

RE.Sto.Re

**REcognition of the Social Theatre Operator
as a professional to tackle the Risk of
social Exclusion**

Newsletter N.8 - SEPTEMBER 2021

Partner organisation

Oltre Le Parole Onlus (Italy)
Comunità San Patrignano (Italy)
Smashing Times International Centre for the
Arts & Equality (Ireland)
ProSoc Association (Slovenia)
Bielskie Stowarzyszenie Artystyczne Teatr Grodzki (Poland)
PELE Associacao Social e Cultural (Portugal)
Magenta Consultoria Projects (Spain)

Associated partners

Università Roma Tre (Italy)
Assoc. San Patrignano Scuola e
Formazione (Italy)
Associazione DireFareCambiare (Italy)

How social theatre operators/artistic facilitators (OTS) worked during the pandemic across Europe. A research carried out in the framework of the Re.Sto.Re. Project www.restore-project.com/, co-funded by the European Commission under the Erasmus+ Programme.



"SWITCHING FROM HEARING TO LISTENING WHICH IS MORE, IS GENERATING BRIDGES"

Eugenio Borgna*



To introduce you to the summary of the results of this research, we have chosen this phrase by Eugenio Borgia, a psychiatrist and academic, because we found something familiar in it, something that happened in the world of the invisible, of all those who operate too often out of sight of the institutions, but who are very visible to those who benefit from their work. During the pandemic, the social theatre operator had to have a deep understanding of the situation that was being created and, in the midst of a difficult changing of regulations and prohibitions, continue to “listen” in order to be able to “build bridges”, especially in favour of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged categories.

The social theatre operator had to read the situation created during the pandemic in depth and, in a difficult process of new and changing regulations and prohibitions, continue to “listen” in order to be able to “generate bridges”, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. This is why, among the most outstanding skills of social theatre operators, generously put to good use, is the ability to communicate, a two-

way process, a soft skill for excellence, together with the ability to adapt, to work in a team, problem solving and creativity.

The social theatre operator not only has a broad awareness of his or her task and clarity of purpose with regard to the groups he or she works with, but also finds himself or herself intercepting new needs, requirements and difficulties, including the unprecedented ones generated by the pandemic itself. In recent months, many vulnerable groups have no longer been able to access the benefits produced by social theatre,

sometimes interrupting their work abruptly and suffering major regressions.

There is also an emerging cry in the social sphere from adolescents, women, families, the elderly, professionals, managers and doctors, who have been overwhelmed by sudden new difficulties and who need to be listened to, shared and addressed through the privileged medium of social theatre.

We hope that the research we are presenting in this special issue may constitute an initial basis of knowledge and investigation for individuals and institutions, where it is possible to develop shared and inclusive areas of intervention, proving that the methodology of social theatre can construct new bridges by “listening” to the needs of our communities.

* Italian psychiatrist (b. Borgomanero 1930), formerly a lecturer in the Clinic of Nervous and Mental Illnesses at the University of Milan and director of the Novara Psychiatric Hospital, he is currently its head physician emeritus. Opposed to any form of schematism and biological reductionism of mental processes, B. is one of the main exponents of phenomenological psychiatry. He shifts his object of analysis from the illness to the patient, in order to reconstruct the profound and subjective dimension of psychic discomfort, which he has investigated by crossing heterogeneous fields, such as literature, philosophy and art, in an attempt to enunciate its multiple and complex dimension, restoring a shared meaning to the existential dimension of pain. (source Treccani)

THE RESEARCH

The complete research can be consulted at the following link:
www.restore-project.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/COVID19_SURVEY.pdf

Summary of the results

The health emergency linked to the spread of the Covid-19 virus, recognised by the WHO as a pandemic, has had a profound effect on our society, causing serious consequences in both social and economic terms. Many professionals have had to reinvent themselves to survive this crisis. These include social theatre operators and artistic facilitators, who have found it very difficult to carry out their work. This has had serious consequences not only in professional terms (many of them have no recognition for the work they do and therefore have had no access to state support, and less than half have received financial support), but has also caused significant difficulties for the people with whom the social theatre operator works, namely vulnerable individuals and/or groups already struggling with social exclusion.

The partners of the Re.Sto.Re project decided to analyse the condition experienced by social theatre operators (STO) during the pandemic. Oltre le Parole Onlus (www.instagram.com/oltreleparoleonlus/), the project leader, created a questionnaire to be administered online, distributed by the project partner organisations. The survey was carried out between February and April 2021, distributed at European level through all project partners. There were 140 OTS participants from 82 cities in 21 European countries with 1.4% of participants from non-EU countries. It is a focus on the social responsibility that is a specific feature of the profession, its safeguards in terms of recognition of the job function and the enormous

social impact that would result from its more intensive implementation in multiple areas.

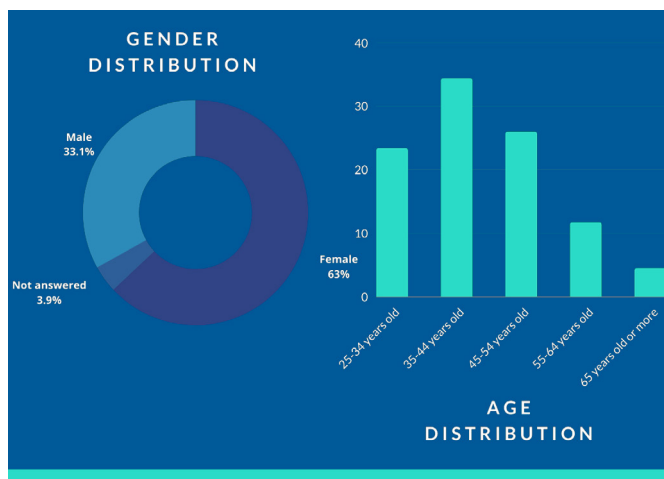
The research highlighted the many fragilities with which professionals in this delicate sector have had to contend in times of Covid-19 and the numerous difficulties they have had to face in order to guarantee their work. Above all, it made tangible and urgent the need for an institutional recognition of this professional figure, not only for the protection of professionals but also to protect the fragile categories to which their work is addressed. A remarkable fact among all: 90% of those who took part in the survey believe that in the near future the role and work of the STOs will be fundamental in order to heal the social distancing that has characterised this time of pandemic.

Progetto Re.Sto.Re hopes that the following small highlights may be useful both for greater self-awareness and exchange of information among those working in the social field but also to stimulate reflection in the institutions on the value and the necessity of this profession.



CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE PARTICIPATING IN THE STUDY

and professional profile of the STO before Covid-19



Important evidence from the research is the fact that the majority of participants have more than 10 years' experience of working in the field and another consistent percentage has experience between 5 and 10 years.

For about 30% of the participants in the research the STO is their main job, while for more than 40% of them the STO activity is complemented by another job of the same level, while 20% report that they carry out the STO as a second activity and devote themselves to a first job that provides more economic security and a consequent commitment in terms of active involvement. Approximately 9% report that they carry out the activity as a volunteer.

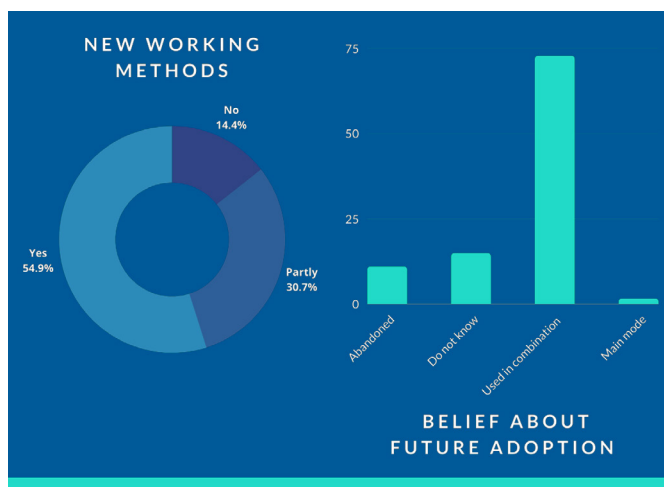
This picture shows how the professional figure of the STO today moves within the precariousness, as a result of its non-institutional recognition as a certified profession.

The vulnerable groups most involved in the activities proposed by the STOs are people with physical and cognitive disabilities, people with problems of social exclusion, elderly people and ethnic minorities. It is interesting to note that most of the STOs report working with additional categories of vulnerable groups, not present in the list proposed by the questionnaire: this data contains a clear indication of the multiplicity of fragile/vulnerable groups present in our society, not always recognised and supported at institutional level, which find in social theatre some responses to their needs.



THE EFFECTS OF THE PANDEMIC on STO work

After the outbreak of Covid-19 only 7.8% of STOs were able to continue working in the same pre-pandemic way. 61.7 reported that they continued to work at least partially in the social field, while 30.5 had to stop working completely. Among those who continued to work, 32.7 were able to work with their groups only through online meetings, while 38.5 were able to integrate online activities with some in-person activities. Only 15.4% continued their work exclusively in presence, having to make few changes to their usual working methods. Finally, 13.5 of the participants report having had to modify their working methodology entirely. But the most relevant fact is that 1/3 of the vulnerable people to whom the OTS targeted their interventions, were no longer able to benefit from the work in any way, with important negative effects on their daily life and routines, elements that in some cases become fundamental for the balance of the person and the related pathology.

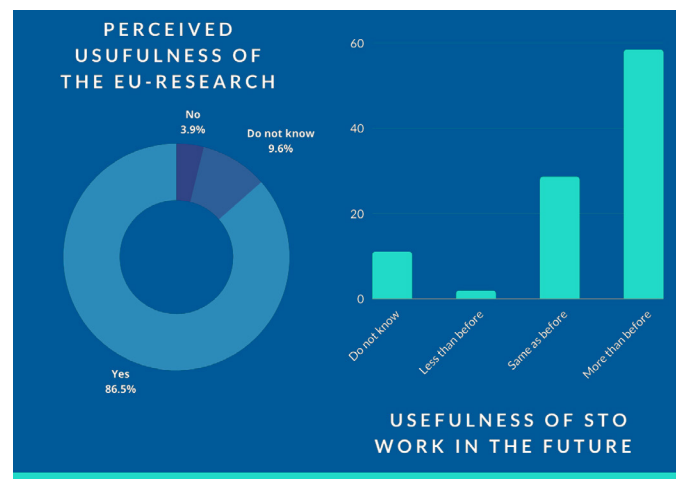


The majority of STOs continued their work while having to adopt new methodologies. 30% have partially modified them due to the conditions created by the pandemic. Only 14% report that they have not adopted any new working methods. Interestingly, a significant majority are convinced that these new methods can also be used in conjunction with the usual activities in the future. As far as their own personal experience is concerned, about 58% of the STOs expressed through the questionnaire their interest in creating moments of sharing on the new methodologies adopted with STOs of other communities and countries different from their own. They also tried to develop new working strategies by interacting with other STOs both nationally and internationally.

Collaborations with teachers, educators, social workers, psychologists etc. contributed to the maintenance of the activity, even though they worked exclusively online. During the suspension of the activities, the operators, in a totally spontaneous way, always remained in contact with the groups they worked with or with some of their members and only a minority could not maintain any form of relationship with them. This underlines how the connection between OTS and the target group facilitates the relationship and becomes an important reference point in the daily life of vulnerable elements and/or groups. In terms of financial support related to the OTS activity, only 51% received some form of support from state bodies and a very low percentage of them were supported by the employer (only in 14.86% of cases). Another significant consequence of the non-recognition of this professional figure and institutional level, a situation which, as already seen, affects the beneficiaries of the support measures.

STO VISION OF THE FUTURE

The future? In general, 41.8% think they will be able to return to work in the same way as pre-pandemic conditions by autumn 2021. Again, 41.8% say they are uncertain and do not see a specific date when they will be able to resume full operations. The overwhelming majority of STOs believe that their work after the pandemic will be more useful than before given the social and human consequences that this crisis has brought. Finally, most of the STOs believe that comparing their methods and strategies at the European level would be useful, in order to have an exchange of best practices that would help them to expand their activities. From the comparison of the two tables we can see that many STOs also work outside their home countries.



REFLECTIONS OF A STO

between sourdough and pandemic

I am a professional educator, every day I operate on that blurred border between despair and hope. Then there came Covid-19, the pandemic, the lock-down. I continued, on an on-off basis, with my work. But after the initial impact, the evil of the world became my evil, and I began to suffer from this constraint that arrived unexpectedly in my life and in the lives of my loved ones. Like many people in Italy, I specialised in homemade bread and preserves, and like millions of people all over the world, I contributed to raising the value of Amazon's shares and making the episodes of "Casa de Papel" jump to millions of views, secretly dreaming of doing a heist like that myself one day. Then one gets used to everything. We are human beings, we have the file of adaptation for survival. And slowly, one day red, one day orange, and then yellow, life seems to start again.

A semblance of normality awaits me every morning as I prepare my coffee and prepare to live my life, about which I have complained so much over the last year and a half.

Then, a couple of days ago, a person contacts me by writing a post about the Re.Sto.Re Project. She wants to know more, she wants to understand how it works, what its goals are, if there is a possibility of collaboration. She leaves me her phone. I call. An affable woman answers and we start talking. For more than an hour. And in the end, I felt small and even a little miserable. This woman has experienced the pandemic from two perspectives. Firstly, as the contact person of a Foundation committed to the inclusion of fragile elements with autism and to the support of their families. The second is that of a mother of a splendid me-



dium-high functioning autistic boy. Their mission, she explains, is to use different art forms as a tool to facilitate communication between these children, their families and the part of the world they decide to include in their lives. They have chosen art and culture as their 'medicine' because they have personally tested its benefits and positive effects. In particular, theatre proved to be an excellent tool for inclusion, allowing this type of emotional and intellectual fragility to express itself in a space free of conventions. The weekly workshop, the group work respecting the peculiarities of each one, the challenge of memory and movement, the creation of the sets, the costumes, the choice of music, the staging have created dynamics in their lives, becoming a fundamental element in their daily life, in their habits. Then the lockdown, she tells me, like an unexpected hurricane, stopped everything and now they are slowly trying to restart and reconnect with all these young people who have experienced this pandemic in total isolation.

She tell me about future performances, direction, theatre workshop and much more. But at a point I can hardly hear her intense enthusiasm any more. Because my mind stops there, at the term isolation. I understand that the pandemic has taken many things away from many people, but in those many people there are neither me nor the many people like me. Autism did not go away, autism did not pass. On the contrary, like all of us, this guy had to wear a mask and lock himself in his house. And it was inside those houses that it was difficult, not in my house where the sourdough reigned supreme. We worried about so many things, we were glued to the television set counting the dead. But I wonder, did we think enough about the living ones? Did we realise that for some of them, going two hours a week to the theatre or painting workshop was like having water to drink? Have we thought that social distancing is a very bad term because it has sanctioned the suspension of inclusion for



those who need inclusion like air. And there is no helmet that can give it to them. I think not. I think we haven't thought about it enough. And it is only today, almost two years after everything began, with the phone call from this woman whom I am honoured to have met, that I realise how fundamental the figure of the STO is. It was before, but it will be even more so from now on. Because her recognition will not only be a formal and bureaucratic event, her recognition will authorise us, even in the most difficult times like this, to ring the intercom, climb the stairs and enter the houses, free up the living room and guarantee those two hours a week to those who will no longer have to feel in intensive care, alone and without air, even in their own homes.

** The Foundation mentioned in the letter is the **Lorenzo Paolo Medas Foundation** for social, artistic and cultural development. To get to know them better click on this link:*
www.fondazione.lorenzomedas.it





BREAKING NEWS

by the editorial team

After Italy, Poland is ready for the kick-off of the European training course for "Social Theatre Operator"



Still in the context of the Re.Sto.Re. Project and thanks to the funds allocated to it by the Erasmus Plus programme, after the Italian lead partner Oltre Le Parole Onlus which announced the launch of the course due to take place in Rome in October 2021, also the Polish partner, the Biel-sko Grodzki Theatre Artistic Association (www.teatrgrodzki.pl/en), has just completed the first phase of preparations for the Re.Sto.re. training course. The course will take place online in accordance with the regulations currently in force in Poland and in order to avoid possible future restrictions, thus reaching 20 operators in the

artistic field and making the distribution of participants more widespread throughout the country.

Kicking off on 13 September:

23 training sessions, each lasting 6 hours and taking place twice a week. In addition to the group sessions, there will be 22 hours of individual work by participants. These will be devoted to the study of multimedia materials and various relevant resources provided by the trainers, as well as work related to evaluation procedures. In addition, the trainers will offer individual supervision to the trainees to support them in planning and realising their artistic projects with socially vulnerable groups.

A dedicated promotional campaign was conducted by the partner organization to reach representatives of different professions active in the field of social inclusion.

The main communication channels used to spread the word about participating in the course also included extensive use of social media and the involvement of a wide network of stakeholders from the

educational/cultural sectors. Accounts dedicated to recruiting training participants were specifically created on Instagram and Facebook, and a number of organisations previously involved in the Grodzki Theatre's activities offered their input to promote the course.

There will be seven trainers conducting the course:

all of them are highly experienced in the application of the arts, especially theater, in adult education activities. One of them will be in charge of designing and implementing different evaluation techniques, to make sure that the learning outcomes of the whole process are clearly defined and monitored. The training program will be divided into modules according to the thematic areas agreed with the Re.Sto.Re. partners.

NEWS FROM ITALY

Olp updates us on the current status of applications for the OTS course they are organising in Italy, based in Rome. A total of 56 applications have been received, of which 42 are from women and 14 from men. They come from all over Italy and their ages range from 22 to 65. They are artists, educators, teachers, psychologists and university graduates and 50% of them have already attended specific social theatre courses or similar masters, while 70% have already had experience of running workshops in vulnerable situations. A group of 23 people was selected and we can now announce the official launch of the 1st European Social Theatre Operator Course.

Stay tuned! We will soon have news about the upcoming courses in Portugal and Ireland and the next Transnational Meeting that will be held in Slovenia on 8/9 October 2021. The ProSoc Association (www.facebook.com/DrustvoProSoc/) will host all the Restore project partners in the beautiful Kranj for two intensive days.

BREAKING NEWS

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www.facebook.com/progettorestore

