



# Acting Diversity

A Project of Intercultural Theatre for Political Refugees and Young

October 1<sup>st</sup> 2012 – September 30<sup>th</sup> 2013

With the support of Anna Lindh Foundation - [www.euromedalex.org](http://www.euromedalex.org)

**Acting Diversity** is 3 artistic and cultural organizations in Italy, Palestine and the United Kingdom, but also asylum seekers, political refugees, migrants and young people from all over the world.

**Acting Diversity** is 2 intercultural theatre workshops with asylum seekers, political refugees, migrants and young people who will give life to 2 final shows about such issues as interculture, racism, migration, citizenship and human rights.

**Acting Diversity** is 2 theatre festivals, 3 different local communities in 3 Countries of the Euro-Mediterranean area and 1 network of institutions, associations, organizations and people working in social, educational, cultural and artistic fields.

**Acting Diversity** is 3 exchange workshops between professional artist working not only in theatrical contexts, belonging to Teatro dell'Argine (Italy), Al-Harah Theater (Palestine), Badac Theatre Company (United Kingdom) in order to find new ways for Art and Civil Society.

**Acting Diversity** is Theatre acting as cultural, social and educational tool, useful to foster intercultural dialogue, active promotion of diversity, for the development of a more integrated, democratic and inclusive society.

## **Background and context**

After all the events during 2011 in North Africa and Middle-East, the challenges that migrants and, above all, asylum seekers and political refugees throw to EuroMed Countries, are more and more high and exciting. But, also, the conflict level is increasing, in cities and suburbs of the welcoming Countries, in political as well as in social life. Public and private institutions are increasingly wondering about welcoming procedures dealing not only with mere subsistence. Learning and spreading mutual understanding and intercultural dialogue is more and more important: in this field, theatre and the arts can provide helpful tools, consisting in body language, incitement of sensibility and creativity, exchange and teamwork which are keywords in the theatrical work.

## **General Objectives**

Contributing to intercultural dialogue and the promotion of diversity as tools for cooperation, social cohesion and inclusion, encouraging artistic exchange and cultural creativity, also through community's involvement and mobilization, to strengthen the sense of rights and citizenship.

## **Specific Objectives**

Encouraging active participation and teamwork of migrants, asylum seekers, political refugees, young people, theatre students and professionals, in experimenting informal learning methods, in order to stimulate their involvement in public life and to create spaces for individual expression and social participation; promoting teamwork oriented to the dialogue between different people, in order to know different cultures, religions, traditions and personal life experiences; fighting stereotypes, widespread in the public opinion, about migrants; fostering the diffusion of culture and art as work tools to favour intercultural dialogue; improving cooperation and the exchange of practices and artistic methods, to be applied also in informal education in the EuroMed area, by sustaining, among other things, transnational mobility of cultural operators.

Main activities:

### **1) Two intercultural theatre workshops held by directors and playwrights of TdA in Italy:**

- the first includes migrants, asylum seekers, political refugees and young people, aged 18 to 35;
- the second includes young people and students, aged 18 to 25;

### **2) International exchange of artistic methods:**

- the artists of Al-Harah Theater (Palestine) and those of Badac Theatre Company (United Kingdom) will take part in both the Italian theatre workshops with two intensive work sessions. Not only the workshop participants will be involved in the intensive sessions, but also the professional workers and artists of the Company, in order to facilitate a comparison and an exchange on theories and practices of theatre work about such themes as those implicated in the project; to explore new possible ways for theatre as tool of intercultural dialogue, active citizenship and social inclusion; and, finally, to activate a moment of mutual information and update about the condition of refugees in the so different areas of the 3 partners;
- during the project period, two TdA artists will be hosted in the partners' centres, respectively in Palestine and the United Kingdom, to develop similar exchange workshops with artists and operators of the two partner Companies. In the case of Palestine, TdA will meet the artists of Al-Harah Theater and the workers of the refugees camps around Beit Jala, near Bethlehem, headquarter of the Palestinian Company. In the case of England, TdA will meet Badac Theatre Company's artists, all along committed to human rights, and the girls of St. Albans School, who live and study in high-tension intercultural contexts;

### **3) Two shows and two final festivals:**

- The workshop with young people and students 18 to 25 years-old will lead to a show premiering in *ITC Teatro's Festival of Schools in May 2013*;

- The workshop with migrants, asylum seekers, political refugees and young people will lead to a show, that will have a preview around June 20<sup>th</sup>, World Refugee Day, and two performances during the **intercultural festival *The Scene of Meeting* in July 2013**;

#### 4) **Documentary and guidelines:**

Project's activities will be shot and edited in a documentary that will be shown on screen at the end of the project. Moreover, guidelines about obtained results and activated processes will be drawn up and spread on line, in order to share data with anyone who deals with similar paths and themes.

#### **Added Value in relation with Anna Lindh Foundation's Policy**

As regards Anna Lindh Foundation's **4Ds Strategy**, *Democracy, Development, Diversity, Dialogue*, this project can provide a contribution, both for proposed contents and activities, and for the typology of involved partners and beneficiaries, including public opinion and civil society.

- Intercultural **dialogue** is the base of TdA's work with multicultural groups since 2005. Theatre, in its essence, requires teamwork and dialogue: each participant has to cooperate and give his/her contribution to a common purpose, through body language, choral work, the exchange of personal stories, the attempt of putting him/herself in somebody else's shoes; besides, interculturality is also one of the themes of the final shows;
- **diversity** is a resource in theatre: different cultures and religions, origins and experiences do not absolutely breed conflicts; on the contrary, they are strong values, because they bring with themselves new inspirations and fresh perspectives. Besides, three different professional and human experiences meet together here: Al-Harah's work in Palestinian refugees camps, Badac Theatre's work on human rights and TdA's work with refugees in Italy. In addition, the union of different theatre professionals and various cultural activities and experiences can improve the cross-cultural players' capacity to elaborate their own productions with an intercultural approach;
- When you work with migrants, asylum seekers and political refugees, "**democracy**" is a keyword: for them, in hosting countries, the main issue concerns specifically citizenship and rights respect;
- Multicultural groups are of great help for their members, many of whom have just arrived in the hosting country, for example in building new social relationships; moreover, these groups contribute to avoid ghetto policies and encourage human and artistic **development**, because contributions to the artistic work do not come only from one, but from several cultures.

#### **Direct and indirect beneficiaries**

The groups and organizations involved in different ways are:

- at least 20 among asylum seekers, political refugees, migrants and young (from 18 to 35 years old), forming the first intercultural group;
- at least 15 among young people and students (from 18 to 25 years old) forming the second intercultural group;
- about 90 students of St. Albans School for girls (15 and 16 years old) taking part to the performance and the local workshop held in the United Kingdom by Badac Theatre, about the issues of human rights, racism and intercultural dialogue;
- about 40 among professional artists and theatrical operators of Al-Harah Theater, Badac Theatre Company and Teatro dell'Argine;
- the audience of ITC Teatro's Festival of Schools;
- the audience of the preview in the World Refugee Day;
- the audience of the Festival *The Scene of Meeting*;
- the audience of the documentary screening;

- the audience of the post drama work and documentary meetings;
- families, friends, relatives of the workshop's participants;
- organizations of the civil society working with asylum seekers, political refugees and migrants in the three partner cities (London, Beit Jala, and Bologna metropolitan area);
- public institutions (the referential municipalities, Bologna Province, Emilia-Romagna Region, Bologna University);
- the local schools, especially in Italy;
- the Anna Lindh Foundation network;
- the local communities of London, Bologna, San Lazzaro di Savena and Beit Jala;
- artists, theater professionals, cultural, educational, social and youth workers in the partner cities.

### **Project Origin**

Since 2005, reflexion and theatrical work on and with asylum seekers and political refugees is part and parcel of TdA's project. The Company acts in an area that strongly needs different interventions on behalf of hosting, in general, migrants and, particularly, political refugees. For TdA the reflexion is double: cultural-artistic and social.

On the one hand, the wealth, spurs, creativity and diversity of perspectives, which a multicultural company brings on, if compared to a monocultural one, are incredible: working with people having different cultures, religions, experiences, opinions, entails that each member of the group, professional or non-professional, can learn and experiment new theatrical skills and exercises, dances, music, approaches, methods, emotions and masks.

On the other hand, Emilia-Romagna Region and other social, educational and political institutions, are more and more trying to involve TdA and other organizations which lead development and community projects that could be really useful during reception and integration, providing migrants with more than just food and lodging. So, it's very important for TdA to be constantly updated about the real situation of migrants and refugees in the Euro-Mediterranean area, to better understand the people with whom the Company is working, in order to be ready to what they bring with themselves.

In this direction, Badac Theatre and Al-Harah Theater have introduced themselves as perfect partners for TdA. Both have cooperated several times with our company in different projects: co-production of shows, European projects, drama workshops, network activities; always mixing social and artistic purposes. As previously mentioned, Badac Theatre has a long experience on using theatre to work on human rights issues, and has produced workshops and shows on domestic violence, mental illness, social exclusion, Holocaust, and on the situation in Palestine: very burning issue for all the EuroMed area. Al-Harah Theater has a long experience on production of shows and workshops for the referential communities: children's activities inside the refugees camps, created to help the community, through theatre, to feel stronger and more peaceful, and seek to reduce the deep sense of social insecurity permeating it.

It's been natural for TdA to seek and develop its own intercultural work with the help of these two partners, both very engaged in the respective fields of action and competence, very different from one other as concerns social context and expected beneficiaries, both aware of the situation of their own countries and very determined to work towards a possible change and to obtain something new from one another.

### **Working methodology**

The method behind the Italian workshop is based on active involvement of each group member, on professional competence of the three partners and constant exchange among the theatrical practices, and common moments of discussion about main themes.

The choral work will be led through breathing, voice and body exercises; improvisations on themes related to political asylum, migration, racism, stereotypes on "the stranger", working with and

without music, with and without words, exercises for text creation and storytelling, dramatization of the created materials and so on.

The participants will be invited to lead part of the workshop, to propose exercises, dances and music of their country of origin, in the spirit of peer education and exchange. The participants will also have the possibility to practice other languages, to meet young members with other cultural backgrounds, to improve their artistic and communicative skills.

The same spirit will guide the international artistic methods exchange workshops in Italy, Palestine and United Kingdom, and also the creation of the final shows, which will be elaborated on the base of materials created by the participants.

Moreover, it will be given to the shows' audience the opportunity to improve knowledge and sensibility by the project themes: a deeper awareness can create a wider comprehension and reduce social conflicts, for a more cohesive and inclusive society.

[The content of this publication is the sole responsibility of Teatro dell'Argine and does not necessarily reflect the position of the Anna Lindh Foundation.]