

Inclusive Programming and Audience Development: Exploring Collective Reflection

An E-manual to Replicating the Workshop Experience



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A Guide to Replicating the Workshop Experience

Presented by
L'Altre Festival

This e-manual is based on the successful experience of the "Inclusive Programming and Audience Development" workshop, held in May 2024 in Barcelona. Designed to support cultural workers, professionals, and students while promoting inclusivity in cultural programming, this guide provides step-by-step instructions to help you organize and facilitate similar workshops in your own community.

This workshop is a part of the project INclusive arts for Social Participation, Integration, Resilience and well-being in Europe (INSPIRE), co-funded by **Creative Europe** program, promoted by Nedomysleno, Fundacja Varszatovnia and l'Altre Festival.



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VARSZATOVNIA



WHY?

Constructing bridge between Mental Health and Arts: A Necessary Step for Wellbeing

The interaction between mental health and arts has become increasingly recognized as essential for fostering wellbeing. Both the World Health Organization (WHO) and key research bodies such as the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health, and Wellbeing have extensively documented the profound impact that artistic engagement can have on mental health. This synergy presents a unique opportunity to address mental health challenges while simultaneously enriching cultural experiences.

The Power of Art

Art has long been acknowledged as a powerful medium for self-expression, identity formation, and emotional release. According to the Creative Health Inquiry Report (2017), artistic engagement can effectively reduce anxiety, depression, and stress while enhancing resilience and overall wellbeing. Participation in creative activities has been shown to provide individuals with a sense of purpose, improve self-esteem, and foster social connections (All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing, 2017).

Moreover, WHO's initiative on Arts and Health emphasizes that creative interventions—whether through theatre, music, dance, visual arts, or storytelling—offer non-verbal channels of communication that can be crucial for individuals who struggle to articulate their feelings.
(World Health Organization, 2019).

WHY?

Art as a Bridge to Mental Health

Integrating mental health into artistic settings and viceversa, not only enhances accessibility but also reduces the stigma surrounding mental health. The Creative Health Inquiry Report highlights several innovative approaches that exemplify this inclusion:

- **Arts on Prescription:** This initiative allows healthcare professionals to refer individuals experiencing psychological distress to creative activities such as painting, dance, or music groups. Studies have demonstrated a significant reduction in GP consultations and hospital admissions among participants in such programs, contributing to improved mental health outcomes and cost savings (All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing, 2017).
- **Arts in Healthcare Environments:** Incorporating visual and performing arts into healthcare spaces has been shown to reduce patient anxiety, improve recovery rates, and create a more compassionate care environment.
- **Participatory Arts Programs:** These programs enable communities to engage in creative expression, fostering a sense of belonging, social cohesion, and empowerment for marginalized groups.
- **Mental Health Transforming the Arts:** Mental health not only benefits from the arts but also has the power to transform them. The arts must reflect the full diversity of our society, and individuals with mental health challenges bring innovative and enriching perspectives to the creative process. Their inclusion enhances not only individual expression but also the work of artistic teams and the cultural sector as a whole—benefiting society at large.

WHY?

The Societal Impact of Arts

The benefits of embedding mental health awareness within the arts extend beyond individuals, contributing to healthier and more resilient communities. WHO's research underscores that social determinants—such as education, income inequality, and environmental stress—profoundly impact mental health. The arts offer a means to address these factors by fostering social inclusion, promoting empathy, and reducing isolation (World Health Organization, 2019).

For instance, arts-based interventions in schools have proven effective in improving student wellbeing and academic performance. Similarly, programs in care homes and community centers have enhanced cognitive function and social connection among older adults.

Policy and Cultural Shifts

Despite the mounting evidence supporting the benefits of including mental health with the arts, significant barriers remain. The Creative Health Inquiry Report emphasizes that healthcare systems often undervalue artistic approaches, and funding inconsistencies hinder sustainable implementation.

To bridge this gap, policymakers must actively promote the inclusion of creative interventions in healthcare strategies, integrating them as essential tools for mental health support rather than optional enhancements (All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing, 2017).

Conclusion

Integrating mental health into artistic practices is not simply about support—it's about transformation. People with lived experience of mental health challenges contribute unique, powerful perspectives that enrich artistic creation. Their inclusion promotes personal growth, fosters group cohesion, and sparks broader social change. Embracing mental diversity within the arts helps build a more inclusive, representative, and dynamic cultural sector that benefits everyone.

References

All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing. (2017). *Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing*. Available at: <https://www.artshealthandwellbeing.org.uk/>

World Health Organization. (2019). *What is the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being? A scoping review*. WHO Regional Office for Europe. Available at: <https://www.who.int/initiatives/arts-and-health>

WHO?

Facilitators: Cultural workers, performing arts professionals, mental health professionals and people with mental health problems as facilitators.

Participants: Students of psychology, performing arts, and social education, cultural programmers, professionals, and individuals with and without mental health conditions.

One of the key aspects often overlooked is the importance of participant selection. This is the foundation of all activities we conduct—**bringing together a diverse mix of individuals is essential**, and it requires deliberate effort. Working on this aspect in multiple ways is crucial, but it is also one of the most time-consuming parts of the process.

Careful planning is necessary to ensure a balanced mix of participants that fosters meaningful discussions and interactions.

60-100
participants

WHEN & WHERE?

Suggested Duration: full-day workshop.

Suggested Venue: Theaters, cultural centers, universities, or community spaces.



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GOALS

1

Promote **awareness of inclusivity** in cultural programming and audience development.

2

Discuss the ethics of interpretation in representing individuals with severe emotional suffering on stage.

3

Facilitate group reflection and creative exercises to deepen understanding of the topic.

ACTIVITIES

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WHO IS MY AUDIENCE?	SHOWCASE RELATED TO DIVERSITY	ACCESSIBILITY VS. INVISIBILITY	WHO IS THE OTHER?



Activity 1 WHO IS MY AUDIENCE?

This activity delves deeply into the context of cultural organisations to **understand their own audience**. Through qualitative research based on **open questions** addressed to the internal **organisational team**, it encourages reflection on who their usual audience is.

An **open debate** between different teams during 30 minutes will lead us to reflect about **who is our habitual audience**.

The big group is divided into smaller groups formed by 4 - 6 people, **representing different backgrounds and roles**.



Activity 1 WHO IS MY AUDIENCE?

This activity aims to **help us realize that our audience may be completely different from us** and that it is essential to consider whom we want to address while **gaining a deep understanding of their needs**.

In this debate, it is important to **invite a diverse group of people representing various roles**, including individuals with disabilities, migrants, and other vulnerable groups, **to share their experiences and perspectives**.

Creating a "safe space" free from judgment or labels is crucial. For this reason, **the debate should be open to everyone**, without requiring participants to introduce themselves beforehand.

The questions that we should answer are:

What barriers do they face in accessing my cultural organisation?

What do I think about our audience?
What are they like?

What kinds of topics are they interested in?



Please be as specific as possible, e.g., 'women aged 35-49 in urban areas' instead of 'adults.'



Activity 2 SHOWCASING DIVERSITY

Showcase or screen a play or other **cultural expression** that could reflect the **experiences of individuals living with mental health conditions**, helping to explore and foster collective reflection on this topic.



Efeito Colateral by Grupo Pendurados at L'Altre Festival
Barcelona, Spain 2024



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Activity 2 SHOWCASING DIVERSITY

Step-by-Step Instructions

- ① **Select the content** – Choose a play, film, or cultural piece that authentically portrays mental health experiences.
- ② **Secure a venue** – Book an accessible theater, community space, or online platform suitable for the showcase.
- ③ **Assemble a team** – Involve directors, performers, and technical staff, ensuring the piece is executed effectively.
- ④ **Plan logistics** – Organize stage setup, lighting, sound, and accessibility measures. If you lack experience in event production, consider consulting an expert.
- ⑤ **Set a timeline** – Define key dates for rehearsals, promotions, and the event itself.
- ⑥ **Promote the showcase** – Use social media, cultural newsletters, and partnerships with mental health organizations to reach the right audience.
- ⑦ **Prepare audience materials** – Develop a program or informational guide to provide context about the performance and its themes.



Activity 3 ACCESSIBILITY VS. INVISIBILITY

Some important audience groups in cultural offerings **are invisible**. This is the case of **people with mental health problems**. That is why we connect them directly with the cultural organisations to **promote their active participation from the beginning**, during the planning and design of their cultural offer.

After watching the show, we propose to create **small groups formed by 4 - 6 people representing different roles and voices**. The key is the diversity of opinions and experience to achieve a collective reflection.



Workshop participants debating after watching *Efeito Colateral* by Grupo Pendurados at L'Altre Festival Barcelona, Spain 2024



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Activity 3 ACCESSIBILITY VS. INVISIBILITY

Each group member receives pen and paper and individually answers one of the following questions using key words

"How did the play portray mental health challenges?"

"How can cultural programming be more inclusive?"

"What ethical considerations should artists keep in mind?"



Activity 3 ACCESSIBILITY VS. INVISIBILITY

There is one debate facilitator who leads the discussion and gives the opportunity to **express all the voices, recollecting all the key words**. It is important to promote “**safe space**” without judgments or labels and that is why this debate should be open to everyone without the participants having to introduce themselves beforehand.



Workshop participants debating after watching *Efeito Colateral* by Grupo Pendurados at L'Altre Festival Barcelona, Spain 2024

Activity 3 ACCESSIBILITY VS. INVISIBILITY

Step-by-Step Instructions

- ① **Preparation Phase** – Secure a venue, confirm speakers, gather materials, ensure accessibility, and select diverse debate leaders from arts, psychology, education, and mental health sectors.
- ② **Performance Setup** – Arrange seating comfortably, brief performers, introduce the play, and allow a short break for rest and reflection afterward.
- ③ **Facilitating the Discussion** – Use the previously suggested open-ended questions to guide conversations, encourage audience participation, and invite personal sharing.
- ④ **Group Reflection Activity** – Distribute large sheets of paper and markers, ask participants to write key words and phrases about severe emotional distress, then collect and read aloud.
- ⑤ **Wrap-Up & Closing** – summarize key discussion points and collect participant feedback via a short survey.



Activity 4 WHO IS THE OTHER?

This exercise invites us to reflect about the diversity that represents our society. Everybody who participates in the workshop receives a sticker representing two colors with the aim to divide the group into two. For example, 30 people receive the blue sticker and 30 the red one.

We ask each participant to find someone with the other color - the red one looks for the blue one and the other way around.

When everyone has their counterpart, each couple will receive a small cardboard and pens to draw.



Workshop participants at L'Altre Festival
Barcelona, Spain 2024



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Activity 4 WHO IS THE OTHER?

Please, draw the person you have in front of you.

This simple activity requires us to watch the other we have in front of us, observing the differences and similarities, and connecting with the present moment.



Activity 4 WHO IS THE OTHER?

Step-by-Step Instructions

- ① **Prepare materials** – Gather stickers in two colors, small cardboard pieces, and pens or pencils.
- ② **Distribute stickers** – Give each participant a sticker of one of the two colors, ensuring an equal division as much as possible.
- ③ **Pair participants** – Ask participants to pair with someone wearing the opposite-colored sticker; if needed, an organizer can join to ensure everyone has a partner.
- ④ **Provide drawing materials**– Hand out a piece of cardboard and a pen or pencil to each pair.
- ⑤ **Start the exercise** – Instruct participants to carefully observe their partner and draw them.
- ⑥ **Encourage reflection** – Remind them to notice differences and similarities while drawing.
- ⑦ **Wrap up** – Conclude with a short discussion about the experience and **the importance of truly seeing others and being seen.**



Have fun!

**Credits**

Kati Riquelme (photos)

Mail

info@laltrefestival.cat

Website

www.inspireplatform.eu



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