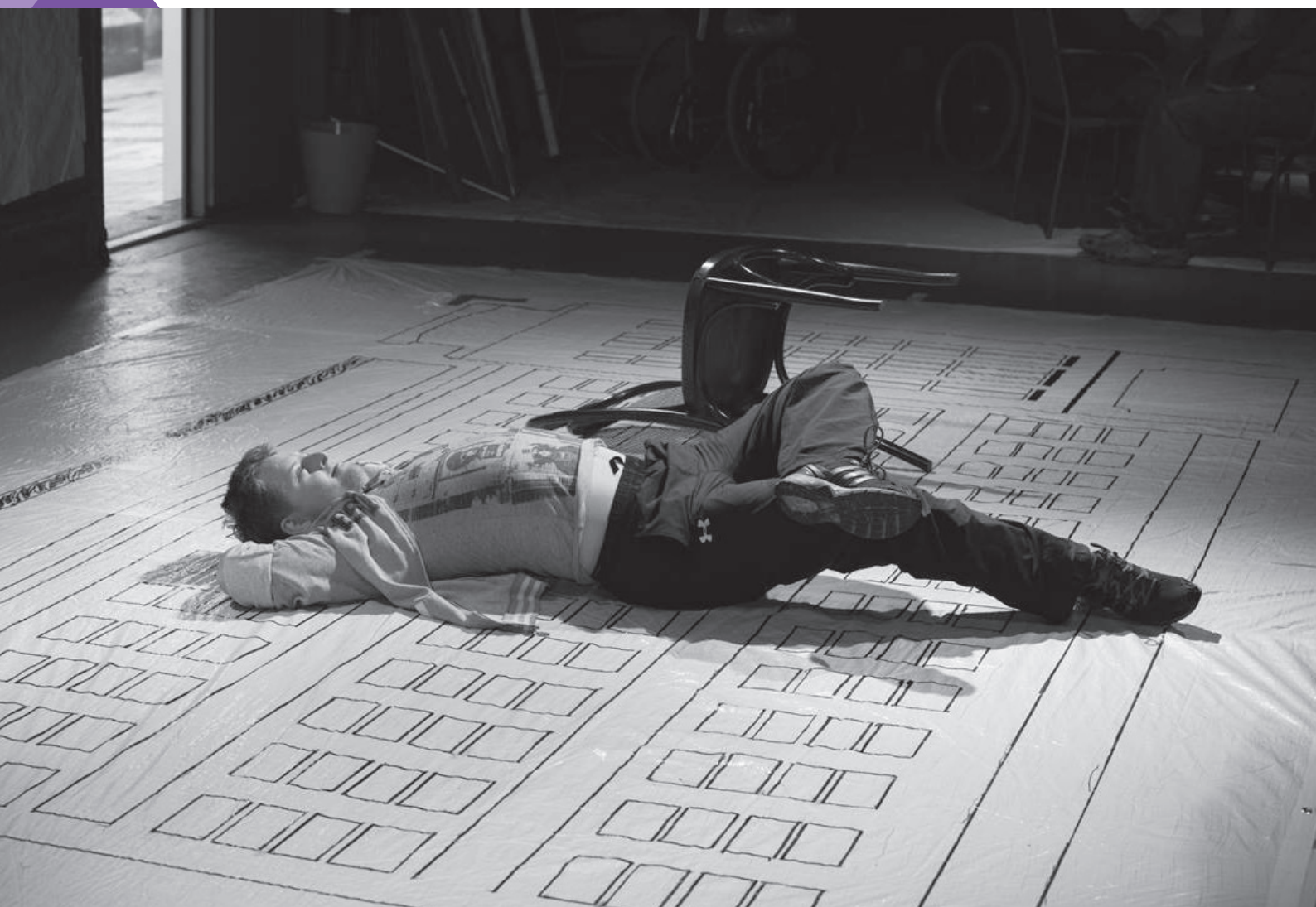




# Creative Inclusion in Adult Education (C.I.A.E.) Guidelines



Erasmus+



Arts education and art creation for people with disabilities is above all an enriching and heart-warming process. It connects worlds and perspectives. It strengthens and disrupts. It comforts and confronts. It brings us to the essence of being human, of entering into relationships, of understanding and being understood. It brings us to the power of art: words, images or movements reveal what cannot be said and give an audience to those who are not seen or heard. And it is usually just great fun to do.

Based on this common experience, six European organizations formed a partnership to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities in arts education and art creation. The partnership consists of:

- Cope Foundation
- Associazione Scuola Viva Onlus
- ENCC- European Network Of Cultural Centres - Réseau Europeen Des Centres Culturels
- CIT - Cork Institute Of Technology
- EASPD - European Association Of Service Providers For Persons With Disabilities
- L'ADAPT - Association pour l'insertion sociale et professionnelle des personnes handicapées

With support of the Erasmus+ programme, these partners gathered promising practices from all over Europe. From these examples they derived practical guidelines for arts organizations and arts educators on supporting the inclusion of adult learners with disabilities. These guidelines also incorporate key insights from the publication *Voor het voetlicht* written by An Van den Bergh and Kris De Visscher (Demos, Belgium) who also edited this publication.

Our guidelines walk a fine line. On the one hand, we don't want to make this subject too difficult or too heavy. We don't want to underestimate people with disabilities or make them too 'special'. Two small practical examples illustrate what we mean by this.

*In Toulouse, Sambaband Résille marches through the streets with blind and visually impaired children. They alternate rhythms and melodies and incorporate breaks perfectly. How do they do that? A few simple whistle signals provide clear instructions. The rest is practice.*

*During the preparation of a European exchange between artists with learning disabilities, the organisers expressed some worries. The participants with learning disabilities spoke very little English. How would they make contact and exchange ideas with each other? During the first evening, some background music was playing, and the so-called disabled participants spontaneously began to dance with each other. Their contact was immediate and warm, while the care workers exchanged some courtesies in clumsy English and stared at the startling ease with which the 'disabled' participants made contact with each other.*

But that doesn't mean that including people with disabilities, in art creation and arts education, is a given. Two more practical examples for illustration:

*A dancer with a disability following a professional dance course had to be supported almost daily and encouraged by his friends and colleagues to stick with the training.*

*A young guy with a disability has one big dream: becoming an actor. A teacher at school runs his dream into the ground: he will never become an actor, because he cannot memorize texts. With the intense support of a director who believes in him, the young actor performs his own monologue, completely by memory. But his path remains difficult: he has difficulty gaining access to formal art education, and some find that his pieces are 'incomprehensible' or even 'could provoke disgust'.*





# **CHAPTER 1: GETTING STARTED!**

In this chapter we explore and challenge inhibitions and prejudices towards the inclusion of people with disabilities in arts education and arts creation. We also discuss some of the challenges you might encounter starting your own project; finding the right partners and making a good match, raising access and presenting and labelling of the work.

## 1. Different partners, different worlds

In practice, we see that different partners can take the initiative to start art projects with people with disabilities. We distinguish three major types of initiators:

- Initiators from the world supporting people with disabilities: parents, care workers, teachers, support figures;
- Initiators from the world of the arts: individual artists, professional or amateur groups, training programmes, studios;
- Initiators with an intermediary role: neighbourhood work groups, community centres, cultural centres, local authorities and services;

Often, there is a personal link that connects these worlds: a care-worker with a great passion for art or an artist with a family member with a disability. Chance also plays an important role: a chance encounter between future collaborators. The spirit of the times also plays a role - as people with disabilities become less isolated and artists with disabilities become more prominent in the media, public interest increases. Lastly, the government can also be an important influence through policies that promote artistic practices with people with disabilities.

Nevertheless, artistic practice with people with disabilities is still in early development in many domains. The worlds of 'art' and 'care' rarely meet and interact, as le Theatre du Crystal noticed.

Le Theatre du Crystal (France) is an inclusive theatre company with disabled and non-disabled actors. Founded in 1989, they've created and performed over 20 plays in France and abroad. The theatre company also organises a free, weekly theatre course where everyone is welcome. The course provides an opportunity to explore the world of theatre with warming-up exercises, verbal and non-verbal communication and improvisation. The course especially welcomes people with disabilities who find it difficult to engage in an amateur theatre company. When the disability forms less of a barrier, the company supports people to enroll in a more inclusive theatre course.

Over the years, le Theatre du Crystal was struck by the gap between professionals in the arts and care workers. Although they both express a wish to collaborate, they rarely meet each other. To bridge this gap, le Theatre du Crystal, founded a resource center on art and disability for the French region Val d'Oise. The purpose is to establish long-lasting relations between arts and care.

By organising an annual festival, they showcase the work of disabled artists. They also run a course for the staff of cultural centres in raising awareness and to welcome

participants with a disability. The group facilitates partnerships between cultural centres and care institutions. They support care workers to start a cultural project and they organise workshops and performances inside care institutions. Lastly, they gather resources and share them online and in several magazines.

More information: <http://www.theatreducristal.com/pole-art-handicap/>



All the parties involved have their own fears and prejudices when it comes to inclusive art practice.

In the disability support network, art and culture are often the proverbial icing on the cake. Only when all the other concerns and problems have been taken care of, would there be time for such things. Parents and care-workers are usually not familiar with the world of the arts and don't know any artists with disabilities. They may consider art and art education as an innocent and childish pastime or a therapeutic tool and not as a valuable opportunity for personal development and self-realisation, never mind considering the possibility of making a professional career out of it. Often, the care network seeks to protect the disabled artist or performer from failure and disappointment.

In turn, very few cultural organizations make targeted efforts to include people with disabilities. They are rarely considered as the audience, consumer, participant, artist or employee. Neither are they commonly regarded as an integral part of the in-house philosophy, vision or working method. This is partly due to indifference, but many cultural institutions are also convinced that working with people with disabilities requires specific skills that they do not have. Here too, there is still the prejudice that the presence of people with disabilities reduces the artistic quality and that 'social' and 'artistic' goals are incompatible.

Finally, intermediary organizations may not make the link between these worlds, either because they are not sufficiently familiar with people with a disability or because they assume in advance that the gap between them and the art world is irreconcilable.

## 2. The Times They Are a-Changin'

Nevertheless, we see an important shift happening in the perspectives of all three types of initiators.

### 2.1 Service providers are discovering the potential of art

Within the services provided for disabled people, the attention for art and culture is growing. Initially, art within healthcare was primarily seen as beneficial for individual development and for therapeutic possibilities. But, these days, art is seen less and less as purely therapy and increasingly as a means of inclusion. This increase in attention for art leads to more collaboration between artists and care facilities. But service providers themselves are also receiving better training and coaching in setting up creative processes and using artistic languages as part of their support.

Creative or artistic languages and contexts expand the possibilities of people with disabilities to engage in relationships, to connect with others and to express thoughts and feelings. Involvement in visual art, dance, theatre and music, offer care-workers and clients new environments and perspectives for interaction and dialogue. The studio, the rehearsal room or the stage are safe but also open and free spaces where people can distance themselves from daily reality, roles, patterns and expectations. This context enables people to experiment with new roles and to come up with new solutions. People can express their vulnerabilities, to show other aspects of their personality and to make their experience, needs and expectations explicit.

An artistic context is sometimes also a bit less (over) protected. People with disabilities can benefit from that. They have to function more independently than they are accustomed to, especially on the stage. This requires a unique effort and concentration. As actors or dancers, people with disabilities can participate more in real life, they get more stimuli from outside (new places, new people...) and are thus taken out of their comfort zone. They get the chance to leave the care facility, to take part in society and to meet other people who share their passion. Art can also promote individual and critical thinking, as The Glucksman illustrates.

**The University College Cork (Ireland)** organises 'The Certificate in Contemporary Living' (CCL), a two-year education programme for people with learning disabilities designed for delivery in a third level education setting. As part of this programme, **The Glucksman** runs a 5 week module to learn about and discover creative approaches that promote confidence and self-esteem. The Glucksman is a cultural and educational institution that promotes the research, creation and exploration of the visual arts.

The arts module sessions are divided into three parts – art appreciation (looking at international modern artists), art interaction (with the Glucksman galleries and University art collection but public artworks and museum trips would also be a perfect fit) and artmaking (drawing on the experience of local artists).

The sessions are designed around three key points:

**Individualism:** how we all see things differently and therefore we all create differently.

**Capacity to be creative:** everyone has the ability to be creative, we can be creative in many different ways and different mediums allow different people to be creative.

**Finding your voice:** through experimentation, practice and choosing methods/ approaches that are rewarding to the individual.

The sessions are designed to ensure all students have opportunities to share their thoughts on artworks, artists and their own practice. The students feel their voices are being heard. This develops their confidence and in turn their personalities begin to emerge.

The lecture series also looks at artists who have overcome obstacles to pursue a life of creativity. For instance, Henri Matisse adopted new approaches to his work due to falling ill; Alice Neel relentlessly maintained a painting practice despite experiencing traumatic life events, inequality and mental illness. Understanding the difficulties that celebrated artists must overcome, encourages students to realise that they too can develop a creative practice that has value.

The module concludes with an exhibition of the students' artworks in the civic space of the Glucksman. This enables the students to develop and express their artistic potential in the public domain, and brings a sense of achievement to their participation in the module. The exhibition gives visibility to the enriching creative contribution of people with disabilities to society.

More information:

<https://www.ucc.ie/en/appsoc/courses/contliving/>

<http://artsineducation.ie/en/2017/04/06/guest-blogger-tadhg-crowley-projects-adviser-blog-4/>

[www.glucksman.org](http://www.glucksman.org)

In practice, we notice that art in healthcare and education is used as a means to achieve very diverse goals. These goals relate to the individual, the relationship with the care workers or to the local community. They also increasingly transcend the purely problem-solving or therapeutic. Art becomes an important tool in the development of autonomous citizens, in expanding their network and in countering dominant perceptions. In the table below (No.1), we provide a schematic summary.



Objectives	Enriching/strengthening/ preventive	Problem-solving/ therapeutic
<b>Individual</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a meaningful way to spend the day</li> <li>• stimulate development on a cognitive, social, emotional and motor level</li> <li>• support people in exploring and expressing their feelings and Thoughts about particular theme and thus increase their (self) awareness, self-confidence and autonomy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• relieve stress and tension</li> <li>• overcome fears</li> <li>• express individual problems, making them discussable, processing and opening new perspectives</li> </ul>
<b>Relationship with care-workers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• make contact and enter into communication</li> <li>• perception, question clarification new / different type of information about People's capacities and needs</li> <li>• find new and creative solutions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• repair stalled processes and relationships</li> <li>• make contact with hard-to-reach clients</li> </ul>
<b>Relationship with a local community and/or broader society</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• overcome prejudices and create a strong bond or a close community</li> <li>• be part of society</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• discuss conflicts between different groups and open new perspectives</li> </ul>

Table No.1: Overview of the different objectives for which performing art is used

## 2.2 Artists discover the contribution of people with disabilities

But also within the world of the arts, new evidence show that people with disabilities offer artistic added value. The world of visual art has long embraced the strong, idiosyncratic and self-taught works of people with disabilities under the label of 'Outsider Art'. But, gradually, the theatre and (contemporary) dance are also coming around. This has both an ethical and philosophical dimension. Inclusive art practice starts from an urge for greater social justice: everyone must get the chance to realize his or her artistic talents and ambitions. But that in turn leads to a profound renewal of what art can be and who can create art. In the United Kingdom, artist Yinka Shonibare refers to inclusive art practice as the last remaining avant-garde movement<sup>1</sup>.

Within contemporary dance, there is a growing awareness that the further development of dance benefits from the presence of a greater diversity of dancers. All dancers are challenged to leave their comfort zone, to abandon well-known techniques and patterns and to see dance as a means of communication. The presence of people with disabilities questions many obvious things: notions such as beauty, elegance, technique, virtuosity and authenticity. Inclusive dance also benefits from the creative autonomy of dancers with a disability. It highlights the stories and forms of expression they bring with them, and on a symbolic level, who is represented at the scene and who - on the side of the audience - can recognize themselves in it.

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<sup>1</sup> See: <http://www.disabilityartsinternational.org>



## 2.3 Art and culture connect people with disabilities with the neighbourhood

Local services, neighbourhood activities and cultural centres increasingly see the potential of inclusive art practice for their local communities. Artistic projects shed a different light on a section of the population that is still often invisible in the neighbourhood. They connect the broader network around people with disabilities in art and culture and give cultural centres an extra opportunity to demonstrate their added value for the community. Involving people with disabilities also makes existing groups more aware of certain barriers and of what they take for granted. If they tackle these barriers, other groups also benefit, such as families with young children or the elderly.

## 2.4 Rough edge

Everyone wins with inclusive art practice, but remember: art can also have a rough edge. Introducing art is sometimes like bringing home a puppy. It starts out sweet, cuddly and controllable. But like a puppy, art can also grow up, and even become unmanageable. It can strengthen a group or a community but also disrupt it. This is almost inevitably a part of the inherent quality of the artistic process. Artistic practices can explore existing power relations. More strongly than in other contexts where people with disabilities live, artistic practices offer an open space in which people with a disability can express their own view and their own experiences and can translate those into words and images that empower them. This in turn can provide a lever to break through existing power relations, for example by standing up for oneself, by making certain taboos negotiable or by increasing their own autonomy. But bear in mind, this isn't always the outcome that their support network expect or wish for.

# **3. Some challenges and considerations when starting your own project**

## 3.1 Dive into the great unknown

Convinced of the added value art can bring, to disabled people and vice versa and to the local community? Great! Nevertheless, in practice, inclusive art remains a big step into the unknown. In most of the existing practices, no one was really ready in advance to begin. Actually, no one really knew how to begin. Not to worry though, in principle, artists are prepared and fully equipped to create an inclusive context, not by doing special things, but just by staying true to their talent. Artists are used to dealing with the deep uncertainty of an empty canvas, a new group or an empty stage. They do not shy away from it. On the contrary, they seek out this context, and they dive into it. Adam Benjamin, founder of Candoco and pioneer of inclusive dance, has only one assignment for artists who want to work inclusively: create beauty and let the work speak for itself.

Neither does the supporting network have to worry. Art and culture are an essential link in the social participation and emancipation of people with a disability. Everyone has the right to freely enjoy art and culture and to become a full part of it. That is a fundamental right of every citizen and is enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons (2006). Therefore one cannot consider inclusive art practice as separate from the broader vision concerning the place of people with disabilities in our society. Artistic passion and talent are equally

divided among the population and therefore also present in people with a disability. Often, people with disabilities also show a lot of discipline, courage and dedication in developing their talent.

No, nothing should stop us... Or not?

### 3.2 Finding a good match and equal collaboration

The support network surrounding people with disabilities, artists and intermediaries have only positive reasons to join forces and work together. They would do well to find a good match in advance between their different perspectives.

Many artists (with and without disabilities), acknowledge that their work can have therapeutic benefits and that, in practice, there can be commonalities and relationships with people who use art as a tool. But they explicitly dissociate themselves from art as pure therapy or a daytime activity. They do not create art from a functional use for themselves or as a daytime activity, but to move, shock, shake up others, to make people laugh and cry... They create work that stands on its own, and they want to share this work with as many people as possible who they do not need to know personally. They want the work to be seen and taken seriously as a full-fledged product, and they want their work to be discussed and judged on its artistic merits.

Those who cherish art, do so in part because of its uncontrollable nature. That does not mean that art has no use. Positive outcomes may result from a creative process, but also negative ones. That makes these processes more human. Even if an art practice arises within an external goal framework, it escapes it, provided there is sufficient feeling for the specificity of the artists, the openness and the unpredictability of the creative process. But even if art has no 'use' or exceeds the predetermined goals, this doesn't mean that art can't have a place in care or educational contexts. It has and gives meaning, even without and perhaps because there are no external goals attached to it.

The above vision makes the arts and support services complementary and equal partners. The support service may not incorporate the art, but should leave the process sufficient time and space and recognize the specificity of creative and artistic processes. Where that happens, the two can reinforce each other. Care-workers then not only support artists in the logistical and practical aspects of an artistic process, they also support them socially and emotionally, and facilitate the communication by translating instructions and images from the abstract to more concrete expressions. The care-workers also watch over the group dynamics and well-being, they keep an eye on any sensitive issues, and they work on the transition between the artistic world and daily life. In various dance or theatre projects, facilitators also participate, and in some groups, facilitators also provide an additional range of activities that support the players in performing arts.

However, there may be differences of opinion between artists and care-workers in relation to educational and artistic issues. Sometimes, care-workers limit the capabilities of the participants. Because of the information they give or withhold, or even simply because of their presence, they impede the artists and/or the participants from going all the way or showing other sides of themselves. Not all care-workers have an understanding of the

specificity of a creative process. Some artists are also far-removed from the world of people with disabilities. They use very abstract language and images, they fail to make contact and build a relationship of trust, and they have a hard time making people with disabilities co-owners of the end result.

Not all care contexts and not all artists lend themselves to good collaboration. But fortunately, there are many practices where it does click. Setting up a project together is a good, concrete start. This can be a limited series of lessons or workshops, possibly with a short presentation. Some people immediately take a bigger step and focus on a year series or creation process that leads to a public presentation (a performance or an exhibition).

Local and national governments and private funds provide project resources for such initiatives. Sometimes, individual artists can also obtain grants to explore these types of artistic processes. But equally, the organization sometimes finds room in its own operating budget to start such a project.

### 3.3 Guaranteeing access



When you start such a project, it is best to think carefully about the accessibility of your initiative in advance. The various aspects of access can be seen as a chain. Each chain is as strong as its weakest link. Working on access requires a broad and integrated approach. In this publication we put forward the following 'chain of accessibility':

*I get the information I need customized for me*

Information circulates in networks. If you start an artistic project, you have to bring your information into the networks surrounding people with disabilities. Take the time to visit organizations and build a relationship of trust or work with existing trust figures. Write clearly and simply and use clear formats. If possible, work with photos or videos that give a picture of what you have in mind. Keep in mind that a flyer or a poster will not convince everyone. Sometimes, personal encouragement is needed to get someone on board.

*I am part of a network that builds bridges*

Few people have the courage to participate on their own. Most people only join in when they know someone else. If you work with existing groups or with people who know each other, this barrier is not such a big factor. When working with existing groups, always bear in mind that tensions or events from outside the artistic process can easily interfere with the work. If you want to reach people who live independently and who are sometimes more isolated, you can ensure that someone they know also participates. You can also ask employees or participants to make an extra effort to establish and maintain contacts (pick up at home, send a message, go by later, etc.). Some groups therefore work with a 'buddy system'.

*I can afford it*

Many people with disabilities live on a limited budget. If participation in an artistic project involves additional costs, this often means that they have to drop other expenses. Try to make your project free or keep the participation fee as low as possible. Try to avoid unexpected extra costs and look critically at unwritten requirements that may mean unnecessary expenses for people (ranging from the purchase of certain materials to buying a drink). Report certain expenses well in advance and give as complete a picture as possible of all expenses at the start of the project. Find out where people might be able to turn to for certain benefits and support them with any administrative tasks.

*Finding a solution in terms of mobility*

Many people with disabilities depend on public transport or other people for their transportation. If people have to move to the studio space or a local cultural centre, mobility is a point of attention. Some facilities offer collective transport, but check whether this also works if you work or perform late in the evening. People who cannot rely on collective transport must find a solution themselves. Some work groups require that the participants come to them autonomously; others support people with mobility requirements: they pick them up at home, provide a carpool system or arrange a taxi.

*The environment and/or the building are accessible*

Not all cultural accommodation is accessible to wheelchair users or for blind and visually impaired people. Being lifted over a staircase or a threshold occasionally isn't such a big deal for many people, especially if it is handled with tact and humour. But if it happens too often, it requires a lot of unnecessary energy and a lot of the enjoyment is lost. Also some wheelchair users truly resent being lifted. Try to find an accommodation that meets the accessibility requirements or communicate openly and honestly about the difficulties.

*I feel welcome, I belong here*

Within the workshop or within the creative process, we naturally pay attention to making everyone comfortable and involved in the activity. Keep in mind, however, that the break times and the contacts with the support staff (desk clerks, maintenance team, technicians...) can also influence the well-being of the participants. Certainly for some people with disabilities who communicate less fluently, it is an extra point of attention to involve them in what is happening. If people need assistance with personal care, it is best to agree in advance on who is responsible. Some teachers or artists want to keep this aspect far outside the artistic process and expect a personal assistant to handle care needs. Others want to form a homogeneous group and also share the care in the group to avoid involving people from outside the artistic process.

*I get something out of it: this is useful and meaningful; I want to keep doing this*

Whether the offer is useful and meaningful depends, of course, to a large extent on the participant. However, as organizers or facilitators, we can leave room for the personal contribution of the participants to a greater or lesser extent, giving them the opportunity to match both the content and the organization of the project to their personal wishes and preferences. We will go deeper into this, in the chapter on co-ownership.

The barriers mentioned above are interwoven. Even so, access is primarily a personal story. For each person with a disability, these barriers are relevant to a greater or lesser extent, and they form a stumbling block or do not.



and they form a stumbling block or do not. Working on access is therefore very much about customising, communication and co-ordination, tact and humour. At the same time, people with disabilities also understand that not everything is always possible, and they often help to find simple and concrete solutions.

### 3.4 Presentating the Work

We are convinced that the work of people with disabilities deserves public attention and that the market for the existing supply is far from saturated. There are still a lot of people that can be attracted and amazed. An increased audience is also essential for creating more support for inclusion in the arts. This does not mean that every performance or exhibition must reach the same audience. Some practices do not need a public moment, and others prefer to target a specific audience, for example friends, family and professionals from the support network. This is inherent in the arts in general and depends strongly on the degree to which process or product-oriented focus is set up: from the early presentation after a workshop, the carefully prepared scene of the experienced amateur artist, the unexpected performance in the public space to the full-length performance that can blow away a full theatre. All parties benefit from clearly selecting and communicating for which audience a performance is created.

The day-care centre of LADAPT in Montmorency (France) aims at including their artists with a learning disability in mainstream arts events and festivals to share their work with a broad audience.

They successfully managed to include the visual artwork of their participants in a fair for local artists - Les Naturelles de Montmorency - organised by the municipality. They also supported the disabled participants and their family to attend the fair. The artists got the opportunity to promote and sell their own work. With the profits of the fair, the day-care centre organised a trip for the participants.

MUSICA, the music group of the day-care centre played at Le Festival de Bandas in France. This participation took four years of preparation, with the participation at the festival as a motivational focus point. The first year they learned to play different instruments. In a second year, they got familiar with different styles of music. The third year they learned about different musical formations and finally in the fourth year, the participants learned to read music notes. During this period they often went to listen to concerts and slowly they progressed from audience members to performers. During the festival they were welcomed as any other artist and they could participate equally.

The day-care centre also co-operates with the local cultural centre La Briqueterie. La Briqueterie selected visual artwork made by participants of the day-care centre for their annual exposition of local artists. They also organise a bespoke guided tour of the exhibition for the participants.

More information about the day-care centre in Montmorency: <http://www.ladapt.net/etablissement-service-ile-de-france-val-doise>

More information about the festival: [www.festivaldebandas.fr](http://www.festivaldebandas.fr)



Some organise their own festivals to promote the work of disabled artists.

The regional branch of LADAPT in the north of France organises the Festival Handy 'arts promoting performing arts (theatre, dance, circus, choir,) and visual arts, created by artists with a disability together with local artists. The festival puts forward the artistic talents of people with disabilities, instead of their limitations. The exhibitions and performances invite the general public to come and meet people with disabilities for mutual enrichment.

The festival also broadens the horizons of the adult learners. It enriches their lives and helps them think creatively and critically. Arts and cultural education help people to develop openness and insight. It sharpens their senses and promotes their creativity. It's also a tool for social inclusion. The festival is made possible thanks to the support of local artists and trainers. Their art workshops enable participants to tap into their own resources and reveal their potential through peer-to-peer exchange.

Culture is at the heart of the city of Cambrai where the festival takes place. Like the city, culture must be accessible to as many people as possible, taking into account the needs of people with disabilities. That means ensuring greater access for all audiences to culture and artistic practices, as well as paying attention to information and communication. It also means opening up artistic and cultural places (library, theatre, museum ...) and promoting discussions and meetings. This way the artistic productions of people with disabilities enrich the shared cultural heritage.

More information about the festival: [https://www.facebook.com/festivalhandyarts/?tn-str=k\\*F](https://www.facebook.com/festivalhandyarts/?tn-str=k*F)

L'association Art Express Compagnie Tatoo (AAEC Tatoo) is an inclusive dance company from France. They create their own performances, but they also offer training to share their experience with other teachers, physiotherapists and art therapists...

Compagnie Tatoo also organises the Festival Hors Champs. The festival aims at promoting inclusive dance practice and giving the opportunity to young companies, amateurs and artists with or without disabilities to present their work in a choreographic universe, to discover the work of professional companies, to raise awareness among the general public and to and to bring people together.

More information: [www.codex14.com](http://www.codex14.com)

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Depending on the objective, the choice may also be made not to show the work. Jo Verrent (2012), senior producer of the Unlimited! Fund in the United Kingdom made a personal list of criteria that in her view indicate 'shitty' performances with people with disabilities:

(1) The performance is shown before it is finished, (2) the performance does not go far enough or is insufficiently elaborated, (3) the performance has no clear intention, (4) the performance is a workshop on stage, (5) the performance is shown in the wrong context or (6) performances that are of interest to the performers rather than to the audience.

Therefore, if possible, agree in advance with the funder of the project whether a public event is needed and, if desired, whether it may be omitted.

### 3.5 Are specific labels really necessary?

As we have already indicated, it remains a delicate exercise to write about the art of people with a disability without making them too particular, especially because it is so contradictory. We speak about the equality of people with disabilities, their equal rights, but write guidelines just about them. That requires some clarification. The naming of a category of people - in other words, those with a disability - is primarily to point out the difference in opportunities that this group experiences in society. The 'special' thing is not so much the people, their disability or the art they make, but the efforts that professionals and policy-makers have to put forth to achieve equal opportunities.

The explicit naming of art by people with disabilities as art of people with disabilities - with terms such as outsider art, art brut, inclusive art etc. - does bring up a broader discussion about labelling and its influence on the process of inclusion and exclusion of people with a disability in the arts. Some organizations or companies proudly mention that they include people with disabilities. It forms an important part of their identity and is a way to distinguish themselves from others. Other organizations consider art practices that include people with disabilities as something very ordinary. They note that the workshop, the series of lessons, the creative process and the performance are not fundamentally different from what is common in the cultural sector. They therefore wonder why they should explicitly state that the group consists of people with (and without) a disability. Still others want to get rid of that antagonistic duality. The British choreographer Adam Benjamin regards the explicit naming of art of disabled people as *"a bit like a road sign warning the unwary theatre-goer of possible encounters with wheelchairs — it tells us that we can expect to see a disabled person on stage, which can only leave us asking, "Is that really necessary? Who is it that needs to be warned?"* (Benjamin, 2002). An ongoing European exchange project on inclusive performing arts even explicitly chose the name Un-Label. On their website, we read: *'Un-Label [...] is aimed at people who in our society are often labelled in a negative way. Our cultural project is designed to create a counterbalance to this form of stigmatization.'*

For many artists, their disability is an important part of their identity and their work in a

certain period of their life. A performance can, to a greater or lesser extent, thematise the disability or originate from it, through which the artist wishes to present himself or herself with his or her disability. Others prefer not to do this, for a variety of reasons. Within the concept of inclusion as co-ownership and equality, this is an important subject to discuss during the creative process. Even if a performance is shown to a wide audience, labelling or not labelling remains important, and it is therefore best done in consultation with the artists or the company.

There is, however, a second reason why they may want to use this publication to explicitly and specifically spotlight art with people with disabilities - without making them too 'special' in the process. Jo Verrent, artistic leader of Unlimited!, the British fund for artists with a disability, puts it this way: *'All artists are artists – and in a perfect world, no one would need to take on a label just to gain funding, find a way in or get taken seriously. But that's currently not the case and by identifying positively, it could be argued that disabled artists can gain a voice and a platform that can push them further, faster.'* (Verrent, 2012). Many people with disabilities - which we agree with - see impairment as something positive. Perhaps it is especially the arts that can change the social perception of impairment and disability. If you know that a moving dance solo was choreographed by someone with a disability, or that a dazzling scene was brought by an actor with a disability, your expectations of what people with disabilities can achieve will be challenged. If you see people with disabilities equally and widely represented in all sections of the cultural sector, the perception will change, and their work will no longer need a separate mention.

### **Ready?**

Inclusive art is an adventure for all parties involved. It means working with the diversity that presents itself. From this encounter of disabled and non-disabled artists, you can create new possibilities from impossibilities, without ignoring the differences. We will discuss how to do this in the next chapter.





# CHAPTER 2 - METHODICAL CHOICES

Perhaps you did not need the first chapter and you're already convinced of the added value of an artistic process with people with disabilities. But you are still unsure of which direction you should take to put this principle into practice. According to us, the ideal method does not exist. Not one size fits all. So, above all, we want to see many more opportunities for disabled artists and as many different types of practices as possible. There should be more choice for people with disabilities, since they are often dependent on the opportunities close by, whether it suits or not.

Therefore, as an individual or organization, feel free to choose an approach that makes you feel good and that fits with the mission, vision and values of your organization. If possible, work with other organizations to create a landscape in which many different forms of artistic participation are possible. Support people with disabilities to find the way that best meets their wishes and needs at that time.

In this chapter, we will give you a lot of options and considerations that can help you to make your own choices or to reaffirm the choices you've made and to convey them clearly in words.

### **1. Why? What is the focus of your project?**

You should first consider the 'why' of your project. Different goal orientations are possible and can coincide to a greater or lesser degree. The publication 'Art for everyone' (Arts access, Victoria, Australia) describes the most common focus areas for an inclusive arts project.

#### *Artistic*

If you are strongly committed to artistic goals, you will try to connect the creative exploration of the ideas and feelings of the players with the relevance for a contemporary audience. Make sure that the individuals or the group are sufficiently technically skilled to implement the ideas and are working towards a product that can be spread out to a wide audience. A critical view from outside can make the development of the work stronger, but pay sufficient attention to your own voice and the co-ownership of your players, so that the artistic process does not overwhelm them.

#### *Participation and engagement*

If participation is the priority, you initially invest in a clear and compelling invitation to the community or people with whom you want to work. In particular, the added value for their needs and requirements is central. Design the project so that everyone can feel welcome and can make a contribution of their own. Make sure that your programme is flexible enough, and that your perspective is also focused on the long-term, on sustainable connection with and between participants. Your project is about finding and connecting people. It is possible that the process will become more important here than the end result, but that does not necessarily have to happen. Social goals don't exclude high artistic quality. However, sometimes you may decide that the pressure of a public event puts pressure on the participatory process. Then you may or may not have the pressure of 'participation and engagement'.

### *Collaboration and partnership*

Many artistic projects work in partnership because one organization or individual rarely has all the skills and resources necessary to succeed in the project. Good collaboration is not only functional, but also a value in itself. You connect and reinforce the interests of the various project partners. If collaboration is an important goal-orientation for your project, pay sufficient attention to the fact that the objectives and the role of the various partners are clear and that the important decisions are taken together. Also try to gain sufficient clarity about the investments and input of the various partners. Pay close attention to careful communication.

### *(Co-) ownership*

It may also be your goal to put the project into the hands of people with disabilities themselves, as individual artists or in groups. The ownership, artistic freedom and decision-making power lie with them. In addition to a dancer, player or creator, people with disabilities can also take on the role of director, choreographer and/or teacher. A possible outcome of the project may also include strengthening the professional development of the disabled artists.

**ARCIL** is an Occupational Centre for adults with disability from **Portugal**. They organise music workshops where disabled (young) adults work together with children and youngsters from the local community. They learn to make music together and work towards an annual performance. This way ARCIL raises awareness and demonstrates the artistic potential of individuals with disability.

The musical activities are developed by a musical expression teacher, supported by a social worker or a psychologist. The team also consists of a group of persons with learning, sensory and/or physical disabilities. Together they form a musical band that implements the workshops for Preschool and School-aged children in mainstream school settings. Diverse materials and assistive technology are used to enhance the access to music: Makey-Makey, Sound Beam, Kaossilator<sup>2</sup>, etc.

More info about ARCIL: <https://www.facebook.com/arcillousa> and [www.arcil.org.pt](http://www.arcil.org.pt).

### *Well-being & health*

Some projects put well-being and health first; for others it is an added bonus. For those who focus on well-being and health, artistic projects can be a turning point to refuel confidence and strengthen self-image. It can lead to a change in living habits, breaking through isolation and creating new connections with the local community or with support services. If you want to achieve sustainable results, make sure that during the project you build sufficient bridges with existing services and organizations and ensure sufficient (after) care to maintain the positive effects of the process.

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<sup>2</sup> you can learn more about the opportunities of digital music making for disabled people on: [https://www.heartnsoul.co.uk/category/artists/details/the\\_sound\\_lab](https://www.heartnsoul.co.uk/category/artists/details/the_sound_lab)

### *Stand up for more social justice*

People with disabilities are often not taken seriously, even when it comes to their own experiences. Artistic processes can support them in turning their ideas and feelings into words, images and/or movements and bringing these to the attention of others. Art can serve as a megaphone for social change. However, it's important to make sure that care workers or arts facilitators do not put their own opinions and ideas in the mouth of the performers and that people are not made to look ridiculous, that they only share what they want to share. Also make sure that the people at the centre of it all can fully stand behind their work and behind the messages, statements and stories they contribute or the explanation given to their work.



**La Compagnie du Savon Noir (Grenoble, France)** creates performances and launches artistic projects addressing social issues and preoccupations. Working with professionals and amateurs, their work voices the perspective of people that are seldom heard in the public domain. The artistic creations, often multidisciplinary, are based on testimonies of underprivileged groups.

La Compagnie du Savon Noir works on the crossroads between academic research, testimonies of the people involved and artistic forms of expression (theater, music, puppetry, exhibitions, installations, poetry, forum theatre). They bring their multidisciplinary creations to the public. They organise workshops, collective writing sessions and animated debates on various social matters such as well-being at work, diversity and discrimination, end-of-life care.

La Compagnie du Savon Noir also creates performances with a group of amateur actors with a disability. Their play 'Pas d'Omelette Sans Casser des Oeufs' tackled issues like autonomy, discrimination in the labour market and the friction between their love life and the rules and regulations of an institutional care-setting. Their recent inclusive performance 'Roméo & Juliette à la marge' continues the exploration of the love life and family ties of people with a disability.

Based on this performance, la Compagnie du Savon Noir organises workshops in care institutions to break down the taboo on love, sexuality and disability, to open up the debate in the institution and to improve some of the policies on this matter.

More information:

[www.ciedusavonnoir.fr](http://www.ciedusavonnoir.fr)

<http://www.ciedusavonnoir.fr/ateliers/amour-sexualite-handicap/>

## 2. Who do you include in your art practice(s)?

Do you only work with people with disabilities or do you strive for an inclusive mix of artists with and without disabilities? Traditionally, creative or artistic expressions of people with disabilities were valued for their position as outsiders. Artists with disabilities were placed within the outsider art because they make art without formal training or without a dialogue with the existing art world. There is therefore still a tendency to shield artists with a disability from other artists and thus to maintain authenticity and purity.

In addition, a movement is growing to involve people with disabilities as much as possible within the existing art world and to discuss with them topics other than just the disability. In practice, the term inclusion (inclusive) is used for this, although we note that this term is used in different ways.

- The term inclusive is often used to indicate that everyone can participate. Nobody is then excluded. The method(s) used and the support provided should ensure that everyone who registers can also participate effectively. There are no specific conditions (knowledge, competencies...) to be able to participate. This interpretation is closely related to the concept of access. 'Inclusive' here refers to the removal of all possible physical and mental barriers.
- The term inclusive is also used to indicate that there is collaboration between people with and without disabilities. For some, this means that a mixed group – balanced or not - participates in, for example, a workshop or is on stage together. Others speak of inclusion when a group of people with disabilities collaborate with a teacher, choreographer, director, costume designer or musician without a disability. Others use the term inclusive only to indicate that the participation takes place in an inclusive setting: at places and times and in circumstances where workshops or creation processes usually take place.
- Finally, the term inclusive can also refer to the quality of the interaction. Inclusive then means that people with disabilities fully belong. They can fully participate. They are co-owners in the creative process, but can also take decisions with regard to the organization



and the design of the process. Equality is a key concept here.

The term inclusion usually has a positive connotation because of the exchange between artists and participants with and without disabilities. The exchange is often put forward as a critical success factor.

The **Kilkenny Collective for Arts talent** is an example of such an inclusive practice.



**The Kilkenny Collective for Arts talent (KCAT)** from Ireland is a multi-disciplinary Arts Centre dedicated to the fostering and nurturing of creative ambition and professional development in the arts. KCAT strongly believes that everyone, regardless of background, age, gender or ability should have access to a creative world – as students, participants, artists or audiences.

Their inclusive ethos forms the core and building frame for their learner-centered approach. This focus blurs the boundaries between ability and disability, with the focus being on individual creative potential. Learners are supported by experienced facilitators who are also professional artists. The relationship between the facilitator and learner is key to supporting the particular needs of each learner. The learning space is also about creating an inclusive space in which nobody feels disadvantaged and about finding working methods that suit the individual and their own process of working and learning. When a learner needs individual support, a co-worker attends and works alongside the learner. The co-worker is encouraged to pursue their own creative potential and is actively discouraged from leading or interfering in the student's work.

The students come from diverse backgrounds, countries and schooling



experiences. The age profile covers ages 16 to late 70s, from school-leavers to retired professionals. People in care and people who live in the mainstream community. The approximate ratio is 40/60 of people with and without support needs. Our program content and flexible delivery, together with a variety of teaching methodologies provides an inclusive environment where the needs of all students are taken into account equally.

KCAT offers a wide selection of learning opportunities so that everyone can be involved in the arts. Their courses are for everybody. They are thoughtfully designed in such a way that they are accessible to people of all races, genders, abilities and ages. They come in the form of year-long courses, term-long courses, masterclass weekends, shorter evening courses and Open Studio settings. The framework of KCAT's programming is reflective of our artist-led and community-based ethos.

In the Studio, artists are supported by mentors and a facilitator in all aspects of their professional development. There is a strong sense of community and mutual support between artists and mentors, which extends beyond the walls of the studio. Working individually, all share, inspire and motivate each other. The Studio welcomes 14 artists with support needs.

The Equinox Theatre Company is made up of 8 actors with support needs. On their website, they describe their ensemble in the following way:

*"We work together constantly and in collaboration with other professional theatre artists to create our own brand of theatre. Our own brand of theatre is inclusive on as many levels as we can manage. That means that our work uses beautiful language, but it does not entirely rely on language because some of us choose not to communicate verbally and so we understand that some of our audience probably choose not to engage with the world aurally. We try to engage our audience with strong imagery – sometimes beautiful, sometimes ugly. But always trying to hold our own mirror up to our world. We want to say things like we see them. We want to tell the truth. We have chosen to become actors – this means that we want to be accepted as such. We understand that this does not happen instantly, but slowly and we are continuing to make our work regardless."*

More information: <http://kcat.ie>  
<https://www.youtube.com/user/KCATarts>  
<https://www.facebook.com/kcatarts/>

Even so, inclusion is sometimes difficult to achieve. People without a disability in particular, have persistent prejudices about working with people with disabilities. They fear that the co-operation will curtail their creativity, slow down the process and lower the quality of the work.

Under the heading 'inclusion', decisions are sometimes taken that are not always to the advantage of the person with a disability. Collaboration between people with and without disabilities always walks a fine line. So there is no such thing as the perfect inclusive project. There are always times of exclusion and inequality. Inclusion, however you interpret it,

remains a goal of avoiding as much exclusion as possible and achieving as much equality as possible. In this endeavour, the relationship between artists with and without disabilities is also a dynamic process.



### 3. Where and when do you work?

In order to keep the barriers low, sometimes people set up artistic projects in a familiar environment where people with a disability live or stay. Sometimes, the mobility of people with disabilities is so limited that art has to be brought into the institution.

**Edos (Milan, Italy)** provides residential care to disabled adults with physical disabilities and/or learning disabilities. It's almost impossible for their residents to participate in artistic workshops outside the centre, so they run a programme called **Inside Art Life (IAL)** offering individualised artistic training themselves, even if people are admitted to high health care departments. The activities take place in the residents' rooms and in dedicated spaces.

The methodology used is a gradual training path from simple to complex techniques. The combination of different techniques challenges the participant to pursue a nonlinear, creative and personal pathway with results that can be shared with others. The participants can make personal choices with materials they wish to explore:



- The type of paper and its weight, even up to the production of handmade paper sheet by sheet
- The materials used to draw: graphite, acrylic markers, wax or oil pastels, chalks, charcoal, etc.
- Materials used for painting: various brands of acrylic products, water-based enamels, oil paints, pure pigments, glazes and crystalline for ceramic, chine, ecoline, oilbar, etc.
- Materials used to mould: clays of different types: refractory, raku, white, gray.
- Technological tools used for a shared return of works: digital cameras, analogical, video editing techniques, graphic animation techniques.

These activities raise the self-confidence of the participants in their ability to manipulate, organise, shape and rethink the world and themselves in a new way.

More information: <https://www.edossrl.it/>

A familiar place offers the necessary safety but can also slow down the artistic process. Some rooms in a day-care centre or an institution are so clean or multifunctional that artistic expression is hindered. Extra attention must also be paid to the distinction between daily life and the artistic process in order to sufficiently establish the free and open atmosphere of dance or theatre. Ultimately, working in a separate care facility can also impede inclusion.

Others therefore choose not to work in the familiar environment but in a place that is attuned to the creative process and where people with and without disabilities can meet. Sometimes, artistic processes begin in the familiar environment of people with disabilities. Once the relationship of trust with the facilitators has been established, they continue the follow-up on the artistic trajectory in a cultural space.



The same applies for the times at which you work. Some care facilities have a very strict timetable. But for some artistic processes, you have to work into the evening or when you have inspiration. Not all artists with disabilities can have a studio space when they feel like it. Or they depend on others for their transportation to and from the rehearsal room. This can limit their freedom. It is therefore important to think about this beforehand and to make any arrangements with the care facilities, the care providers and/or the parents and the immediate environment.

#### 4. Which activities do you want to set up?

In almost every artistic discipline, there are examples of inclusive art practice: visual arts, video art, poetry, theatre, dance, music, rap, performance, circus, multidisciplinary. New forms of art, like Digital Art, offer perspectives to artists with a disability as the Centre de la Gabrielle demonstrates.

The Centre de la Gabrielle (France) organises 'Couleurs et Création', a day-care unit for 20 people with learning disabilities aged 45 plus. It forms a transition between professional life and retirement. For learning disabled people, 45 years old is a threshold: at this age people with learning disabilities become less able to work full time in sheltered employment, while at the same time they don't fit the profile required to access a mainstream retirement home.

"Couleurs et Création" offers an alternative to work, where people have the possibility to be recognized as active and find fulfillment through artistic creation. Participants undertake a long-term process in artistic creation, initiated and carried out by artists and professionals, in partnership with recognized cultural institutions.

At "Couleurs et Création" the creative process is developed in five workshops experimenting in several creative fields:

- Digital and visual arts workshop, managed by a professional artist
- Choreographic and corporeal expression workshop
- Writing and new media workshop
- Physical activities
- Memory

The artistic focus of 'Couleurs et Création' is on Digital Art. It is an innovative field that people with disabilities don't always have access to. It is a way to access technology and learn how to use it. The digital world also adds a new dimension to artistic research. Through digitalisation (photos, computer drawing and 3D modeling), participants can modify their creations directly on the computer, then print it with a classic or 3D printer, and keep on working on the objects to develop their imagination.

"Couleurs et Création" participates in exhibitions, theatre and dance performances and artistic

workshops thanks to partner institutions in Paris and the surrounding area. To share the creations with the public and to get recognition for participants, “Couleurs et Création” regularly showcases the output of creative projects via exhibitions or performances open to the public, which can take place both in the center and in cultural institutions.

The Centre de la Gabrielle is also part of ‘IN-ORCHESTRA’, a partnership with several Italian partners and a Turkish partner. The purpose of the project is to promote and support the educational inclusion of students with learning disabilities, through innovative methods in various artistic forms (music, visual art and theater).

More information on the project: <https://www.inorchestra.eu/>

More information: [www.centredelagabrielle.fr](http://www.centredelagabrielle.fr)

Inclusive practices also take on different forms. Some initiatives support individual artists with disabilities on an artistic and logistical level. Others work in collaboration with an artist with or without a disability or as a collective, while others are assisted by a director or choreographer.

Inclusive art practice occurs within different contexts: in care settings, within arts and culture education, amateur arts, cultural centres and arts organizations. This ranges from one-off projects, permanent work groups and professional inclusive companies.

Many organizations continue working with the existing formats that they may slightly adapt to people with disabilities. The workshops, residencies, master classes etc. largely follow the usual way of working. Sometimes, extra attention is paid to the communication and tempo, there is extra guidance or support provided and there is more time to find out how a particular instruction has to be ‘translated’. People also think more deliberately about the accessibility of the working environment and sometimes consciously remove disruptive factors such as background noise or materials that are lying around. But the same expectations are also presented to participants with and without disabilities: concentration, self-discipline, self-care etc.

Some organizations create new formats tailored to people with disabilities. Heart n Soul from London, for example, organizes THE BEAUTIFUL OCTOPUS CLUB to combine accessible workshops and exhibitions with performances and clubbing options.

## **5. How will you work?**

Many common processes, methods and techniques in arts education and creation are also useful when you are working with people with disabilities. Within dance, specific exercises or techniques are developed<sup>3</sup>, and within music, there are alternative ways of composing and creating music like sound painting<sup>4</sup> for example.

People who work with people with a disability make more observations and are more aware of differentiations. With careful observation, you can determine whether your exercises are working sufficiently for all participants. You can also incorporate the beauty that can arise from mistakes and misunderstandings into the creation process. People who work with

people with a disability make more observations and are more aware of differentiations. With careful observation, you can determine whether your exercises are working sufficiently for all participants. You can also incorporate the beauty that can arise from mistakes and misunderstandings into the creation process. If not everyone can keep up with everything, some will differentiate and give participants other or additional exercises or work with supportive or stimulating roles. Others adjust their approach so that everyone can participate in all exercises or work forms. A lot depends on your goals, but you can also discuss this with your participants.



<sup>3</sup>See <http://www.idancenetwork.eu> and <https://inclusivedance.eu>

<sup>4</sup><http://www.soundpainting.com>





# **CHAPTER 3: (CO-)OWNERSHIP**



Art and art educational processes with people with disabilities are usually highly valued. But critical questions also arise. Representatives of people with disabilities and the arts express their doubts about the contribution that people with disabilities can and should offer to the and artistic process. We refer to this as the (co-)ownership of people with disabilities.

## 1. What do we mean by (co-)ownership?

The social model is central to the current view of people with disabilities. People with disabilities are citizens, with rights and obligations. They do not have to be integrated into society; they are part of it by definition. However, they are entitled to specific support to be able to participate equally in ordinary society and to make a contribution of their own. Also, when people with disabilities study or create art, they deserve any necessary support to make their own contribution. This (co-) ownership is made concrete in five key concepts:

- Control:** To what extent do players have a say in the different facets of the educational/creative process (choice of theme, text and/or movement material, character, costume, decor, music)?
- Freedom of choice:** To what extent can the players decide for themselves whether and in which way they participate in the creation/education process?
- Independence:** To what extent are the players themselves responsible for their contribution to the performance/training? Is the support offered weighed against their autonomy?
- Self-awareness:** Is the person with a disability aware of their contribution to the performance? Is he or she critical of themselves and others?
- Empowerment:** Is the person with a disability stronger in their daily lives due to participation in the creation/education process?

## 2. What's the problem?

(Co-)ownership seems to us to be primarily a theme within the performing arts. Within the visual arts, it is clearer who created the work. In fact, within the idiom of the Outsider Art, the work is created in complete independence, not influenced by the prevailing views on art and without any formal training or dialogue with the existing canon. However, even when visual art is created in a more collaborative way, the individual artist's stamp is often still easily visible.

Within the performing arts, there are more doubts and questions about the educational/creative process itself than the work of people who have a physical disability. But even then, questions arise about their input. Especially for dance performances; some people quickly feel that the movements do not come from the dancers themselves. Many questions are raised by the engagement of people with disabilities in performance art, two questions that often arise are.

### *Do people with intellectual disabilities play a full role?*

Due to the growing focus on the social model and citizenship paradigm, we are increasingly looking at the role and place of people with intellectual disabilities in performing arts. One of those critical voices we found was with Dr Nick Owen from The Liverpool Institute of Performing Arts. In early 2000, he developed Solid Foundations, specific training for and by artists with a disability. The aim was to fully integrate these artists into regular arts fields. However, inspired by the social model, Owen wondered: how can you judge whether this integration has been successful?

For Owen (2002), two themes are crucial: focus and power. For 'focus' Owen wonders: At what and at who are we asked to look? To whom should we listen? Does everyone get the same opportunities? With 'power', Owen asks: Who are the protagonists? Who guides the action; who tells the story? Who is central to the story, and who will first receive the story? Are there also players who passively watch the action pass them by? To assess the question about integration, Owen asks 'the puppet question'. Any player who can be replaced by a puppet is not part of an integrated show, but has been added - sometimes with the best intentions - as a frill or statement. In concrete terms, this is everyone we have to look away from, whose presence does not really count, who is not a protagonist, who does not have a meaningful role in the story, and who does not exercise any control over his or her own contribution to the story. Today, we are a lot further along than in 2000, but the puppet question is still a useful tool for looking critically at the contribution of people with learning disabilities to the performance.

### *Can people with intellectual disabilities play a full role?*

Not only do questions arise about whether people with intellectual disabilities may play a full role, there are also doubts whether these players can fill a full role. Is (co-)ownership even possible? Can someone with a disability play along in a piece if he or she does not understand what it is about? Can people with learning disabilities reflect sufficiently on the theatre play? And if not, are they allowed to play along in a piece they do not understand the full meaning and scope of?



Is it not true that people with learning disabilities may be easily manipulated by others? To what extent do they fully support what they say and do during the performance? Are they being pushed into a role? And why is the audience actually watching? What do they hope to see? Are they curious about something special, a curiosity? Does the audience seek authenticity and assume that these players cannot distinguish between fiction and reality, that they can only be themselves on stage or cannot consciously play a role? But are they actors then? Or are they being put on display?

We can connect these questions and doubts with developments within the art of performance itself. Since the Seventies, the autonomy of the player has increased. The actor becomes theatre-maker. They have evolved from a pure executor to being co-responsible, acquiring co-control over all aspects of the performance. They have developed from interpreting someone else's characters to creating characters themselves. Actors or dancers can work in collectives without a director or choreographer, or the latter may only give the framework within which the performers get the freedom to create. In this creative process, extensive and abstract conversations sometimes play an important role (Van Rensbergen, 2014).

This evolution raises the bar for full participation ever higher. Can people with learning disabilities, even with support, reach this bar? Or are we unnecessarily setting the bar too high? Do objections come from prejudices and stereotypes

### **3. Co-ownership is possible, even in the performing arts**

Firstly, it turns out that people with learning disabilities are not as simple to manipulate as may be believed. *"You cannot impose anything on people with a learning disability",* says Marc Bryssinck, artistic director of Theater Stap. *"You can ask people without a disability to take a role and direct them. You cannot impose anything on these people. That means that the performance comes more from these people themselves. As a director, you at most make some adjustments."* (Mazure, 2011). Actress Marit Stocker (Opening Doors Belgium) also says: *"In the beginning, I had my own ideas about certain scenes. Those scenes looked great in my head. But when I explained them to the learning-disabled performers, I soon realized that my approach did not work. They stuck nicely to what I had described, and we were soon done talking. A scene must come from the inside, so I had to put my ideas aside and find a match between the players and the scenes in my head. Then I got something back that was much nicer."* (De Visscher, 2015)

People with a learning disability can also make a distinction between playing and being, between theatre and real life. Marit Stocker: *"What they play is based on what they really feel, not on what they imitate from me or from the television. Only when you do not emphasize 'playing on stage' do you get a result that feels real and not corny or cliché. But it remains a stage. They play. They can repeat their actions, they are not really happy or sad... They also know that it is theatre. It is important to me that there is a clear distinction between the stage and real life. I do not want to mix the two; that's just confusing. But there is a thin line, and I do not want to cross it. When I ask someone to get angry, for example, I keep an eye on the person when the scene is over, and I check whether*

*they can let go of that emotion again.” (De Visscher, 2015)*

If given the opportunity, people with disabilities can also play the role of someone without a disability or where the disability is not relevant to the character. The British actress Sarah Gordy, for example, has previously played characters with disabilities in various television series, including *Upstairs Downstairs*. But in 2014, she was cast in a play for the role of a woman without a disability.

People with a learning disability may also want to reflect and talk about the quality of their art. The problem is that the reflection and the conversation are often conducted in abstract terms, above the heads of the artists. This is a dilemma that this publication also struggles with. In the United Kingdom, people with intellectual disabilities therefore took the initiative to enter into this conversation themselves. During The Creative Minds Conference, they showed their work and engaged in conversation with directors, choreographers and critics. The conferences were organized by a steering group of people with learning disabilities, supported by Carousel, a British arts organization for musicians and filmmakers with a disability. On the website for the project, you will find a detailed script for those who want to set up such a conference<sup>5</sup>.

Finally, we also wonder to what extent actors and actresses without intellectual disabilities estimate the full meaning and scope of their work. Can they always create in complete freedom and autonomy? Is this expected from them in every production? And are actors without a disability sometimes looking for a more direct, intuitive way of playing that they can find with actors with intellectual disabilities?

We therefore want to put the questions and doubts about the (co-)ownership of people with intellectual disabilities into perspective. Even so, we notice that certain choices within the artistic/educational process can further strengthen this (co-)ownership. We provide a number of concrete suggestions and tools for this.

#### **4. Increasing (co-)ownership in the creative and educational process**

##### *Orientation*

During the orientation process, the foundation for (co-)ownership is laid. Artists without disabilities who step into this project create opportunities for artists with disabilities to develop (co-) ownership. In principle, every artist is equipped to step into such a process. The working method is not fundamentally different from other creative or educational processes. This collaboration does require the artists to put their own ideas and their own ego into perspective.

This is what Marc Bryssinck from Theater Stap expects from an external director: “In any case, you must have an interest in your actors, and realize that they have their qualities, but that it often takes more time to create a performance with these people. Also important is the attitude of the director. The director must be flexible and prepared to subordinate all his or her beautiful ideas to the capabilities of our players.” (Mazure, 2011)

<sup>5</sup> See <https://www.creativemindsproject.org.uk>

To put their own ideas into perspective doesn't mean that artists without a disability have to make themselves fully of service. It remains important that everyone is challenged to achieve their full potential. Nathalie Gordon of the Royal Conservatory in Antwerp: "*The choreographer must make sure that the focus does not lie on showing what all dancers with disabilities can achieve. The focus must remain on creating an artistically sufficiently interesting product that challenges everyone as a professional artist and therefore does not only revolve around the interaction and integration of the dancers.*" (Nan Alphen & De Visscher, 2016)

Artists who opt for this work are therefore more likely to show a great openness to and curiosity about jointly undertaking an artistic search for an unknown destination (Fox & Macpherson, 2015). After all, you don't have a complete picture of all the participants capabilities in advance. Prejudice and preconceived ideas often prove unjustified. The collaboration surprises artists and provokes creativity. Artists enter into this collaboration from different motives. For some artists, their view on people and society is inextricably linked to their artistry. They do not distinguish between their artistic ambitions and their social engagement.

Some artists get the label of 'socially engaged artist' and may fall into a circle with less artistic cachet. In fact, art only creates social added value from its artistic quality. In the orientation phase of the process, the makers can connect social and artistic goals and from there go on an exploration together. What they cannot control is social acceptance. This is largely based on stereotypical images that can only be broken by the art itself. This is a matter of time and external factors, but the quality of the interaction also plays an important role. We will clarify how this interaction takes shape in the next steps of the creative process.

### *Preliminary stage*

At the beginning of the preliminary phase, there is strong investment in the connection between the group members and any teacher, trainer, director or choreographer. This is an important focus of attention, both during the formal and the informal moments. A close relationship creates the necessary confidence and creates a climate in which everyone knows they are safe. This search for 'connection' is not a trick or a formality that is used strategically, but a way of working that is inextricably linked to such processes. A clear structure and plan also contribute to the safety that is necessary for starting a creative process. In this phase, but actually during the entire process, it is important to provide sufficient time; it takes time to get to know each other, to build security and trust.

In addition to safety, the atmosphere of freedom and choice that is part of a creative process needs to be established. With an inexperienced group, more experienced artists can be role-models. By behaving in a 'non-conformist' way, they can establish the atmosphere of the arts: art is different from real life; different laws apply here, and here you can 'go crazy'.

Zig Zag, a French centre for inclusive arts, developed their own method of 'assisted improvisation'.



**Zig Zag (Vauréal, France)** is a centre for theatre practice run by professionals from the worlds of art and care. Based on their experience with circus and clowning, they have developed their own working method of “accompanied improvisation”. In this method a person with a disability comes on stage and is invited to play and to express himself according to his desires or sensitivity. An actor/clown accompanies him on stage to support the disabled person in this exploration - always carefully observing and listening. The clown is completely at their service and enables the playful dialogue that takes place. A soundtrack or an improvising musician supports the duo of actors and their exchanges, itself interacting, giving the improvisations a narrative and temporal framework.

Accompanied improvisation, explores through play the individual language of each person with a disability, and invites us to discover their unique forms of expression, outside of our representations and our presuppositions. It is a journey in original expression, organic and sensory, often without any reference. It's an invitation to turn theatre into a toy, a place to witness different ways of being in the world. This game of reciprocity is “a land of equality”, a momentary place at the heart of society.

Zig Zag organises weekly workshops and courses from one to five days. They also hold specific ‘laboratory’ workshops, dedicated to the playful and artistic exploration of all kinds of materials like tubes, rubber wheels and blankets. They've also created an improvisation performance ‘Balbutio’, tailor-made to be performed in care institutions. Zig Zag also offers a training course for care-workers, art therapists and students to study their method of assisted improvisation and to become an accompanying artist themselves.

Finally Zig Zag ZIGZAG also offers workshops on masquerade, photography, video and cinema, puppetry, sound and music, and creative writing.

More information: <https://www.zigzag-theatre.com>  
<https://balbutio.jimdofree.com>

In their daily lives, people who live in an institution or who depend on others, often have to comply with the goals and agendas of others. They have limited freedom. An artistic process often offers much more freedom, but then artistic facilitators have to step out of the driver's seat. For example, they can teach basic techniques, but after that, the joint artistic quest should start. Artists with a disability can also seek dependency themselves by putting artists without disabilities in a guiding position. To avoid this pitfall, it is important that artists continue to question themselves critically: who has the power here? Who makes the choices? Who exercises control? Who contributes the ideas?

In this phase, it is also important that the disability support network is involved. In order to become (co-)owner in an artistic process, artists with a disability usually depend on the approval, the goodwill and the support of parents or care-workers. These parties are not always familiar with the specificity of these processes, do not always value them or do not immediately recognize the talents and career opportunities of their child or client. On the one hand, it is important to keep them well informed and sufficiently involved, so that they

are prepared to make the extra efforts necessary, both for themselves and for their children/clients. On the other hand, it may be necessary to leave enough distance if they interfere in a controlling manner.

Finally, it is important at this stage to launch a theme that triggers the rest of the process. Sometimes, the director or choreographer determines the theme. Sometimes, (co-)ownership in this area isn't possible because the funding application requires that the theme is defined before the project starts. In that case, most themes are very open and universal, or they are related to the world of people with disabilities. In other projects, the group itself chooses the theme

### *Research phase*

In the research phase, the theme is explored and deepened in every possible way. Improvisation is a strong and common way, in both dance and theatre, to realize (co-)ownership. Improvisation can also be used in the visual arts as 'Jamming' illustrates:



**Jamming (Czech Republic)** is an experimental art project in which artists with learning disabilities and artists who are 'handicapped by an art school education' co-operate with one another. The main concept behind the project is to apply the idea of group improvisation, jamming - a common phenomenon in music - to painting. It is an attempt at breaking down barriers on various fronts: the project aims to show that multiple painters can work together on one canvas and that people with learning disabilities, and those without, don't have to live in separate worlds. These jam sessions manage to create an atmosphere of openness and tolerance that is experienced by both artists with and without learning disabilities as inspiring and enriching.

The Jamming project started in 2014 as a small-scale experiment by four painters, two of them with learning disabilities, trying to paint collectively. In the following years both the number of participants and the size of the paintings increased. The artists experimented with various methods of creating work together. Participants in Jamming have included artists with learning disabilities or autism, professional painters from the Czech Republic, and abroad and students of the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague.

The spontaneity and authenticity of artists with learning disabilities is often a source of inspiration for artists without disabilities. On the other hand, working side

by side with professional artists stimulates artists with learning disabilities not only in their artistic development, but also in the development of social and practical skills. The inclusion of people with learning disabilities as equal partners in a quality art project supports their sense of dignity and self-worth. The workshops also provide the opportunity to meet with people without disabilities.

Finally, an exhibition in the DOX Centre for Contemporary Art, one of the most prestigious venues in Prague, led to more recognition by the general public.

More information: [www.jamming.cz](http://www.jamming.cz)

All kinds of theatre or dance exercises are also used to obtain raw material. These are common exercises and work forms; specific working methods are not necessary. However, it is important that directors and choreographers communicate the assignments clearly and understandably to people with learning disabilities. Sometimes specific assignments are also given to strengthen the (co-) ownership of the person with a disability. In 'De Gedekende', an inclusive dance project, for example, dancers with a disability were asked to create a solo by 'writing' the letters of their name in the air. These solos were further developed together with the dancers without a disability. Sometimes, the artists also get homework. They look up information about the theme or collect (movement) material.

The regional branch of **LADAPT** in the west of **France** used stop motion to enable six women with a disability to reflect on their situation and to express their dreams and ideas. The women worked together with local artist Frédérique Ody. They wrote the scene themselves based on their personal experiences in three domains: family, work and the glance of others. They made the backdrop and the characters of the movie out of paper cuttings and created the stop motion movie frame by frame. The artist involved mixed all the images together to create the movie itself. The women involved learned a lot from this experience: expressing their own thoughts, making their own choices, working together in a team with patience and in great detail.

You can watch the movie here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O6r5uAs2mwk>

Learn more about LADAPT: <http://www.ladapt.net/>

Frédérique Ody on facebook: [https://www.facebook.com/frederique.odye?tn-str=\\*F](https://www.facebook.com/frederique.odye?tn-str=*F)

Other artists and teachers work with questions in this phase. This keeps them close to their players. Questions like *'what does meeting mean for you'* or *'what is friendship?'* Provoke reactions and associations. If one of the participants makes an association, they invite the participants to translate this association into a scene or an image: *'How can we show what this word means to us? How can we create a scene that illustrates this word? How do we make theatre from this, something that other people can watch?'* Based on improvisations in and around this image, they refine the 'scene', often with the person who contributed the association in a central role. When the scene is more or less clear, it gets the name of the person who initiated it.



In various practices, it is striking how sensitive artists with and without a disability respond to each other's input. There is a great openness for different forms of communication and small, meaningful movements or statements are picked up and further developed. Directors and choreographers also make detailed notes during the process or ask others to do so. They also challenge themselves to maintain sufficient openness, to continue exploring new opportunities and to critically question their prejudices. This requires the ability to let go, to take risks and not to avoid uncertainty, but to seek it. Even when the process is stuck, something always happens. And if the director or choreographer is open and alert enough to pick this up, he or she can succeed in using theatre skills to transfer this to the public. If people with a disability feel that the final picture is already fixed, they will also behave accordingly. But if they are fully engaged in the creative process, they always know exactly what they are doing. Even if it looks strange or abstract, it has meaning for them.

### *Creation Phase*

In this phase, the director or choreographer can take more ownership. He or she gets to work with the material generated by the participants. That is why it is important that artistic facilitators also take a critical look at their role and their interventions during this phase. To what extent are these interventions necessary? Why are they needed? Does the director or choreographer acknowledge the dialogue between artists with and without disabilities to the full?

In the visual arts, arts facilitators must restrain themselves from interfering in the artistic expressions of the participants, as Scuola Viva illustrates.

**Scuola Viva onlus (Rome, Italy)** is a non-profit, non-governmental rehabilitation centre. One of their main activities is a day-care centre for people with intellectual disabilities that holds art workshops. On a daily basis a group of youngsters with intellectual disabilities aged 25-35 years old, are engaged in artistic activities, supported by two art facilitators with an artistic background.

The main mission of Scuola Viva is to improve the quality of life of persons with disabilities, to increase their self-esteem and to promote their independent living. In the early days of the day-care center, art was mainly used as a form of therapy. While this is still the case for some users, other participants are considered artists and they make art for art's sake. Their work is put on exhibition on a local and national level and the organization hopes to bring their work to the market.

The artists enjoy a number of painting techniques and applications: on glass, canvas, paper, walls and ceramics. New participants are offered a warm, peaceful, positive and stimulating reception. An important key point is the establishment of an emotional relationship, in order to make a connection and install a relationship of trust. After a period of observing participants' personal graphic-expression, the art facilitator identifies the personal style and attitudes of the

client. Later, the art facilitator suggests appropriate techniques that will encourage the development of their personal style.

The workshop is particularly proud of their large, commissioned collective masterpieces. Scuola Viva developed their own working method to create these large paintings.

The production process starts with careful planning. A specific group is put together to create the new work. Once established, the group discusses the subject of the painting, sharing their personal ideas and interpretations. During this creative stage, sensorial input is offered, such as art magazines, art exhibitions, observation and technological tools.

During the next phase all the artists start independently creating their own drawings based on the common theme. The technical interventions are limited to a few images or keywords. Then each client introduces to the group his/her segment of work. Together they select the more significant drawings. Photocopies are made and those who have a good ability using scissors will cut the drawings chosen.

The group collectively creates a story using hand drawn images. Characteristic of this collaboration is the avoidance of technical or conventional art education parameters. The clients, guided by the art facilitator or by themselves, copy the drawings to gloss paper, reducing a few lines. Then, the choice of the colours and the preparation of a sample will follow.

The preparation of the colours is done together with the art facilitator to mix the colours to match the tones chosen. The client hands out the colours on the draft freely. During the preparation of the final sketch, the intervention of the art facilitator is limited to suggesting some matching of colours.

To carry out the definitive project, the drawing is projected on the wall or on a board in its concrete sizes, using a projector. The lines screened are then drawn on using an acrylic colour. The colouring stage begins, having the final sample as a referral point.

It is important that the client has a real opportunity to run through the full process to finalize his/her project as a tangible activity step by step, having the right of freedom of expression.

The art facilitator should never forget their restraint, but at the same time, should answer to the needs of the client and help to discover, if necessary, the 'vein' of an artist.



There are also forms of work in this phase to keep giving people with disabilities (co-) ownership. For example, a theatre company had the habit of having a different player tell the story in his or her own way at the beginning of each rehearsal. In this way, the actors made the story their own step-by-step and had an overview of the work. After all, a story can be told in many different ways.

Sometimes, people with a disability bring in elements from their own worlds; they may have certain heroes they want to imitate, have different tastes in music, or even a unique sense of humour. Directors and choreographers deal with this in different ways. Some look for a suitable context in which this contribution comes into its own. Sometimes, this means that you show certain everyday actions in all their simplicity. Others lay down different layers of image, music, text and movement that enrich the play of the actors. Others search behind the players' proposals for an underlying question or value and propose an artistic alternative that expresses the same. Or they try to broaden the view by taking people to shows and exhibitions, by letting them get to know other music genres.

Another interesting point is the learning/teaching of specific skills. For some, learning the necessary skills is an essential element of developing (co-)ownership. Only when artists with a disability master the proper skills, are they able to use the necessary vocabulary to bring their message across.

**MARGARITA** is a vocational training centre for people with learning disabilities in Greece. They use theatre therapy to minimize the difficulties faced by people with disabilities in expression and management of emotions. The participants conceptualize and work on their personal issues through theatre, discovering their creativity and their talents. At the end of each year they publicly perform a play that incorporates their work and achievements as actors and as people. The subject of the performance is inspired by their personal life. They bring a story concerning their lives that isn't mediated by someone who doesn't share their personal experiences.

Their working method is based on the Embodiment-Projection-Role Model (EPR) of Drama Therapy, developed by Sue Jennings and based on the way children up to the age of seven develop dramatic play. To move from a dramatic work to a stage performance, MARGARITA uses six 'keys':

- 1st key - The threshold: the ability to enter and exit the dramatic reality.
- 2nd key - Quality of dramatic reality: style of acting and involvement of the participants, their spontaneity and concentration, the general flow and all other aspects which form the performance.
- 3rd key - Roles and characters: the ability of the individual to maintain his/her role and encounter others.
- 4th key - Plot, themes and conflicts: the ability of the individual to deal with the situations and relationships portrayed in the scenario.
- 5th key - The audience: the ability of the individual to accept and deal with the response of the audience, even if it is negative.

• 6th key - De-rolling: the ability of the individual to separate from his/her role, reintegrate in the reality and evaluate the experience.

More information on Margarita: <https://www.eeamargarita.gr/en/>  
[More information on the Embodiment-Projection-Role Model \(EPR\) of Sue Jennings: http://www.suejennings.com/index.html](http://www.suejennings.com/index.html)

Others stress the natural talent of people with disabilities to express themselves with more freedom and less prejudice than people without a disability. They acknowledge that people with disabilities also need to acquire the necessary skills, but they refuse to see a significant difference between participants with and without a disability.

The **Spanish** visual artist **Jesús Placencia** organises inclusive drawing workshops, providing training to people with and without disabilities. The main aim of the workshops is to develop the individual ability of expression and communication in every participant. The workshops don't require a specific technical level but depart from each person's capacities and uses those for personal development and group interaction. The workshop offers a balance between group teaching and individual needs; so that each participant advances in their own capacities and skills while a group belonging is developed. Therefore, the number of participants should not exceed 15 people. Through the practice of visual thinking and graphic ability, participants learn to recognise the value of diversity. They break stereotypes, become aware of their own talents and share results for which they feel proud and valued.

Being hard of hearing himself, Jesús can be a role-model for the participants. In his workshops, Jesús demonstrates that visual thinking and graphic expression are channels of communication among people which go beyond any kind of barrier: cultural, linguistic, and economic and, of course, barriers in relation to 'ability' and 'disability'.

Participants, with or without disabilities, usually start the workshops shyly drawing and with limited interaction, until finally they express themselves with more freedom and consciousness of their creative abilities. The skills acquired contribute to social inclusion. The enhanced active communication and increased self-confidence permeates everyday life.

Many participants without disability are surprised by what they learn from people with some 'disability', who, many times, express themselves with more freedom and less prejudice than themselves. The workshops highlight the positive contribution people with disabilities can have that enrich society and break down cultural limits between ability and disability. As the workshops are often provided in mainstream cultural environments, the general public is made aware of inclusive learning experiences and also about the capabilities of disabled persons.

More information: <http://www.jesusplacencia.com/index.php?otros/taller-de-dibujo/>

## *Presentation*

After weeks of preparation and rehearsals, the tension rises, the process intensifies, and in the run-up to the performance, there is a very frequent, sometimes daily gathering. The directors put the finishing touches on the scenes. In this phase, directors and choreographers take more ownership. They watch over the quality of the performance. Choreographer Nienke Reehorst talked about this to Dansmagazine: "It starts with an honest question and the right intention. Then I watch what unfolds and what that means. You always have to look critically to see whether the resulting work has the standard to be shown in a theatre. The work must resonate qualitatively in people who experience it. It must bring them physically, mentally and emotionally beyond the daily here and now. To promote the emancipation of people with disabilities, you have to show good pieces." (Keurentjes, 2016). Even so, artistic facilitators at this stage also ensure that they explain all decisions well and frame them for the players.

On the stage, the players are largely on their own. This usually works without any problem. In fact, outsiders are amazed about how much perseverance, self-discipline and concentration people with learning disabilities show during a performance. Even so, some players still need extra support on stage. If only people with disabilities are on stage, the facilitators sometimes offer discrete support. In an inclusive group, the players without disabilities usually take on this role. In order to prepare the group for this, some artistic facilitators focus on the cohesion of the group of players on stage.

In the run-up to the performance, the artistic facilitators also take the final decisions about decor, lighting, music choice and costumes. Players get a say in this, to a lesser or greater extent. Some players find it important to leave their mark on this; others leave these choices to the director. The performance 4:3 from Theater Stap and Thibaldus allowed the players to choose for themselves which costume they put on during each performance. But after a few performances, they were always on stage with the same clothes.

Based on the individuality of people with learning disabilities, the London arts organization, 'Heart n Soul', is also experimenting with other, less classical forms of presentation that are more accessible for people with a disability and that are more closely related to their world. The Beautiful Octopus Club Festival is thus a mix of clubbing, performance, open mic, performances and workshops. This festival is a bundling of more specific formats such as The Squidz Club (clubbing) and Allsorts workshops. In Tunnel of Love, Heart n Soul bundled different work forms into one thematic multisensory and multimedia installation

## *Completion*

After the series of performances, the completion of the entire process follows. The facilitator usually ensures that the project does not suddenly stop but provides a gradual wind-down. In this phase, an evaluation is usually also planned. Sometimes, it is not easy for people with a learning disability to be objective and to reflect on

what happened. Yet there are possibilities.

The research project *Kunstinclusief*, within the visual arts, resulted in the DVD *Learning from images*. This DVD shows images of work discussions, in which people with disabilities and art facilitators reflect on the artworks that have been made. The DVD shows how art facilitators can make their students both independent and give them power. The difference between instructive and active learning is also visualized, and we see how the facilitators remove abstractions, so that the participants experience more insight into the art activity they are currently doing.

Time and language also play an important role in evaluation and reflection. If you give people little time and only verbal options for expressing themselves, you only get a reaction from those who can answer quickly and verbally. Allowing other voices to speak requires other processes. A strong example is *Side by Side* from 2013, a retrospective exhibition in the London Southbank Centre about collaborative art between people with and without intellectual disabilities. The exhibition was compiled by an inclusive group of people with and without learning disabilities. This selection process was visually supported with images of all the submitted works and plans and scale models of the Southbank Centre. In consultation, the works were selected together based on their visual strength and placed in the centre. A symposium was also linked to this exhibition. Curator and artistic director of The Rocket Artists, Alice Fox, also wanted to actively involve people with learning disabilities in the symposium. The central questions of the symposium were translated into creative workshops where people with and without disabilities could search for answers in a creative way. Each workshop resulted in a 1-minute video with an overview of the activities and the results. These videos were shown at the end of the day and merged into one manifesto<sup>6</sup>. After a stage performance, you do not have to create an exhibition or organize a symposium. But you can get a better picture of the experience of the participants based on visual support and creative work forms.

Once the performance is finished, plans are usually made for the next one. Some external directors and choreographers remain heavily involved with the group. They make new proposals, help submit new projects or involve the players in other initiatives. The group of players usually also has a great need for continuity. After one or more projects, there is a growing need for structural work. People with a disability can also acquire (co-)ownership in the organization of such an operation.

## **5. (Co-)ownership in the development of an organization**

In the United Kingdom, the number of Disability Led Arts Organizations is growing. The Art Council considers an organization as 'Disability Led' if 51% or more of the members of the Board of Directors and the management of the organization are people with disabilities.

Often, there are many prejudices about the capabilities of people with disabilities to take

<sup>6</sup> <http://arts.brighton.ac.uk/projects/side-by-side>

a leading role within the organization. They are thought not to have the necessary skills to play a role in a steering or advisory group. At Afanias, a Spanish organization for people with disabilities, they turn this argument around. Angeles Martinez, one of Afanias' directors says: *"All our services are led by a council and a board of directors. Both of them consist of representatives of the families, or staff members and people with learning disabilities themselves. We include disabled people directly because family and staff tend to forget the perspective of the disabled participants they are supposed to represent. Sometimes they tend to make decisions based on their own criteria and their own insights. Disabled participants are aware of this, so they gather the opinions of their co-participants and bring these to the council and to the board."* (De Visscher, 2015)

(Co-)ownership starts with inviting people with disabilities to meetings. That seems obvious, but it's not. People with disabilities are quickly overlooked, and prejudices are not always questioned. But of course, it is more than a matter of inviting.

People with a disability need to receive comprehensible information beforehand and sufficient time to prepare themselves and to consult others. We found a strong example of accessible communication at the British organization Heart n Soul<sup>7</sup>. They work with a clear structure and fonts, use photographs, symbols and illustrations and succeed in giving the whole a contemporary and attractive design. The meetings deal with concrete topics; people speak in turn, and the meetings do not last too long. People with disabilities can also receive support to participate; they receive tailor-made training, and/or they can count on a personal assistant to help formulate their opinion. There are also specific ways of working to collect ideas and make plans together with people with intellectual disabilities. The methodology *Plan P*, for example, offers a roadmap with creative techniques that support people with intellectual disabilities and their environment to change and improve something in their environment. The method consists of four steps: identifying the problem, coming up with ideas, choosing an idea and presenting this idea. Per step, Plan P offers a number of working methods<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> see for example the policy plan of the organization on <http://www.heartnsoul.co.uk/category/about/details/strategicplan>

<sup>8</sup> see <http://www.planp.be>



## 6. (Co-)ownership over one's own artistic development

Within the performing arts, people with a disability also want to shape their own artistic development: developing certain skills, elaborating artistic ideas or even facilitating and teaching workshops. The British dance company Stopgap Dance Company developed a model called IRIS to discuss and develop this artistic track together with their dancers. IRIS stands for Include, Respond, Integrate and Specialize. This model positions itself as an alternative development model, outside the existing circuits, but with the same qualitative output. People with disabilities can follow and determine their development in this way. Include is about acquiring basic skills in the field of dance. Respond provides specific, tailor-made sessions for dedicated dancers with disabilities. Integrate is about gaining experience in an inclusive dance company. Specialize revolves around the development of a career as a dancer, choreographer and/or teacher. Such models not only provide a stepping stone for organizations, but also for people with disabilities and their environment.

We also refer to the dialogue cards that were developed within the research project *Kunstinclusief*. With the dialogue cards<sup>9</sup>, people with intellectual disabilities and their artistic partners talk about different steps in artistic development. The package consists of 23 cards, with questions and suggestions for each of the partners on each side, covering topics such as: 'my artistic plan', 'show and tell who I am' or 'learn to experiment'.

## 7. Attention to fees, property rights and copyright

A final aspect in the (co-)ownership of artists with a disability is their property rights and copyrights. Especially within the visual arts, the attention for this theme is growing. Critical questions are also posed within the performing arts. It is not yet really a pressing problem. The studios, workshops and day centres that support artists with a disability usually receive funding to expand their activities. And people with a disability themselves can in principle devote themselves to their art without needing the earnings to survive. They usually receive benefits such as a basic income, unemployment benefits, replacement income or disability benefits. However, conditions and restrictions are attached to these benefits with regards to earning. This makes it very difficult to compensate artists with disabilities in practice. For example, receiving significant compensation can have far-reaching consequences for the benefits of the artists. Moreover, the restrictions and conditions for the various benefits appear to be a complicated matter and often not transparently established. For example, with some benefits, the consequences in case of violation of the conditions are impossible to estimate in advance. That makes it even more difficult to compensate these artists.

The sale of visual art is not a major priority, for the artist nor the studio. There is little expertise about the price setting. If works are sold, the proceeds are usually divided between the artist and the studio. Artists receive a small financial compensation or material support. We currently have no data on the compensation of artists with disabilities in the performing arts. Within the performing arts, property rights and copyright are also more difficult to establish because of the co-operative way in which performances come about.

<sup>9</sup>You can download this package for free from

[https://demos.be/sites/default/files/dialogoorkaarten\\_de\\_jacht\\_en\\_het\\_wachten\\_2010.pdf](https://demos.be/sites/default/files/dialogoorkaarten_de_jacht_en_het_wachten_2010.pdf)



EgArt (France) supports isolated artists or artists socially excluded because of their learning disabilities or mental illnesses, in their hopes of selling and displaying their artworks: paintings, drawings, sculptures, installations, photography, video etc. EgArt wants to guarantee equal access to the art system for all artists. The association promotes and defends artists who have difficulties to access the art system because of their vulnerable situation. EgArt offers support through:


- Legal advice or information to protect artists' rights in the art system
- Personalized support: the association can look for exhibition venues to show and sell artworks – through the artist's mandate to sell – for artists who apply and are selected by EgArt artistic committee.

16 international artists have been supported by EgArt since the creation of the association. EgArt is not only focused on French artists, it works with international artists as the art system is international. EgArt continuously receives applications from new artists.

More information: <https://egart.fr>

For the system to be fair and just, it is important that the artist can receive an equitable compensation. If the financial support in the future were to decrease, for both the artists with disabilities and the places where they can create their art, the revenue from the work would become even more useful. For example, we already notice in several countries that the pressure is increasing, also within the performing arts, to acquire more and more own income. From this perspective, a research project has been set up in the United Kingdom, *InVisible Difference*<sup>10</sup>, bringing together legal and artistic expertise. With this project, the researchers want to provide a legal framework for the property rights and copyrights for people with disabilities.

<sup>10</sup> see: <http://www.invisibledifference.org.uk>



# **CHAPTER 4: DEVELOPING AND DISCOVERING TALENT**

When you set up artistic projects with people with disabilities, talent emerges. For us, talent is not defined by the ease with which someone acquires techniques. It is more about passion and drive than about technical perfection. It concerns personality and individuality, storytelling and poetry.

Some people with disabilities and a passion for art find their way to expression, even in the most difficult circumstances. In the world of Outsider Art, there are plenty of examples of people living in psychiatric facilities who had to write their drawings and ideas on the smallest pieces of paper or even on toilet paper. Before he was discovered, Hans-Jörg Georgi worked in his small room in the institution on his sketches and his paper airplanes. His work was occasionally thrown away to make space for new creations. Today, he works daily in the studio, and his work is exhibited internationally. 'Disability might diminish opportunity but not talent', says dancer and choreographer Marc Brew.

However, a lot of talent remains undervalued and underused. Of course, projects, workshops and tasters are offered, but artistic development often stops there. For some, this is enough. Others find their talent in professionally supported amateur art as one of the many interests and activities they want to develop. Others want to go further and dedicate themselves entirely to their art. For this last group especially, many doors remain closed. How they can find their way is what this chapter is about. But we will start at the very beginning

## 1. You are never too young to learn

Usually, people with a disability only come into contact with art as a (young) adult. There are few opportunities for children and young people with a disability. Moreover, parents, teachers or care givers are sometimes less open to such activities. They have incorporated dominant ideas about dance, theatre or music and do not see children and young people with disabilities functioning in such a context. Or they want to protect them from a disappointment (Aujla & Redding, 2013).

Nevertheless, we know from various practical experiences that the arts are beneficial for children and young people with disabilities. Disabled children and young people often have to work on what they cannot do well during speech therapy, physical therapy and in the classroom.

The big advantage of the arts is that you cannot do it wrong. These children discover something they can do well and that they can show to someone else who can only respond positively, because it is simply amazing what they do. Their creative development and their self-confidence also improve. The earlier they start the better.

> □ See Julia Brown's testimony <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cQYCjyFxzqY>

Just as with other languages, young children quickly pick up a feeling for music or dance, and they have that for the rest of their lives. We have heard from several (semi-)professional dancers with a disability whom we have been able to meet that they started at a young age. But even those who become acquainted with the



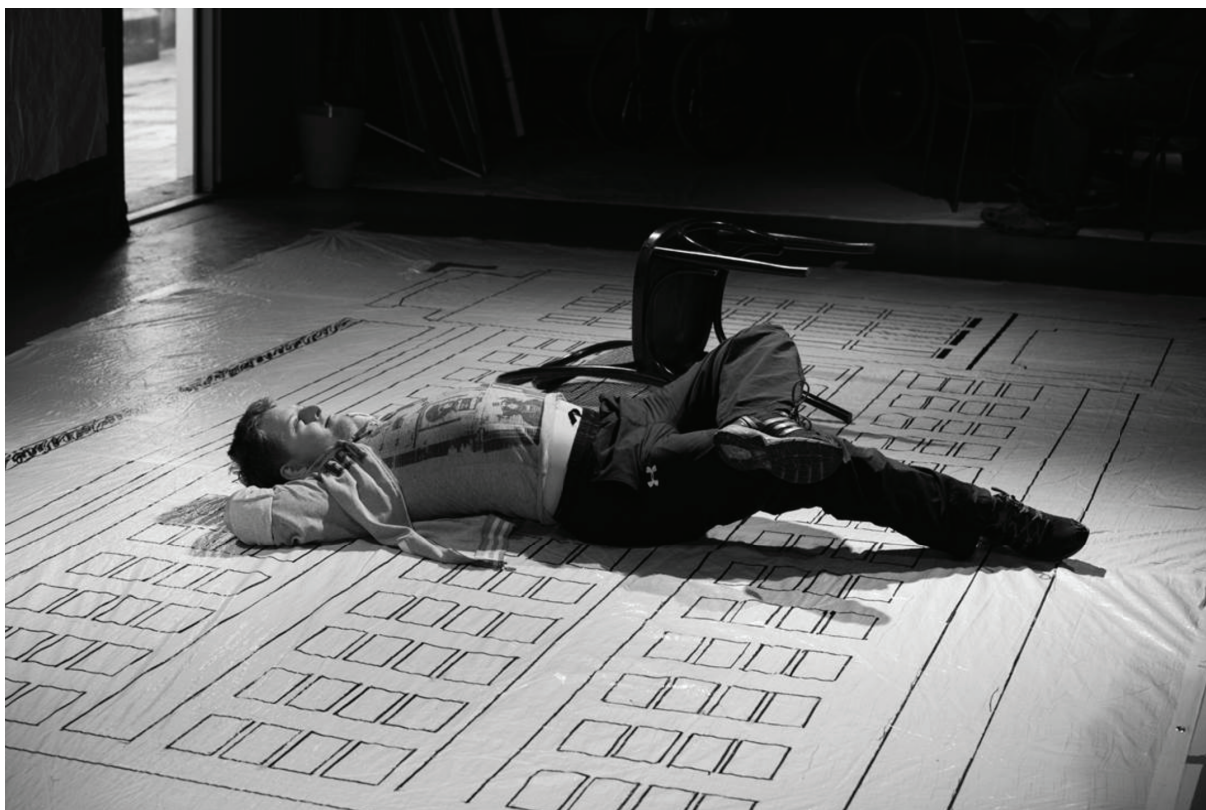
performing arts later in life can develop significantly.

## 2. Picking up signals and recognizing talents

Not everyone is bitten by a passion for art. There are a number of signals that can tell you a lot about the involvement of people, even if they cannot speak or have difficulty speaking.

- Facial expressions or sounds that indicate approval.
- Verbal expressions of enjoyment and/or the expressed desire for a repetition of the activity.
- Maintained concentration and self-control (more than for other activities).
- The speed and enthusiasm with which the activity is begun.
- Difficulty stopping or urging to resume quickly after a break or doing this spontaneously.
- The energy and effort that one wants to invest in the activity.
- Accuracy, drive to do well.
- Interest in learning more, openness to feedback.

If the above-mentioned signals occur frequently, then you may suspect that the activity provokes a high level of engagement, and then it pays to explore this path further and to offer more and/or more different possibilities. Participation currently depends too much on chance. People with disabilities must generally satisfy themselves with the options that are available in their neighbourhood. Usually there are not so many options so people with disabilities can't always find something that really appeals to them. Cope Foundation (Cork, Ireland) shows that this doesn't always have to be the case.



Cope Foundation is a non-profit organization supporting over 2,300 children and adults with Intellectual disabilities and autism in Cork, Ireland. "Suisha Inclusive Arts", a community-based arts initiative, focuses on arts education, staged productions, exhibitions and influencing and Creating policies and opportunities across all art forms.

Suisha Arts is focused on learning by doing and experiential learning. Its approach is learner-centred and it is adaptable to the learning style of each learner. Learners work alongside professional and amateur arts practitioners collaboratively and creatively on artistic and educational outcomes. Throughout the discovery process of "doing", all participants are considered learners and each with a unique role and offering to the process. Learning can be individual or collective.

Suisha Inclusive Arts offers a wide variety of experiential, formal and non-formal Adult Arts Education programmes:

- **Suisha Inclusive Arts Theatre Group** including people with disabilities, professional actors and amateur performers from the local arts community. The group focuses on theatre and film.
- **Art for All – Suisha Inclusive Art Group** is an fluid group of people of all ages and abilities who are interested in sharing creativity together. The aim of the project is to open up friendships and understanding between people of all abilities through the medium of creativity. They have worked on individual and collaborative art and craft work, large graffiti boards, an annual calendar, Art for all also participates in local art projects and exhibitions.
- **The M.E.L.O.S project** is a European project on instrumental music training, music education and gaming/music technology.
- **WEST Cork Inclusive Dance** is a weekly facilitated workshop for all abilities. During the sessions participants explore improvisation, movement in response to each other, personal expression and the creation of new choreography.
- **Chance to Dance.** With access to some of the country's best dance teachers, the Firkin Crane supported by Suisha Inclusive Arts provide a wide range of dance classes for any age, ability and agility. Schools, groups and clubs are invited to take part on a weekly or monthly basis, either with their own private teacher or as a part of a larger groups.
- **Productions and technical training at the Everyman Palace.** The Everyman is one of Ireland's leading middle scale presenting and producing theatres. Along with Suisha Arts, they run a 10 week production and Technical Training course for people with learning disabilities.
- **Choirs. A number of Choral groups** for adults with learning disabilities have emerged through the work of Suisha Inclusive Arts. Choirs heve worked on regular weekly rehearsals and also on specific performances.
- **Together Music School** Suisha Arts initially supported



their participants to take up instrumental tuition at the Together Music School in Cork City. Now the musicians attend the school independently and supports to school are provided when and if necessary.

- **Music Appreciation.** Suisha arts also developed a music appreciation module to be implemented internally within the Cope Foundation.

Besides their own initiatives, Suisha Inclusive Arts is a partner in several local and European festivals and networks promoting the participation of people with disabilities in the arts.

More information: [www.suisha.ie](http://www.suisha.ie)  
<https://www.facebook.com/Suisha.Inclusive.Arts/>

### 3. Identify and overcome barriers

The barriers between passionate artists with a disability and opportunities tailored to their needs can be divided into four categories.

**Dispositional barriers** are linked to the personality or (self) perception of the participant or their environment. People with a disability can doubt whether a career as an artist is something for them. A lack of role-models can further strengthen this conviction. The reluctance or doubt can also come from the people who work with people with disabilities, such as their parents or care-workers along with other professionals in the care and culture sector. Expectations about the artistic performance of people with a disability are usually not as high. In the cultural sector, this may lead to the clichéd idea that access and excellence are each other's opposites. But there is also fear of the unknown.

**Informative barriers** ensure that people with disabilities are not informed, do not know where to search or have incorrect information. This has to do with the networks in which information about the arts circulates. There are too few links between the artistic and art education networks and the networks supporting people with disabilities. Every organization has its own methods and channels for making information known, and the selection is not compiled anywhere in an orderly manner. The necessary information reaches people with disabilities only sporadically and rather by chance (Aujla & Redding, 2013).



There are also barriers that relate to a person's personal life and the specific context in which someone lives (Aujla & Redding, 2013). These are the **situational barriers**. For example, someone may experience financial difficulties or problems with mobility. People with disabilities often depend on others for support with everyday activities. If specific activities are involved, such as daily rehearsals or performances in the evenings and weekends, this can sometimes be very difficult. Limited budgets and support options force people with disabilities and their carers to make choices.

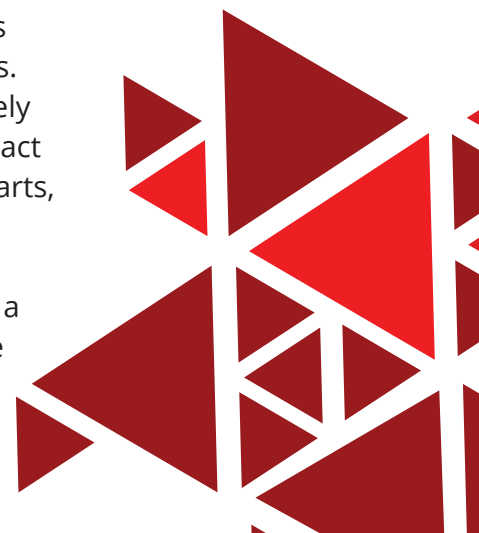
Finally, we also distinguish **institutional barriers**. These are barriers at an organisational level that make access for people with disabilities more difficult. If you want to call yourself a professional actor, dancer or musician, you need a diploma from a recognized programme. The selection of (semi) professional talent within the performing arts is in principle intended for everyone, but it is still insufficiently directed to people with disabilities. This affects the accessibility of the infrastructure, the structure and orientation of the programmes, the expertise of teachers and job opportunities in the professional field (Aujla & Redding, 2013).

The fact that there is not high sales revenue or labour market is part and parcel of the arts in general. Employment opportunities are limited, and job security is low. This means that strict selection is also used for the programmes. The chance of following a recognized education within the arts is therefore very small. This challenge is even greater for people with disabilities because of the above-mentioned dispositional barriers: the possibility of lower expectations and the fear of the unknown. Moreover, today, in times of scarce resources, there is also a general lack of time and space for experimentation and innovation within the arts. This conflicts with the sometimes slower pace that working with people with a disability necessitates or is presumed necessary. This brings us to a second aspect that hinders the access of the current training selection. A barrier that often occurs in interviews with professionals and literature research turns out to be a lack of knowledge among teachers about working in an inclusive learning context.

#### 4. Vicious circle

A remarkable observation we made, and which different authors indicate, is that almost all of the above barriers seem to find their roots in dominant philosophical views about art and artists and the degree to which they are linked to a 'perfect' body and a 'healthy' spirit. *'Disability provides a powerful challenge to the prevailing dance aesthetic which tends to privilege the acquisition of a "flawless" body. It is within this broader cultural context that training and education providers should and have begun to address the very real barriers to participation in dance that are experienced by disabled people'* (Whatley, 2010). From these dominant views, we can see a vicious circle, because they lead to barriers for regular training opportunities, which in turn ensures that fewer artists with disabilities move on to the professional companies and venues. This in turn ensures that artists with a disability are not or are barely visible to a broader audience, and that role-models are lacking to attract new artists. In this way, the dominant views are confirmed about the arts, about who can and may be considered artists.

Also, Deaf actors, for example, are rarely offered a full part in a performance, although sign language can have a very expressive



power. Kukunor is performance that includes Deaf actors in an equal way.

Kukunor is a Finnish play about four enemy soldiers who guard and cross borders in a love-hate relationship. The distance between these sworn enemies is both unbridgeable and uncomfortably small. The border guards each form a duo, two men on one side, and two women on the other. Each duo consists of a Deaf person and a hearing actress/actor. They each play the same performance in their own language - spoken and signed - to an audience of Deaf and hearing spectators. But the Deaf players are much more than just interpreters for the hearing players. All actors play the game of attracting and repelling, sometimes with and sometimes next to and through each other. They play equal roles. In this way they form each other's mirrors, but they also create their own accents and nuances, if only because they are on stage with their own personality and register. The expressive power of sign language is an essential part of the performance.

Kukunor is a universal piece about people who are trapped in wounds that do not heal and in a hostility from which they can hardly escape. But after six years at the border it becomes increasingly difficult to sustain hatred. The piece contains references to conflicts between nations and people, and also between men and women. The presence of Deaf actors on the scene is not an issue. On the contrary, the Deaf and hearing actor/actress always form a team. They form an 'us' against 'them'. Some interpersonal differences disappear, others are magnified.

The Deaf community have previously criticised the fact that most theatre performances are primarily made for a hearing audience. Afterwards, interpretation is then provided to the Deaf, but this does not automatically benefit the quality of the experience. This performance is inclusive in design and elaboration. The intense creative process (with the support of a deaf interpreter) leads to a fairly short but powerful performance that makes you curious for more.

The performance is part of a wider European project Sign and Sound Theatre. Kukunor will be adapted and played in the United Kingdom, Belgium, Portugal, Croatia and Bulgaria. Exchanges and workshops are also planned so the actors can share their experiences with each other and with external partners.





## 5. Break out and expand your network

One of the main causes of this vicious circle lies in the fact that people with disabilities usually end up in a parallel (care) network and are therefore alienated from the rest of society. The (care) network surrounding persons with disabilities and the network of cultural providers rarely interact with each other and if so, only by chance. For example, people with a disability fall outside the scope of an art and cultural offering that is in principle set up for everyone. Conversely, art programmes have difficulty infiltrating the world of people with disabilities. As a result, people with disabilities fall through the cracks of the world of culture, between a healthcare sector that is difficult for cultural participation to access and a cultural sector that is difficult to access for people with disabilities.

There is thus a need for brave initiators who dare to take a step outside their familiar (work) context. People who are active within the arts, can contact care facilities, schools for special education, day-centres, parents' associations, home counselling services or leisure organizations. People who work within care settings can make contact with individual artists, directors, choreographers, galleries and studios, specialized museums etc.

Admittedly, sometimes it requires a sustained effort from the arts to win the trust of (the environment of) people with a disability. Conversely, it is not easy to be taken seriously in the world of the arts. People with disabilities do not fit into the dominant image of who can and should create art. Organizations that work with these artists do not either. Every art world determines which art is acceptable. It grants full membership to artists whose work it can place within the usual boundaries. Whoever challenges these boundaries threatens to fall out of the boat. *"Wherever an art world exists, it defines the boundaries of acceptable art, recognizing those who produce the work it can assimilate as artists entitled to full membership, and denying membership and its benefits to those whose work it cannot assimilate."*(Becker, 1982)

Nevertheless, it is worth the effort to keep going. A single training session, one show or one exhibition can create a turning point and initiate a positive spiral. Such a learning experience, performance or exhibition creates critical discussions, new collaboration with strong artists, invitations to workshops or master classes, stage and presentation opportunities. These opportunities in turn enhance the artistic quality of the work.

In the United Kingdom, the opening ceremony of the Paralympic Games in 2012 was an eye-opener about the possibilities of inclusive dance for many people.

The Belgian inclusive dance company Platform-K scored an international hit in 2016 with *Monkey Mind*, ironically just after they had lost their structural operating resources.





The government can play an important role in creating such opportunities. The British government launched Unlimited! to set up an ambitious support programme for artists with disabilities. And with Unlimited Impact, the UK supports a strategic plan to make the effects of its support programme more sustainable. With The Creative Case for Diversity, the Arts Council formulates a bold vision on diversity in the arts. The British Council proudly promotes its own performing arts with Disability Arts International in collaboration with people with disabilities abroad.

## 6. Art schools as gatekeepers?

Art schools can position themselves as gatekeepers of the artistic world, partly based on a number of objective quality criteria, partly on the basis of their perception/assessment of who has 'it' to be able to make it within the arts. The walls that such art education puts up are often impenetrable for people with disabilities.

But once past the gate, many art schools have the necessary resources to support people with disabilities. Many art schools offer an individualized approach that can be adapted to the needs and capabilities of their students. Due to the growing attention for inclusive (higher) education, art schools are implementing more and more measures to increase their accessibility. In the brochure *Moving Matters*, Sarah Whatley provides an overview of all kinds of interventions to support students with disabilities in their studies in higher art education.

Because the step to (higher) arts education is still so great, different programmes also set up collaborations with artistic work groups by and for people with disabilities. In this way, they bring their students into contact with artists with disabilities and vice versa. We found several examples within the visual arts, but there are also examples of interesting exchanges within dance. Art schools can also set up research projects, such as *Disability on stage*.

## 7. Worthy alternatives

Because the step to art education is so great, many artistic organizations for people with disabilities offer alternative learning opportunities. Not only do they organize refresher courses and on-the-job training for their players and makers, they also participate in internships and master classes from other organizations and challenge themselves by working together with other artists, directors and choreographers who comment on their work. They also often take on an educational role in addition to their artistic role. They organize low-barrier workshops or training sessions. In this way, experienced dancers, actors or visual artists with a disability also have the opportunity to take on the role of teacher or coach. For example, dancer Chris Pavia, under the guidance of Stopgap, is building a career as a choreographer, and Hannah Sampson was hired by the company full-time as a dance teacher. The Spanish organization Afanias gives dance workshops to people with learning disabilities. These workshops are each given by two teachers, one of whom has a learning disability. In this way, many artists with a disability can further develop themselves and nurture their talents. Even so, for many people, this form of education appears less worthy than formal education.

## 8. An inclusive mind-set

In order to realistically develop and nurture talent for people with disabilities in the arts, a shift in thinking seems to be necessary. Instead of a vertical or pyramidal approach to talent development, in which, step by step, fewer and fewer people are working to reach the top, we have to look more broadly and recognize the value of various practices that can exist alongside and especially in collaboration with each other. In this way, equal partnerships become possible between the arts, education and the broad welfare sector, because not one agenda - that of the arts - but different agendas and objectives can co-exist. This broad horizon must give rise to the creation of more space for innovation and experiment, so that customization is possible for various profiles, needs and possibilities. Such horizontal thinking is only possible if we do not define talent development from a predetermined aesthetic model, but allows genres, cultural frames of reference or a canon to be constantly in motion and challenged by the development of new artistic languages.



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