

SOCIAL ACTING

COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the 'Social Acting' project partners

Coordinator:



Pramata & Thamata

Partner organisations:

NORDISK
TEATER
LABORATORIUM



Nordisk

Teaterlaboratorium



μοντέρνοι καιροί
δραματική σχολή & θέατρος

Modernoi Kairoi

TEATR BRAMA
БРАМА

Stowarzyszenie
Edukacyjno-
Społeczno-
Kulturalne Teatr
Brama

act. SCHOOL
FOR ALL

Actors School



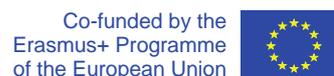
Replika Cultural
Association

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1 Preface

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all kinds of operations worldwide, and theatre has not been an exception. Social Acting, a project with theatre at heart, was forced to have its activities suspended due to the lockdowns taking place all over Europe. The present report seeks to cast light on how the pandemic has affected the partner organisations situated in the following member states: Denmark, Greece, Poland, Portugal, Romania. In addition, the report showcases real-life examples of adaptation to a somewhat unprecedented event by organisations where physical presence has traditionally been a given.

2 Feedback

Partners were asked to share their experiences during the lockdowns. With the help of the two questions that follow, partners described how the pandemic affected their operations, how they managed to mitigate the lockdowns' negative results, and how they "made the best out of it".

2.1 Question 1: How were your organisation's operations and activities affected by the pandemic?

Denmark: The Danish government cancelled all activities in Holstebro, where Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium is located, so all international activities for spring and summer 2020, such as performance seminars and visits, have been cancelled. Given that the situation for autumn 2020 is uncertain and Danish border restrictions are in place, Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium decided to also cancel or reschedule planned workshops to March 2021.

Greece: Since the Greek Government decided to ban activities in order to prevent the spreading of the new virus, Drama School Modernoi Kairoi closed its doors between 13 March – 17 May 2020. Classes were still being held online. Online classes consisted of asynchronous homework assignments as well as live sessions. The school reopened in late May and managed to complete the curriculum by the end of July while operating under strict COVID-19 directive. Apart from classes, scheduled performances of the school, including *Exit the King* and *Mayakovski*, as well as a performance in Bucharest, were cancelled. Finally, the pandemic affected a scheduled relocation of the school to a new building, which is now expected to take longer time to complete.

Poland: To control the effects of the pandemic, Poland proceeded to a three-month-long complete lockdown allowing only necessary movement of citizens for things like shopping and doctor visits. Theatre Brama, which works primarily with the local community, was also forced to cease operations during that time. The operations that were affected are performances held by the school's team of ESK volunteers aimed at local groups (children, youth, adults, seniors, disabled), in addition, one new premiere planned to take place in late May. Theatre Brama rescheduled all their summer events and festivals for November 2020 because their funding needs to be spent by the end of the year; it is likely, however, that their funding will be cut in the event of a second wave that prevents them from holding any events. As far as online sessions go, Theatre Brama managed to do a limited amount of artistic work in collaboration with a theatre company in Australia, however, the project never reached a satisfactory level. On a brighter note, the lockdown gave Theatre Brama time to do some administrative work such as organise the extensive archive, redesign their website and begin with the creation of online materials as well as digitisation of the said archive.

Portugal: Actors School (ACT) ceased all activities where physical presence is required for two months. Some acting classes were able to continue with the help of technology, namely Zoom, while regular

classes with the students' physical presence were continued after the complete two-month long lockdown, primarily in open spaces, such as yards.

Romania: Replika Center closed their doors and postpone all activities that required physical presence right after completing the Learning Activities of the current project in March. They adapted their current projects to the online format which were realised using Zoom. The school managed to pull funding from the German Embassy and the French Institute in order to support the online sessions, however, people/students are not fully satisfied with the online sessions. At the same time, the team at Replika Center is concerned about the future and, in particular, the second wave of the pandemic.

2.2 Question 2: Undoubtedly, theatre suffered some of the global pandemic's heavy consequences. How can we turn this damage into fuel for actions that will propel theatre and the society in general to more creative pastures? Give diverse proposals in free format.

Denmark: It may be possible to address the social distancing directive by clever redesign of stages and shifting audience seats because, according to Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium, reducing the size of audiences is not financially feasible especially for small theatre companies. In parallel, efforts are made to redefine theatre as a field where travelling is part of theatre's business side, thus allowing for mobility during lockdown times.

Greece: By nature, theatre is a strong, persistent form of communication art that can and will overcome the pandemic effects. From a business perspective, theatre schools can survive until the end of the pandemic by reducing the size of the audience and increasing the number of theatrical performances.

Poland: According to Theatre Brama, it is not possible to tailor their activities and their established ways of making theatre to the digital way. Attempts were made but they were followed by disappointing results and constant burn outs of all parties involved. Contrary to this disappointing finding, however, Theatre Brama observed that the lockdowns caused a dramatic influx of low-quality "pseudo-theatrical" digital materials on various online social networks, that made Theatre Brama appreciate the value of relevant high-quality materials available online. The team decided to advocate this concept and to create an online repository featuring the best of their works, and keep on populating it with content regardless of the pandemic.

Portugal: An online version of theatre rehearsals can bring some value to the conventional art of theatre. However, the essence of theatre lies on the physical proximity of people, the assembly. It may be possible to reduce the number of spectators and transition to an online audience system, however, actors need to physically be together.

Romania: Replika has been facing challenges when it comes to unplanned integration of new technologies aimed at mitigating the limitations caused by social distancing regulations on Replika's activities.

3 Conclusions

Based on the responses gathered from the drama schools in the five member states, is it evident that the pandemic has had a significant impact on the operations and the schools themselves. The schools had to close their doors and pull their physical activities, such as lessons, rehearsals and performances, on hold until the end of the pandemic. In addition, the funding of some organisations (e.g. Replika Center in Romania) may be reduced by the end of the year because it is calculated on the number of physical events they hold and not on their efforts otherwise. However, almost all partners have sought alternative ways to do their work, namely online sessions using video conferencing platforms such as Zoom, to somewhat limited avail. Finally, most organisations have exploited this opportunity to do administrative work and build a digital archive.

Given the fact that physical proximity and people's assembly is part of the nature of theatre, transcending actual performances and rehearsals to an online "plane" is very challenging. However, smart redesign of existing stages to comply with the COVID-19 directive may help. Shifting to a smaller audience model with more performances could be a viable solution for temporary financing according to the Greek partner, however, the Danish partner disagrees. Moreover, several partners agree that this is the time to invest in high-quality digital archives and online repositories that can pave the way for a reference of widely accessible theatrical tools and materials.
