropriate - we write down the things people say and what it has meant to them.’²⁴

Given the challenges and sensitivities around working on topics of migration and refugeedom, it was refreshing that our interviews demonstrated that there are huge variations in how organisations can engage in evaluating their work. For some it can be direct and non-verbal. For example Zoukak mention that ‘in theatre, the impact sometimes is very visible, and even physical, it is about the voice, about the person being able to look at you straight in the eyes where before he was looking down at his feet.’²⁵ Clowns Without Borders put this succinctly: ‘Measuring impact is about noticing’²⁶, a point echoed by Ad.dar who state ‘We see the people and know about their lives.’²⁷

Arts organisations need to be supported to find the right way for them to evaluate their work and their impact, in order to be able to best represent their achievements and reflect on their challenges. This will allow us all to better develop our practices, leading to stronger organisations and a stronger and more resilient arts infrastructure.

²¹ | *Els Rochette, Globe Aroma, interviewed for this publication, October 2018*

²² | *Micaela Casalboni, Teatro dell’Argine, interviewed for this publication, October 2018*

²³ | *Tom Green, Counterpoints Arts, interviewed for this publication, November 2018*

²⁴ | *Naomi Webb, Good Chance Theatre, email interview, November 2018*

²⁵ | *Maya Zbib, Zoukak Theatre Company and Cultural Association, interviewed for this publication, October 2018*

²⁶ | *Naomi Shafer, Clowns Without Borders, interviewed for this publication, October 2018*

²⁷ | *Elizabeth Hewitt, Ad.dar, email interview, November 2018*

Think about Sustainability and Long termism from the start

An aim for this updated report was to explore why some organisations we spoke to in 2015 have survived whilst others have not?

It is worth first emphasising that not every project needs to last for ever – some of those we spoke to in 2015 were addressing a specific need at a specific point, and as such came to a natural stopping point, which should be applauded. This tension between creating short term responsive projects, and the desire for long-termism, is something that came up repeatedly in interviews, and we aim to present some findings around this.

Long Term Vision

It was emphasised by many interviewees that in order for this work to have long term impact, and long term sustainability, the focus of the work must be weaved into the core of the organisation, it needs to be part of a long term vision rather than a one off project. If the aim is to do a one-off project, then you may be better served by locating an organisation working in this field in the long term, and partnering with them.



Good Chance - Museum of Immigration Dome - Paris (Photo © Raphael Hilarion)

Diversify your Offer

Along with the need for diversity of participants mentioned above, a number of organisations encourage us to build year-round projects with a diverse offer. For example, Zoukak Theatre in Lebanon have increasingly moved from direct interventions to training and capacity building of participants. This is echoed by Teatro dell'Argine whose 'project has grown very much mainly because some of the boys and girls who were with us from the very beginning started having almost no experience in theatre, now they start to have some skills and competencies and this is very important both on artistic and human level'.²⁸

Build Sustainable Structures

No one can tell you what sort of structure is right for your organisation. This report has spoken to organisations with non-hierarchical structures, those with clear hierarchies, and those with very loose and flexible structures. The critical thing is to aim to build a structure that reflects your current needs, and be able to adapt as those needs change. For example, Ad.dar in Turkey have grown 'organically, by word of mouth throughout the community, and we change our services according to what the community needs. Because we are the community, we are aware of the needs and changing needs'.²⁹ Globe Aroma in Belgium

also have a very integrated and consensus-based approach, which they realistically assess as 'beautiful work but with a lot of consequences. It takes a lot of time to make decisions, especially when you have hundreds of ways of thinking'.³⁰

Funding can be a key and obvious element to build stronger structures, for example additional funding support for organisations can mean there are more support staff working there, which provide a base layer of sustainability. However, funding can also provide a false veneer of sustainability, and organisations need to ensure they have diverse funding sources and are not overly dependent on one form of funding. For example, Good Chance noted that crowdfunding is now 'much more difficult - public engagement isn't the same and it's no longer a 'crisis', so we have had to find new sources of funding (...to be) more sustainable'.³¹

This fragility of funding is noted by Teatro dell'Argine who stated that 'Organisations that are smaller than us or that do not have structural funding, if you take away the project based funds, they will die'.³² This is further emphasised by Counterpoints Arts, who stressed that in the UK 'we are experiencing a lot of cuts to arts and refugee infrastructure. There have been so many cuts that they present a real challenge to the work'.³³

²⁸ | Micaela Casalboni, Teatro dell'Argine, interviewed for this publication, October 2018

²⁹ | Elizabeth Hewitt, Ad.dar, email interview, November 2018

³⁰ | Els Rochette, Globe Aroma, interviewed for this publication, October 2018

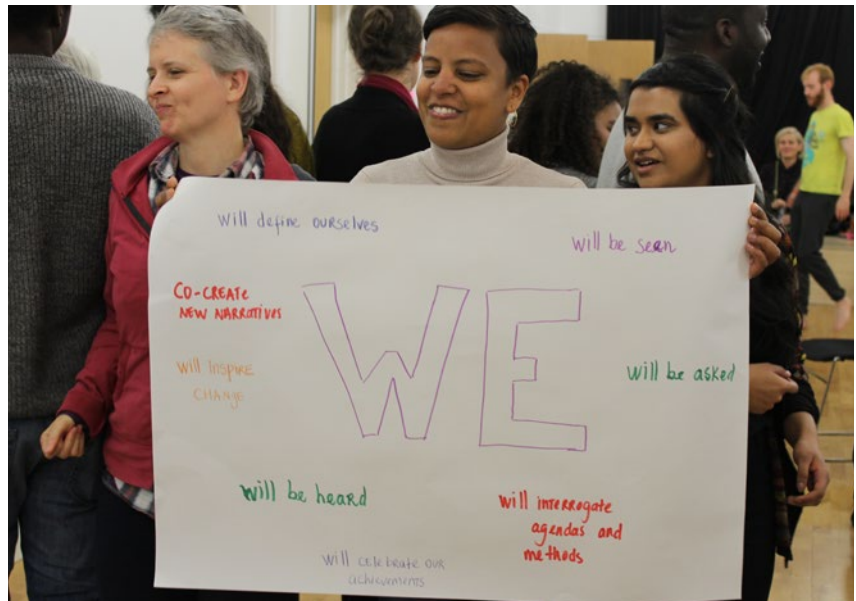
³¹ | Naomi Webb, Good Chance Theatre, email interview, November 2018

³² | Micaela Casalboni, Teatro dell'Argine, interviewed for this publication, October 2018

³³ | Tom Green, Counterpoints Arts, interviewed for this publication, November 2018

Build diverse partnerships

Diverse partnerships are a vital element of sustainability and success, not just for the organisations involved, but for those participating. Collaboration and partnership was a frequent topic of our conversations with interviewees. Clowns without Borders are active on an international level, and view local partnerships as vital. Their local partner ideally becomes their ambassador and point of access. 'Local artists are experienced and they have a knowledge of the community and the culture of the audience. That is valuable. Working in collaboration wherever we go as there are experienced clowns and artists, this can only strengthen our work to make the connection.'³⁴ Partnership working is also emphasised by Counterpoints Arts, who expressed the need for cross-sectoral networking as a way of building sustainability. 'We see ourselves as an arts organisation but we have strong ongoing connections in the refugee sector and I think that is very necessary. If you don't have expertise yourself you need to know people who do. It works in both directions, so if you are not an arts organisation you need to build those long-term partnerships with the sector... For us to work effectively in partnership, we need the partner to have some level of resources.'³⁵ This idea of building partnerships based on equality, with each organisation contributing based on their available resources both financial and in-kind, can lead to long term sustainable collaborations across sectors.



Platforma (Photo © Counterpoints Arts)

Engage in networks

The importance of building networks was highlighted throughout conversations with almost all organisations we spoke to. Networks can be vastly different things to different organisations. For the purposes of this report we haven't differentiated between formalised networks at national or international level, and informal networks based on sharing and collaboration. The power of being 'networked' was discussed in terms of strengthening organisations themselves, sharing skills and resources, increasing impact, and providing opportunities for those from refugee or migrant backgrounds.

For some of the organisations interviewed, engagement in networks forms a central part of their work. For example, Counterpoints Arts in the UK coordinate two major networking events – Platforma and Refugee Week. Platforma takes place every two years in England and consists of

a festival and several days of meetings and discussions. The 2018 edition of Platforma saw over 100 producers, creative practitioners, educators gather to create a collective Platforma Manifesto on the arts by, about and with refugees and migrants.³⁶

Refugee Week is held on an annual basis. This is a major event in the UK arts calendar, with over 250 organisations and hundreds of schools participating in 2018. As well as an arts event, it also appears from the outside to have a strong focus on awareness raising and for Counterpoints Arts 'it is also about building networks.'³⁷

The importance of building networks is also clear to Teatro dell'Argine in Italy, who told us 'when you build a good network, then you can be influential'. In November 2018 they organised a national network meeting for organisations across Italy, with the aim to bring together organisations

³⁴ | Naomi Shafer, *Clowns Without Borders*, interviewed for this publication, October 2018

³⁵ | Tom Green, *Counterpoints Arts*, interviewed for this publication, November 2018

³⁶ | <http://www.platforma.org.uk/platforma-manifesto/>

³⁷ | Tom Green, *Counterpoints Arts*, interviewed for this publication, November 2018

from across the theatre sector who are engaged in working with those from a migration background. This meeting was organised in partnership with the UNHCR (the UN Refugee Agency), and over 40 organisations took part, highlighting 'the necessity of being together and working in a network – we all feel very alone in this moment in Italy so we have to join forces in order to better resist to all this bad legislations'.³⁸

This belief in the necessity of networks in the current political context is also echoed by Jiwar, who state that in order to 'create some political pressure we should network'.³⁹

Alongside the use for organisations, networks and diverse partnerships can also open up opportunities to newly arrived artists or participants in projects. This was particularly mentioned by Globe Aroma, who told us how it is 'very difficult when you are new here and starting from zero, (...) and it is very important to have the access to the arts scene'.⁴⁰ They approach this challenge through a number of ways. One is to work closely with established artists in Belgium or Europe, to facilitate the entry of newly arrived artists into the art scene in Brussels. They also work closely with centres for asylum seekers in the city to organise over 100 accompanied cultural visits per year, with 10 different activities on offer per month, ranging from visits to theatre and museums to attending concerts and dance performances. They have found for 'a lot of newcomers it is the first time they get to know Globe Aroma or the offers on arts activities in the city'.⁴¹



Thomas Strickland – A day with Ruben – Jiwar Creation and Society (Photo © Dariusz Dogdanowicz)

Get mainstream

One of the methods of increasing impact, and building opportunities for long termism, is working on projects with a chance of mainstream traction. However, there is a tension between attracting mainstream media coverage and maintaining high quality programming, with the risk of homogenising or sanitising work with the aim of attracting mainstream coverage. Two UK based organisations have worked on exploring this creative tension in different ways – Good Chance Theatre and Counterpoints Arts.

Good Chance was founded in 2015 by two British playwrights, Joe Murphy and Joe Robertson, with the aim to: disrupt, explore, innovate, welcome, connect, and create. Since their founding they have focused on three key projects: Good Chance Theatre Domes; Productions (The Jungle); and the Good Chance Ensemble. Of these, The Jungle performance has reached over 13,000 people through performances in London at the Young Vic and The Playhouse in the West End, and in New York at St. Ann's Warehouse in Brooklyn and at the Curran Theatre in San Francisco.

Counterpoints Arts have observed an increased interest in their field of work, from the general public and more, and as such they are looking into methodology to engage with mainstream audiences, as they feel that 'work done by artists from migration background should not be confined to the margins'.⁴² Some of this development is inspired and informed by a work done in the USA by the organisation called 'Pop Culture Collaborative',⁴³ and they are looking how best to engage broad audiences in the intersection between migration and arts and culture through diverse platforms including broadcasting and fashion.⁴⁴ One easy, and often overlooked methodology is that of having a focus on presentation: 'good design has been very important for us'.⁴⁵ However, the challenge with developing more mainstream presence is the lack of depth of interaction which often comes with this. As such the topic under presentation, as explored above, is of vital importance. 'The challenge to get the media engage on a deeper level remains'.⁴⁶

³⁸ | Micaela Casalboni, *Teatro dell'Argine*, interviewed for this publication, October 2018

³⁹ | Mireia Estrada, *Jiwar Creation and Society* interviewed for this publication, October 2018

⁴⁰ | Els Rochette, *Globe Aroma*, interviewed for this publication, October 2018

⁴¹ | Els Rochette, *Globe Aroma*, interviewed for this publication, October 2018

⁴² | Tom Green, *Counterpoints Arts*, interviewed for this publication, November 2018

⁴³ | <https://popcollab.org/>

⁴⁴ | Tom Green, *Counterpoints Arts*, interviewed for this publication, November 2018

⁴⁵ | Tom Green, *Counterpoints Arts*, interviewed for this publication, November 2018

⁴⁶ | Tom Green, *Counterpoints Arts*, interviewed for this publication, November 2018

Use your Influence

And finally: whilst there was wide agreement on the potential for performance to have an influence on those watching and engaging with it, there was divergence on the methodology of achieving this aim. For example, Zoukak state that 'theatre shouldn't have to change the political climate, shouldn't have to work towards that otherwise it is kind of propaganda'. However, this does not mean it should be politically empty, indeed they feel exactly the opposite: 'What theatre can do is to change the reaction and misconceptions and preconceptions of audiences, participants, communities and cities then grow from there. Changing perceptions that will lead eventually to changing policy'.⁴⁷ Teatro dell'Argine in Italy provided an example of how engagement with political institutions can happen organically: 'when we did our first training for trainers and learning partnership in the UNHCR project, we involved our politicians (the deputy mayor doing theatre with us) and she said that it was a very important experience for her and that next time, they would like to do training for their employees, they would like to involve us to use theatrical tools in learning'.⁴⁸

Some organisations feel that we should focus on specific issues, such as mobility. Jivar in Spain mention that 'I think the priority is the visa issue, to remove the obstacles in front of mobility'.⁴⁹

Counterpoints Arts in the UK build on their commitment to taking stories to the mainstream as a tool to lead to policy change. 'I think that people now understand that there is a broader case about why the culture is important for the political change to happen. Politicians respond to what people think, and we need to be taking that message to a broad audience. We tend to take a broad view of policy goals, helping people to have a greater understanding across society with the aim that this will lead to political change or at least make positive change less contested. You maybe not able to predict the policy change, but if the culture changes slowly then we have to trust that people will advocate to policy change and will receive a better hearing'.⁵⁰



Clowns Without Borders leads a workshop for staff of Medecins Sans Frontiers in Haiti. (Photo © Clowns Without Borders)

⁴⁷ | Maya Zbib, Zoukak Theatre Company and Cultural Association, interviewed for this publication, October 2018

⁴⁸ | Micaela Casalboni, Teatro dell'Argine, interviewed for this publication, October 2018

⁴⁹ | Mireia Estrada, Jivar Creation and Society interviewed for this publication, October 2018

⁵⁰ | Tom Green, Counterpoints Arts, interviewed for this publication, November 2018

03.

COLLECTION OF INTERVIEWS

Zoukak Theatre Company and Cultural Association
(Lebanon)

Clowns Without Borders
(USA/International)

Good Chance
(France/UK)

Counterpoints Arts
(UK)

Jiwar Creation and Society
(Spain)

Ad.dar
(Turkey)

Globe Aroma
(Belgium)

Teatro dell'Argine
(Italy)

ZOUKAK THEATRE COMPANY AND CULTURAL ASSOCIATION (LEBANON)

Zoukak was founded in 2006 as a non-hierarchical structure, dedicated to theatre practice as a social and political involvement, with a belief in theatre as a space for common reflection and in collectivity as a position against marginalising systems.

www.zoukak.org

'What is amazing about theatre is that it is addictive, theatre by itself is personal development, it is a tool for development as a person and for integration within a group.'

Maya Zbib



Zoukak - The Jokers (Photo © Randa Mirz)

Since 2015, Zoukak have made a conscious shift to 'work more on capacity building (such as the training of social theatre practitioners) rather than just working and giving drama therapy workshops to groups of people'. In recent years in Lebanon and across the region they have seen that there is a developing 'trend' for drama therapy, psycho-social interventions and social theatre. Rather than judging this from afar, they decided to get involved in strengthening the practices of those who are delivering it. Since 2015 they have delivered numerous training for trainers to support those using psycho-social techniques and interventions in different contexts. The main focus of this for the participants is on 'continuity and the ongoing work on their tools as facilitators, their own development as a person, reconsidering prejudice'.

Zoukak's direct work is with a diverse group of individuals, including migrant domestic workers. This is extremely fragile work in Lebanon. They originally planned a project which would include a series of workshops with migrant domestic workers, culminating in a public performance, but this had to be cancelled as they received a call from the General Security asking whether the performance

text was submitted to censorship, so they decide to cancel the event for fear of facing issues due to the visa status of some they work with. This highlights the kinds of challenges this work can bring. Zoukak are reflecting on this, and may return to work 'with them more as a community and not necessarily to create live performances'.

They are finding that increasingly 'people want to hear stories now more than before, it is all about what happened, let's talk about it, and feel good that we are talking about it and then put it in a box... There is a kind of eagerness to hear real stories of hardship and pain'. This fetishising of painful stories is apropos to the work of Zoukak, who state very clearly that this 'hurts the people who are involved and only serve a purpose of catharsis for the audience, making them feel good that they have shared the pain of people who have lived through war, and then forget about it. Rather than have a more intellectual or more global reflections on the issues, there is increasingly a direction towards this kind of audience focused relief'. Zoukak, on the other hand, are more interested in looking at causes, 'in discussing why did these stories happen? What is the global responsibility towards this?'

CLOWNS WITHOUT BORDERS (USA/INTERNATIONAL)

Clowns Without Borders (CWB) is an international organisation of professional clowns whose goal is to bring smiles to those in difficult situations.

www.clownswithoutborders.org

'Listen for a NO.'

Naomi Shafer



Performance for refugees along the Balkan Route (Photo © Clowns Without Borders)

Clowns Without Borders have performed for 'approximately 100,000 people through 400 shows since the beginning of 2016'. One of the key changes for them since 2015 has been responding to how 'human migration and displacement has changed and escalated', and how they engage with displacement and people in moments of displacement. Clowns Without Borders was formed in the early 1990s, with the idea that the general trajectory for people in refugee camps was that they would at some point leave the camp and gain refugee status in a new country. Now they recognise that 'for many people that's not the case, for instance in Colombia and El Salvador we are working with communities that have been displaced for generations'. As such they have given significant thought to the question of what programming is most appropriate for different groups in different states of displacement, and affected by displacement in different ways. This now includes performances 'both for the people who are displaced and for the communities that offer the shelters, because that is a tension – these hosting communities are also experiencing the impact of displacement'.

Since 2015 the context for their work has changed considerably. In 2017 they encountered a lot of new restrictions for working in refugee camps, and as such a number of their partners felt unable to invite them to come. As such they have had to postpone various tours multiple times. However, this level of flexibility and ability to change plans is something they credit with their longevity: 'our sustainability is about being willing to adapt and being really flexible'.

A further element they credit with their sustainability is their ethos and respect between partners – their partners know that if they invite Clowns Without Borders then the project will be approached in a thoughtful and respectful way. For example, before taking photographs of any activities they attempt to assess 'what is the unexpected cost, what are the potentials for somebody to be hurt, and this leads to what and when we take pictures'.

Clowns Without Borders biggest recommendation for others looking to work in this field is: 'listen for a NO, be open to being told that your work is not wanted'.

Other key recommendations are:

- Focus on your area of expertise: 'figure out if it is appropriate to do this work. If you are not a child psychologist in your home country, don't assume that you can go and do that somewhere else.'
- Look around your local area to begin with: 'Maybe the most important thing to do as an artist is to work in your home town/country as there are many displaced communities everywhere, you don't have to travel to make an impact.'

GOOD CHANCE (FRANCE/UK)

Good Chance was founded by two British playwrights, Joe Murphy and Joe Robertson, when they established their first 'Good Chance Dome' in the heart of the refugee and migrant camp in Calais in September 2015. Through theatre and art, Good Chance aims to create new kinds of communities, empowering artists from across the world and connecting people, stories and cultures.

www.goodchance.org.uk

'Art is the secret weapon.'

Naomi Webb



Good Chance Dome - Paris (Photo © Raphael Hilarion)

Good Chance primarily credit their ongoing success with the fact that they offer something different to standard ideas around charity and aid. As they put it: 'Art is the secret weapon' – it allows for different types of conversation and can be disarming and unexpected. The huge public success of *The Jungle* has allowed for their continued work in Paris and other projects through the Good Chance Ensemble, and has connected them with whole new audiences and a wide range of new supporters. The three strands of their work – Theatre Domes, Productions and Ensemble – interweave and nourish each other. In the Good Chance theatre domes, people from across the world who have experienced profound trauma come together with local residents to express themselves, share cultural experiences and take first steps towards understanding each other. Some of these people go on to perform in their productions or to be part of the Good Chance Ensemble, including members of the cast of *The Jungle*, which itself was directly inspired by Good Chance's work in the dome in Calais.

In everything they do, Good Chance aim to support artists from refugee backgrounds and provide a safe place for expression and creativity, as well as trying to humanise the refugee and migrant experience and bring it to an international audience. They feel that this kind of work can inform people

in a totally different way to the media, allowing for empathy and a different type of understanding.

Concurrently with these successes, the challenges of fundraising continue. In general, they find that crowdfunding is much more difficult than in 2015, 'public engagement isn't the same and it's no longer a 'crisis', so we have had to find new sources of funding'. Grant funding from the UK can be difficult with so much work happening internationally, and fundraising in France for projects based there is difficult within the intricate French arts funding system. Funders often require at least three years of activity in that country and a three-year strategic plan for the future, which can be hard for a company trying to react to changing circumstances.

Good Chance's key recommendations for those aiming to work in this field are:

- **Focus on empowerment.**
- **Bring different people together, rather than working with refugees in isolation and pigeon-holing people into that label.**
- **Engage the public, open up space to have conversations and meet people in a way that might not otherwise be possible.**

COUNTERPOINTS ARTS

(UK)

Counterpoints Arts is a leading UK organisation in the field of arts, migration and cultural change.

www.counterpointsarts.org.uk

'People now understand that culture is important for political change to happen.'

Tom Green



No Direction Home, Counterpoints Arts, January 2019 (Photo © José Farinha)

Since we last spoke to them in 2015, Counterpoints Arts have found that there has been a growing interest in their work. In 2015 the conflict in Syria, the number of people trying to seek asylum in Europe, with the associated tragedy of deaths in the Mediterranean led to huge media coverage. That moment saw an immediate artistic response from people and organisations that had not done this type of work before. Three years on from then a lot more people have been brought into this work – people are engaging more deeply and more mainstream organisations are participating. One of Counterpoints Arts' focuses is to support that engagement to happen, for example to bring mainstream organisations and venues together to focus on refugee engagement and create opportunities. They have a strong belief that work done by artists from migration background should not be confined to the margins, it 'has the right for a place in the mainstream'.

Counterpoints Arts credit their relative longevity to a number of key factors: they have a strategic view, they get support when needed, and they build networks. Their strategic view has clarity of purpose – they were established specifically to carry on to the need identified in this country to work around this intersection

between arts and migration. They have a clarity of identity – they see themselves specifically as an arts organisation, one that is 'always concerned about arts'. They aim to 'support diverse artists to express whatever they want to express', and as such they are 'helping artists to set an agenda'.

They are an arts organisation with strong connections in the refugee sector. This is critical to their work – 'if you don't have expertise yourself, you need to know people who do. It works in both directions, so if you are not an arts organisation you need to build those long-term partnerships with the sector'. As such they have a strong focus on building networks. For example Refugee Week (which they coordinate) is not a traditional sort of awareness raising exercise, it is much more about building networks. These networks can often be very local and that is the real strength because when dealing with refugees, especially newly arrived people, it often comes down to individual, local relationships. As such, they feel that 'building these networks up from the grass roots is a real strength'. And finally – they highlight the importance of good design – your design 'makes a statement about quality'.

JIWAR CREATION AND SOCIETY (SPAIN)

Located in Barcelona, Jiwar Creation and Society is an international residency for artists and researchers focused on or inspired by urban space.

www.jiwarbarcelona.com

'We need to go further than the condition of migrant or refugee.'

Mireia Estrada



Thomas Strickland – A day with Ruben – Jiwar Creation and Society (Photo © Darius Dogdanowicz)

Since we spoke in 2015, Jiwar Creation and Society have increasingly focused on work incorporating people of both migrant and non-migrant backgrounds. For example, their annual “Making Neighbourhoods” project, which happens annually, invites two international and one local artist to develop a project around the concept of ‘neighbourhood’. Within this framework, and through the different editions, they had several projects focused in the interaction, collaboration and exchange with several migrants and refugee communities based in Barcelona.

One of these projects was “Transitions” by the Canadian curator and architect Thomas Strickland. This project worked with members of the LGBT communities in Barcelona, which had to leave their countries because of their sexual identity. This was an in-depth project with a number of stages, including home visits, city walks and collective workshops, and culminated in an exhibition and a public presentation. For the final exhibition each participant wrote a letter to their country they had left, and one to Barcelona, accompanied with a photograph of them holding their passport and another one of their hand in a place in Barcelona that became important and representative of their experience in the host city, Barcelona. The exhibition took place in the district municipality hall where at least 500 people visited on a daily basis.

As an integral part of their residency program, Jiwar has had mixed experiences working with ‘artists at risk’. Too often “artists who arrive to the city as artists at risk are in fact not the ones that most need to be considered at risk... it’s becoming increasingly difficult to find and support those that really have the need to be hosted.” Because of their previous experience and after long discussions and debates on this issue, Jiwar is increasingly critical about the focus on ‘immigrant artists’. Also, it is very difficult to find external support to create and stable programme for ‘artists in risk’. After more than 7 years and a half of residency activity, they have decided to cease this residency and to continue only through project-based work.

They are developing strong philosophical critique of this focus on ‘immigrant artists’ and argue that “we need to go further than the condition of migrant or refugee. These categorizations stigmatise their individuality as artists. In the middle term the position of refugee artist is not interesting for them or for us, they will reach a moment where they will say, ‘I don’t want to be a refugee artist, I just want to be considered as an artist’”.

AD.DAR (TURKEY)

Ad.dar ("home" in Arabic) is a non-political, non-religious, multi-cultural community initiative established for Syrian and Syrian-Palestinian refugees living in Istanbul.

www.addarcenter.org

'We are of the community that we serve.'

Elizabeth Hewitt



Ad.dar (Photo © Ad.dar)

Ad.dar is an 'all volunteer organisation that is run by Syrians, and half of our volunteers are Syrian. We are of the community that we serve – this builds trust and dedication'. As an all-volunteer run organisation they have very low overhead costs, and as such are able to be more nimble and selective in terms of their funding. They have thus far only ever requested funding from small organisations and this has been generally small amounts – 'never more than \$25,000 and usually much less'. This is as a result of strategic thinking – early on in the process of establishing the organisation, they realised that receiving funds from larger organisations could limit them, or require them to do activities that are outside of (or against) their policy and vision. Most of the funding from INGOs for Syria projects has now ended (particularly in Turkey), but as Ad.dar have always relied on small and diverse funding streams, this has not affected them as much as it has others.

Ad.dar also credit their survival with the fact that they have 'grown organically, by word of mouth throughout the community. We change our services according to what the community needs. Because we are the community we are aware of the needs and changing needs'. Alongside the sustainability that being all-volunteer run provides, there is also a challenge. As they have grown, so has the workload,

particularly the administration. Meeting this challenge is something Ad.dar is currently focusing on.

In some ways the situation for Syrians is more stable in Istanbul than it was in 2015. In 2015 a lot of Ad.dar's work focused on young children, and specifically on helping children get enrolled in schools. Now there is are clearer pathways for them to access education, and Ad.dar know how to navigate it. Ad.dar are themselves in a more stable situation, and have moved to a larger space and refined their focus.

As many of the children they originally worked with are now in school, they have increasingly shifted their focus to young adults and adults, as 'the largest population of Syrians in Istanbul are males aged 16-30 that are mostly alone with no family'. Young males are rarely the interest of large INGO's, and as such Ad.dar have developed a strong strand of work in this direction, including bi-weekly concerts, cooking club and family meal on Saturdays, poetry readings, film screenings, regular classes and more.

In terms of recommendations, Ad.dar are very clear: Make sure that refugees are part of the team running the project and making decisions – "build community".

GLOBE AROMA (BELGIUM)

Globe Aroma is an open House of Arts where refugees, first-time artists, Brussels residents, immigrants, and those active in the immigration and/or arts sector meet and inspire each other.

www.globearoma.be

'Everyone wants a refugee on stage.'

Els Rochette

Founded in 2002, Globe Aroma is a Belgian organisation which aims to reach new comers through artistic methods. This includes providing space in an open art house in the centre of Brussels to newcomers who are artists to continue their practices, to have a place to come to in Brussels every day and use the internet or have a meeting without being obliged to go to a café. There is a rehearsal room and basic artistic supplies on hand. Alongside this, they work to try and enlarge the networks of newly arrived artists in Brussels, to provide 'access to the arts scene'. Another key element of their work is to show the work that is created by those using their space, through open door events, concerts, performances and exhibitions.

They also organise a hundred accompanied cultural visits per year for new comers. These visits are organised in collaboration with centres for asylum seekers, and participants are offered 10 different activities per month. This can include visits to theatres, dance performances, museums and concerts. Recently Globe Aroma have developed projects with a focus on co-creation, between artists who are established in Belgium or across Europe, and those who have recently arrived. These co-creation projects have the aim of providing Globe Aroma with a stronger image and standing within the Brussels art sector, and also opening



Globe Aroma (Photo © Marie Lhoir)

up new networks to those participating. This mixing of new comers and long-term residents reaches across all their work, 'although we focus on new comers, there are always in these projects people who were born in Belgium. Seventy-five per cent of participants are new comers. It is richer to mix the groups and not only focus on refugees.'

Globe Aroma have a strong focus on engaging participants in all decision making. 'Some of the refugees are in the council of Globe Aroma; one started in one project then became volunteer and then came in the council.'

Recently, Globe Aroma has been provided with some longer term funding from the Ministry of Culture, which provides them with a measure of sustainability and longevity. This in part is due to the increasing 'recognition of the importance of our organisation in the wider arts scene'. This has included a lot of vocal support from important theatres, museums, and concert houses. These organisations 'want to collaborate with us to involve the public that we are reaching', and many of these art spaces are becoming more open to thinking about this in different ways.

However, the increasingly right-wing national political situation in Belgium has had direct consequences for Globe Aroma. In February 2018 they were subjected

to a major police operation in their art house. They were told that this was a 'social inspection', and involved several services including migration controls. The raid happened on a Friday evening and a number of people who didn't have certain papers were arrested, with some detained for up to four months. This raid was a major surprise for Globe Aroma, as they already had the state support through the Ministry of Culture, and has led to a feeling of insecurity and fragility for the organisation and participants in their own space.

As a response to this raid, there was a strong reaction of support from the arts and social sectors, from unions and from the Ministry of Culture. This led to the formation of a new network with the aim of preventing this type of intervention from recurring..

Like many we spoke to, Globe Aroma are cautious about the fashion for refugee stories, noting that 'everyone wants a refugee on stage', but most of these stages are only open to those using familiar motifs, artforms or ways of performing. Globe Aroma, they aim to open up the space to those who are creating the work they want to make, 'to respect different forms of arts and to make sure they can be shown and seen'.

TEATRO DELL'ARGINE (ITALY)

Teatro dell'Argine is a social cooperative theatre, founded in 1974 in San Lazzaro di Savena (Bologna), Italy. They create work with a focus on dialogue with the local community, keeping in mind the importance of a multidisciplinary, international, intercultural, social and high-value theatre.

www.teatrodellargine.org

'Our work is against prejudice and stereotyping.'

Micaela Casalboni



Exodus group, "L'Eredità di Babele" (The Legacy of Babel, Teatro dell'Argine)
(Photo © TLucio Summa)

Since 2015, Teatro dell'Argine have continued their project 'Exodus', which was covered in the earlier IETM report. The project focuses on diversity throughout its planning. Participants are aged between 15 to 25 and originate from over 30 different countries as well as the local neighbourhood. Participants are also from very different socio-economic backgrounds.

Teatro dell'Argine feel that those born in the local area need the project as much as the new comers, to be able to 'see further than the over-simplification conveyed by the mass media'. The project forms a parallel route of education to learn from their peers from across the world. As such they aim for as mixed a group as possible, finding even the label 'intercultural' too determinative: 'We aim to take away all possible reasons for categorising people or labeling people, as simple words such as "refugee" or "unaccompanied minor" have become "bad words". Our work is against prejudice and stereotyping – it is not only for the non-Italians it is above all for the Italians, it is for everyone.'

Exodus has also developed to include a project called Acting Together With Refugees, thanks to the support and partnership of UNCHR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees). This is a more sector-focused element to the programme, and for this they have created a short documentary video about the project⁵¹ and a set of suggested guidelines for those working with individuals of refugee or migrant background.⁵² These include practices, exercises and tools

that can be used in the theatrical world, but could also be implemented by in the cultural, educational and social sector. The guidelines were developed from trainings of trainers they organised, peer learning partnerships, and a number of focus groups run by a team of psychologists with Teatro dell'Argine.

Teatro dell'Argine's biggest recommendation for artists wanting to work with refugees is 'don't only think about your art, exploiting people and their stories and their bodies to squeeze them into your art. If you really want to work with people, work with people, involve them from the very beginning in organising things, ask them, do you really want to do this?'. To achieve this, Teatro dell'Argine cite to the motto of the Australian association Rise: 'nothing about us without us'. They warn that it has 'become a fashion for theatre companies to work with refugees. This can also be dangerous – we must not exploit people and their stories, we have to be very aware and sensitive'. They have found that the theme of the performance does not need to be directly about migration, it can be 'any issue that we want to face together'. In general they find that people's concept around themes of migration tend to focus on the negative, the challenges, and sad stories. When focusing on migration they aim increasingly to emphasise the positives, to focus 'on the good things that can come from migration. This idea of working together maybe will bring us also to change the wider perspective on migrants and refugees and their situation'.

51 | [Acting Together With Refugees video](#)

52 | [Acting Together #WithRefugees: guidelines](#)