



## **“The Art of Reading: Prison Theatre and Literacy”**

**March 2018**

Frédéric Schoenaers, Salim Megherbi<sup>1</sup>  
Centre de Recherche et d’Interventions Sociologiques (CRIS)  
University of Liege

*“The theatre helps people to grow!”*  
Actor - inmate (Spain)

### **1. General Introduction**

The project "The Art of Reading: Theatre in Prison and Literacy" <sup>2</sup> is born from the collaboration among five organisations in the context of the “Erasmus +” programme concerned with the issue of literacy through prison theatre. Three theatre companies (Alarm Theatre, Germany; Teatro Del Norte, Spain; and Teatro Nucleo, Italy); a social action organisation (Alpha Centuri, Italy) and a university (University of Liège, Belgium) partnered to develop prison theatre programmes that could be analysed for their impacts on inmate literacy and social progress.

Carried out between September 2015 and September 2018, the programme resulted in the introduction of theatre workshops in different prisons and the production of reports derived from the experience and analysis of the programme. The first report (output 1) constitutes a “toolbox” establishing a series of specific proposals for re-producing a theatre workshop in prison with the goal of improving literacy of the participants.

This report (output 3) presents the results of research from experiments performed by the three prison theatre companies. The purpose of the research was to investigate whether there is a beneficial link between the participating companies’ prison theatre programmes and the literacy of the inmates.

---

<sup>1</sup> To contact : [f.schoenaers@ulg.ac.be](mailto:f.schoenaers@ulg.ac.be), [s.megherbi@helmo.be](mailto:s.megherbi@helmo.be)

<sup>2</sup> Programme: Erasmus+, Key Action: Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices. Action and field: Strategic Partnerships for adult education. Call: 2015. Project Title: L'Arte di Leggere - alfabetizzazione e teatro in carcere, 2015-2018.

## **2. Presentation of the Project**

Since the revision of the European Prison Rules (EPR) in 2006, penitentiary institutions have faced many challenges. The penitentiaries have been constantly evolving from purely punitive institutions to prisons that incorporate prisoner rights in the punitive process. The ERP principles, based on human rights, propose a general organisation of detention based on the respect for human dignity. These rules, though not binding, have prompted many European countries to revise their prison legislation.

Central to these revisions is the concept of the usefulness of the prison sentence, which sometimes translates into the reconstruction of the penitentiary world. This transformation may include implementing a range of services and activities for detainees that emphasise societal integration, reparation, education and rehabilitation. Paralleling this structural evolution is a demographic change in the prison population. The percent of foreigners incarcerated in European Union (EU) prisons is steadily increasing (over 50% of the population in some nations). This factor further complicates attaining the goals embedded in the 2006 EPR.

The “classic” sociological profile of an inmate<sup>3</sup> is a male, with an over representation in the 25-34 age group, coming from the disadvantaged social classes. The majority are lacking the basic education skills and with the growing number of foreign inmates, many are illiterate in the language of the country where they are imprisoned. Given this educational and language gap, many prisoners lack the basic competence required to undertake any “classically structured” training courses. Thus, there is a need to employ methods outside traditional school parameters. Utilising expressive and corporal methods can provide detainees the pathways to basic and transversal skill acquisition required for tackling structured training and ultimately a better likelihood of success, long term work and social reintegration.

This project aims to improve the skills of educators engaged in prison literacy by comparing them with foreign colleagues and developing a paradigm shift that infuses performing arts into literacy pathways. This will contribute to increasing the number of literate detainees and at the same time providing the transversal competences needed both for access to professional training courses and their social reintegration. Our ultimate goal is to reduce the number of low-skilled adults, especially among the most disadvantaged prison population, and increase their access to individualised training opportunities.

---

<sup>3</sup> FAFEP, Whit paper, 2004, p7.

[https://www.adeppi.be/sites/default/files/pdf/livre\\_blanc\\_sur\\_la\\_formation\\_et\\_leducation\\_permanente\\_en\\_milieu\\_carceral.pdf](https://www.adeppi.be/sites/default/files/pdf/livre_blanc_sur_la_formation_et_leducation_permanente_en_milieu_carceral.pdf)

### **3. Presentation of partners**

#### **3.1. Teatro Nucleo – Ferrara, Italy**

Since its foundation in 1974 in Buenos Aires (rebuilt in 1978 in Ferrara, Italy), the Teatro Nucleo has been devoted to the social aspects of the theatre. It has created theatre workshops in psychiatric hospitals and in communities for drug addicts. More generally, it has designed and managed theatrical activities in non-formal educational settings throughout Europe and Latin America. On international tours, Teatro Nucleo has performed street theatre shows always accompanied by training initiatives directed at both theatre operators and spectators. In the squares and streets, the theatre acquires a social dimension and a specific pedagogy that allows dialogue and communication with marginal sectors of society not available in traditional cultural offerings. It has also participated in the training of social workers, educators and street workers in collaboration with the University of Ferrara.

In agreement with the Municipality of Ferrara, Teatro Nucleo manages a theatrical venue on the northern outskirts of the city. This is historically a working area that is currently confronted with serious problems of precarious work, strong presence of immigrants and young people at risk of leaving school. Since 2009, it has created successful inter-generational projects with an association of more than sixty residents (between the ages of 8 and 80) in the neighbourhood where they are the actors and co-authors of shows.

Teatro Nucleo has been operating a permanent theatre workshop in the Ferrara Prison since 2005 and has started a stable collaboration with elementary school teachers inside the prison. In the specific context of literacy, Teatro Nucleo has responded to the learning needs of foreign detainees housed in the Ferrara's Casa Circondariale. Also, the Teatro Nucleo has been the founding partner and promoter of the Coordination of "Teatro Carcere" of the Emilia-Romagna Region since 2011. It is a network that includes the prisons of the region, the Emilia-Romagna Region (Department of Culture/Education/Labor/Social Services), the Penitentiary Administration of the Ministry of Justice (PRAP), seven municipalities of the Emilia-Romagna Region and the University of Bologna. The Coordination was created to implement shared projects monitored by the University of Bologna. Through the Regional Coordination, a debate has begun at the national level regarding the "Thinking about Education" document that highlights the position of the European High Level Group on Literacy.

#### **3.2. Teatro Del Norte – Lugones, Spain**

Teatro Del Norte was created in February 1985 as a meeting group and a research space for experimentation around the theatrical event. Since then, its activities have shown great sensitivity to various social issues devoting increasingly more energy to literacy, gender differences, and migration. These themes are addressed in specific labs for sector professionals, and above all for interested citizens. The artistic research work has become a vehicle to address situations in our fast changing daily life. A great innovation in the flat landscape of Asturian theatre, it is a platform for confrontation and knowledge for young

European theatricals, a place for reflection and new ways of theatrical pedagogy, and an open avenue to bands of the population far from the cultural centres.

Teatro Del Norte has created over fifty theatrical performances and countless seminars and pedagogical and educational projects in Spain, Portugal, France, Italy, Egypt, Brazil, USA, Uruguay, Argentina, Mexico, and El Salvador. Teatro del Norte has been working in the cultural, social and non-traditional education sector. Its activities are aimed at everyone, regardless of sex, nationality, age, religion, profession or level of education. It collaborates with local authorities, school establishments and other territorial organisations in projects that promote active citizen participation and governance processes that contribute to lifelong learning and inclusion, social cohesion and intercultural dialogue.

Teatro Del Norte has gained extensive experience in the realisation of educational projects through social theatre, which allows it to address the less educated segments of the population. The same techniques have been successfully used both in local training and in European workshops and seminars. Teatro Del Norte is particularly attentive to European-wide initiatives and the integration of good learning practices. Since 2011, it has been part of two Grundtvig Learning Partnerships, whose activities have enriched initiatives to promote awareness, education and dialogue at the European level. Teatro del Norte has been involved in a prison theatre project developed with and for Oviedo prison detainees in an attempt to offer new opportunities for learning and perspectives for social and professional reintegration.

### **3.3. Alarm Theatre – Bielefeld, Germany**

Alarm Theatre, founded in 1993, is an independent theatre and a socio-cultural centre. In relation to the interaction between art and pedagogy, the theatre organises up to eight productions annually with disadvantaged individuals of diverse ages and backgrounds. Productions address social issues such as racism, dementia, dependence, unemployment, and the problem of abandoning school. Participants act in their sociocultural context and are stimulated in their artistic expression. At the theatrical meeting, participants can think creatively about their usual behaviour. In the encounter with the public a change is made in the way of thinking about inequality and social and cultural exclusion.

For many years Alarm Theatre has been conducting projects for the cultural education of "disadvantaged" students in secondary schools. It is currently participating in the cultural evolutionary process in the city of Bielefeld. Also, for more than ten years, Alarm Theatre has developed activities for prisons. It performs theatre workshops through which it refined its own pedagogical techniques for the teaching of theatrical art and the production of performances both for detainees and the general public.

The expertise that Alarm Theatre contributes to the field of informal theatrical pedagogy relies on the ability of its staff to utilise mental and practical forms that converge around a shared and well-defined project. It also requires the ability to speak to and be received by problematic personalities (young drop-outs, refugees, immigrants and detainees). Rather than focusing on professional qualifications, Alarm Theatre stresses the ability of staff to work together, to instil in learners the desire to learn, to collaborate without friction or

conflict in different settings (such as prisons), to persevere in difficulty and to have an open spirit in research and experimentation. Over the years these skills have grown, resulting in the awarding of the highest prizes.

### **3.4. CRIS-University of Liege – Liege, Belgium**

The University of Liège (ULiège) is a public and pluralist university, which hosts about 22,000 students, employs 4,300 individuals, including 2,800 teachers and researchers. ULiège offers a rich and varied curricula and is deeply involved in several international research programs.

The Center for Research and Sociological Interventions (CRSI) is a research centre that brings together various services from the faculty of Social Sciences. Its primary purpose is the promotion of research and sociological intervention in the domains of the analysis of organizations, collective and public action and the social problems that transcend our society.

Over the years, CRSI has been able to develop considerable expertise and is recognised at the European level, in the domains of health, scientific and industrial innovation, justice and social policies. In addition, the CRSI is intended as a space for reflection and exchange between scientists and professionals. The latest CRSI research is concerned with the changes that are occurring in our society, with specific reference to issues related to social exclusion and the impact of public policy.

The experience and skills of CRSI researchers at the University of Liège are widely present in four sub-topics that transverse this proposed project: prison, prison culture, prisoner literacy and adult education in prison. Since 2005, the various activities (training, cultural, mediation) organized in prison were analysed in order to contribute to this concept of “reparative justice”. Subsequently, CRSI researchers were interested in training adult prisoners in prison, devoting research to vocational training and basic education. The question of the illiteracy in prison, elaborated by the CRSI team, highlighted the emergency of providing literacy activities to detainees in Belgium.

### **3.5. Alpha Centauri – Ferrara, Italy**

Alpha Centauri is currently active in several areas: socio-cultural, sports-environmental, health, information and informal education. The association was born many years ago, spontaneously and informally, by members of civic society and professionals from various sectors voluntarily engaged in initiatives in favour of prisoners in the Ferrara Penitentiary. This work was formalised in 2007 with the establishment of the Social Promotion Association.

Over time, the Association has expanded and diversified its scope to the aforementioned areas, while still maintaining a specific focus on prison work, where it continues to coordinate the activities of volunteers to improve the quality of life in prison. It also strongly supports the reintegration of detainees after their release, also mediating between the various bodies involved in reintegration processes at the end. Alpha Centauri is particularly committed to organizing and supporting all initiatives aimed at fostering dialogue between

prisons and cities, for example at the "Festival di Internazionale" under the "Books Behind the Bars" event but also organising events ad hoc. Inside the prison, Alpha Centauri has collaborated with the Municipality of Ferrara, Professional Training Centres and Third Sector Associations to organised courses, workshops and seminars involving educators and experts in the field of informal education, literacy, ICT, art, agriculture, environment, sports and health.

#### **4. Presentation of the Research**

As specified in the General Introduction, activities of this project were twofold. First, the theatre companies (Alarm Theatre, Teatro del Norte and Teatro Nucleo) that developed theatre workshops in a prison located in their region. Then, a report<sup>4</sup> constituting a "toolbox" was drafted to propose a series of exercises allowing for the concrete establishment of a prison theatre workshop. Simultaneously, our team at the CRSI conducted research based on the work of the partner theatre companies.

The focus of our investigation was the link between theatre work in prison and the improvement in the literacy of the inmates involved therein. Given the below average education level of the inmates, we were interested in examining a non- traditional method of teaching literacy. The theatre a priori, constituted a non-classical teaching method for educating individuals, specifically inmates, in literacy.

The first step in our research was defining literacy and its underlying skills through extensive literacy reviews. This formed the basis of establishing the parameters of the evaluation. With this, we specified our research questions to document the experiences in prison theatre.

Finally, our process allowed us to discuss several response elements concerning the impact of the prison theatre work on the literacy of the inmates.

This report is structured as follows: The methodology used will be specified followed by contextualisation of our research and the literature review examining the concept of literacy. We will then specify our research question and discuss it using the empirical elements collected. The report will end with a discussion of the results obtained and a final conclusion.

#### **5. Methodology**

We based our work on the qualitative research methodology used in social sciences by proceeding in two main stages.

First, we undertook a literature review specifically concerning the concept of "literacy". "Literacy" may include a series of meanings and require the precise definition of the outlines. This approach then allowed us to specify a research question aimed at developing the empirical side of our research.

---

<sup>4</sup> This report is titled "*Toolbox for the use of theatre as a literacy device in prison*".

The second stage of our process consisted of an empirical approach<sup>5</sup> that was divided into three categories. First, we obtained observations of theatre workshop sessions within the prisons and attended theatre performances based on these sessions. By doing so, we were able to obtain specific images of our partners. In addition, we conducted a series of individual and group interviews with organisers of the theatre workshops. Finally, group interviews<sup>6</sup> were conducted at the start and end of each theatre workshop. Specifically, for this method, we attended the first workshop session to meet the inmates and ask them questions that are detailed in the methodological annex. The aim at this stage was to establish base facts about their theatre performances. We reproduced this schema during the last theatre work session with each group in order to assess the evolution of their performances and any learning that may have occurred.

We aimed to obtain information from a meeting with selected inmates in prison in Italy and Spain. Since time was severely constrained, it was necessary to find a method that quickly provided inmates the freedom to speak in front of the group<sup>7</sup>, to overcome language barriers<sup>8</sup> and to establish a positive and favourable climate in the prison<sup>9</sup>. To conduct these group interviews, we used the “Motus” tool<sup>10</sup>, which allowed us to overcome the specific constraints of the environments investigated. “Motus” is now recognised as a solution to achieve certain effectiveness in the collection of the targeted data. It is a “symbolic language tool” allowing exchanges between members of a group (the inmates) typically subject to obstacles. The words of the individuals are facilitated by the use of images<sup>11</sup> provided to the group. One at a time, each member chooses a certain number<sup>12</sup> so as to produce their “response” to a question asked at the start of the process. The use of symbolic images allows the individual’s performance about the problem discussed to be understood since each participant is asked to explain the choice of their images to the group. It also allows understanding of the group’s reaction to the performances of each participant. This method, based on the use of other objects such as images facilitates the expression of the participants and fairly quickly establishes a climate encouraging positive open exchanges. In terms of the use of language, it is facilitated by the use of images and was strengthened by the possibility of translating the exchanges. We conducted “Motus” sessions and transcribed directly<sup>13</sup> the words of each participant.

---

<sup>5</sup> The details of our empirical work are presented in a methodological annex to this report.

<sup>6</sup> We were unable to go to Germany to meet the inmates involved in the theatre workshops. In fact, during our research, the process was cancelled by Alarm Theatre. So we worked with transcripts and interview videos carried out with the inmates having taken part in the workshops.

<sup>7</sup> Number of inmates at each session

<sup>8</sup> We don’t speak Italian or Spanish. In, some inmates do not speak these languages fluently.

<sup>9</sup> In Spain as in Italy, we only had two hours to meet the inmates.

<sup>10</sup> “MOTUS, images for saying things”, developed by the social education workshop “Le Grain”, Editions le Grain, Brussels.

<sup>11</sup> 280 drawings representing a wide range of situations and empty squares allowing drawings by their own hand to be proposed.

<sup>12</sup> In our case, two drawings per participant.

<sup>13</sup> We do not have permission to take a recording device to the prison with us.

## 6. Contextualisation

### 6.1. A Changing Environment?

Since the birth of the prison institution, penal systems and penitentiaries have been the target of strong criticism and incessant controversies (Foucault, 1975; Garland, 1990). In its resolution of 17 December 1998, the European Parliament invited all Member States to develop a "fundamental law on penitentiaries defining a framework regulating the internal legal regime (material), the external legal regime, the right of claim as well as the obligations of the inmates and provides for an independent control body which can be contacted by the inmates in case of a breach of their rights". In addition, the case law of the European Court of Human Rights broadly penetrates the closed prison world (Céré, 2002; Tulkens, 2002). In 2006, the revised version of the European Prison Rules offers member states of the Council of Europe a set of guiding principles based on human rights to be observed in a prison environment. Finally, reports from the International Prison Observatory (IPO) and the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment (CPT) have stigmatised the precarious state of many European penitentiary systems.

The environment of the penitentiary institution is changing and there are new requirements relating to sentence philosophy and the rights of inmates or the "quality of the service" (Boukaert et al., 2006). These requirements notably result in the emergence of the usefulness of the prison sentence (Artières and Lascoumes, 2004). This results in an expected period of reconfiguring the penitentiary with a paradigmatic shift in the execution of the sentence. While the traditional representation of the prison institute is a rigid and opaque place (Veil and Lhuilier, 2000), this new configuration paved the way for a prison to offer "useful" public services focused on reintegration and atonement.

Imprisonment is given a new meaning (Kellens, 2000) inspired by the European Prison Rules focusing on "afterwards". It is now perceived as a process (De Terssac, 2003; Segrestin, 2004) when the time of imprisonment is used to serve other objectives such as reintegration, redress and rehabilitation (Mary et al., 2006) through services and activities offered to inmates. This new design of imprisonment impacts all in the prison world. It aims to limit the detrimental effects of imprisonment by introducing a principle of "standardisation" (Snacken, 2002) that "involves the creation of a framework of existence close to living standards and which should allow many marginalised inmates to learn about ways of living which are close to reality" (Seron, 2006: 555). Thus, the inmate is given responsibility and engaged (Genard, 1999; Vrancken, 2002) via individual planning of their imprisonment. Finally, the prison reform is in keeping with formal recognition of the roles and missions of "guest speakers" (Aymard and Lhuilier, 1997), now defined as "third parties" (Milly, 2004).

The presence of "guest speakers" in prison is materialised through the work of cultural stakeholders such as our theatre company partners. Based on the context, they are recognised and accepted by the prisons where they work. Despite the presence of a favourable institutional framework, we have shown that this *"recognition is linked to an essential condition: the importance of the link between the prison and the "theatre" leaders. Yet, this link is only created at local level since it is particularly based on intuitu personae*

*relationships. As a result, a cultural activity, according to our observations, only appears if one or more stakeholders belonging to the prison affected are favourable and open to allowing the establishment of the project by the companies/associations. By doing so, the contexts of the action are completely contingent depending, at a given and specific moment, on adequate attitudes of certain prison stakeholders with sufficient authority to welcome theatre leaders”* (Schoenaers & Megherbi, 2013: 16). Our partners have clearly maintained these essential links as their work continues today.

## **6.2. Prison theatre**

*“Everyone has the right to freely participate in cultural life, community, enjoy the arts and be involved in the resulting scientific progress and benefits”.*

(Article 27 Al.1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights)

*“Recreational activities, notably including sport, games, cultural activities, pastimes and the practice of active leisure activities, must be offered to inmates and the latter must, as far as possible, be authorised to organising them”.*

Rule 27.6 of the European Prison Rules)

The access by inmates to culture is a right recognised by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In addition, the European Prison Rules insist on the need to allow broad access to activities under the label “culture” that includes, depending on the country and prison, music, cinema, literature, plastic arts and theatre. It is recognised that participation in cultural and creative activities facilitates the development of social and personal skills. It encourages self-confidence and can provide inspiration for learning other subjects and disciplines (Donnay, 2007). Cultural activities may also have a therapeutic effect by offering new ways of thinking and may contribute significantly to the establishment of a reintegration and rehabilitation process (Bi Blasio, 2012).

Among the cultural activities, theatre offers specific possibilities for inmates. It takes on a special form when exercised in prison. Two dimensions<sup>14</sup> are particularly present in this context. The first is the political dimension that aims to offer a representation of a problem (exclusion, diversity, racism, discrimination, etc.) The public performance is part of a recognition process. It allows inmates access to express publicly an experience or suffering. Inmates rarely have the skills required for this type of project from the outset. There is henceforth a relatively long process of interactions where individuals work together to create and assert themselves. This allows a second subjective dimension to develop. In fact, we see a resulting therapeutic effect allowing “restoration of the subjective qualities”<sup>15</sup> of the person, a recovery or production of self-confidence and, in the end, possible resocialisation (Schoenaers & al., 2015). Finally, the “cultural” development of the inmates offered by the theatre could also encourage the “literacy” of the inmates. This is the major

---

<sup>14</sup> BRAHY R., 2010, “Théâtre-action: que vive la démocratie en actes! ”, *Politiques*, n°65, p.70 - 73.

<sup>15</sup> DONNAY J.-Y., VERHOEVEN M., 2007, “Politiques de la subjectivité et insertion socioprofessionnelle”, in CANTELLI F., GENARD J.-L., 2007, *Action publique et subjectivité*, Paris, L.G.D.J., coll. Droit et Société.

question posed by this project and we are going to examine it more closely by defining the concept of “literacy”.

## **7. Literature Review: The Concept of “literacy”<sup>16</sup>**

The meaning of “literacy” covers several dimensions from a rather strict definition to a broader vision. This literature review aims to tackle the subject of “literacy” with the broader view than that of the skills required for pure and simple “literacy”. More specifically, we will attempt to define the social and cultural challenges underpinning literacy by focusing our literature review on the concept of “information literacy”.

### **7.1. Literacy or Information Literacy**

Let’s start with “literacy” and understand how and why it deserves a broader definition.

According to the Education for All Global Monitoring Report published by United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2006), literacy initially refers to the “*process of acquiring literacy*” (p. 156). The most common interpretation of literacy, according to this same report, is the idea of a set of tangible cognitive reading and writing skills (UNESCO, 2006). These skills are also complemented by numeracy skills (“*numeracy*” in the Crowther report submitted to the UK’s Ministry of Education, cited in UNESCO’s 2006 report) which designated it as the “*mirror image of literacy*” (UNESCO, 2006, p. 158). In this same report, we observe a design to conceive literacy in a broader perspective than that of a simple skill independent of its context. It seems essential to study literacy as a practice dependent on a given social context.

According to *Lire et Ecrire*, a Belgian association defending the right to literacy for all, “becoming literate” does not just mean learning to read and write but also presupposes the ability to question and reflect, imagine and create. Becoming literate also consists of everyone’s right to actively participate in the different dimensions of our society (De Clercq, 2015). Similarly, Régine Pierre (2003) suggests questioning this literacy by considering it more broadly and going beyond a minimalist view of the skills required to talk about literacy (Fernandez, 2005). It is in this respect that the concept of information literacy emerges, as “*the way in which individuals can adapt to their environment by digesting new knowledge, by being able to solve problems or creating new knowledge*” (Pierre, 2003. p.12). In a sociological approach to information literacy, this concept is closely related to culture (Pierre, 2003). According to the same author, information literacy has the advantage of reshaping literacy by integrating epistemological, social, historical, political, linguistic, psychological and ideological factors. This determines the way in which individuals in a given society appropriate writing generally. Serge Wagner (cited by Fernandez, 2005) tends to go beyond a functionalist vision of literacy, functioning within a society by a process of perception of the written code. There is a specific understanding of this code and of its role in a specific cultural context with references to the social, symbolic and economic universes shared within this society.

---

<sup>16</sup> The authors thank Florence Albert and David Bedji, students of the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Liège, who have contributed to this literature review.

According to Vanhulle and Schilling (2003), information literacy should be presented in the form of three metaphors. It should be *“an adaptation to social expectations”, “an ability to achieve aspirations and participate in social changes”* and *“a kind of sense of grace achieved by a literate person”* (p.2).

The Organisation for European Cooperation Development (OECD) (2000) considers information literacy in the context of a broader equation, that of human capital. From an individual point of view, information literacy helps to improve an individual 's participation in society, their position in the employment market and their income. From a global point of view, the issue is more complex. We will return to this point later. *“Society deems that all its members should have a high level of information literacy to guarantee broad participation in economic, social, cultural and political life”* (OECD, 2000, p.84). Therefore, information literacy is an essential part of citizenship.

Literacy is a broad concept notably including the dimension of information literacy. Understood as such, the concept covers the acquisition of “technical” skills such as reading, writing and calculation as well as provisions related to a type of citizenship. This then concerns the learning of “social” skills allowing a form of full participation in society through thinking, imagining or creating.

## **7.2. Literacy: Which Skills Are Required?**

Literacy skills fall into two categories, “basic skills” and “key skills” (Daratos, 2016).

The basic skills are summarised in three categories: information literacy, numeracy and the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) (Daratos, 2016). In terms of “key skills”, there are eight of them:

- “Communication in the mother tongue (listening, speaking, reading, writing);
- Communication in foreign languages;
- Maths skills and basic skills in science and technology (solid mastery of calculation, reasoning, ability and desire to use mathematical models of thought and representation, etc.);
- Numerical skills (safe and critical use of information society technologies, mastery of ICT, etc.);
- Learning to learn (undertaking and continuing with learning, organising your learning yourself, including effective time and information management, ability to persevere with learning, motivation, confidence, etc.);
- Social and civic skills: personal, interpersonal and intercultural covering all types of behaviour to be managed by an individual to be able to effectively and constructively participate in social and professional life as well as civic and democratic life;
- Initiative and enterprising spirit (creativity, innovation, taking risks, etc.); and
- Sensitivity and cultural expression” (Daratos, 2016, p.25).

### 7.3. Information Literacy: Determining Variables

A report published in 2000 by the OECD looks beyond a simple definition of information literacy to consider factors influencing its performance. According to this report, it is undeniable that information literacy is closely linked to the level of education. However, considering this single link leads us to a paradox. In some countries, a significant number of poorly educated adults achieve a high level of information literacy. This report also reveals other factors influencing the level of information literacy and the level of education (OECD, 2000):

- age;
- professional category;
- speaking a language other than that in which the information literacy level is tested;
- participation in active life;
- structured education for adults and informal learning at work; and
- the reduction of socio-economic inequalities within society.

Other factors also influence information literacy. In addition to education level in the strictest sense, other elements allow the achievement of objectives underpinned by the notion of information literacy. In terms of learning, this opens the way for educational devices other than a formal education. In this sense, information literacy may be considered by non-formal education devices such as theatre for example (we 'll return to this).

### 7.4. Literacy/Information Literacy Practices

#### a) Information Literacy as a Social Practice

Barton and Hamilton (2010) study information literacy as a *social practice*. According to these authors, information literacy should be considered as a set of practices. In reality, it is formed of various information literacies corresponding to the different areas of life that encompass broader social objectives. In addition, changes in practices take place in the context of the learning processes and it will therefore be situated historically. Barton and Hamilton (2010) discuss *writing practices* for studying the link between reading and/or writing practices and the social structures surrounding them. Writing practices go beyond directly observable activities to understand the complexity thereof. These authors also use the term *information literacy event* to refer to social practices in which information literacy plays a role. By observing these different events, we observe that information literacy can take the form of different practices according to social and cultural contexts. Therefore, there are as many literacies as there are distinct fields of activity (home, work, school, etc.) and different cultures.

#### b) Cooperation in Literacy

Norbert Alter (2009) presents cooperation as being a "*creation of a social link through exchanges*" (Storme, 2015, p.12) and a "*source of learning, professional support, pleasure and feeling of belonging*" (Storme, 2015, p.12). Understood as such, cooperation may be encouraged by a literacy process. Storme (2015), from *Lire et Ecrire* suggests studying the

cooperative practices in popular literacy. She prefers the concept of cooperation when talking about literacy practices to the concept of collaboration which, based on Alter's definition (cited by Storme 2015), unlike cooperation, would refer to an economic productivity or effectiveness objective. In its charter, *Lire et Ecrire* considers that its objective to develop literacy through emancipation and more social equality, requires a collective action and the participation of individuals (Storme, 2015). Cooperative practices are part of the objective of collective skills as an emancipation method (Letor, 2010, cited by Storme, 2015). These cooperative practices must aim to encourage several "values" of literacy. First, these practices must consider participation and emancipation via the development of collective skills (Letor, 2010, cited by Storme, 2015) as already mentioned above. Second, these practices should focus more on solidarity and openness through intercultural methods. Literacy practices should encourage "living together" through the meeting of different cultures and their constructive contrast.

Three approaches are required in order to "*access communication, understanding and tolerance when faced with diversity*" (Margalit Cohen-Emerique, 1997, cited by Storme, 2015). This means, first, a decentring process focusing on getting to know yourself better as well as the reference settings to establish some distance between them. The second stage consists of the discovery and openness to the reference settings of others to understand their identity. Finally, the time required for mediation between the codes which may be conflicting in order to reach a compromise and to respect each other identities. The idea is to question your own subjectivity through contact with the other person to develop together.

These cooperative practices are expected to favour coherence and innovation so as to fulfil the diversity of specific needs while providing global responses to support the literacy project. Finally, these cooperative practices must support the self in a social construction approach to know-how that has a privileged place in popular literacy. This resonates with "*learning takes place in a socialised setting. We learn "with" others - through cooperation - and against others - through confrontation, contradiction*" (Storme, 2015, p.16). Learning is increasingly constructed by the learners themselves and not with a view to the pure transmission of know-how. Again, this is more focused on participation requiring building on the skills and resources of the people involved in the learning and coherently directing them towards a common goal (Storme, 2015).

Focusing on objectives such as emancipation, participation, equality, solidarity, openness to interculturality or innovation is never an obvious task. There may be hinderances that slow or obstruct attainment of cooperative literacy practices. "*The establishment and the maintenance of a climate of trust, based on friendliness and respect, as well as non-judgement, are crucial to allowing cooperative work to develop*" (Storme, 2015, p. 17). It is also important to define the common interests allowing the emergence of a collective identity to give meaning to this cooperation which also requires compromises, questioning skills and a certain personal desire from those involved, avoiding the image of an imposed procedure at all costs (Storme, 2015).

The literacy process also includes the learning of cooperation, an essential element for integration in a given social group. There is the possibility of offering learners the capacity

for self-construction of the education device, applying the same logic as informal learning (different from a pure transformation of “technical” know-how).

### c) Cultural Practices

According to De Clercq (2015), becoming literate also involves actively participating in society and its cultural dimension. The right to participate in cultural life, forming part of several legal texts such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is unfortunately not always acquired by a large part of the population. This cultural exclusion is statistically linked to socio-economic exclusion. Karyne Wattiaux<sup>17</sup>, cited by De Clercq (2015), goes as far as comparing language to culture, thus allowing artistic expression workshops for literacy to be considered as privileged places for participation in society.

For *Lire et Ecrire*, creative practices are powerful drivers of learning. Education involving literacy is increasingly based on varied artistic and cultural practices. These practices offer real triggers for pleasure and creativity thus representing a certain vector of emancipation sought by literacy practices. This cultural approach aims to meet the objective of openness to interculturality presented by Storme (2015). As Michelle Minne<sup>18</sup> said during the inauguration of the Arts and Literary Festival in 2012: “*therefore, the integration of creativity in a literacy process is an essential challenge of permanent education since it not only allows personal development and self-expression as well as access to other cultures. Because participating in cultural life is a factor of freedom and social impetus*” (De Clercq, 2015, p.44). This festival, intended to meet a need in society for expression spaces, is therefore a specific example of “living together” forming tighter links than those offered by integration, activation or insertion policies (De Clercq, 2015).

With a view to an informal education device, cultural and/or creative practices constitute powerful drivers of learning. They encourage self-expression, result in personal fulfilment, and facilitate the establishment of a process for the acquisition of social skills useful for active participation in society.

## 7.5. Assessment of the Literacy Action: How is it Assessed?

### a) Individual Impacts

*Lire et Ecrire* (2010) presents, in one of their reports, five categories of impacts of the literacy action as follows:

- *Transformation of identity*: personal emancipation, feeling of progress; self esteem, restoration of a positive identity, improvement of relationships with family and support persons, the feeling of overcoming isolation, etc;
- *Basic knowledge and know-how*:
  - First circle: linguistic and maths skills;
  - Second circle: technological or media-related skills, related to the first circle;

<sup>17</sup> Educational advisor at Lire et Ecrire Brussels and leader of writing workshops

<sup>18</sup> Member of the permanent steering committee on the literacy of adults and secretary of the General Department of Youth Services and Continuing Education.

- Third circle: skills concerning orientation in time and space; and
- *Social integration*: effects on daily life (administrative, legal, medical approaches, access to leisure), evolution of social relationships (broadening of the network, level of integration, etc.);
- *Work and socioprofessional integration*: impact of the level of employment, professional plans, impact at the level of professional training, impact at the level of the driving licence as a key element of socioprofessional integration;
- *Citizen participation*: involvement at the level of the education of children, access to cultural spaces, access to know-how, access to rights, intercultural positioning, awareness and critical thinking, etc.

We can consider these five categories of impacts of literacy as learning levels able to be used to assess the influence among learners.

## **b) Societal Impacts**

The OECD (200) identifies impacts mainly at the macro level. In other words, more “societal” impacts b- and, to a lesser extent, at meso level. In addition to encouraging personal development of life in society and in the employment market of an individual, information literacy can also contribute to the overall socio-economic return.

First, the OECD (2000) reports an important link between information literacy and various phenomena related to the employment market. At a constant education level, information literacy is a positive vector of change in the knowledge economy, leading to increased employability, decreased unemployment and/or increased income. Via different analyses, the OECD observes a link between economic inequality and equality in information literacy. At this stage, it is yet to be determined the direction and degree of any causal relationship. Nevertheless, the information literacy level influences the level of income in many countries regardless of educational attainment.

Finally, outside the employment market, the economic market and thus from a more meso point of view, the level of information literacy allows an improvement in social cohesion, health and participation in political life, particularly for women. Therefore, information literacy offers a significant contribution to the quality of life and conditions in OECD countries (OECD, 2000).

## **7.6. Conclusion**

Through this brief literature review, we can observe that there are several recurring “themes” when we analyse information literacy. First, we find the theme of skills, “basic skills” and “key skills” (Daratos, 2016), and lifelong learning (Bastyns, 2006). We note the link between literacy and education that exists without being systematic and sufficient in the analysis of the factors influencing literacy. A link exists between the socio-economic and family context and the level of literacy. We can establish a most crucial link between literacy and issues related to employment, socioprofessional integration and the employment market in both directions of causality (the socioprofessional status influences literacy which is itself in part at the origin of this same status). Citizenship or participation in society is

related to informational literacy. Discussing literacy without studying the question of the learner's identity change does not seem possible. Finally, it is interesting to note that these variables influencing the information literacy status of a person or a society overlap with the useful themes to tackle the effects generated by practices in information literacy. This points to a type of virtual circle between the determinants of information literacy and the effects.

## **8. Research Question**

As a reminder, the project forming the basis of our partnership had the aim of researching the link between theatre work in prison and the literacy of the inmates involved. Starting from an observation linked to the poor education level of the prison population, it seems interesting to consider a specific method for literacy education using an “informal” learning device, namely the theatre.

After the literature review presented previously, it is now possible to specify the questioning proposed.

Literacy is a broad concept which exceeds the acquisition of “technical” know-how to consider mostly “social” skills. Therefore, by extending the point of view, we can perceive, in accordance with the proposal from *Lire et Ecrire* (Godenir, 2010), the impacts of learning based on five categories:

1. *Basic knowledge and know-how*
  - a. First circle: linguistic and math skills;
  - b. Second circle: technological or media-related skills, related to the first circle; and
  - c. Third circle: skills concerning orientation in time and space;
2. *Transformation of identity*: personal emancipation, feeling of progress; self-esteem, restoration of a positive identity, improvement of relationships with family and support persons, the feeling of overcoming isolation, etc.;
3. *Social integration*: effects on daily life (administrative, legal, medical approaches, access to leisure), evolution of social relationships (broadening of the network, level of integration);
4. *Work and socioprofessional integration*: impact of the level of employment, professional plans, impact at the level of professional training, impact at the level of the driving licence as a key element of socioprofessional integration; and
5. *Citizen participation*: involvement at the level of the education of children, access to cultural spaces, access to know-how, access to rights, intercultural positioning, awareness and critical thinking, etc.

Thus our research work proposes perceiving the theatre work as a non-formal educational device, that is not a pure transformation of “technical” know-how. It focuses on the literacy

(in the broadest sense) of the participants in prison theatre workshops. In doing so, we aim to examine the performances of the inmates relative to the learning required by the theatre. Are there elements generating a form of literacy of the participating inmates, specifically with regard to the five categories of impacts mentioned?

## **9. Feedback from the inmates on the learning brought about by the theatre**<sup>19</sup>

This section aims to transversally detail the discourse and performances of the participating inmates concerning theatre contributions. We will address these elements with our questioning on the learning possibilities offered by prison theatre based on the five categories of impacts mentioned above (Godenir, 2010).

### **9.1. Basic Know-how and Skills**<sup>20</sup>: Linguistic Skills

The promotion of linguistic skills relates to a strict notion of literacy. In the contexts of this project, language skill (German, Spanish and Italian) appears essential. In fact, it may seem difficult to consider<sup>21</sup> theatre work without using verbal expression. Language knowledge is essential for taking part in the project and especially for inmates whose native language is not used.

*“I learnt German in prison. By working with the [theatre] group, I learnt lots of words. And I’m trying to learn even more. German is a difficult language but the project was much better than German lessons. I had to talk a lot”.*

Inmate - participant (Germany)

*“Words are important in the theatre. We have to read, sometimes write, speak and listen”.*

Inmate - participant (Italy)

We have already mentioned that many inmates have a relatively low level of education. So by participating in the theatre, some inmates must (re)use skills practised relatively rarely.

*“We had to write a text. I wrote it in my mother tongue, Spanish. German is a difficult language but I learnt it here. It was important for me”.*

Inmate - participant (Germany)

*“Remember all these texts! When I saw the number of pages, 18-19, I wondered how I would be able to do it and remember everything. But*

---

<sup>19</sup> The aim of this section is not to go back over details of the workshops and their organisation or the way in which the leaders do their work. In fact, this description is discussed in depth in the report also taken from this project entitled “*Boîte à outils pour l’implémentation du théâtre comme dispositif d’alphabétisation en prison*”.

<sup>20</sup> We do not address maths and technical know-how and skills relating to orientation in space and time. In fact, the contexts analysed did not result in any information of interest to us.

<sup>21</sup> However, we have observed a lot of physical work or musical expression. These methods did not require any linguistic skills but relate to artistic expression.

*as you get into the [theatre] piece, you manage the transitions and you remember what you have to do with the others”.*

Inmate - participant (Germany)

For most participants the investment is considerable. Getting involved in the theatre project represents a “cost” in terms of effort to be able to sufficiently master the linguistic aspects in front of the group, even in front of the audience. Therefore, with a strict perception of the concept of literacy (from linguistic knowledge), our interviews and observations<sup>22</sup> have convinced us that the majority of participants see a clear improvement in their skills. In the perspective considered by the leaders of the three theatre companies analysed, language is essential to participation in the project. As a result, the improved linguistic level is inherent to the device but does not correspond to an official objective announced by the leaders in any of the three contexts. They never present the theatre workshops as formal language classes. Therefore, we can see a positive emerging effect for the comedians who learned or improved their linguistic skills by the simple fact of being in contact (regularly and in a structured manner) with other participants with better mastery of the language (mutual adjustment) or even through profound contact with the text (to understand, master, express, etc.).

## **9.2. Transformation of Identity**

Literacy, in the broadest sense, may also offer the possibility of a transformation of the individual during the learning process. Referred here are the following: personal emancipation, feeling of progress; self-esteem, restoration of a positive identity, improvement of relationships with family and support persons, the feeling of overcoming isolation. These different opportunities are very clearly expressed by the comedians.

*“In the beginning, I was there, like this, with the others. Then I decided to get involved. We began to write texts. I wrote about my past, my truth. This really helped me to become a new me. It was hard when I had to perform before everyone [the theatre group] for the first time. Then I later read my letter about my mother’s cancer to the group. I found some self-confidence. With you [the theatre leaders], it is like being with family”.*

Inmate - participant (Germany)

*“The theatre aims to make people happy”.*

Theatre leader (Germany)

*“I want to be someone else”.*

Inmate - participant (Germany)

*“I’ve never had such feelings without drugs”.*

Inmate - participant (Germany)

---

<sup>22</sup> For example, we have not quantified this evolution using a language test. This type of test is not within our skills since we work in environments where we do not have mastery of the national language. Finally, this method appears ineffective in the eyes of the theatre companies as they do not claim to formally provide participants with language classes.

*"I did something I never considered before. Writing about my life and recounting it to others".*

Inmate - participant (Germany)

*"Thanks to theatre, I've found happiness, joy. Over the years, I've built a wall to hide behind. And something changed. The wall has fallen".*

Inmate - participant (Germany)

*"Something changed in me. I improved at each session. My health has improved. I have found myself".*

Inmate - participant (Germany)

*"Thanks to my theatre work, I understand that I can accomplish what I want in my life. All I need is the desire to do so.*

Inmate - participant (Germany)

*"Theatre has been important to me, to work on myself. Because when I am released from prison, I want to be someone else [she cries]. I think I have managed to become someone else. I now know what I want and what I don't want. The wardens have also noticed this change. It is thanks to you [the theatre leaders]".*

Inmate - participant (Germany)

*"Theatre can save people"*

Inmate - participant (Italy)

*"Theatre is freedom"!*

Inmate - participant (Italy)

*"Theatre in prison is like opening a window. You open it and you see somewhere else, outside the prison, beyond. For me, it allows me to escape from myself".*

Inmate - participant (Italy)

*"I feel like theatre opens up the imagination. It gives me a feeling of calm. It opens up a new dimension which removes all others, which opens up new possibilities. It makes me feel like a new person" .*

Inmate - participant (Italy)

*"The joy, energy, strength provided by the theatre".*

Inmate - participant (Italy)

*"I never knew what it was like to be a normal person".*

Inmate - participant (Italy)

*"Theatre allows me to express myself without hurting anyone".*

Inmate - participant (Italy)

*"[Just after a public performance] I come from a world where you become someone when you do something really bad. This is the first time I've felt like someone by doing something good".*

Inmate - participant (Spain)

*“While performing, we can forget who we really are”.*

Inmate - participant (Spain)

*“We put our complexes to one side to dare to say who we really are”.*

Inmate - participant (Spain)

*“For us, theatre is a new way of expressing feelings” .*

Inmate - participant (Spain)

*“It is a form of security, without drugs. We can smile, we can be real, exist”.*

Inmate - participant (Spain)

These many extracts show how theatre can facilitate a transformation of identity for the participants. This emancipation paves the way, during workshops or shows, to offer actors a reality different from their prison reality. This provides the opportunity for self-expression other than the status prescribed by the prison. In fact, playing a role is very effective for escaping from the status of inmate, and may also be seen in the positive (re)construction of the inmates. Theatre allows actors to consider alternative identities, to work on themselves, to glimpse a form of self-recognition (subjugated by the performance), which may be essential assets when it comes to their release.

### **9.3. Social Integration**

In addition to a positive impact on identity, theatre as a literacy device also positively affects integration and social cohesion. By participating in the theatre project, actors have the chance, even the obligation, to be part of a “troupe”, a social group formed for a reason. For them, this is a rather unique opportunity during their imprisonment.

*“The best thing I got from my participation in the [theatre] project is cohesion: everyone cares about each other. I was surprised that this works in prison. I was worried about being ridiculed in front of the group with my texts and songs. But they took this really seriously and receiving so much applause on the day of my performance was amazing”.*

Inmate - participant (Germany)

*“Thanks to the theatre, relationships have improved between inmates and between inmates and wardens. We [the inmates] have learnt to get to know each other and to lower our barriers”.*

Inmate - participant (Germany)

*“The breathing exercises we did allowed us, together, to reduce our misgivings relative to each other. But the group was in total chaos just before the first session. We annoyed each other, then, with the first session approaching, everyone realised: we are only six. We must rely on each other, regardless of whether we like each other or not,*

*we need to get the job done. And after the first session we began to feel better together”.*

Inmate - participant (Germany)

*“I felt like a member of a team. I found some confidence”.*

Inmate - participant (Germany)

*“We work, we perform together. It’s positive, it is the human quality of the theatre”.*

Inmate - participant (Italy)

*“Life is a theatre. So being part of this project is working towards my life after prison”.*

Inmate - participant (Italy)

*“We can maintain a link with a group. Outside the theatre, it’s complicated, we are not a troupe but a group. Here, yes”.*

Inmate - participant (Spain)

*“I stayed with people I did not like”.*

Inmate - participant (Spain)

Therefore, the cohesion of the theatre group affects the socialisation skills of the actors. They see a way of belonging, motivated by and for the group. The project's logic applied to this device unites them until the show which is the culmination of their investment. Beyond the transformation of the individual, we observe the development of the integration potential of the inmates. This works during their incarceration and also offers them an escape from the daily reality that could also have a positive effect on their life after prison.

#### **9.4. The Work and Socioprofessional Integration**

Prison theatre is not a formal socioprofessional integration method. Indirectly, the logic of “work” that is required for all participants (getting involved, being at the required level, repeating) may have socioprofessional consequences.

*“Theatre is a project. It is like a birth, we work then we give birth to something”.*

Inmate - participant (Italy)

*“We build things. Good things, together, it’s a project. Together, we decide to create something, it’s is group work”.*

Inmate - participant (Italy)

*“Theatre is difficult, it teaches me to face my responsibilities, to bear the weight of commitment. I hold firm, I overcome, I enter a world I don’t know”.*

Inmate - participant (Italy)

*“We try to build a future. What makes it complicated is that the majority of us do not know how to build a future without history,*

*without returning to prison. Theatre helps us to make a plan, with few possibilities in prison. But outside there are endless opportunities. We learn, with few resources, with the theatre, a new way of seeing things ahead of our return to free society. They give us the tools”.*

Inmate - participant (Italy)

These testimonies reveal, to a certain extent, the impact that the theatre can have on inmates. In terms of their future and their return to society, we can consider that some have developed useful skills for socioprofessional reintegration.

### **9.5. Citizen Participation**

The show performed before an audience of individuals from outside the prison can constitute an element of citizen participation.

*“We can share our suffering thanks to the theatre. We can share it with others, outside”.*

Inmate - participant (Italy)

*“The show allows us to feel better afterwards. We show others what we can do”.*

Inmate - participant (Spain)

*“It is important to show ourselves and others what we can do”.*

Inmate - participant (Spain)

*“We can show people that prisoners are more than their crimes. When we perform before an outside audience, we show another side to prison. And I think that’s good”.*

Inmate - participant (Italy)

The expression of the actors in this perspective is looking outside, beyond the prison. As actors, the inmates can take part in “real life”, show and assert themselves in the heart of the city. Their messages, through their performances allow the audience to discover the reality of prison life of which they were unaware of before. Here we find a political dimension, that aims to offer a representation of a problem (exclusion, diversity, racism, discrimination, etc.) and becomes part of a recognition process with a public performance. It allows inmates access to the expression (public) of an experience or suffering.

In addition, prison theatre offers participants a particular view of the world.

*“I now understand things I didn’t before. My anger towards society blinded me. Today, with the theatre, our discussions, I have a better understanding of how things work outside”.*

Inmate - participant (Italy)

*“We learn about what is happening elsewhere. We learn new things about the world and what is happening”.*

Inmate - participant (Spain)

*“Learning about culture is learning about the world, is it not? Here, we learn to perform, as well as history, knowledge”.*

Inmate - participant (Spain)

*“I’ve learnt humanity”.*

Inmate - participant (Spain)

As a result, some actors envision elements relating to how the world around them works. This may be new for some and could equally pave the way for more enlightened citizen participation.

## **10. Discussion**

The many interview extracts presented in the previous section aimed to present the comments from actor inmates about theatre-related learning. To do this, we used the type of impacts induced by literacy conceptualised in the broadest sense (Godenir, 2010). Therefore, it effectively seems that the participants in the theatre workshops: 1. Receive learning in terms of linguistic know-how; 2. Begin an identity transformation; 3. Enjoy better social integration; 4. Work on socioprofessional integration skills; 5. Envisage citizen participation.

From this perspective, the prison theatre process is more than a “pure” cultural device. In fact, we can understand it as a real learning method leading to the literacy of participants.

We now envision a “social” use of the theatre (Dubois & al. & al., 2011), that favours the development of the person rather than pure artistic creation. Some of the theatre’s social practices result in a different meaning compared with the pure and simple artistic sphere, such as literacy. We talk about “theatrical mediation” to express the path between the art of the theatre and any other context in which it takes place, such as prison. Some activities may focus on social change *“so that tomorrow things are not exactly as before”* (Dubois & al., 2011: 37), by developing the citizenship of the target audience. As an example, in the case of our inmates who, due to their imprisonment, are subject to a loss of citizenship, theatre offers them a feeling of considering as a subject (Dubois & al., 2011).

We can consider the impacts brought about by the theatre among inmates through a two-fold development: individual development from the point of the skills and the feeling of empowerment of the actors and group development from the point of view of the group targeted for theatre activity.

The practice of the theatre relates, for individuals, to their creative abilities, that changes their relationship within themselves as well as relative to the world (Dubois & al., 2011). Theatrical expression also improves the self-confidence of the participants by exercising their oral and physical comfort. Similarly, it contributes to personal development from the point of view of the individual and the sector where the project takes place (e.g. feeling more human in a prison). In addition, when the individual is active on the stage, they learn

to control their emotions through those of their character without being overwhelmed by said feelings.

Finally, we can understand that theatre awakens a curiosity in the individual and offers paths in their identity search. Lesavre (Dubois & al., 2011) talks about a discovery of the “I” through “acting” making the theatre a vector for sincerity in the individual.

We have seen that theatre helps to create social links. Lesavre (Dubois & al., 2011) states that theatre is an act of communication between the actors and between the actors and audience. According to Vinit and Mongeau (Dubois & al., 2011) theatre reactivates communication in the target group making them less anxiety-provoking. Theatrical practice can also help to open a dialogue to improve awareness of everyone’s problems as well as common rules of life within the target audience group (Dubois & al., 2011).

Thus, theatre allows the integration of individuals within a group as well as within society. The social use of theatre adds a social link where it may have been missing previously. As an example, Poirel et Vincent (Dubois & al., 2011) observe a paradox in prisons. According to them, *“it is the imprisonment which deprives the individual of any social link while it is this lack of social link which usually leads to prison”* (Dubois & al., 2011: 50). Theatre then facilitates listening and meeting without which life together in prison seems tricky.

In addition to the social effects of the theatre, we can also highlight the pure educational virtues. This theatre/education pair relates to the fact that theatre encourages the involvement of learners to master the language while developing a sense of responsible dialogue and citizenship (Dubois & al., 2011). Education increasingly requires active participation, spontaneity, creativity, focus on personal development and these theatrical practices such as dramatic expression, simulations, role play, etc. are real drivers of learning.

Therefore, prison theatre is a learning process through “social” uses with “educational” benefits.

There is still something to be discussed. We are referring to the issue of the sustainability of the effects generated by prison theatre. Our study does not allow us to confirm that the impacts described by the inmates can last in the long term. We cannot assume that these benefits will stay with the actor when they return to society or even when they return to their cell after the workshop or show.

*“Since I have come to know art, this cell is a prison”.*<sup>23</sup>

*“At the end of the show, it’s like I’ve returned to prison for a second time”.*

Inmate - participant (Spain)

These extracts show the paradox caused by prison theatre: a great openness in a closed world.

---

<sup>23</sup> Cosimo Rega in *“Caesar must die”* by Paolo and Vittorio Taviani, 2012.

## **11. Conclusion**

Our research work proposed perceiving the theatre work as an informal education device that is not a pure transformation of the “technical” know-how. It focuses on the literacy (in the broadest sense) of the participants in prison theatre workshops. In doing so, we wanted to address the performances of the inmates relative to the learning encouraged among them by the theatre, and whether the learning fell within the five impact categories mentioned.

According to the feedback from the participating inmates, prison theatre is a literacy process that results in a series of impacts in terms of learning, identity transformation and social participation. In addition to the pure cultural (or artistic) value of prison theatre, we can confirm that this device works on other levels such as language, confidence, motivation, acknowledgement of self and others, participation, integration, etc.

Prison theatre is an educational device with indirect learning benefits. At the beginning of the theatre workshops, inmates were not told of the aims concerning learning a language, achieving an identity transformation or improving their social participation. This learning method does not correspond to educational “standards”, which, in our opinion, show their strength when offered in prisons. As the vast majority of inmates have a poor level of education, there is little doubt that traditional learning activities are less attractive to inmates. The educational strength of prison theatre is clear and by not calling it a “class”, theatre paves the way, through acting, for the learning and literacy of the inmate-actors.

## 12. Bibliography

- ARTIERES P., LASCOUMES P., (dir.), 2004, *La prison, un modèle indépassable ?*, Presses de Sciences Po, Paris.
- AYMARD N., LHUILIER D., *L'univers pénitentiaire*, Desclée De Brouwer, Paris.
- BASTYNS C., 2006, *Ressources Européennes pour l'Alphabétisation* : [http://communaute-francaise.lire-et-ecrire.be/images/documents/pdf/pass/ressources\\_fr.pdf](http://communaute-francaise.lire-et-ecrire.be/images/documents/pdf/pass/ressources_fr.pdf)
- BARTON D., HAMILTON M., « La littératie : une pratique sociale », in *Langage et société* 2010/3 (n° 133), p. 45-62. DOI 10.3917/lis.133.0045
- BOUCKAERT G., DEPREE R., DRUMAUX A., (dir.), 2006, *Un instrument d'amélioration de la qualité au sein du Ministère Public*, Maklu, Anvers.
- BRAHY R., 2010, « Théâtre-action : que vive la démocratie en actes ! », *Politiques*, n°65, p.70 - 73.
- CERE J.-P., (dir.), 2002, *Panorama européen de la prison*, Editions L'Harmattan, Paris.
- DARATOS A., 2016, *La place de l'éducation des adultes dans les politiques de l'union européenne*, Lire et Ecrire, Brussels.
- DE CLERCQ E., *Festival Art & Alpha : L'intérêt des démarches artistiques en alphabétisation*, Echos n° 88, Lire et Ecrire, Brussels.
- DE TERSSAC G., 2003, « La théorie de la régulation sociale : repères pour un débat », in DE TERSSAC G., (under the dir. de), *La Théorie de la Régulation Sociale de JD Reynaud : débats et prolongements*, Paris, La Découverte, p 11-33.
- DI BLAISIO B., 2012, *The Social Power of Theatrical Performance: A Narrative Approach to Prison Theatre*, Working paper, University of Pècs.
- DONNAY J.-Y., VERHOEVEN M., 2007, « Politiques de la subjectivité et insertion socioprofessionnelle », in CANTELLI F., GENARD J.-L., 2007, *Action publique et subjectivité*, L.G.D.J., coll. Droit et Société, Paris.
- DUBOIS & AL. J. & al., 2011, *Les usages sociaux du théâtre hors ses murs*, Editions L'Harmattan, Paris.
- Euro-Compétences et Initiatives pour le Développement de l'Entrepreneuriat Solidaire (CIDES), 2009, *Education des adultes en prison : un chantier en friche*, impact study commissioned by the Europe Education Training Agency France.
- FAFEP, 2004, *Livre blanc sur la formation et l'éducation permanente en prison*, Huy. [https://www.adeppi.be/sites/default/files/pdf/livre\\_blanc\\_sur\\_la\\_formation\\_et\\_leducation\\_permanente\\_en\\_milieu\\_carceral.pdf](https://www.adeppi.be/sites/default/files/pdf/livre_blanc_sur_la_formation_et_leducation_permanente_en_milieu_carceral.pdf)
- FERNANDEZ B., 2005, *L'alphabétisation dans les pays francophones: situations et concepts*, Paper commissioned for the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2006, Literacy for Life.
- FOUCAULT M., 1975, *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison*, Gallimard, Paris.
- GARLAND D., 1990, *Punishment and modern society*, Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- GENARD J.-L., 1999, *La grammaire de la responsabilité*, coll. « Humanités », Cerf, Paris.
- GODENIR A., 2010, *Evaluation de l'impact des actions d'alphabétisation sur la vie des personnes : Résultats d'une enquête menée par Lire et Ecrire auprès des personnes en formations entre mars et juin 2010*, Lire et Ecrire, Brussels.
- QUIVY R., VAN CAMPENHOUDT L., 2006, *Manuel de recherche en sciences sociales*, Paris, Dunod, 3e éd.

- KELLENS G., 2000, *Punir : pénologie et droit des sanctions pénales*, Editions juridiques de l'Université de Liège, Liège.
- MARY P., BARTHOLEYNS F., BEGHIN J., 2006, « La prison en Belgique : de l'institution totale aux droits des détenus ? », in *Déviance et Société*, vol.30, n°3, pp. 389-404.
- MILLY B., 2004, « L'enseignement en prison : du poids des contraintes pénitentiaires à l'éclatement des logiques professionnelles », in *Déviance et Société*, vol. 28, n° 1, pp. 57-79.
- OECD, 2000, *La littératie à l'ère de l'information : rapport final de l'enquête internationale sur la littératie des adultes*.
- PIERRE R., « Entre alphabétisation et littératie : les enjeux didactiques », in *Revue française de linguistique appliquée* 1/2003 (Vol. VIII), p. 121-137.
- SCHOENAERS F, MEGHERBI S., 2013, *Etat des lieux exploratoire de la pratique du théâtre en prison dans une perspective européenne*, Rapport de recherche, Programme Grundtvig - Partenariat éducatif « Vienamo da lontano » 2011-2013 - <http://hdl.handle.net/2268/156501>.
- SCHOENAERS F, BRAHY R., MEGHERBI S., 2015, « Faire du théâtre en prison : étude de cas d'un programme européen », in *Quaderni di Teatro Carcere*, vol.3, pp.10-17.
- SEGRESTIN D., 2004, *Les chantiers du manager*, Armand Colin, Paris.
- SERON V., 2006, « La loi de principes concernant l'administration pénitentiaire et le statut juridique des détenus : vers la fin d'un non-droit ? », in *Journal des Tribunaux*, 553-562.
- SNACKEN S., 2002, « Normalisation dans les prisons : concepts et défis. L'exemple de l'avant-projet de loi pénitentiaire belge. » in DE SCHUTTER O., KAMINSKI D., *L'institution du droit pénitentiaire. Enjeux et reconnaissance de droits aux détenus*, Bruylant, Brussels.
- STORME A., 2015, *Pratiques coopératives. Concepts et place dans le champ de l'alphabétisation populaire*, Lire et Ecrire, Brussels.
- TULKENS F., 2002, « Droits de l'homme et prison. La Jurisprudence de la nouvelle Cour européenne des droits de l'homme », in CERE J.-P., (dir.), *Panorama européen de la prison*, Editions L'Harmattan, Paris, pp. 29-73.
- UNESCO, 2006, *Global report on education for all Chapter 6: "Literacy and becoming literate, some definitions"*.
- VANHULLE S. & SCHILLINGS A., 2003, *Avec le portfolio : écrire pour apprendre et se former*, Labor, Brussels.
- VEIL C., LHUILIER D., 2000, *La prison en changement*, Editions Erès, Toulouse.
- VRANCKEN D., 2002, *Le crépuscule du social*, Labor, Brussels.

## **Methodological Annex**

This annex presents the empirical approaches we have taken to collect the data required for our research work. We present them according to the three key modalities underpinning this empirical section: 1 observations – 2 individual and group interviews with theatre leaders – 3 group interviews with inmates using the “Motus” tool. Finally, we used one last method that provided us with information. Interviews were carried out in Germany with theatre leaders from the *Alarm Theatre* group with inmates having taken part in the previous prison theatre sessions. These interviews were filmed along with the performances relating to these sessions. We used these different videos to also work on the performances of the participating inmates.

### 1. Observations

September 2016 – Villabona prison (UTE), Spain: show performed by participating inmates in front of an audience of co-detainees and a few invited guests.

October 2016 – Ferrara prison, Italy: workshop

June 2017 - Ferrara prison, Italy: workshop

October 2017 - Villabona prison (UTE), Spain: show performed by participating inmates in front of an audience of co-detainees and a few invited guests.

### 2. Individual and group interviews with theatre leaders and other stakeholders

#### *Individual interviews*

- 1) October 2015 – Ferrara, Italy: n=2 (prison teachers)
- 2) April 2016 – Ferrara, Italy: n=1 (prison theatre leader)
- 3) September 2016 – Lugones, Spain: n=2 (prison theatre leader)
- 4) October 2016 – Ferrara, Italy: n=3 (prison instructor, prison teacher and prison theatre leader)
- 5) March 2017 – Bielefeld, Germany: n=2 (prison theatre leaders)

#### *Group interviews*

- 1) October 2015 – Ferrara, Italy: prison theatre leaders
- 2) April 2016 – Ferrara, Italy: prison theatre leaders
- 3) September 2016 – Lugones, Spain: prison theatre leaders
- 4) March 2017 – Bielefeld, Germany: prison theatre leaders
- 5) September 2017 – Liège, Belgium: prison theatre leaders

### 3. Group interviews with inmates

Use of the “Motus” tool systematically takes place as follows: once the method has been presented to the participants, we ask them a general question. We then ask them, initially, to choose two images relating to their performance and their response to the question asked. We then ask them to place these images on a table in front of everyone following (or not) the images of others. Each participant was then invited to comment on the two images

chosen by another participant. Finally, for the final round of discussions, each participant offered an explanation for the choice of their own images. Each “Motus” session ends with free exchanges between the participants and us.

- 1) October 2016 – Ferrara prison, Italy: first session of the process (12 participants – 2 hours spent with them), general question asked to the participating inmates: *Why get involved in the theatre workshop?*
- 2) February 2017 – Villabona prison (UTE), Spain: first session of the process (10 participants – 2 hours spent with them), general question asked to the participating inmates: *Why get involved in the theatre workshop?*
- 3) June 2017 – Ferrara prison, Italy: final workshop of the process (7 participants – 2 hours spent with them), general question asked to the participating inmates: *What have you got out of your participation in the theatre workshops?*
- 4) October 2017 – Villabona prison (UTE), Spain: final workshop of the process (10 participants – 2 hours spent with them), general question asked to the participating inmates: *What have you got out of your participation in the theatre workshops?*