



don't dis my ability



report of the ART-is project

Kris De Visscher – Demos (Belgium)





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**through painting and drawing I connect with the
world of colour, light and shade**

**through my hands I connect with the earthly matter,
with nature**

my work brings joy to other people

through movement I connect with my life energy

through love I connect with my human nature

**all this is what defines me as an artist...
and as a human being**

Arni Alexandersson
Erla Björk Sigmundsdottir
Runar Magnusson

Solheimar, Iceland

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CONTENTS

1. EASY-READ SUMMARY	page 6
2. REPORT OF THE MEETINGS	page 28
3. RESEARCH	page 110
4. EVALUATION	page 122



1. ART-is project EASY-READ SUMMARY

WHAT DID WE LEARN ABOUT MAKING ART?

	<p>ART-is was a partnership of nine European organisations. They all work with learning disabled adults in a creative way.</p> <p>Two organisations came from the UK.</p> <p>The other organisations came from: Poland, Iceland, Malta, Turkey, Finland, Spain and Belgium.</p>
	<p>All these organisations are engaged in the performing arts, but from very different points of view:</p> <p>adult education,</p> <p>professional and amateur arts,</p>



social care work,

self-advocacy,

community care

and community arts.



The project took two years.

We met seven times.

At the meetings people travelled to one of the countries.



We did workshops together.

We performed together.



We took photographs and we made movies.

We also had meetings to discuss the project.



And we did some sightseeing and some shopping as well.



In between meetings, we kept in touch through facebook and through our creative chain.



In this creative chain, each partner challenged another country to come up with a creative answer to an inspiring question.



We learned that **we have a lot in common**. All over Europe I disabled people are making art. It's nice to travel to another country as an artist.



It's nice to meet up with other artists and to make new friends. It's nice to see how other artists work and to collaborate with them.



We learned that people should **take learning disabled artists seriously** and **treat them equally**. This means that learning disabled artists can take the initiative and share their proposals and ideas.



This also means that learning disabled artists can participate in the discussions and the decision making.



Before the project, we made a distinction between disabled learners and non-disabled teachers.



But we learned that this distinction is stupid.

We are all learners, just as we are all teachers.



Disabled artists can teach others a lot about art. Just by being their creative selves. But also as a trainer or as a member of a steering team.



We learned that art is our common language.



Through music, dance, theatre, video and photography we could communicate, connect, create and perform together. We have become a small family of artists.



We discovered that there are differences between our countries:

in the words we use, in the food we eat, in how we live and in how society treats learning disabled people.





We also discovered that there are differences between our organisations in how we use art. Some use art for a purpose. Others make art for art's sake.

ART FOR A PURPOSE

Some organisations use art as a means to achieve a certain goal. Performing is not their main aim.



→ **Solheimar** is a community in Iceland where disabled and non-disabled people live and work together. They use art to make their community stronger. Through art, all the members of the community can connect and contribute equally.



→ **Virtaset** from Finland is a group of learning disabled people who learn how to live independently. They participate in all kinds of art projects to express their own thoughts and feelings. Art makes them more mature and more individual. They learn about their own feelings and they form their own opinion. That makes them less dependent on others.



ART FOR ART'S SAKE

Other organisations create art for art's sake. Performing is their main aim. But we found differences in how disabled and non-disabled artists collaborate



→ Some organisations support **individual** learning disabled artists. They provide technical tools, art materials, studio space, grants, moral support and opportunities to exhibit or perform.



For example: Heart n Soul (UK), Afanias (Spain).



→ Some organisations work with **duos**. A disabled person and non-disabled person give dance-training as equal partners. Or people with and without learning disabilities are paired up to be friends and to go to events together.



For example: Afanias (Spain), Stay up Late (UK).



→ Some organisations create a **collective** where disabled and non-disabled artists have an equal contribution and make the decisions together. There is no one instructing the others.



For example: Afanias (Spain), Heart n Soul (UK).



→ Some organisations work with a **director** or a **choreographer** or a **composer**. Sometimes the director, choreographer or composer creates a performance based on the ideas of the performers. Sometimes they give instructions or tasks to the performers.



For example: Opening Doors (Belgium),
Opening Doors (Malta)



→ Some organisations work with a certain **repertoire**. That can be a folk dance, a composition or a theatre play. They want to show that learning disabled people can perform these stories, compositions or very complicated patterns of a folk dance just as well.

For example: Güroymak Zihinsel (Turkey),
Autokreacja (Poland)

Some ways of working offer more freedom than others. But we don't think that one way of working is better than the other. What's really important is that learning disabled artists should have a real choice to work the way they really like to work. Too often, learning disabled artists don't have that choice. They work with the opportunities that are offered to them. Too often they come across the right offer by chance. This should change.

Some photos from the different trips



Stay up Late All stars said it was a dream come true to perform at the Belgium Music Festival



Dancers perform to the President of Malta



Each country showcased their own talents



I loved learning to dance with the Spanish



8 different countries joined together to make Art-Is



We had a tea party at the High Commissioner's house in Malta



We made a performance about friendship



Rehearsals underway for our final performance



Dance games in Brighton UK made us laugh



Drawing made us feel happy



We were delighted to be surprised by a flash mob in Malta



Stage view of our group performance to 5,000 people!

Art-is gave us freedom to go out at night



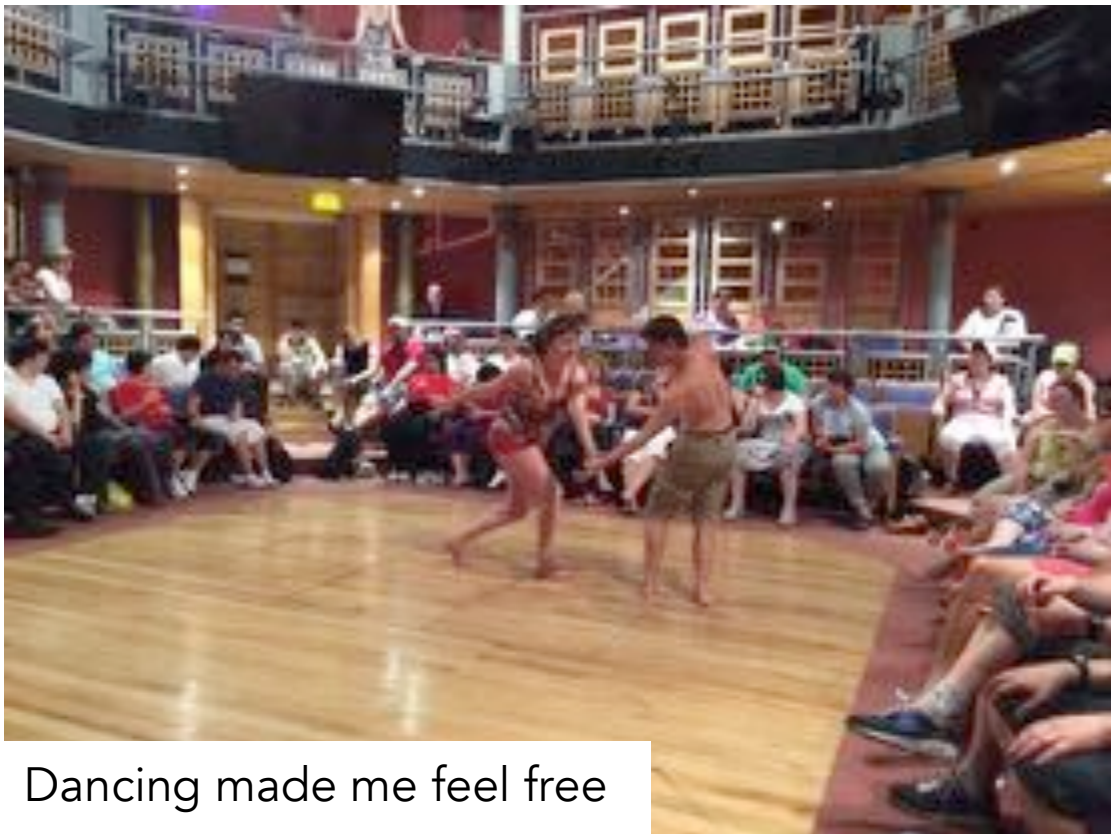
'I was here' in Finland!



We saw Big Ben in London



One of our participants led a walking tour of Brighton UK



Dancing made me feel free



We worked together to come up with ideas



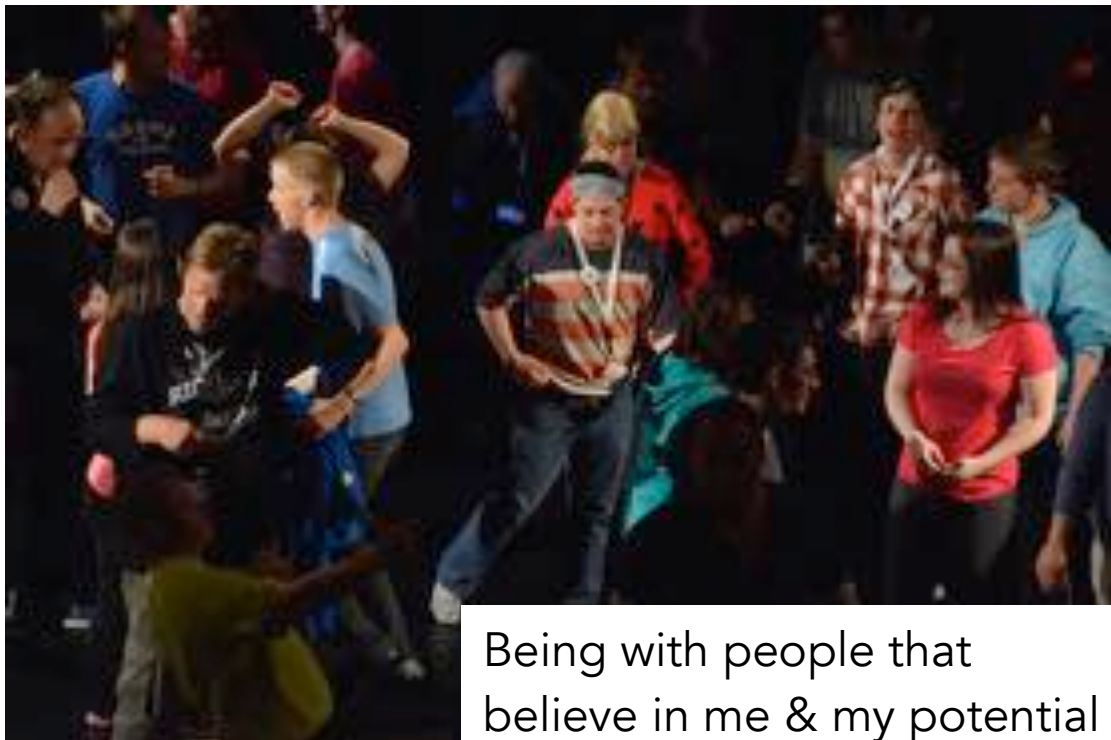
We loved making art at the university of Madrid



All being treated equal as artists.



We enjoyed free time to do what we enjoy



Being with people that believe in me & my potential

We were very proud to get 'oscars' for our film making in Poland



We made meaningful friendships

2. REPORT OF THE MEETINGS WHAT DID WE DO?

Iceland	10 – 13 Octobre 2013
UK	06 – 09 March 2014
Finland	25 – 27 June 2014
Belgium	27 – 29 August 2014
Spain	26 – 28 November 2014
Poland	20 – 22 March 2015
Malta	12 – 14 June 2015

REPORT OF THE MEETINGS

Iceland 10 – 13 Octobre 2013

Let's kick off this project!

Larus Sigurosson & Holly Straton

Friday 11/10	
09:00 – 10:30	Introduction

Morning gathering with Solheimar people. Every morning Solheimar people gather together for news and morning song. Then the group meets up in *Sesseljuhus*. We get to know each other through dance, games, improvisation, song...

Friday 11/10	
10:30 – 12:00	Working in smaller groups

We split up in six different teams:

- a **steering committee**: responsible for drawing the agenda for all the meetings the next two years + practical organisation
- a **web team**: sharing ideas and tools for the web platform
- a **creative team**: designing the ART-is logo
- an **artistic team**: sharing ideas about how to create and share content (theatre, music, dance, films, photos...) between the meetings through the web platform
- a **dissemination and evaluation team**: design the dissemination plan and evaluation method and to find research partners, prepare the Brighton conference of March 10 in 2014
- a **communication team**: designing the communication plan + making videos and photos of this meeting.

Some of the key issues that came from this first meeting were:

- Everyone is born with the same capabilities. It's up to the environment to adapt to people's skills so everyone can reach their full potential
- All organisations in this project have ways for everyone (including people with learning disabilities) to contribute ideas. The tool kit and the tools we create to share our approach and practice has the potential to have a great impact on society.

- This project is about breaking down barriers – both within ‘mainstream’ society and within the arts.
- The challenges / issues we look at in the ART-is project through art can be applied to other areas of people’s lives. Barriers to joining a meeting, barriers to living independently.



Friday 11/10

13:00 – 15:00

Introduction to Solheimar and visits to the different workshops



Friday 11/10

15:30 – 17:00

Groups meeting up again. Continuing the meeting of this morning.

Friday 11/10	
19:30 – 20:30	Concert in Solheimar church



Saturday 12/10	
09:00 – 12:00	Warming-up and icebreaking workshop Planning of the meetings Planning of the final festival

We start off with an icebreaking workshop by Stefan Perceval.

Then we work in small groups on the planning of the final festival and the planning of the meetings.

Festival planning

Elements of 'best party' to become key ingredients for the festival:

- Theatre
- Dance
- Music
- Film
- Photography
- Party/Disco
- Outdoor
- Audience
- Festival lounge

Theatre

- Stephan (Belgium) to be director of theatre element
- Flash mob idea

Dance

- Javier (Spain) to be director of dance element
- Group dance
- Flash mob
- Stay Up Late (UK) have lots of Beach Balls – Javier can choreograph a dance or dance flash mob using them

Film

- All groups (apart from Spain) have an iPad
- We can use iPads as the filming tool
- Film to be a giant video journal for the project
- Need to set some guidelines / rules for filming footage
- Niina (Finland) and Lilly (HnS, UK) to lead on editing
- To be shown at festival

Photography

- Finland to lead on this
- Kate from Poland has taken a lot of photos
- How can we share all of our photos from the trip? Flickr? The website?

Music

- HnS (UK) musicians and Larus (Iceland) to direct on this
- Have workshops in London and Belgium
- Include HnS soundlab or digital elements as well as live

Collaborations

- Jamie (Stay Up Late, UK) has created 'Storm and Thunder' films – can we link this up with recordings from the hand chimes from Solheimar that Larus led

Disco / Party

- ART-is to create a shared playlist so everyone can contribute their favourite songs.
- Who can lead on this? What platform is best? iTunes? Spotify?

REPORT OF THE MEETINGS

UK 06 – 09 March 2014

Let's stay up late

Stay Up Late

Thursday 06/03

On Thursday, we went to Heart n Soul in London! We spent the day there doing different workshops on dance and special effects.

Pictures © Tim Mitchell, 2013 www.timmitchell.co.uk



Friday 07/03

On Friday we went to Brighton. We went for a meal in the North Laine pub and the meals were blooming huge! We got told what groups we were in, whether we were going to the Green Door Store or to the Fortune of War. I took the groups from Finland, Belgium and Poland to the Fortune of War - inside the pub was like the shape of a boat.

"The band was a hip-hop group, they were doing a lot of rapping which was really great. They were asking the audience for different words, and making a rap with the different words. I thought it was amazing - they made a romantic thriller and put the music to it. I think that the visitors had a good time, the Finland group stayed until the end - they were the hardcore ones! They were doing their "Yo!" (part of a rap they performed to us on Saturday)."



Saturday 08/03

We had breakfast and then we did dancing, where we had to go and touch people on the shoulder and get them to lead everyone, dancing to the tune. Then we had a meeting, we told people all about Stay Up Late. Then we had the tour!



REPORT OF THE MEETINGS

Finland 25 – 27 June 2014

THAT'S ME IN THE SPOTLIGHT

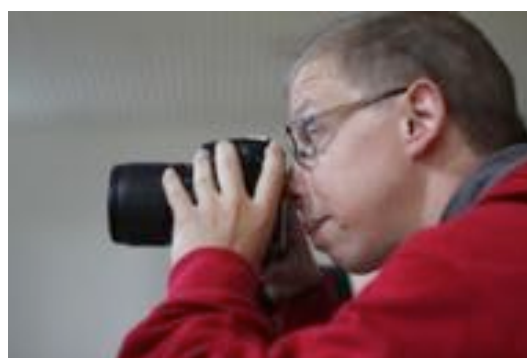
Kris De Visscher

Thursday 26/06	
09:15 – 11:00	Getting to know each other - photography work

- 1) Let's make some different group photos with the entire group (standing straight, sitting down, seriously, happily...).



- 2) Make smaller group photos. Individual participants receive a piece of paper with the instructions on how to form a group of two or three people: male/female, country, distinct features (like some one with short hair or earrings). When the participant has collected the right set of 'people' he or she also makes the photo.



3) Make a short presentation of your country. The participants form a group with the people of their own country. Together they prepare a short presentation of typical elements of their country. They're free to use their own language or just use movements.

Thursday 26/06

12:45 –	Imagination – ideas and photography work in groups
15:45	I am wonderful – portraits

For this workshop we went to Ohtakari, an island and old fishing village. Ohtakari is at the head of the Lohtaja Vattaje peninsula, connected by a causeway, the last island before the open sea. On the island, we received two assignments. This workshop and the warming-up in the morning was created by Niina Perander.

I am wonderful - portraits

The first assignment is a personal one. All the participants were asked in advance to bring a photograph portrait of themselves as a child. During their visit of the island, the childhood photograph was recreated. Here are some examples. You can learn more about this method in the interview with photographer Jari Eklund.

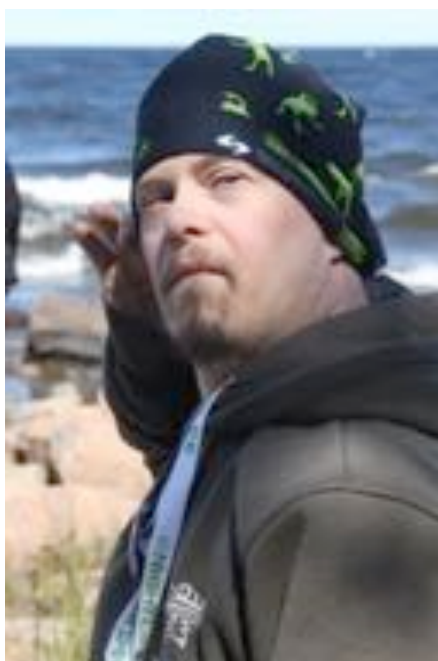


For the second assignment, each group received 'six' words or sentences to inspire them in making original photographs of their visit to the island. Those words were:

1. Stop!
2. Surprise
3. Can you hear it?
4. Hidden
5. Perfect
6. Why not?

Afterwards, the results were presented. All the different 'stop' photographs were shown one after the other (and so on for all the other words and sentences). This way participants could see how the other groups were inspired by the same words.

During the visit we noticed that it was difficult for some participants to link these words/sentences to an image or a photograph. Some participants didn't seem triggered to make the photographs, some weren't really focussed. We asked the organisers from Finland how they would deal with this, as they had given this assignment more than once. They suggested to support the participants by asking them questions. Take 'surprise' for example. They would ask: 'Did you ever get a surprise? Did you ever surprise anyone? What is or what would be a surprise for you here on this island? How do you feel when someone/something surprises you?' Based on the answers to these questions, they would then ask the participants how they could turn those feelings, events, actions, memories into a photograph here on the island. They also suggested to work in small groups, so you can actually offer everyone the support they need.



Can you hear it?



Hidden

Thursday 26/06

15:45

Bus returns to Kälviä

16:30 - 17:30

Dinner

18:00

Disco and "photostudio"

Photographer and photography teacher *Jari Eklund* set up a professional photostudio at the adult education centre. Every participant is portrayed individually. Here are some of the results. You can learn more about the methodology in the following interview with Jari.



Interview with photographer Jari Eklund

Can you tell us more about working with the childhood photographs?

“Working with childhood photos is based on a well known method. The original idea is not ours of course. Before photographers discovered it, therapists have used the same kind of method for decades. Therapists didn’t only use photos. Anything that could bring back childhood memories was useful, even a pen for example. About 15 years ago a small group of professional therapists started working with childhood photographs in Finland. A couple of years later one of the members created a specific method, based strictly on childhood photographs. During the last two years this method received a lot of attention here in Finland. We have even got a mainstream (reality) TV-show about it.

About five years ago I got interested in this way of working. One of the first things I noticed was that all the people involved were professional therapists or educators or so but none of them were professional photographers. Not surprisingly of course, since the technique is 95% about therapy and only 5% about photography. Photos taken during the therapy don’t have to be high-end photographs, so there’s no need for professional photographing skills. The more I was thinking about this, the more I wondered: why not improve the photographic quality as well? What about putting together two professionals: a photographer and a therapist?

And if doing this, what could be achieved? I found this very interesting and inspiring, so I started to study this subject. Studying here meant for me learning by doing as well as studies at the university. It wasn’t that easy to start to work this way, as I was afraid that I am too much a photographer and too little a therapist? Am I too much focused on the light, the camera, the composition and all that? Are my photographic skills like spoiling the important moment where there should be nothing but two humans? After a while I discovered that actually there is not that big a difference between this kind of photography and any other kind of photography. Both are mainly about getting in touch with people, the most important thing is the making of a connection between the persons involved. The only difference is that the people I work with nowadays, like in this Art-is project for example, might be less interested in the technical quality of the final result.

At the moment I have just as much of this kind of photosessions as I can handle. One session takes approximately 8 to 10 days of work, plus travelling. When I am completely done with one session, I need to do other work for at least two weeks. These sessions are often quite strong experiences, I am there with all my heart and after the session I need some time to reload my batteries. When not working on these projects I am running my workshops, teaching photography and concentrating on my own art. Another project with people with learning disabilities I’m working

on is about giving a moment of dream. The original idea of "Moment of dream" belongs to Sari Hiltunen. We're asking them what they have always wanted to be. Someone wants to be a bride, someone a postman, a policeman, or a fireman. We fix the costume, the make-up and the studio.

How does recreating childhood photographs effect the people involved?

First of all: you can not re-create what once was. You can re-enact the scene for a photoshoot, but not re-create. With help of the childhood photos, we can try to make people recall the feelings of their childhood. People can recall their feelings on the exact time or place a certain photo was taken and we can work based on those feelings. If the method works, it's like opening doors. Some of these might have been closed for a very long time. The childhood photographs do effect the people if there's time enough to work with them. These childhood photos are a very strong tool for a therapist. Not only the feelings, but a closed history of an individual can be seen wide open. The question in these situations is: what is your responsibility as a therapist?

This is not only about photographing or about having a look at some old childhood photos, it's about working as a professional therapist. If you wake up a lion, you need skills to handle the situation. It's obvious that if your goal is to get some good results as a therapist, it depends on the time you've got for your work. No results will be achieved in too little time, we all know that. If there's not enough time, the process is almost the same

as what you would do when shooting photos anywhere with anyone. Which can be fun for people involved and which is important as well, but having fun is not the major point here when working with childhood photos.

How do you make this connection with the person you're photographing, often in very little time?

It's not easy to make the connection. And of course the connection isn't always there. For example, yesterday at the studio, I wasn't happy with three of the portraits we made. It didn't feel right from the start. We did the shoot, there was a picture, but it didn't feel okay. That was because there was no connection. For that reason I invited those three people to take the picture again and it worked out better the second time. When working with people the most important thing from my opinion is: how does it all feel while we are shooting. There's an old saying that photography is not about 'depth of field' (that's technique) but about 'depth of feelings'. The better connection we have, the deeper feelings we can get. There is no concept, for that. Nothing I've learned from the books, or from the masters in photographing. The way I am working now is pretty much the same to what I did with the models who I used to work with. It's all about getting closer, being there with humans as an other human. It's about basic instincts.

Stefan tells me he loves to work with people with learning disabilities because they don't hide behind a mask and they don't have a hidden agenda. They're not so

'complicated', they don't create an 'image'... Is this the same for you?

I do understand what Stefan means. When I think about the models I've been working with... you know... there are models and there are top models. If you want to be a top model, you can't have a hidden agenda. There has to be just you and nothing else. From a photographers point of view, a top model can't be loaded with hidden things, can't be complicated. Why, it's quite obvious for me, but that's a long story, this is not the place for that here. What is fascinating is that a top model and a person with learning disabilities are pretty much the same here, on stage, from the point of a photographer.

Yesterday, during the photo-booth session, you were very concentrated, the setting was very professional. Is it because you see people with learning disabilities as normal that you create an equally professional and serious setting?

Working in a studio, using high-end equipment when photographing people with learning disabilities, is based on my personal idea. I am using exactly the same setting like when I was working with professional models. There's lot of lights, a background, an assistant, big camera, a catwalk, computer-based-shooting etc. The idea is to create exactly the same atmosphere for people with learning disabilities as what I did with fashion models. All the people are equal, when they are walking on the catwalk in my studio. Normally it takes about, let's say, 45 seconds to shoot one frame. Then another shot, and another, and another, that's the way it

goes. We've all seen fashion shooting on TV. It's fast and a lot of frames are taken in quite short time. When working with people with learning disabilities, the point is not that how fast you are as a photographer or how many different kind of frames you'll take during the session. It's about the quality of the time we can spend together in the spotlights. I want to keep them in the middle, on the catwalk, because of the feelings which can be created in that situation. Sometimes we are walking round and round on the catwalk. It's not because they couldn't do it on the first tour, but because I want them to forget everything else. I want them to feel extraordinary. While walking in the middle of the lights, you can see and feel how they are straightening their back and how their eyes are starting to shine. And perhaps they do feel themselves mentally stronger, even a bit. They do realize: *they're shooting pictures of me! me! me!* It's a magical and an important moment. I wish that when these people are looking at their photo, they will remember the feeling they had when we were shooting. That they're as much entitled of a high-end photo as anybody else on that same stage.

When you worked with professional models, you had to be focused on a certain type of 'beauty'. How do you look at beauty now, now you're working with all kinds of people?

At a first sight, this background of mine looks a bit special for this kind of work. But if thinking more carefully, you can see that this background, my previous work, has given me an inside view of modern people, of our society and our values. What is 'beauty'? Who

is is 'beautiful'? What's real and what's not real in this society?

When I decided that I wanted to make a living with my camera, my options were: fashion, models and weddings. I started my career helping young no-name-models to create a portfolio. That's nothing creative in the end, it's a very industrial kind of working, actually. The years passed by and I was working. About the time I became 40 years old, I felt like I've lost the touch. If you want to shoot good photos of models, you have to understand all the small details of their world. It gets harder when you are 40 something and they are seventeen. It's possible, but it's pretty hard. The age was one thing, but not the only one. I also got sick of their superficial world. Those people I was working with, they started to look like aliens to me. Seen that, been there. The result is that I am asking myself quite often, what is normal? Who is normal? Off I went, left the models and started to shoot more of those weddings. Now, if you want to make a living out of that, you have to work for those people who can spend a lot of money on a wedding. Which means you're more than often working with those people who are making a glamorous show out of their own wedding. They want to see a lot of *hollywoodish* pink dreams at their wedding, if you understand what I mean. As a pro-photographer I did what was ordered and gave them the glamour and the silver clouds. But there I was again! In the middle of something which really does not exist! After shooting a wedding like that, I got my money, sure, but I was really sick afterwards. Asking myself: what

kind of society are we involved in? What are the values of this society? For my own pleasure I also shot some more journalistic kind of photos during some of these weddings. Took these ones behind the scenes. It's all there: the grief, the quarrels, the stress.... The real story. The married couples are not interested in buying those, not even seeing these photos. They don't even want these photos to exist. Does this mean, they don't want to meet reality? Anyway, I'll keep the photos. Maybe I'll publish them one day in a book (that's a joke!). I don't know if I am the right person to answer what's beautiful and what's not. For one thing I am sure. For me beauty goes hand in hand with an honest mind and a genuine personality.

Do you want to present people with disabilities just the way they are, or do you support them - like your 'models' - to present themselves better?

"I think it's important that the person can be him- or herself on stage. If someone is shy, then let him be shy. If someone wants to act like a model, then go for it. Quite often they do ask for help, for example if they have an idea what to do, but they don't know how to start with it on stage. And I help them with their idea. I support them to be as relaxed as possible in that situation and I do support them with their ideas. But I don't push them to present themselves better. I do appreciate to work with them as they are, genuine persons. And by the way, that is something they could teach most of the models!

Friday 27/06	
09:15 - 11:00	Guest workshop by Stefan Perceval: theatre work

Note: Describing a workshop is always tricky. You can describe the exercises and the assignments, but a lot of the details, the unique approach and the personal touch of the person leading the workshop, goes lost. This is especially the case for this workshop by Stefan Perceval, due to the fact that it's Stefans unique style, his enthusiasm, involvement and proximity towards the participants that forms a big part of the 'magic' that makes this workshop 'work'. He doesn't demand anything from his participants he wouldn't demand from himself, no more, no less. But nobody else could achieve the same results just by copying these exercises. You can use them as an inspiration for your own approach, but the most important thing is that the workshop is truly 'yours' and your heart and soul is in it.

1) Energy

The group is lined up in a few rows so that everyone has enough space to move. Stefan puts on some music and invites a participant to stand in front of the group and make some clear moves to the music. The other people in the group have to follow the moves. Stefan encourages the person in front to 'spread their energy' over the group. After a while, Stefan invites someone else to stand in front of the group. He also changes the music from time to time.

2) Focus

The group stands in a circle and passes a ball around. Every time someone throws the ball, he shouts his own name. After a while, speed up the pace.

3) Trust

The participants stand two by two. Stefan puts on some soft music. One of the partners closes his/her eyes and the other partner leads him/her gently through the room. After a while, they change roles.

4) Themes/topics

The group sits down for a while. One person is invited to stand in front of the group. He states his name, hobbies and tells something about a theme or a topic he chooses or which is given by Stefan or the group, for example: what does friendship mean to you? Or, what would you like to tell about your mother? After the little presentation, Stefan asks the 'audience': what have we seen? He and the audience give their feedback about the body language of the person in front.

5) Create scenes/ images

Then Stefan asks the group how we can turn what we just heard into a scene. For example, if the person in front says: 'friendship is very important in my life', Stefan asks the participants: how can we show this? How can we create a scene that expresses this feeling? How can we turn this into theater, into something other people can watch. Stefan invites different participants to create the scene/image. He puts some music to it and when the scene/image is established he names it after the person who 'started' the action, like 'image Laura' for example. When Stefan has created several images like this, he mixes them all together in short play.



REPORT OF THE MEETINGS

Belgium 27 – 29 August 2014

WE DON'T NEED WORDS HERE

Kris De Visscher, Anny Camps, Joachim Put

Wednesday 27/08	
10:00 – 11:00	Icebreaker activities Let's get to know each other (by Martine Bastmeijer)

1. Throw the ball around

We stand in a big circle and throw a ball around in the circle. The person who catches the ball, says his name out loud and throws the ball to someone else.

2. Imaginary present

We remain in the circle. Someone starts off by giving an imaginary present to his neighbour. Without saying a word, he has to make clear through his actions what the present exactly is. The neighbour then passes on the gift to his neighbour and shows very clearly that the gift remains the same. *The first 'gift' was a kitten. It was nice to see how the participants treated the imaginary kitten (stroke it, cuddle it, kiss it). It immediately created a warm atmosphere in the group. But also there was a lot of openness, humour and improvisation. After passing round the kitten, Martine asks who else knows a present we can pass around.*

3. Sing that song

Finally Martine asks every group to perform a typical song from their country.

Wednesday 27/08	
11:15 – 12:15	Workshop Music workshop with <i>Supercell performance</i> by Opening Doors and Alex Otterlei

We start of with the *Supercell performance*, the framework for the rest of the meeting and for the performance at the *Buitenbeenpop festival* on Friday. The performance consists of three elements: music, theatre and dance.

Music

In the spring of 2014 Belgium was struck by a big hailstorm. This inspired Alex to create a pianopiece. The musicians with learning disabilities support this composition and make it stronger. With their body (rubbing their hands, snapping their fingers,...) and with ritmic instruments the musicians build up a storm: step by step they move from a little wind and soft rain to a hudge hailstorm and back again.

Theatre

A group of performers with learning disabilities visualise the story of the hailstorm. One part of the group is safely inside as the hailstorm begins. The other part is working outside. They are surprised by the storm and cannot get inside in time. When the storm is over, the group that was safely inside goes out to look for their unfortunate companions and comfort them.

Dance

In the middle of the piece, Alex inserted another composition. The participants, and especially the dancers from Spain and Malta, are invited to create a choreography for this music and within the theme of 'storm'.



Wednesday 27/08

14:30 – 16:00	Workshop of choice <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Music/instrumental workshop (by Lárus)2. Punk workshop (by Paul)3. Dance workshop (by Javier and Aiala)
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1. Musicworkshop with belleplates

About the instrument (source: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belleplates)

Belleplates is a brand name of a musical instrument of the percussion family and Handbell sub-family. Consisting of a handle attached to a trapezoidal aluminium plate, struck by an attached hammer, they are something of a combination of handbells and handchimes. They are played with the same basic methods as handbells by teams or by individual players. Belleplates are manufactured by [Belleplates, Ltd](http://Belleplates.Ltd). Belleplates were invented by Maurice Davies when he struck with his knuckles a piece of aluminium he had cut out to make something in his workshop, and was pleasantly surprised that it made a pleasant musical sound much like that of handbells. The instrument fills a gap in the market for a cheap, durable and lightweight handbell type instrument. Due to these qualities they have been used preferentially to handbells in schools and with elderly or disabled musicians. Belleplates are not used as a professional instrument, however they blend with handbells and related instruments, allowing them to be used in a concert setting to provide a contrasting melody. Belleplates are generally sold in sets of between 12 (1½ octaves diatonic) and 61 (5 chromatic octaves). Belleplates are made with coloured plastic handles; diatonic bellplates have white handles, and chromatic belleplates have black handles.

The workshop

1. Lárus explains how to use the instrument by pointing it forward.
2. Everyone gets his own belleplate and plays it when Lárus gives the cue.
3. By taking turns, everyone gets the opportunity to stand in front of the group and to be the conductor.
4. The groups stands in a circle and throws notes to eachother like a ball.
5. The groups stand in a circle, with their back facing the centre and with their eyes closed. Everyone can play a note, whenever he feels like it, without anyone conducting.



2. Keep it punk

Paul Richards and his newly formed *Stay Up Late All Stars* gave a punk workshop. They started off with a Ramones-song with the refrain: "*<name> is a punk rocker*". They go around the circle until everyone has shouted out his name in the refrain.

Next we form small groups. In the groups, participants from different countries are mixed. In those groups the participants draw or write down what ART-IS and this meeting mean to them. After a while, everyone comes back to the big circle and we bring all the words together. Paul makes a song with all the different words and teaches to the group how to perform it.



These were the lyrics:

Refrain

*we don't need words where we come from
'cos we're from UK, België, Espana, Polska,...*

ART-IS Friends, Mijosc
zycie is LIFE

Music, Emotions
Dance is ballet, danza contemporanea

People is mensen
Together is birlikte

Being away from home
United



Paul's thoughts on the workshop:

"The workshop was one of those moments where we dived in to a real moment of uncertainty – trying to write an original song with 24 people with intellectual disabilities who didn't share the same language was going to require a significant amount of creativity and experimentation. It turned out though that through talking and trying things out, and turning our guitars up loud, we found a common language and managed to pull it off. As a facilitator I did find the session very challenging as you never know if you're going to be able to create something or not – it takes time to find the angle that's going to work, but we pulled it off as a team!"

The Stay Up Late Allstars came together again to run a punkworkshop with the children at ExtraTime's holiday club in Brighton, teaching the kids how to write a punk song. <http://stayuplate.org/news/extra-times-young-punks/>

Learn more about Stay up Late at www.stayuplate.org. Read about their project 'gig buddies' in this [article](#).

3. Sol, Luna, Estella – dance workshop

The dance workshop was facilitated by Javier Alameda and Aiala Urcelay from Afanias in Spain. They work together professionally and train young dancers with learning disabilities. Here we see Javier and Aiala preparing the workshop.



The workshop

1) Everyone walks around in the room. When you meet someone, just give him a hug, don't speak.

2) Everyone walks around in the room. When you meet someone, just say 'buonas tardes' (good afternoon) and nothing else.

3) We make a circle and try to stand still.

- warm your hands by rubbing them against each other
- warm your body by rubbing every part of it firmly with your hands
- slap every part of your body
- and then go rubbing again
- put your arms in the air and then let them slide over your body to the ground, first slowly, then faster
- stamp your feet, try to find a common rhythm
- one by one, go to middle of the circle, make one or more movement(s) and say your name – *the facilitators go up to the people who are afraid to do this exercise and by dancing they invite them to overcome their shyness*

4) To warm up your voice:

- say 'sol' (sun) as you rub over your heart
- say 'luna' (moon) as you slap your bottom
- say 'estellas' (stars) as you shake your hips

5) Remain in the circle, but turn around until you face the back of your righthand neighbour.

- rub the back (sol) and the hips (estellas) of the person in front of you
- rub the legs
- slap the bottom of the person in front of you (luna)

6) Everyone walks around in the room. When you meet someone, make a movement towards this person. When your movement is done, then you say your name. Then the other person makes a movement and says his name. Apart from that, no talking.

7) The group is divided in two groups. They each take place on one side of the room. From each side, one person dances into the middle towards the other dancer. Once the two dancers reach the centre, they hug and 'melt into each other'. Then they sink to the ground and once they are both down, they roll away from each other over the floor, back to their own side of the room. Then two other dancers dance towards each other.

The facilitators invite all the participants to join in. They support them by dancing closely next to them and by guiding their movements. This way, they delicately reinforce or adjust certain movements.

8) Everyone sits down in the circle. Four volunteers dance into the middle of the circle. Two people form a statue with an 'opening' in it, made by the arms or the legs. The other two dance 'through' the 'opening' and then they form a statue themselves. After a while, four new volunteers enter the circle.

9) Everyone sits down in the circle. Everyone can come into the circle and dance freely to the music. But there can only be a maximum of four dancers in the middle of the circle at the same time. When there are more than four dancers, the person longest in the middle has to leave. You can also invite people to come into the circle with you.

10) Two by two. Choose a place in the room. One person stands behind his partner. He warms his hands by rubbing them firmly. Then he puts his hands on the shoulders of the person in front of him and softly caresses them, then rubs and kneads them. Then move down over the back (sol), the hips (estella), the bottom (luna), the legs to the feet and then back upwards. Then switch roles.

11) Stand in the circle, very close to each other, back to back. Close your eyes and just listen to the music. *The facilitators encourage the participants to stand closer to each other.* Then slowly sink down to the ground. Then everyone sits in a big circle in such a way that everyone can make eyecontact with the other participants. End with a little discussion about the workshop.



Thursday 28/08	
10:00 – 11:30	Practicing and rehearsing for the performance tomorrow
17:00 – 18:00	

On Thursday, the music-, dance- and theatregroup practice and rehearse their part of the performance bit by bit. The facilitators give clear instructions, they work individually with the participants, they support them, encourage them and adjust certain movements or actions. They prepare the group for the big day tomorrow. In the mean time, the *Stay Up Late Allstars* are rehearsing for their gig at the Buitenbeenpop festival.

Friday 29/08

09.00 – 10.00

**BUITENBEENPOP festival soundcheck
Soundcheck + final rehearsal on the festival stage**

10.45 – 11.00

ACT 1! SUPERCELL

11.00 – 11.15

ACT 2! Punk act Stay Up Late



Pictures © Sonja Bruggeman and An Verstraeten

Interview with Alex Otterlei, composer of *Super Cell*



Alex Otterlei is a professional composer who has created music and soundeffects for computergames, roleplaying games, short films and many other projects. These days his main focus has returned to the essence of his passion: writing evocative music about the subjects that most inspire him, with the symphonic orchestra as his main tool of expression. If you like to know more about his work, check out www.alexotterlei.com.

For this project, *Stefan Perceval* invited Alex to work with the team of Opening Doors, a group of performing artists with learning disabilities. Performers from three adult day care centres join Opening Doors every Monday afternoon for practice and

rehearsal at the cultural centre of Leopoldsbury. At first, Alex admits, the idea frightend him. But he soon decided to accept the invitation. For Alex, confronting your greatest fear is the best way to push your boundaries.

Can you remember what exactly frightend you, when Stefan invited you to work with the team of Opening Doors?

Almost everything actually (laughs). First of all, I have no training or education at all in working with people with learning disabilities. I have never worked with them before, I have no relatives with a learning disability,... I had no experience whatsoever. I saw Stefan create work of high quality with the team of Opening Doors, but he's a director of course and he's been doing this for years. I wondered if I would be able to work with this team. Normally I work behind the scenes. I'm a composer, I like to work on my own, in peace and quiet. I create the composition in every detail, I hand it over to the conductor and then it's up to the orchestra. But now I had to work with a group, inspire them and create a whole performance together with them. And quickly it became clear to me I had to perform live on stage as well. All those things were a first for me.

But hey, for some years now, my motto is: *find your greatest fear and confront it*. It's not about putting your hand in a container full of spiders. It's about convincing yourself that you're good enough to do the things you really love to do. Taking up that kind of challenge actually does make you stronger. It can trigger a real transformation. Stefan also reassured me that everything would work out fine. Just be yourself, he said and that was okay for me, because I'm no good at pretending. So off I went. I still remember my first encounter. I sat behind the piano and the performers came up to me with such an ease and selfconfidence. I was really nervous, but the team gave me such a warm welcome, it put me at ease. They don't pretend, they present themselves just the way they are. After ten minutes I was already touched by their enthusiasm, their openness and their complete trust. It took away all my doubts and fears. Also the staff members of the adult day care centres, Anny and Martine, gave me their full support.

Did you ever doubt their ability to make music?

The first suggestion was to do some covers, but Stefan encouraged me to follow my own ideas. And then we had this big hailstorm and it struck me how much damage such a storm can do in so little time, but also how much

support and solidarity such an event can trigger. It seemed like a nice idea to create a storm together with the team of Opening Doors. You don't have to be able to sing or keep in tune, to create a storm. You just snap your fingers or stamp your feet. We checked if the participants could make all the movements and also if they were able to follow the direction of the composition,... and this worked out well. I also knew that *Super Cell* would be the framework for an international exchange, so I was looking for something universal and easy to learn. Gradually we then added the drama. We also created some extra music for the dancers from Spain and Malta, who really made a beautiful choreography in very little time. It all grew organically and it was only until yesterday that all the pieces fell into place and I knew it would work out.

What could be the next step for this group, musically?

I have no idea. I'm completely empty after this performance. But what I do keep in mind - and what really surprised me - is how quickly the participants pick up instructions, if you explain them well. A few of them are actually good singers. So there are actually very little limitations to what they can do, musically, given the right instructions. They also have so much discipline and they work so hard...

Any memorable moments?

An important moment for two guys in the group was when I gave them the responsibility of creating lightning with the cimbals. They were so proud! Another participant who really touched me was *Fons*. He used to have a normal life, but due to an accident, he lost a great deal of his abilities. Fons made clear to me that he used to play the snare drum in a marching band when he was young. So we arranged a snare drum and we discovered that he had still maintained some of his skills. That was really unforgettable.

And what did you gain from this project?

I've never done something so *social* before. I work in a tough, professional environment with contracts, deadlines, pressure,... strictly focussed on the result. But in this project, the focus was on the process, on making people happy. This is such a warm environment, it's almost family. I think this is the first time I've had a professional experience where 'feelings' played such a central role. The gratitude and the enthusiasm of these performers is such a different kind of return compared to sending an invoice or receiving professional appreciation.

Giving trust, responsibility and warmth works in both ways. When we create the storm, it feels like

we're all brothers and sisters, because we're pulling this off together, against all odds.

How was it like to cooperate with professional caretakers?

Well, it struck me how much artistic abilities these caretakers had. *Martine* has a great feeling for drama and theatre. *Anny* has a strong musical sense. She easily recognized the musical patterns and was my 'eyes and ears' inside the group. *An* plays percussion herself and she brought along all her instruments. Without them, I would have never been able to create a performance like this. They really supported me.

How would you describe your part in this process?

I put in my ideas and my enthusiasm. I also think I made a kind of structure that supports the artistic expression of the participants. I didn't make a rigid structure as I would normally do, when I'm composing for an orchestra. Then everything is strictly timed. But in this case, this would only stress us. So I made 'chapters' in which the piano creates a certain atmosphere (rain, hail, sunshine,...) with a few notes or chords. Within those chapters I could improvise freely and make the piano fit with everything else that was happening on stage. I could also look closely to everything that was going on,

instead of being focused on getting it right.

Is it important for you that you have created something of artistic quality?

I've made no compromise, I didn't take their disability into account. I wanted to create something with artistic quality that I really like myself and that would make me proud. I would also perform this with a professional orchestra. I often wondered if it would work out, and I really get a kick out of pulling this off with people with learning disabilities. That's really something! It has artistic quality, but it's not high brow. I wanted to create something original, but universal and accessible for everyone. I think that's why I

usually make scores for short movies or computergames, because there's a strong visual aspect to my music. I'm actually a painter with music. I create musical stories. I think this makes it easier for people to relate to the music, to get touched by it and to link it to theatre or dance. Maybe I work so visually because I'm mainly a self-taught composer. I was always passionate about music and then I met a great mentor, Luc Van Hove of the Antwerp conservatory. He inspired me to develop myself as a composer. That's my true passion, to compose for a symphonic orchestra. I can paint the biggest paintings this way. But hey, if you want to know more about my career, do check my website!

Interview with the participants from Afanias (Spain)

Adolfo Palacios, Marta Navarrete, Icaro Maiterena, Javier Alameda, Aiala Urcelay

Can you tell us a bit more about your daily work at Afanias?

At Afanias, we have two dance classes for people with learning disabilities. One for children and one for adults. There are only dancers with a disability in these classes. There are always two teachers who work with the class, so the participants have two references. There is a teacher with a learning disability and a teacher without a learning disability. Marta Navarrete and Guiomar Campos teach the adults on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. Javier Alameda and Aiala Urcelai teach the children on Tuesday and on Friday. The children are divided into three different groups. Marta also gives danceclasses to a group of youngsters with learning disabilities at another centre.

Icaro: At first, Marta and Javier were students themselves. That's how they met Aiala and Guiomar, who were their dance teachers. In total, Afanias works with about 1500 people with a learning disability. We have many centres, so lots of people have the opportunity to discover their talent, from a very young age. Afanias saw that Marta and Javier – and so many other people with learning disabilities – had artistic talent and ambition, but very little opportunity to develop it. So

Afanias created an *artistic area/workspace* where artists with a learning disability could focus on their art. Artists without a learning disability work there as a mentor. For example, we created an inclusive dance company where dancers with and without disabilities are equal partners. We don't see dancers like Javier as a dancer-with-a-disability. We consider them *dancers*, period. Within this *artistic area*, the idea grew to make Javier and Marta teachers as well. So from being a student, they became a professional dancer and an equal partner in our inclusive dance company and finally they became teachers themselves.

How do the teachers prepare their classes?

Javier: We each prepare the workshop separately at home. Then we put our ideas together.

Aiala: Javier cannot write, but he makes sketches and drawings of the movements he would like to teach. We have been working together for such a long time, we understand each other very well, often without words.

Icaro: Marta is more analytic. She makes notes of all the exercises she does and she's good at

synthesising. She's always writing down her ideas.

Javier and Aiala, can you describe what each of you contributes to the cooperation?

Aiala: Javier has a lot of imagination and he's very creative. So when we prepare the classes together, Javier can turn a small idea into something big.

Javier: Aiala helps me to put all my separate ideas together.

Adolfo: If I may add - *I'm not an artist, I'm a manager, but I see them working together* - I have witnessed how people with different capacities can create a performance together using different forms of communication: music, photography, dance, drawing, writing... You can have a disability in certain ways of communication, and an ability in other forms of communication. For me, the key is to use all these different forms of communication and to be receptive to these different forms of communication. After all, art is a way of communicating.

Would you describe your cooperation as completely equal?

Aiala: Yes. We work at the same professional level. Javier gets paid to give the classes, just like me. We have the same role. We have

the same rights and the same obligations. If one of us can't make it to a class, we have to find a substitute.

Earlier on, I witnessed how you were improvising in the forest. You give very little direction: one word, one gesture. How do you bring dancers to that point where they need so little direction?

Icaro: The philosophy of the dance company has always been to work through collective collaboration. Usually in the world of dancing a choreographer instructs the dancers. We think it's far more enriching if a dancer finds his own movements. We think it's the most natural and organic way to work in a group. It's also the best environment to make individual progress, in and though working in a group.

Aiala: And it adds so much value to the creation.

Icaro: We noticed that when we instruct people, the movement doesn't fit that much. But when we work on a theme, like *intimacy*, for example, and we ask the dancers to translate how they feel intimacy into movement, we get a much more natural result.

Adolfo: In their latest creation, the dancers gathered all the movements collectively and they decided together what would be

the proper movements for the choreography. From that moment on, the person with the right capacities directs the choreography that everyone has chosen. So there is also discipline in this group.

Icaro: But it takes time for the dancers to figure out what they want to dance themselves. In our last project, for example, we got the opportunity to go to Iceland and to create a performance based on this visit. First, still in Spain, each one of us gathered all kinds of images about Iceland. During our visit, we could see and feel the things we had previously studied. From those experiences the movements emerged in a natural way. Suddenly someone like Javier transforms these experiences into movement, in a natural way. He doesn't need a choreographer to instruct him, the movements come from inside. So when you see Javier on stage, you can see that he's totally engaged in his role.

Javier, how did the Iceland project inspire you?

Javier: I was looking for an image. I found that ice is a very cold rock. I then transformed this image through my body into dance.

Do you have any final remarks?

Icaro: The only problem I have with this interview is that the communication is verbal. And that's a way of communicating that Javier and Marta are not so comfortable with. So we need other languages to communicate their knowledge and make our communication less verbal.

Adolfo: In order to understand the work, you have to see it. Words are not enough.

Aiala: I hope that we can evolve to a point where there's nothing special or specific about what we do. I hope that one day it will become completely normal that everyone can take dance classes in an inclusive setting.

Icaro: Martha is now a regular student in a dance class.

Martha: I want to gain more experience, so I can teach the adults better.

Aiala: Learning technique really supports their personal expression.

Icaro: Behind every movement, there is a lot of work!

Interview with the participants from Poland

Krystyna, Artur, Jarek, Jan, Danuta, Joanna, Katarzyna Gontarczyk, Katarzyna Luczak

Did you find inspiration for your own work?

For me it was inspiring that people can communicate, even if they don't know the language. This is the first time I could actually communicate abroad, with foreigners, without speaking English or any other language.

For me it was inspiring that we could create a performance in such a short time and present it at a spectacle like this. Even simple things can make people open themselves and express themselves. For example, the exercise of passing a cat or a ball we did the first morning. Or the work we did in smaller groups. It was inspiring to see how people could express themselves through simple exercises and how quickly this could create positive feelings. There was so much positive energy. And I discovered punk music, I never knew I loved punk.

Do you work the same way in Poland as the people here?

In general, there are a lot of similarities. We work with the same people, do the same things, face the same problems. But there was one big difference: we take to much care of our participants, if we compare ourselves to others. We are overprotective and

overconcerned and we take away responsibility.

Another difference that we've noticed is that people from other countries show their positive emotions more openly, by hugging for example. In Poland, we don't do that, we're much more reserved. So we decided that we would show our love more openly to our participants, but we would serve them less.

Did the activities here trigger you to do something similar?

We use instruments as well, but we've noticed such a variety of instruments here, that we realise now we have a lack of instruments in Poland. So we want to expand the variety of our instruments. We also would love to have a composer or a musician like Alex, because for now we use recordings as a background to our music and no live music.

Are there things you do better in Poland? Things you're proud of?

We're very proud of our theatre. We have a person like Alex, but this lady is doing theatre, so it's hard to compare. But we are mostly actors. We also have an international theatre festival for disabled people.

Interview with Paul and Chris from the UK

Paul Richards, Chris Rider

There were quite some different tastes in music here, these past few days. How did you deal with this?

Chris: I like any music, so I take it with the flow and see what happens.

Paul: Some people are very much into one genre, like metal. I think that's the only music he ever listens to. But the others listen to all different kinds of music. I do wonder how our punkperformance was for the audience? Peter told me the festival had never programmed loud rockmusic before... I hope the audience liked it... The point about doing our performance around punkmusic is that, going back to the original ethos of punk, punk is for everyone. If you want to do it, just go out and do it. And that's what the message is about: you don't have to be technically accomplished to be a musician or a performer. It's about emotion and self-expression. Things don't have to be technically brilliant to be brilliant if the emotion and the soul is there. And it's a very direct way of getting across to the audience.

Is there a big difference between how disabled people are treated on the continent compared to the UK?

Paul: If I'm not mistaken, the Buitenbeenpop festival has been

going on for 15 years and this was the first time that learning disabled performers took the stage. I'm surprised at that, but I think it's absolutely brilliant that ART-is could accomplish this. That's the revolution we need, where learning disabled people don't get stuff presented to them on a plate, but take the lead and create performances themselves.



Did you find new inspiration?

Paul: In the punkworkshop, I had 20 people or so, who didn't understand a word I was saying and had never heard about punkmusic. That was a difficult place to start from (*laughs*), so I had to adjust quite quickly. But that's interesting, because in

working with learning disabled people, even from the same country, communication can be such a challenge.

Chris: It was interesting to discover a new culture and discover how things are going here and to bring all I've learned to you guys.

Can we learn something from this meeting to improve future meetings?

Paul: Yesterday we acknowledged that learning disabled people should be a part of the coordinators meetings and have the opportunity to take the lead. That would be great, I think.



Interview with the participants from Malta

Saviour, Peter Jean Paul, Sylvana, Andria, Leanne, Christine, Brian, Sandra, Douglas

Did you get new inspiration for your work in Malta?

Dancing with live music and live percussion was new. It was really nice.

Did you learn a lot from the Spanish dancers?

We learned to improvise. This is new for us.

Sandra: Our group is quite new. We dance together for six months. We did some improvisation, but not much. Our aim is to reach the same level of quality as the dancers from Spain, but we are at the beginning of our process. So, for our dancers, it was quite inspiring to do so much improvisation.

Also the (*physical*) contact was new and moving together.

Sandra: As soon as we walked in the recreation room, on our first night, two people of the Spanish group were already dancing. We sat down and watched them and all of a sudden Sylvana started dancing with Javier and there was a bit of an improvisation. They had not even said hello, but 'dance' was their common language. They danced very profoundly, and at one point even back to back, so there was no eyecontact, only a

big sensory knowledge and awareness of each other. This was a new, surprising and very moving experience for us all. It was magic. We will keep remembering this experience. Sylvana will of course, because she was part of it, but also the people who were watching.

How was it to perform today at the festival?

I wasn't nervous. I was confident. I was dancing next to a girl I like.

I learned new moves.

I was excited.

I didn't dance, but I could be an actress. I like to be an actress. I liked the part where we pretended that the food was melting in our mouth.

I liked to play the maracas. I also liked the dance with the live music. For me it was a new experience to play an instrument on stage.

And how was it for the teachers?

Sandra: I really learned a lot from the Spanish group. It was the first time that I saw learning disabled people dance and move this way. So I'm really excited that this level of dance is possible. I discovered that in Malta, we train our dancers in a similar way, so I'm confident we will get to that level on day. Of course, in Spain, they start training dance at a very young age, so it will take us some time.

But to be honest, there's also a conflict in my head. Because what I saw made me feel really good, because the way of dancing I saw is very similar to how I dance myself as a non-disabled dancer and what I see around me in contemporary dance. But then I started thinking: maybe that's not what should happen, maybe there should be another aesthetic, maybe we should use the same techniques, but discover new types of movement and get those accepted by the dancing community. So I was happy to see that this type of contemporary dance is possible with learning disabled dancers, but in a way I'm unhappy because this will probably lead me in this direction instead of maybe taking a risk and trying to develop a new type of dancing. Maybe it is possible to move dance to somewhere else, but I don't know where that is, it's a big mystery.

In our group, we also have some dancers with physical disabilities, so we have to encompass all the types of disability. Some movements are only possible for a few dancers who are completely able to do the movements they want to do. So it's a challenge and a big question mark. So I would like to see much more practice. This is the tip of the iceberg for me. I know now that it's possible. There are some dancers in my group I can push in that direction. But some of them are not able to

be part of that process. And what do we do then? Do we say no to them? How can we include everyone in the process? Can we differentiate?

In the theatre group of Opening Doors for example, there are those who are more interested in verbal theatre and there are those who are more into movement and expression through the body. I think the direction is that we need to provide a space for both. This might be together, but not necessarily. We can also give them different, separate opportunities. This might also be the future of the dance group. We're already discussing that there might be two levels in the dance group. One group can be for community work for those people who just want to have fun and another group should have more artistic aims, with a certain amount of depth in the work. But this will take time and it requires resources. We also need enough 'quantity' for quality to emerge.

Did you like the atmosphere during this exchange?

Douglas: For me it was lovely they had a structure already in place. If we had to work from scratch, it would have been a much more difficult process. But now there was a structure where everyone could fit in, that was a really efficient way of working. I was well planned and well organised.

REPORT OF THE MEETINGS

Spain 26 – 28 November 2014

WE ARE ARTISTS, WE ARE FAMILY

Kris De Visscher

Wednesday 26/11	
16:00 –	Welcome
17:00	Presentation of Afanias

Welcome

What has been your experience so far?

What are your expectations for this meeting?

- It's nice to meet people from different countries, it's a nice experience.
- It's really amazing to come to a different country.
- It's nice to see how everyone can create art, you don't need to have to a special education.
- Students like to be part of an international environment.
- It's more than just the art, it's traveling and being away, doing it independently.
- It's an eye-opener for me.
- It's nice to be a part of something bigger, something that people all over Europe are figuring out how to do.
- We don't often get the opportunity to discuss our work with other people from other countries.
- It's amazing to see how the abilities of people with learning disabilities have no limits.

Presentation of Afanias

Angeles Martinez - Technical Director Afanias

Introduction



Afanias has been working for 50 years now for learning disabled people and their families. We're really passionate about art, because for us, art is the highest thing any person can achieve. Recently, we celebrated our 50th anniversary with a concert performed by learning disabled artists in one of the main cultural venues of Madrid. It was very emotional for us to perform there and to see disabled people on that stage. We have been struggling for such a long time to give disabled people access to culture. It is a hard struggle and sometimes a crazy one. And so we're very glad to meet other 'crazy' people from all over Europe who share that same struggle.

Afanias

AFANIAS was created in 1964 by families who were looking for support for their learning disabled children. Since then, Afanias has defended the rights and improved the quality of life of learning disabled people and their families. More than 1500 people with a learning disability are being attended by Afanias, from 3 up to 90 years of age. We work in Madrid and in the surrounding area.

We have:

- *2 schools for special education*
At the centers for special education, learners with special educational needs are taught in different stages, such as Nursery School, Primary and Secondary School and Adult Transition Programmes. Our curriculum contributes to develop the learner's personality, to consolidate self-esteem and enhance quality of life.

- *3 occupational centers*

The occupational centers work within four areas: an occupational area, an employability area, a lifelong learning area, a psychosocial support area and some complementary services.

- *2 residences + occupational centers*

Offering: accommodation and support, leisure and free time, personal development and community inclusion.

- *2 residences for people with severe learning disabilities*

Offering: accommodation and support, leisure and free time, personal development and community inclusion, health enhancement, personal care, monitoring and protection, family support, independent life support programme, information technologies workshop and theatre workshop.

- 3 Special Employment Centers

We employ about 350 people who work in graphic industries, catering and gardening. We've been doing this for 40 years now, so we're now looking for solutions for our employees who are retiring. Afanias never really wanted to become an employer, but we did because we saw these people have the ability to work, but mostly don't get the opportunity to do so at present.

Next to those services, we also have some lateral services:

- *Women and disability*

This is rather unknown, but learning disabled women often find themselves in a very vulnerable situation. There is a lot of physical abuse. That's why we developed specific protection measures and social support such as: hosting and assistance, social resources application, Temporary accommodation in special situations, individual psychological care in crisis situations, advise in specific women's rights judicial services, information and advise in family law

- Service for individual plan resources and independent life

We support people to live in their own house, with roommates or however they want, manage their money, feel good about themselves, take care of their health, use regional services, share wishes and experiences

- Labour insertion Service

Inclusion of people with learning disabilities in the ordinary labour market through valorisation and definition, job search, potential jobs analysis, training, workshops, rehabilitation activities, prospecting and raising awareness of companies and social agents,...

- First job experience

We facilitate labour itineraries for each person with learning disability, giving them the tools so they can be well prepared for a certain job in a short term: We offer: vocational and labour guidance, practical training in real work environments, resources, information and a specific *Congress Assistant* course

- Leisure and Sports

The Leisure Service creates a structure in our association that brings leisure-opportunities to people with disabilities: sports, shared leisure, tourism and holidays, culture, leisure school and volunteering.

Afanias is a disability led organisation

We don't use the word 'client' for our participants. We consider them co-owners. You wouldn't call Steve Jobs a client of Apple either. All our services are led by a council and a board of directors. Both of them consist of representatives of the families, of staffmembers and of 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. For that purpose we have created three mailboxes: one for compliments, one for complaints and one for suggestions. We've made these mailboxes very accessible by using images and easy to read words. This way, the disabled participants share their worries and ideas with their representatives.

Another consequence of this policy is that all our information has to be understandable for people with learning difficulties. Because if they don't have the necessary information, they can't participate properly in the decision making.

We have also changed our way of organising meetings so that people with learning disabilities can participate: we discuss concrete topics, we take turns when speaking, we limit the duration of the meetings. People with learning disabilities also receive the necessary support:

- they receive training to attend meetings and to represent others
- they receive information in advance to prepare themselves
- they can get an assistant who supports them to express their opinion

Afanas Cultural Area

Afanas is dedicated to achieve universal rights for disabled people. At this moment, educational and labour rights are consolidated in Spain. But the access to culture is not consolidated. Learning disabled people are still very much invisible in this field.



AFANIAS has a double commitment:

- A commitment to the whole group of learning disabled people and the universal right of every disabled person to access culture
- A commitment to learning disabled people who, individually, have expectations, motivations, skills, etc to be artists, and to contribute with their artistic work to a more inclusive society

Methodological description

For Afanas, the people who offer the artistic support must be trained professionals artists themselves. We want artists and not caretakers to support artists. We also believe that it's vital to provide potential (and

current) artists with material resources (venues, materials, structures), with experiences and with necessary personal support to allow them to experiment with different techniques, so they can find the expressive technique that suits them best and make it their own.

Purposes of AFANIAS cultural area:

- To promote the recognition of the right of learning disabled people to access culture
- To make artistic work of learning disabled people visible in

professional and mainstream environments

- To generate the resources needed to promote professional artistic productions including learning disabled people
- To include learning disabled people in contemporary artistic creation, identifying them as new agents of intercultural dialogue

Learn more about some of our artists in this [documentary](#).

Thursday 27/11	
10:15 – 12:45	Brainstorm for the final festival in Malta

1) What would you like to share at the festival in Malta

- we need a name for the festival
- it has to be affordable
- start of with a street parade and end by the sea with a picnic
- the street parade could be accompanied by a live band and digital band, we could also have VJ's and we could all be dressed up.
- we could print T-shirts
- every country could bring their own favorite music
- we could have open workshops, where people can create handmade stuff
- we could do a flashmob or a pop-up choir
- we could have a chill out room
- we could end with a big disco party
- we could have an open mic
- maybe make a trailer to advertise for the festival
- let people give online feedback – through facebook
- organise speed dating
- cinema with live show
- photo booth
- pop-up performance

- multimedia
- exhibitions with photos of the different meetings
- have the flags of the different countries on display
- have one big performance, directed by Stephan Perceval
- themes: *Why am I an artist? Family Reunion.*
- rehearse in the streets, show work in progress
- show a documentary of the artists who are not there
- theme: fairy tales
- maybe involve children passing by
- maybe practice already in Poland?

2) What will we do?

- It would be nice to create one big final street theatre performance together. Stephan would love to direct it. Maybe in the theme of a 'family reunion'?
- It looks like a nice idea to also rehearse this performance in public, to show the work in progress and to make it a part of the final performance.
- Besides that, anyone can share what he likes to perform. Maybe we can have a common theme for all our separate acts? Maybe a theme like '*I am an artist./ I affirm: I'm an artist!/ My work is just as good as anyone elses.* In that case: we need to maintain high standards for the work we show.
- We must keep in mind that not everyone has attended every meeting and that not everyone can be present in Malta. Maybe we can share their work and the results of the previous meetings by a video or a documentary?
- It would be nice to have a name for the festival, a logo, artwork and a T-shirt.

Thursday 27/11

14:15 – 16:00

Theatre workshop by Marit Stocker (Belgium)



1. Stamp – clap – shout

The group stands in a circle. One by one, the participants stamp with one foot on the ground, they clap their hands once and they shout their name while they stretch out their arm. It's important to show *energy*.

2. Acting emotions

Remain in the circle. One person portrays a certain emotion (happy, sad, angry,...). Then the rest of the group tries to copy this person.

3. Follow the leader

One person stands in front of the group. He/she slowly makes some clear movements. The other people in the group have to follow these moves.

4. Mirroring

Two by two. One person slowly makes some clear movements. The other one tries to follow these movements as if he/she is the reflection of that person in a mirror.

5. I am an artist

Back in the circle again. One by one the participants step forward and make a movement that makes clear that they are an artist. In that movement they have to show how they feel when they are creating art.

Thursday 27/11	
16:00 – 16:30	Discussing the Art-is research report

The purpose of the ART-is report is to hold on our experiences in this project. We also have to upload the report on a website called *European Shared Treasure*. The report consists of pictures, descriptions, interviews and questionnaires. Problem is: the report will be in English, on paper and it will contain a lot of words. So the question is, how can we make the report more accessible for:

- *for people who don't speak English?*

We agreed to send the document in word to every partner so they can easily have it translated in their own language.

- *for people who have difficulty reading?*

We agreed to:

- avoid jargon
- make an easy read summary with the key facts
- use photosymbols
- have someone check for difficult words
- use bigger letters
- use less words
- work with bullet points
- break up into paragraphs and leave white space between paragraphs

Thursday 27/11	
16:30 – 17:00	Introducing the Cultural activities of AFANIAS, danceprojection

Rodrigo Gonzalez, who coordinates Afanias' Cultural Area, starts of with a short explanation about the cultural area.

Before this cultural area was installed, different centres had their own art projects and exhibitions. The idea of the Cultural Ara is to coordinate the artistic work and to make the cultural policy of Afanias more consistent. Another aim is to improve the circumstances in which the art is created.

For Afanias 'art' is an alternative, equal and common language we all have as children. It's the formal education system that separates us. That's why Afanias stimulates art, from a very young age up to the elderly. On the one hand, Afanias wants to give every person the opportunity to create art. Never deny culture to anyone, is their motto. They have about 200 students in all kinds of disciplines (theatre, music, dance,...). They want to teach art in a standard environment that is adapted to creating art. They avoid separate settings but work in regular schools, rehearsal studios, etc.

On the other hand, they specifically want to stimulate talented learning disabled artists to develop themselves as professional artists, teachers or professionals in the cultural sector. That's why they also focus on the quality of the work and the effort that is needed to achieve that quality.

Rodrigo: *"For Afanias, artistic development is an essential part of personal development. We believe that art develops emotions, creativity and beauty. That's why we really care that the environments in which artists work, have all the necessary tools and materials to stimulate art."*

After the introduction of Rodrigo we watched a video of the dance performance 'Inside'. This dance performance was created as part of an exchange programme with Iceland and is inspired by typical elements of the landscape of Iceland (fire, volcanos, ice rocks, water,...). The performance was created by two teams, one for the scenography and one for the choreography. Disabled and non-disabled artists worked together as equals.



We ended with some Q&A with the dancers of the Inside performance who came to join us.

How long did it take you to put together this performance?

Nine months.

How often do you rehearse?

In the beginning, three hours a week. Later on, several days a week, for six, seven hours a day.

What are you working on for the moment?

Each of the dancers are developing their own ideas for the moment and their own personal language. From improvisation each of us is developing the personal expression of their feelings.

During the rehearsals, do you teach or learn new techniques or is it just improvisation?

The dancers have already had five years of training in contemporary dance. So they have the basic techniques. From that point, we did a lot of improvisations and the performance is composed from parts of these improvisations.

Do you think it's necessary to have these basis techniques to create a performance?

I think you need some body awareness to develop your movements.

There are also different kinds of dance performances you can make. You can make one for an audience, but you can also make one just for yourself.

In the performance you just saw, there was a change in the methods we used. In the beginning we we're just having fun, developing our movements, exploring our abilities and what we could do with our bodies. But as we were going to show this performance to an audience, we had to change our way of working at a certain point. From that moment on, we needed to have more discipline, our movements needed to be clearer, we had to be more rigid in our technique.

The idea of working as a group, as a collective is the most important for us, more than the technique. We didn't give the artists strict instructions on how they should develop their movements. Step by step we learned more about Iceland, it's landscape, it's culture,... An important part of the process was that we had the opportunity to actually travel to Iceland. During that trip, we decided that every performer would express one aspect of the landscape of Iceland: water, rock, ice, vulcano, fire, fog,... So the individual performances were based on technique but also on our study of Iceland and on our work as a collective. The movements that came

out of this work are completely natural.

Nobody has to instruct the dancers what to do, because the movements just flow out of all the preparation we put into the project. The key is to open their creativity and expression.

Did other professional dance compagnies see your work?

Yes, we presented in the work in Malaga and Bilbao for example.

Did anyone get an invitation to dance in another company?

Javier and Marta also work in another professional dance company. And we're waiting for offers ;-).

What other kind of art forms are part of the culture section of Afanias?

Music, painting, sculpture,...
Tomorrow you will see the painters

at the University of Madrid, a project that started appoximately five years ago to develop the artistic abilities of learning disabled painters by giving them the proper environment and the proper tools.

For example, in the last exhibition we made at the University, the key issue was that art is in the process. So we designed the room to be an optimal environment for the artists, so the people who attended the exhibitions didn't just see the work that was made, but also the artists creating them. So when the exhibition was open, there were people coming in each day to see how these works of art are realised. The exhibition was launched with a guided tour accompanied by live dance and music. So we created a shared experience including different types of abilities and disabilities.

Did you get any good feedback after your performance?

Yes, very good ones!

Thursday 28/11	
18:00 – 19:00	Meeting in inclusive classroom at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Complutense University of Madrid presenting art work by learning disabled artists

Every Thursday, for a couple hours, one of the classrooms at the Faculty of Fine Arts of the Complutense University of Madrid is available for learning disabled artists. Sometimes, students at the Faculty of Fine arts join them and collaborate with them. Icaro Maiterena is the driving force behind this initiative. He invests a lot of his time and personal material into this class. All of these materials are laid out on a big table and everyone is free to use whatever he/she likes. Icaro supports all the artists in their personal research and stimulates them by providing the necessary materials.



REPORT OF THE MEETINGS

Poland 20 – 22 March 2015

WE CAN MAKE MOVIES

Kris De Visscher

Friday 20/03	
10:15 – 12:00	Welcome Ice breakers – JERZY KLONOWSKI

In the museum

In the different national groups, someone is appointed as 'sculptor'. He/she creates a sculpture with some of the people in the group, while the others walk around and visit the sculptures the others groups have made. It's an interactive museum, so the visitors can change the statues if they wish to. If you're tired of being a sculpture, you can be a visitor of the museum and other people of the group make a sculpture. After this, work in pairs. One is the sculpture, and the other is the sculptor. He/she manipulates the other person carefully into a sculpture/statue. Then, make groups of 4 people - mix nationalities - and make a sculpture where the four people touch each other.

Pantomime

Against the wall

Everyone stands in one line. You put your left hand in front of you against an imaginary wall. Then your right hand. Then move your left hand to the left, then your right hand, and then quickly move your feet to the left. Then pretend like your cleaning a mirror by rubbing it with your hand. Blow some air towards the mirror and rub it again. Finally admire yourself in the mirror. Then step back to the right.



Hands on the table

Put your hands on an imaginary table. Move your left hand to the left, then your right hand and then quickly follow with your feet. Do a few steps to the left and then back to the right. Finally jump up while you leave your hands lying on the imaginary table.

Walking in the same place

Lift your right foot and very slowly put it back down, from your toes to your heel. Then do the same with your left foot. Then both feet quickly one after the other. Then lift your right hip a bit, as you lift your right foot. And lift your left hip a bit as you lift your right foot. Then again one after the other. Finally pull back your right arm and shoulder a bit as you lift your right foot and hip. The same with your left foot and then again quickly all the movement after each other.

Throwing an imaginary ball up and down

Make a little cup with your right hand and pretend that there's an imaginary ball in it. Throw the imaginary ball in the air by making a small upwards movement and by straightening your hand. Follow the movement up and down with your eyes. Catch the ball again by making a small downwards movement and cupping your hand again. Then do the same with your left hand. Finally throw the ball from one hand to the other.



Friday 20/03

12:30 – 13:30

**Movie workshop part one
KRZYSZTOF KROLAK**

The group is divided in two groups. Both groups will make a movie based on a fairy tale: *little red riding hood* and *snow white and the seven dwarfs*. The organisers have prepared a scenario, some costumes and props. In this first session we agree on the different roles: actors (little red riding hood, mother, grandmother, big bad wolf,...), a director, assistants,... and we create the costumes for the characters. After that, we start preparing filming the first scenes.



Friday 20/03	
14:30 – 18:00	Movie workshop part two

After the break we filmed the rest of the indoor scenes.

Saturday 21/03	
10:30 – 11:30	Visiting The Educational Centre in Laski – experienced in the education and rehabilitation of blind and visually impaired, also with additional disabilities. http://www.laski.edu.pl/en/node/418

The centre in Laski (which means 'forest') is part of a group of institutions founded in 1911 by Countess Rosa Czacka who had lost her sight as a young girl, but who decided to help the blind. In 1918 she established the order of *the Franciscan Sisters Servants of the the Cross* who are dedicated to the care for these children and youngsters. There are others places in Poland and abroad who are part of the same foundation. The centre is a very big institution, with lots of facilities for the visually impaired, from very young age up to young adults. The young people here learn to be independent, receive an education and are stimulated to develop their talents (intellectual, artistic,...). Most of all they learn that they are a valuable person like any other. After their years here, some students continue their education at the university, while others try to find a job. They go on to live independently or with their family.

Saturday 21/03	
11:30 – 13:30 14:30 – 16:00	Film workshop part three and four

We film some more scenes at the centre in Laski and in a forest nearby.

Sunday 22/03	
15:00 – 18:00	Charity Auction for the benefit of Synapsis Foundation

Presentation of the movies and a short presentation of each country during the charity auction.

Interview with the Virtaset-group from Finland

Marko, Olli, Jukka, Taija, Calervo, Minna, Sari

What do you do in the Virtaset-group?

"We learn English, we learn to go shopping, we do maths, we learn about first aid, we dance and we play theatre."

What is the difference between the Virtaset-group and a normal school?

"It's easier to study in Virtaset-group."

Sari: "In the Virtaset-group we focus on what they can do, on their talents and we try to raise their self-esteem and make them more independent. We give them the opportunity to try different kinds of experiences like dancing, art,..."

What does independence mean to you?

"You can move to your own flat. You can live on your own"

How does the Virtaset-group learn you to live indepent?

Minna: Every now and then, the group stays at school for a whole week, without going home. During those weeks, they learn how to take care of yourselves.

What art do you like?

"Drawing, painting, handicraft, dancing, signing, theatre,..."

Do you have any good memories of the art you made?

"We liked the dance performance we made. We loved the movements we did together with the girls."

Minna: "We use a certain type of community dance methodology. We have a professional dance teacher who specialises in this kind of dance."

Has the Virstaset-group changed them in any way?

Sari: "We can see many changes during the studies. Some of the personal achievements are that they have an opinion of their own and they have more self-confidence to perform or to speak out. For example Olli, who studied for a year in the Virtaset-group, got so much more self-assurance and courage that he could move to his own flat, which he is very proud of."

Is their something really important about the Virtaset-group that people should know?

"The whole school is nice and the teachers are nice."

"I like the discobar and the singing."

Maybe the teachers can fill in some of the details about the way they work?

Sari: "The name 'Virtaset' is a very common surname in Finland. A lot of people are called 'Virtaset', it's like 'Jones' in English. We chose that name to point out that learning disabled students are normal people. The students join the group five days a week, for a minimum of one year and a maximum of three years. They're welcome from 16 years old and there's no maximum age. Four weeks a year, they stay over for a week, to practice independent living."

Minna: "Every week has a certain theme: theatre week, photography week, painting, sports..."

What are the aims of the group?

Sari: "One part of the group are young people who have finished school and who are preparing for the next step in their life, to live independently. But we also have older students, who have been working in a daycare-centre for a while and who are looking for some new inspiration, just like the non-disabled students who come to our centre. Finally there's a part of the group who's preparing to work in a real job. The Virtaset-group offers the opportunity to

work in different firms, like a kind of jobtraining."

How does art fit in? Why do you use art in working with this group?

Sari: "Art offers different ways of expressing yourself, of getting to know yourself better and of working in a group."

Minna: "I think it also very important to discover their talents. I'm convinced that everyone has a talent, you just have to find it and then encourage it."

What makes you proud?

"Working makes me proud."

"I received a rose after our spring performance. That made me very proud."

"I'm proud to be a student at the school."

"I sang a few songs in front of a large audience."

Is there something important I forgot to ask?

Minna: "An other difference between our group and other types of education is the way we integrate the Virtaset-group in our centre for adult education. All the staff members work with them and they are considered like any other student in our school. And that's very important for us."

Sari: "We're not just on the campus, we mix the Virtaset-group with the other groups of adult learners and they work together. For example, they follow a dance class together."

Minna: "Many of our non-disabled students have never met a learning disabled student before. It might be the first time they meet someone who is a little bit different. But meeting each other in different ways is very enriching. In the beginning of the year, they keep a big distance, but by the end of the year they're greeting each other, talking to each other,..."

And what's the effect of this interaction on the students of the Virtaset-group?

Sari: "They fall in love... So we need to talk a lot about feelings and letting go... Luckily they are so open and honest."

Minna: "Well, falling in love is just an extra side effect. Naturally Virtaset gets both feeling and experience of being included. They are met as any other student at our school which raises their own view of themselves as a "real" student. Also, some of them have found a great personal passion in some art form."

Interview with Anna Formosa (Malta)

Can you tell us a bit more about Opening Doors Malta?

For the moment, we meet twice a week, for about two hours each meeting. We meet once with the whole group to work towards our own performance. And during the other meeting we prepare our European projects. Opening Doors is involved in two European projects: *ART-is* and *Creative Ways* and for the preparation of those projects, we have split up our drama group in two groups. One group is more verbally expressive and the other group is more physical. The verbal group is also more thoughtful about their performance. The physical group consists of slower learners, so the storyline is more simple, but also very beautiful. In the beginning it was a bit strange, because the dynamic is very different in the small groups, compared to the large group. But the division enabled individuals in both groups to develop in their own pace. But it's also nice to have a mix of abilities when we work together with the whole group. Then the actors take care of each other and support each other.

And can you tell us a bit more about yourself and your previous experiences?

I did a [master](#) in applied Drama at the University of Exeter. The

master had a double focus: drama for social intervention and drama in education. During my training I did a lot of voluntary work. I lived in England for 7 years in total, working on different projects, such as youth theatre for the Barbican Theatre (Plymouth), community arts festival for Raise the Roof in Devon, an intergenerational project at the Ark T Centre in Oxford among others. Two of my most influential and positive experiences were Haringey Shed and Creation Theatre. [Haringey Shed](#) is an inclusive theatre company for children and youngsters from 7 to 16 years old. The company was based in Haringey, a more deprived area in North-London and it's an offshoot from an organization called [Chickenshed](#). The participants came from difficult backgrounds and about 20% of them had a learning disability. We created a performance with about 60 children and I learned a lot from that experience. After Haringey I worked as an education manager for [Creation Theatre Company](#) in Oxford. I developed their educational program and I did outreach work. I have now been in Malta for 4 years. I work with children in schools and through the local arts festival for children called 'Ziguzajg'. I work on creative projects with elderly people, and lead intergenerational projects as well.

Within the field of inclusive theater and performance, I saw great things happening, but sometimes I also had my doubts. I saw performances that weren't inclusive at all. In one performance, for example, the main characters were played by non-disabled, professional actors and the disabled actors only played minor parts or functioned as a kind of chorus. Another performance I saw was very biased, it uncritically told the story from one point of view. But also the projects I worked on myself weren't always that perfect. For example I did a project with young offenders that started off really well. Through improvisations, the youngsters opened up and they expressed that they were looking for alternative ways to react to situations and for new models of behaviour, because they felt they were stuck in what they knew. I wanted to explore this, but then the project was hijacked by the caretakers who brought in a camera crew to film these vulnerable young people in such a sensitive moment. I wanted to move on with the youngsters, but the social workers urged them to elaborate on the past. I didn't like that approach at all.

What attracts you, as a person, in this social aspect of theatre? Why do you choose to do this kind of work?

As my tutor used to say, you have to feel a love for people and for

humanity. I find it very fulfilling and satisfying to create a platform where I can be an agent of change for someone. It's the participants who develop themselves and I create a platform where everyone can join in. I guide them and challenge them, each in their own way. Not like an actor who wants to be seen or who wants all the glory for himself.

How do you go about creating this platform? How do you create an atmosphere where everyone can develop themselves?

I start with games and exercises. Then I start with something the actors can tap in to. For example, in my latest project, I worked with statues. I started off with a well known theatre game with a lot of stopping and moving in it. During that game, the actors had to strike a pose and then they move on again. After that, the actors formed a statue and the statue took on a bit of life, it did a little action and then it froze again, as soon as the others knew what the statue is about. Then the others joined in slowly and we made a tableau. After that, I used a kind of imaginary remote control to let (certain parts of) the tableau come to life. When I noticed the excitement of the actors and I saw how much fun they had, I knew: this thing works. So we developed this a bit more and we made a few more statues and then the themes

of 'marriage' and of castle-like fairytales started to pop up. Then I split the group in two and I gave them a few words to make up their own stories. They had done this before already, so they knew how to create a story. We then put the two stories together and we shaved off some information, but always with the whole group. We would do a little improvisation and then we would come back into the circle and decide how the story would continue. Everyone had the chance to choose their part and to develop it. Some of the actors were really keen on developing their part and I encouraged them. Others were slower learners, and needed a much slower pace, but they were challenged in their own way to do a little bit more than they're used to.

What do these actors bring to the world of theatre? What makes it interesting to put these performances on a stage?

The performance was really entertaining and some actors were able to take on improvisation, so there was a lot of humour and unexpected elements popping up. Some of them really bring in a kind of playfulness. Some things go so easy, so fluidly and are so genuine.

This performance challenged the actors, because they had to express themselves verbally. The concept of the fairy tale was really close to them, but it was a little straightforward, so now we want to challenge them a little bit further.

And what effect does theatre have on the actors?

The actors get the opportunity to push their limits and to discover new things they have never done before. The theatre enables them to express themselves. It's empowering as well, especially when the story is theirs and when they don't feel like being directed.

Interview with Justin Spiteri (Malta)

Justin, you are an actor with Opening Doors Malta, but you come from an artistic family, I believe?

My brother and my father are musicians. On my father's side, there's a well-known writer and on my mother's side, an actor.

How did you get in touch with Opening Doors?

That is a quite a story. I never went to drama school. But I'm part of a hiking group, we go walking together. And it was the leader of this hiking group who introduced me to Opening Doors. He saw that I had talent. And I liked it straight away. I'm with the group now for one year and I'm so glad I've made the right move. Drama gives me more satisfaction than sports because there's more social interaction. Drama is more inclusive. I would give everything for Opening Doors. You know, I really hate my job in the hospital. I'm really pissed off with this job. I prefer the arts much more. I can meet nice people there, who are really kind to me. They are like family to me. They also take me seriously as an actor. Opening Doors has changed my mentality. I have had so many negative encounters, my self-esteem was very low. I have been harassed and bullied and I've heard so much rubbish about disability. Opening doors is

a positive place. If you have a disability, some people don't accept you. But at Opening Doors, I feel accepted, a lot.

Is there a friction between the world of theatre and the world outside the theatre? How do you deal with that? How do you manage?

I just keep on going. 'Hard' is a word that is not in my dictionary. Like Nelson Mandela in *Invictus*, I believe that it's important to keep on going, even if it's hard. I can cope. I learn a lot from the people at Opening Doors, they support me. They are fighters too!

How was it for you to go on stage and perform?

Brilliant! Theatre is my passion. We have a lot of fun together, with our crazy ideas.

How is it for you to come to Poland?

I'm very happy. I like the friendship and meeting new people. I'm a very social person.

What are your dreams for the future?

I want to see it grow. In Malta, we are like a king in a bucket. It's important that disabled people are included.

Interview with Marit Stocker (Belgium)

How do you create a performance together with the performers of Opening Doors in Belgium?

I always stay close to the performers. On the one hand, I ask them a lot of questions, like *'What if the world would be upside down?'* or *'When do you feel at home?'* I ask them to answer with one word for example or with a gesture or a movement. I also ask them if they have any questions of their own. Once they came up with *'Why does candy taste sweet?'* I really liked that one. On the other hand, for the performance I'm making now, I also use the story of Alice in Wonderland as an inspiration. Because for me, this story is about a person who sees the 'normal' world as 'strange' and I think this suits our performers very well. The story also leads to questions like *'What is normal?'* and *'When is something considered normal?'* I also try to let the group work with these kinds of questions. For example, in the story of Alice in Wonderland, there's a rabbit who's always in a hurry. So I ask the group: *'Do you have to hurry up sometimes?'* *'What does it mean for you to be in a hurry?'* *'Do other people tell you to hurry up?'* Some of the performers are aware of time and know what it means to get somewhere on time. While others have all the time in the world. So

we created a scene where some of the performers are walking around in a hurry until one performer enters the stage and says: *'I have all the time in the world'*. So the story helps me to conduct a more focussed and coherent research and this always leads me to interesting results.

This way, you create a lot of separate scenes. How do you go from there towards a performance?

I try to find an intuitive way for one scene to flow into the next. So a 'serious' scene called 'the sea of tears' ends with making funny faces, for example. Also projecting a 'title' or a 'question' supports the audience and the performers.

You work very close with Stefan and you also use a lot of his methods. What's your personal touch?

I used to have my own ideas about certain scenes. In my mind, these scenes looked great. But when I started explaining the scenes to the performers, I quickly noticed that my approach didn't work out. They kept to close to what I had described and that wasn't enough. A scene has to emerge from within. So this really forced me to *kill my darlings* and find a match between the performers and the scenes I had in my mind. And then

I got something in return that's much more beautiful. What does work is when the performers can search for the emotions themselves and get in touch with real experiences. If I want them to be happy or sad, we search for something that really makes them happy or sad, so they always know what they'r' doing. Their performance is based on something that they really feel, not on something they copy from me or from what they see on television. Only when you avoid notions like 'acting' and 'drama', you get a result that's open and genuine and not something cheesy or sentimental or cliché. And it's still remains theatre. They're still playing, they can repeat their actions, they're not really happy or sad,... When they give an answer to one of my questions, we turn that answer into theatre by adding some theatrical element, but that theatre always remains rooted in reality. There's a big difference between asking someone to act like a king and asking him: '*How would you be, if you were a king?*' The answer to the second question is much more personal and it's far more interesting for me to see how they think a king should behave, instead of me asking them to perform a *typical* king. Because then they start to copy each other, for example. But if I ask them: '*How would you hug someone, you haven't seen in a long time?*', then then scene automaticly starts from them.

Sometimes its interesting to work with the kind of clichés they spontaneously come up with. So I ask them to act like a princess, for example. But I don't want them to copy my image of a princess. It's more interesting to see how their princess can be very shy or doesn't say a word or just sings...

Once, I asked them if they sometimes tell a lie or do something secretly. It was wonderful to see the effect that question had on them. When they told me what they had done, the relived those moments completely. We made a scene where I asked them if they had stolen my cookie, and they're so open and honest, half of them couldn't tell a lie, and for the others it was really exciting just to say: '*No, I didn't take your cookie.*' I find this a very interesting tension, because it's real. We turn this into theatre of course, and the performers know it's theatre. It's important for me that there's a clear distiction between the stage and real life. I don't want to mix that. That's only confusing. But there's a thin line and I make sure not to cross it. For example, when I ask someone to be angry on stage, I keep a close eye on that person when the scene is done. I check the body language to see if he can let the emotion go. When the anger remains, we make some jokes about it or we prospone the scene till next rehearsel...

Do you have to be a certain type of artist to do this kind of work or could any artist do this?

I think that any artist is capable of doing this kind of work. I don't know if they would want to. And that's quite fundamental. As an artist, you always want to create something great, and you want other people to tell you how much they liked your performance. So at the back of your mind, there's always something in it for yourself as an artist. Otherwise you wouldn't be in it. And as a director, you always make your mark, because you often decide what scenes make it to the final performance and in what order. But strictly speaking, you should invest all your theatre skills in your performers, and not bring too much of your own ideas and aspirations to this work. You should have other opportunities for that. Seeing it as *their* performance also makes it less scary for me as an artist to do this job. I'm supporting the performers and the result is not completely my responsibility. I try to put on stage what I like about their stories in such a way that it comes across to an audience.

What effect does theatre have on the participants of Opening Doors?

Theatre really challenges them, they're also really tired afterwards. They have to keep focussed, they have to be quiet behind the

scenes, they have to be considerate for others, they have their responsibility to come on stage at the right time and to do their thing as we rehearsed,... They also receive attention in a very positive way. Furthermore, I don't know that many places where they get challenged this way, where people ask them all kinds of crazy questions,...

Theatre also gives them an opportunity they sometimes miss out on, to share their story. By asking questions we create an open space. But that doesn't mean that anything goes. You can't just say or do anything you like. There are limits in order to protect the freedom and the safety of others. And what you say or do is not without obligation, it has a purpose, a function in the performance.

What do these performers bring to the world of theatre?

Everything! It's quite easy to direct a non-disabled, professional actor. You give them your instructions, they give you what you ask and that's that. And of course, a professional non-disabled actor also tries to stick close to himself while playing. But learning disabled actors only know themselves and their own world and how they experience it. So as a director you can't imagine something in advance for them, because it doesn't work out.

Because you're not in their world. You have to have some idea of what you want them to do of course, you have to prepare some questions or exercises in advance and then you have to let the scenes emerge from within the performers themselves. This brings me to one of the essential elements of making theatre: not to be afraid of what you don't know, but to go looking for it and to embrace it. To dive into that moment of uncertainty and to let it be, is essential for something to emerge. It's no problem if we get stuck, something always happens, and if I'm open and alert to pick up these actions and respond to them with all my theatre skills, then we can create something that gets the message across and is interesting enough for an audience to watch. If I already know how the scene will look like, then the performers don't need to be creative and they sense this immediately. But when they are involved in the creative process, they always exactly know what they're doing, even if their movements look strange and abstract to us, for the performers the movement is very concrete and specific.

And I believe this is interesting to put on stage and to watch, because there it's so direct, there is no mediation. Of course, actors pretend. But this 'pretending' sometimes gets in the way of the communication with the audience.

I'm a professional actress as well and when I know the piece too well, I know what's coming up next, and that sometimes makes it hard for me to be in the moment. And then you're clearly pretending. The great thing about these performers is what they do or say is real, it's their world. They wouldn't know how to hide that even if they wanted to, and why should they? They can't lie. If we stand before a group or on a stage, we take on a certain posture, and that's something they don't. They can't be anything but themselves. And if you respectfully start creating a performance from their point of view, you get a performance from such a different perspective, it's like from another 'world'. And I think this really deserves to be seen because it tells us all so much about who we are, about humanity. There so honest, it confronts the audience with their own (dis)abilities. You also see their effort and their struggle and that's really moving. Sometimes I polish the scenes, but sometimes I just let them be.

For professional actors it's their job of course, so they also have other issues: practical, financial, personal,... For the performers of *Opening Doors*, it's their job as well and they take it really serious, but it remains pure and without any ballast. It's their moment. Non-disabled people have to get into their world and not the other way round.

But do they have real choices then? If they can't be anything but themselves, do they have control over their performance? Are they aware of the effect on the audience?

I think they are really aware of the fact they're on stage. They love the attention. Actors are trained to use their voice and their body as an instrument to get a message across to the audience. And I think the performers of Opening Doors also know what it takes make theatre: energy, imagination, concentration, anticipation,... they know these concepts and they know what these words mean. They know we're creating a performance about Alice in Wonderland, they know what the performance is about,... And if I see that there unable to hide certain emotions, we transform this into theatre. I try order the scenes in such away that the performance tells their story and lifts it up to a higher level.

But as a director, you also have a lot of power, so there are strong ethical issues as well?

Indeed, for example one of the performers loved to sing a certain song and at the end of it, she always cried. It was really wonderful... But we didn't use in the performance, because it was too heavy on her. It's not comfortable when you have to cry each rehearsal and each performance. I

could have filmed it and used the footage in the performance. That would have been less of a strain on her. The performers should get something out of it as well.

Is technique something important for you?

I think that we're not at that point yet, where the performers of Opening Doors are able to create a professional performance we can tour, for example. You have to be able to repeat it again and again and that's very straining. And then you really need technique to carry on. But I do think it's important for them to always stretch themselves a little bit further, push their limits a bit, without losing comfort. I doesn't have to hurt, I'm not going to push them over the limit. But once they've made a step forward, I want them to keep that level. I think it's important for them to feel they can move on and improve their performance. Maybe the only technical thing I really want from them, is that drive to improve yourself. And of course, they sometimes say '*I can't do that.*' too easily. But then I know we can work on it and they often show they're capable of much more than they initially thought. So it's also my job to challenge them. It's not only up to them.

But you're not turning them into trained actors?

We try to avoid to emphasise the 'acting'. They do 'act', they perform, and calling them actors helps to make a difference between the stage and real life. But they're not trained actors, in the general meaning of the word. For example, they sometimes need the technical support of the

projection, the lights and the music and the support of people assisting them backstage, to make the performance run smooth and clear enough for an audience to enjoy. And I prefer using these kind of support to training them so hard they can perform fully autonomous. This way, the performers can focus on showing their unique way of looking at the world.

REPORT OF THE MEETINGS

Malta 12 – 14 June 2015

LET'S SHOW THEM WHAT WE'VE GOT!

Kris De Visscher

Friday 12/06	
11:15 – 13:00	Creating a performance together Stefan Perceval

Stefan starts of by saying that he wants to mix the performances of the different countries. The subject will be 'meeting'. What does 'meeting' mean to you? Can anyone find an image/scene that shows what 'meeting' means to you?

One participant, Aldean, starts of: *meeting means 'friendship' to me.* Okay, asks Stefan, how can we make an image of 'friendship'? Who wants to be friends with Aldean? Several participants join in.

Aldean movement 'friendship'

Aldean starts of alone in the centre of the scene and makes a sound: 'Ahhh'. This takes quite a while. Then, one by one, the other participants come in, from different corners of the room. They hug Aldean and say 'ahh' together with him. Finally the whole group hums together. Louder and louder, then to a climax and then silence.



Enrique movement 'family'

Enrique stands in front of the others, who stand on several lines behind him. Enrique does his movement and the others copy the movement.

Jesus movement 'team'

The dancers stand in a circle, with Jesus in the middle. He makes the movements, and the others follow. Jesus is the captain of the team, he has to watch the team.

Vicen(te) movement 'music'

Vincente stands in front, he claps a rhythm with his hands. One part of the group follows his rhythm, the other part stamp a rhythm with their feet.



Marta & Marcos movement 'fun'

In this dance you always keep body contact, but constantly change the bodyparts that are in contact. Other participants join in and dance in a duet, just like Marta and Marcos.



Aldean says what 'meeting' means for him.

Maria says what 'meeting' means for her.

Kasia says what 'meeting' means for her.

Then we practice the different scenes and put them in an 'order'.

- 1) Aldean
- 2) Enrique
- 3) Marta and Marcos
- 4) Freeze
- 5) Three people say what 'meeting' means to them
- 6) Freeze
- 7) Martha and Marcos again
- 8) Freeze
- 9) Other people come in, they walk around in and look at the statues and show genuine interest
- 10) Everyone in the middle says ahh, makes a hug, loader and loader, to a climax, than silence
- 11) Then everybody goes off the scene and Aldean stays alone in the middle again.

Friday 12/06	
14:00 – 17:00	Creating a performance together Stefan Perceval

In the afternoon, Stefan continues to collect the raw material of the participants. Some participants have a strong idea of what they want to perform (stories, songs, poems, dance...), other participants are more shy and need a push/an impulse to perform. Stefan tries to find a way to integrate all the ideas and to involve as many participants as possible. During this afternoon, differences in points of view and some tensions emerged, also due to the tight time frame.

- tension between the collaborative **proces** and achieving a final **product**
- tension between creating a performance **together** and leaving room for the **separate** talents and practices
- tension between the **freedom to do your thing** and establishing a common **structure**

- tension between **facilitating creativity and co-ownership (collective work)** and working with a **director** and his artistic point of view

This kind of tension can also be understood from the decision that was made at the previous meeting to create a performance together at the final festival and to put Stefan in charge as a director.

On the one hand, you can make a fixed performance (with a fixed script or a fixed choreography). The focus then is on technique/on getting it right and there's very little room for personal input. On the other hand you can choose a very open structure (festival, improvisation, open mic,...) where anything goes and everyone can do their thing, sometimes in the spur of the moment. In both of those scenarios you'll probably have less friction or tension.

Here the choice was to create a performance together, to leave room for freedom and personal input but also to make a common structure/framework. Stefan also wanted the different partners to leave their comfort zone and combine their practice with the practice of others.

This approach left more room for tensions, as some partners really wanted to get their practice into the performance. It took a lot of self-confidence, support and trust to keep the ship heading in the right direction. And when we finished on Friday it wasn't quite clear that everything was going to work out fine...





Friday 12/06	
19:00 – 20:30	Reception at the British High Commission

In the evening, we were invited to a [LiberTeas](#) event at the home of the British High Commissioner to Malta to coincide with the Magna Carta celebrations during our trip to Malta.

Here, Paul Richards of Stay Up Late presented The Stay Up Late 'Manifesto for Change' (a new Magna Carta for people with learning disabilities):

For people with learning disabilities to be able to lead great lives these are the things they've told us that need to change...

- 1) *We need to be able to choose our support staff*
- 2) *We need to have happy staff*
- 3) *We need to be able to choose our friends and have a social life*
- 4) *We need to be able to choose where we live*
- 5) *We should have the right to have relationships and a sex life*
- 6) *We should be able to choose what time we go to bed at night*
- 7) *We should be able to choose how we spend our time*
- 8) *We should be welcome and active in our communities*
- 9) *We should not be referred to in negative ways in the media*
- 10) *We should have proper paid work*

After Paul had presented his Manifesto, Heart 'n Soul artist Tilley and her pig Dell gave away her opening speech:

"It is hard to imagine that on 15th June, some 800 years ago, Kings and Queens had the monopoly on things and even wealthy Barons and Earls struggled to get a fair deal. Perhaps it feels much the same to how our so called democracy is today with David Cameron (the UK's Prime Minister) cutting the social care and NHS funding budgets left, right and centre?!"

What was it like to be an ordinary, working class person in 1215?

Without a doubt, civilisation has changed beyond recognition and yet people only wanted what they deserved, what was just for them! Like us today they wanted similar things, like the right to work and be reasonably safe doing so and if they made a massive mistake in which they were found guilty of an offence, the right to appeals, proper sentencing, advice and reasonably humane conditions in prison. After

all, people are not so different, through thousands of years they have had relationships, fallen in love, married and had their own families, worked hard...

...found ways of amusing themselves and had disagreements and voiced opinions. King John may have been a tyrant, like many monarchs throughout our history, but is he and those quarrelling Barons (who felt he was too powerful) that we owe gratitude forever – “Magna Carta” ~ the original and “Great Charter” was born!!!.....

Written in Latin (referred to as “Magna Carta Libertatum” or “The Great Charter of Liberties”) on parchment paper at Runnymede near Windsor, it was first drafted by the then ‘Archbishop of Canterbury.’

Promising the protection of church right, general exploitation and charges to Barons (dealing with finances and – criminal justice), the banning of certain abuses of privilege and most important of all, a clause still in use in the present day ~ people’s rights under what is known as the common law, this was the first time in history that a king was forced to abide by the law of the land, so yes “The Magna Carta”, whatever your beliefs was a pivotal moment but like so many documents declared throughout history, it was not without fault!... In the first three months it was to be seen as just a stumbling block and a way of bargaining with other privileged people. Eventually, poorer working people – the servants and such of the barons gained their influence and power over the monarchy, church and the law. Through many centuries of struggle, constant change, reigns and wars, none greater than the 1st and 2nd World Wars ~ “The Human Rights Act”, probably Britain’s most recent version, if you like of The Great Charter was conceived in 1998!

I have not and will not attempt to read all of these documents, there are many adaptations and reissues, modernisations to attempt to make things more relevant at those particular times in history. I will not bore you anymore with a history lesson or thesaurus, we are all interested I’m sure but tired too!...

Fascinating as it all is, I wish to just remind you all of the fact that any rights and freedoms, civil liberties we have today, maybe you wonder if you have any rights and independence at all, believe me when I say that I understand how you must feel let down a lot of the time but without this Act of 1998 ones issued due to the carnage of Great Wars and the 17th century was also a popular era of reform. “Magna Carta”

(and all that followed since) inspired change, equality, and the common people for the common good, all to stand up, be counted and demand a better, fairer, safer life for ourselves and our future, innocent generations, AMEN!

'Del' and I have not always felt very free in our lives, you know free to make our own choices about such simple, typical things like when and where to go out, who to associate with, where to live or even when to shower or what we choose to eat!... As 'Paul' and many learning disabled adults around the world can appreciate, we can not always choose to 'Stay Up Late!' now I don't know about you but I am not in to clubbing until god knows what these days, not since 18 have I done any of that!

Unless it is a "BOC" (Beautiful Octopus Club) or something and we are performing and then off to the after party of course, that is our definite exception of course. What I am meaning to say in a very long winded way is that it is about the right to have the choice, an opportunity to decide whether or not we go clubbing, shopping, visit friends/family, stay out overnight, even go on holiday, yes, push the boat out ~ at any time of the day or shock horror, night!!!... Sometimes when you are in a care setting and the staff have far too much red tape to be helpful, it can be a thin line between the care staff supporting independence and them hindering it. Today we were creating a piece of international theatrical art together to be performed tomorrow as part of 'The Art is Festival', 'Open Doors Malta', and we were inspired by several things that we saw but most notably seeing my friend 'Wayne' and a member of "The Stay Up Late crew" dancing closely with each other. Now 'Maria' is a clearly confident and talented 'Dancer' but 'Wayne' I rarely see him. 'Del' the piggie wait you had your turn, my owner and I, on behalf of 'Heart N Soul' and the UK at large, wish to express our utmost gratitude to you, the High (British) Commissioner of Malta, and all who have made it possible for us to be here with you right now, we feel truly blessed to be in such an incredibly beautiful city and marking such an awe inspiring milestone – 800 years since the original 'Magna Carta' was created!!!.....

This VVIP – yeah Very Very Important Piggie wishes to commence "The Bunting Proceedings", now where's my cake?!?!.....

One of the activities during the tea party was to ask everybody to write on yellow napkins all the freedoms that they enjoy and on the pink ones all the

things that we felt were still inequalities for people with learning disabilities that we still need to change. We eventually turned this into a long piece of bunting which we stretched across the High Commissioner's garden.

Having read through all the napkins, here's a selection we picked of some of the comments made on the napkins:

From the yellow 'freedoms we enjoy' napkins, we have:

"Freedom to be yourself"
"Normal is a cycle on a washing machine"
"Being able to go out to a nightclub"
"Freedom of speech"
"Go out in the community"
"Free to work where you want"
"Audio guides in the museums and elevators"
"Buses with loud speakers"
"Discounts for tickets"
"Happy to be part of a dance company at Opening Doors"
"Grateful to be part of the board at Opening Doors"
"People believe in me and my potential"
"Given the possibility to perform on stage in front of an audience"
"I decide what to wear"
"I decide to be in a drama group"
"Freedom to dance"
"Happy to have the opportunity to work"
"To be able to go to Malta with some wonderful people"
"Art, sports, cinema"
"Freedom to play music and sport"
"Solheimar is very good...everybody is equal life being together"
"I really like is cinema"
"Gig Buddies, having friends you can trust"

And from the pink 'things that still need to change' napkins, we have:

"There's not enough books in braille"
"Sceptical employers"
"Proper work opportunities in quality jobs"
"More laws in favour of people with a disability"
"Be more included in society with everybody else"
"Have a proper education at school"
"Be able to get a job"
"People shouldn't make fun of disabled people"

"We need to be taken seriously"

"Toilets are strictly male and female"

"Change the world's attitude for all types of disabilities and for some people to adjust how they speak and think"

"I would change discrimination"

"Be able to do arts, crafts, go to school and play games"

"I would change it so that people with learning disabilities in the arts are taken seriously"

"To have voice in parliament"

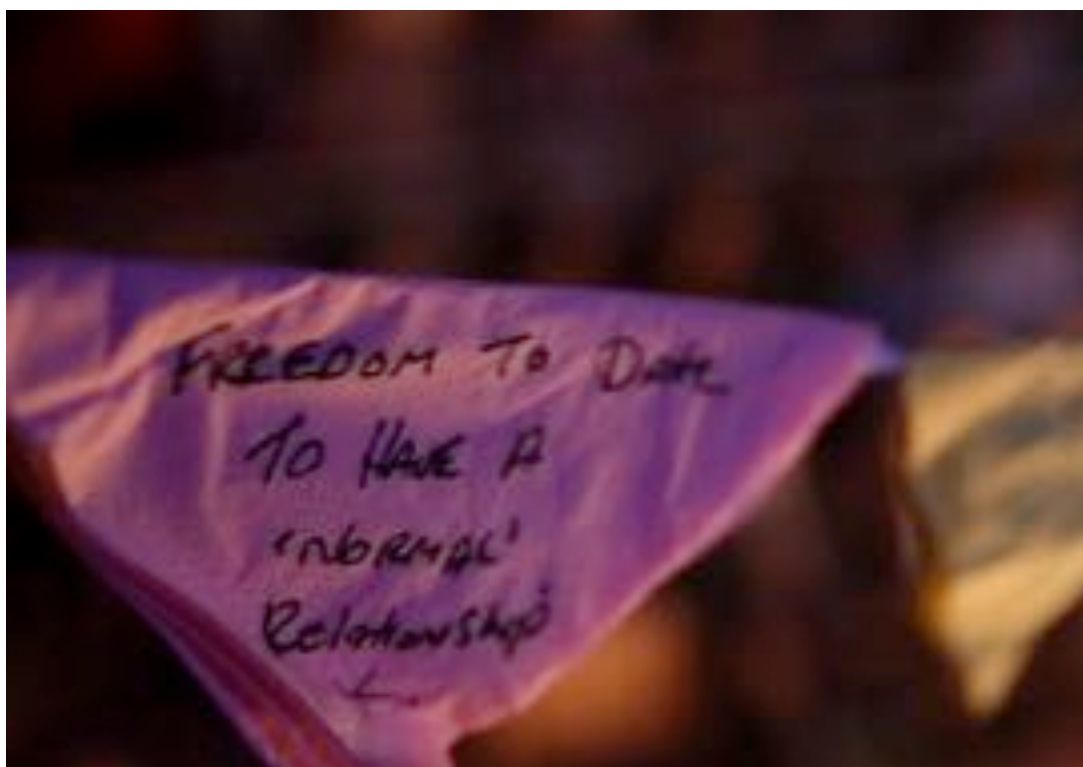
"Freedom to date and to have a 'normal' relationship"

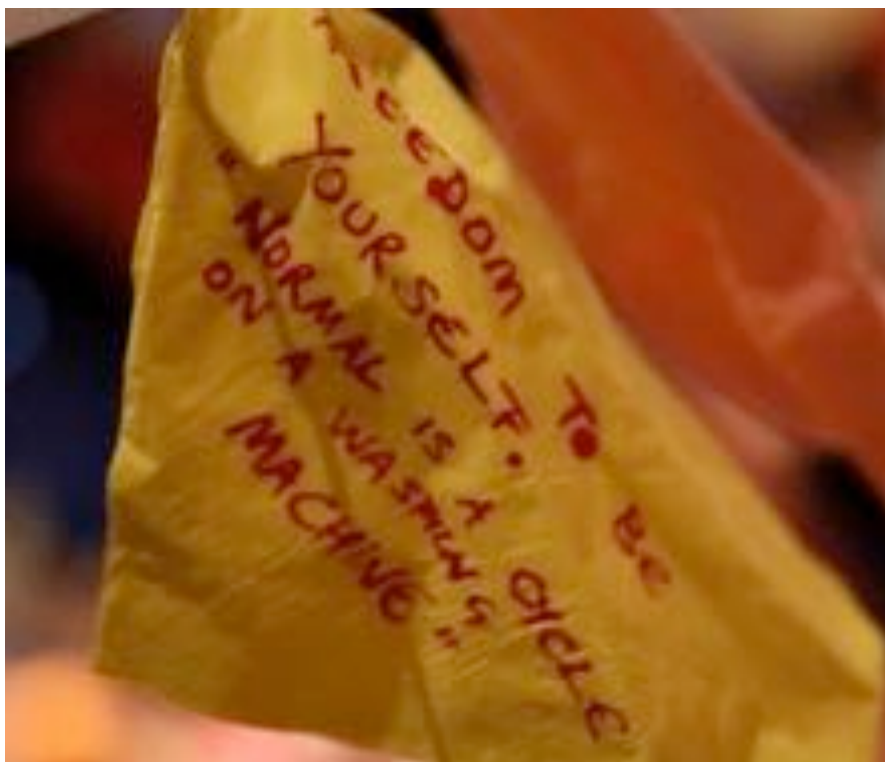
"I don't want sex to be a taboo"

These comments represent the views of people from Malta, Poland, Finland, the UK, Belgium, Turkey, Spain and Iceland. It was impossible to tell which comment came from which country. From this finding we were able to ascertain that the issues the participants face are universal.

It was so refreshing to see 100 people with and without learning disabilities having a fantastic time drinking gin and tonics in the evening sun and eating canapés in the beautiful setting of the British High Commissioner of Malta's home. This most certainly does not happen every day!

We need to continue to work towards making the difficulties written on the 'pink' napkin list nonexistent and the improvements the participants suggested, something that does happen every day!





Saturday 13/06	
10:00 –13:00	Rehearsing and putting the performance together

This morning, we practiced the different elements of the performances in the order that Stefan proposes. We also practice the changes between the different elements.

0. Videos of previous meetings play as the people come in.
3. Confusion – a soundscape with 'confusion' in the languages of the participants
4. José Manuel tells his story.
5. Axel sings his song while two participants carry José Manuel of the stage.
6. Justin tells his story.
7. Alexander brings a German poem.
8. Aldean 'friendship' scene - in the meantime the people from Iceland join in with the hand bells and others make music with shakers and stamp their feet.
9. Aldean and Kasia say what 'meeting people' means to them
10. Then Malta starts to laugh out loud and come to the front as a wave
11. While the 'fun' music plays, we do the meeting people scene.
12. Martha and Marco – body contact scene with live music (hand bells)
13. Everybody leaves the stage except for Maria and Marco. Maria and Marco perform their duet accompanied by an Icelandic song
14. Kasia sings 'yesterday', accompanied by Aldean while the participants of Finland invite people on the stage to meet them
15. Turkish group do a folk dance two by two with someone from another country
16. Confusion 2
17. Enrique movement family – accompanied by the song of Daniel together with Icelandic bells
18. Vicen(te) movement 'music' accompanied by Stay up late and Heart and soul
19. And then 'freak out'

By the end of the morning sessions, it seemed that everything had worked out, but the rehearsal was still a bit chaotic and the changes between the different parts didn't go that fluidly. But it was clear that all the different participants could put their own ideas and talents in the performance and all those ideas and talents were mixed.

Saturday 13/06	
14:00 – 15:00	Final rehearsal
16:00 and 18:00	Performance






Finally we succeeded in putting on a performance where different cultural elements were mixed and integrated into one performance: sound lab (UK), bell choir (Iceland), Turkish folk dance, solo singers (UK, Iceland, Poland), contemporary dance (Malta, Spain, Poland), percussion (Belgium, Malta), theatre (UK, Belgium, Finland), Spoken word (UK, Poland),...

This [video](#) gives you a taste of the performance we've created.



3. RESEARCH

1. Research proposal

 <p>Education and Culture Lifelong learning programme GRUNDTVIG</p>	<p>Grundtvig Learning Partnership ART-IS Research proposal</p>
	<p>Who will do the research? My name is KRIS. I live in Belgium. I am 38 years old. I studied Special Education. I work for DEMOS. My office is in Brussels.</p>
	<p>What does DEMOS do? Demos is a knowledge centre. We study how people with learning disabilities create art. We read research reports. We attend conferences. We talk to artists with learning disabilities. We talk to the people who support them. We do our own research.</p>
	<p>Why is KRIS joining the meetings? Peter from Belgium invited Kris to join ART-IS. Kris helps everyone to hold on to their experiences. He looks at what happens and he makes notes. He talks to artists and trainers. He writes everything down in a report. He puts this report on the internet.</p>
	<p>Why is Demos interested in joining ART-IS? We love art! People from different countries come together and learn from each other. We can learn new things. We can share this knowledge with others. These are the things we want to learn more about:</p>

	<p>1. How do people with learning disabilities create performing arts?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How is the performance made? - How do artists with learning disabilities make sure their work is of a good quality? - What do they want the audience to get from their work?
	<p>2. How do people with learning disabilities create art together on the internet?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What new opportunities does the internet bring? - What makes an internet platform work? What conditions must be fulfilled?
	<p>3. How can artists with learning disabilities collaborate in equal partnerships?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How do artists make decisions together? - How do artists get freedom of choice? - How can artists work independently? - How does performing raise self-confidence?
	<p>4. How can people with learning disabilities take the lead?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How do people with learning disabilities get a fair chance to express their opinion? - How do people with learning disabilities collaborate in the organisation of an event?
	<p>Do you have a question or a comment? Please mail me at kris@demos.be</p>

2. Research methods

Participant observation

Since the meeting in Iceland, I have attended each meeting as a research partner, creating an opportunity for me to conduct participant observation during the workshops, rehearsals and performances and during the informal moments inbetween the programme of the meeting. It also created the opportunity for small conversations in the margins of the programme. Some of these conversations turned into an interview.

Interviews

Two types of interviews were conducted. On the one hand, there were five interviews with facilitators, exploring the methods they use in their practice. *Jari Eklund* (Photography - Finland), *Alex Otterlei* (Music - Belgium), *Anna Formosa* (Theatre - Malta), *Marit Stocker* (Theatre - Belgium), *Afaniás team* (Dance – Spain). On the other hand some occasional interviews were conducted with participants from Poland, Finland and Malta, asking for their experiences.

There wasn't a real systematic and consequent approach to these interviews. Sometimes, it wasn't easy to find a suitable moment in the schedule of the meeting. Sometimes the participants were very tired or they wanted to use the free time in the programme to relax, to go shopping or sightseeing. Also, the time I could put into this project was limited. This restricted the number of interviews I could conduct.

The notes of the participant observation and the interviews were transcribed fully and put in a report per meeting. Together with the results of the questionnaire, the report of the meeting was sent out for feedback.

3. Results

3.1 How do people with learning disabilities create performing arts?

All the partners in the project are engaged in the performing arts, but from very different points of view: adult education, professional and amateur arts, social care work, self-advocacy, community care and community arts. We also discovered that there are differences between these organisations in how they use art. Some use art for a purpose, others make art for art's sake.

ART FOR A PURPOSE

Some organisations use art as a means to achieve a certain goal. Performing is not their main aim.

→ Solheimar is a community in Iceland where disabled and non-disabled people live and work together. They use art to make their community stronger. Through art, all the members of the community can connect and contribute equally.

→ Virtaset from Finland is a group of learning disabled people who learn to live independently. They participate in all kinds of art projects to express their own thoughts and feelings. Art makes them more mature and more individual. They learn about their own feelings and they form their own opinion. That makes them less dependent on others. The Virtaset-group doesn't only share the same campus with other students in adult education, the Virtaset-group is also mixed with the other groups of adult learners and they work together. They are met as any other student at the school which raises their own view of themselves as a real student.

ART FOR ART'S SAKE

Other organisations create art for art's sake. Performing is their main aim. But we found differences in how disabled and non-disabled artists collaborate.

→ Some organisations support individual learning disabled artists. They provide technical tools, art materials, studio space, grants, moral support and opportunities to exhibit or perform.

For example: Heart n Soul (UK), Afanias (Spain).

→ Some organisations work with duos. A disabled and non-disabled person give dance-training as equal partners. Or people with and without learning disabilities are paired up to be friends and to go to events together.

For example: Afanias (Spain), Stay up Late (UK).

→ Some organisations create a collective where disabled and non-disabled artists have an equal contribution and make the decisions together. There is no one instructing the others.

For example: Afanias (Spain), Heart n Soul (UK).

→ Some organisations work with a director or a choreographer or a composer. Sometimes the director, choreographer or composer creates a performance based the ideas of the performers. Sometimes they give instructions to the performers.

For example: Opening Doors (Belgium), Opening Doors (Malta)

→ Some organisations work with a certain repertoire. That can be a folk dance, a composition or a theatre play. They want to show that learning disabled people can perform these stories, compositions or very complicated patterns of a folk dance just as well.

For example: Güroymak Zihinsel (Turkey), Autokreacja (Poland)

Some ways of working offer more freedom than others. But we don't think that one way of working is better than the other. What's really important is that learning disabled artists should have a real choice to work the way they really like to work. To often, learning disabled artists don't have that choice. They have to go along with the opportunities that are offered to them. To often they come across the right offer by chance. This should change.

3.2 How do people with learning disabilities create art together on the internet?

Heart n Soul provided the project partners with several tutorials to support learning disabled artists to create their own content and share it on the internet themselves. You can find these tutorials [here](#). These tutorials include:

- How to use an iPad?
- Guidelines for Social Networking on Ipads
- iPad Tutorial - Garage Band to Soundcloud
- iPad Tutorial - iMovie to YouTube

In between meetings, the different partners communicated through a creative chain. One partner would ask a question to another partner, who would answer with a short video and in his turn would ask a new question to another partner. You can watch these videos on the ART-is [facebook](#) page.

Unfortunately, it wasn't possible for me to observe how these questions and answers came about. So it's very hard to give a good answer to this question. I'm afraid I must leave it unanswered.

3.3 How can learning disabled artists collaborate in equal partnerships?

In the different meetings and interviews, several elements were mentioned that improve the equality in the collaboration between disabled and non-disabled artists.

1) Establishing a real connection

The first and maybe the most important condition for an equal collaboration is the establishment of a real connection.

"The better connection we have, the deeper feelings we can get. There is no concept, for that. Nothing I've learned from the books, or from the masters in photographing. The way I am working now is pretty much the same to what I did with the models who I used to work with. It's all about getting closer, being there with humans as an other human. It's about basic instincts." (Jari Eklund, Finland)

Making this connection is something that (learning) disabled artists are good at. They don't hide behind a mask, they don't have a hidden agenda. Their openness and honesty puts the people they work with at ease.

"I still remember my first encounter. I sat behind the piano and the performers came up to me with such an ease and selfconfidence. I was really nervous, but the team gave me such a warm welcome, it put me at ease. They don't pretend, they present themselves just the way they are. After ten minutes I was already touched by their enthusiasm, their openness and their complete trust. It took away all my doubts and fears." (Alex Otterlei, Belgium)

2) Letting words and movements emerge from within

It's important to find an approach that triggers the creativity of all the artists involved, a key to open their creativity and expression.

"Usually in the world of dancing a choreographer instructs the dancers. We think it's far more enriching if a dancer finds his own movements... We noticed that when we instruct people, the movement doesn't fit that much. But when we work on a theme, like intimacy, for example, and we ask the dancers to translate how they feel intimacy into movement, we get a much more natural result. But it takes time for the dancers to figure out what they want to dance themselves. In our last project, for example, we got the opportunity to go to Iceland and to create a performance based on this visit. First, still in Spain, each one of us gathered all kinds of images about Iceland. During our visit, we could see and feel the things we had previously studied. From those experiences the movements emerged in a natural way. Suddenly someone like Javier transforms these experiences into movement, in a natural way. He doesn't need a choreographer to instruct him, the movements come from inside. So when

you see Javier on stage, you can see that he's totally engaged in his role."
(Icaro Maiterena, Spain)."

"I used to have my own ideas about certain scenes. In my mind, these scenes looked great. But when I started explaining the scenes to the performers, I quickly noticed that my approach didn't work out. They kept to close to what I had described and that wasn't enough. A scene has to emerge from within. So this really forced me to kill my darlings and find a match between the performers and the scenes I had in my mind. And then I got something in return that's much more beautiful. What does work is when the performers can search for the emotions themselves and get in touch with real experiences. If I want them to be happy or sad, we search for something that really makes them happy or sad, so they always know what they're doing. Their performance is based on something that they really feel, not on something they copy from me or from what they see on television. Only when you avoid notions like 'acting' and 'drama', you get a result that's open and genuine and not something cheesy or sentimental or cliché. And it's still remains theatre. They're still playing, they can repeat their actions, they're not really happy or sad,... When they give an answer to one of my questions, we turn that answer into theatre by adding some theatrical element, but that theatre always remains rooted in reality." (Marit Stocker, Belgium)

3) Being sensitive and responsive

This type of work requires for sensitivity and responsiveness.

"I start with games and exercises. Then I start with something the actors can tap in to. For example, in my latest project, I worked with statues... When I noticed the excitement of the actors and I saw how much fun they had, I knew: this thing works."
(Anna Formosa, Malta)

"It's important for me that there's a clear distinction between the stage and real life. I don't want to mix that. That's only confusing. But there's a thin line and I make sure not to cross it. For example, when I ask someone to be angry on stage, I keep a close eye on that person when the scene is done. I check the body language to see if he can let the emotion go. When the anger remains, we make some jokes about it or we postpone the scene till next rehearsal..." (Marit Stocker, Belgium)

This means that non-disabled artists who engage in this kind of collaboration, can't put themselves in the centre of attention.

"I find it very fulfilling and satisfying to create a platform where I can be an agent of change for someone. It's the participants who develop themselves and I create a platform where everyone can join in. I guide them and challenge them, each in their own way. Not like an actor who wants to be seen or who wants all the glory for himself." (Anna Formosa, Malta)

"As an artist, you always want to create something great, and you want other people to tell you how much they liked your performance. So at the back of your mind, there's always something in it for yourself as an artist. Otherwise you wouldn't be in it. And as a director, you always make your mark, because you often decide what scenes make it to the final performance and in what order. But strictly speaking, you should invest all your theatre skills in your performers, and not bring to much of your own ideas and aspirations to this work." (Marit Stocker, Belgium)

4) Embracing uncertainty

To make the collaboration work, non-disabled artists can't imagine scenes in advance. They can prepare some questions or exercises in advance. This brings artists to what might be one essential element of making a performance: embracing uncertainty.

"Not to be afraid of what you don't know, but to go looking for it and to embrace it. To dive into that moment of uncertainty and to let it be, is essential for something to emerge. It's no problem if we get stuck, something always happens, and if I'm open and alert to pick up these actions and respond to them with all my theatre skills, then we can create something that gets the message across and is interesting enough for an audience to watch." (Marit Stocker, Belgium)

5) Handing over the necessary tools and techniques to the disabled artists

Teaching (learning) disabled artists theatre and dance technique (from very young age), can offer them the same 'vocabulary' as non-disabled dancers or actors. This vocabulary enables them collaborate equally. Especially when you plan to tour with a performance, a certain amount of technique is necessary.

"(If you want to) create a professional performance you can tour, for example, you have to be able to repeat it again and again and that's very straining. And then you really need technique to carry on." (Marit Stocker, Belgium)

But teaching technique might also discourage new forms of art to emerge:

"What I saw is very similar to how I dance myself as a non-disabled dancer and what I see around me in contemporary dance. But then I started thinking: maybe that's not what should happen, maybe there should be another aesthetic, maybe we should use the same techniques, but discover new types of movement and get those accepted by the dancing community. So I was happy to see that this type of contemporary dance is possible with learning disabled dancers, but in a way I'm unhappy because this will probably lead me in this direction instead of maybe taking a risk and trying to develop a new type of dancing." (Sandra Mifsud, Malta)

3.4 How can people with learning disabilities take the lead?

Some of the partners in this project are disability-led (arts) organisations. This offered an opportunity for all the partners involved to learn how learning disabled performers can take the lead in an (arts) organisation. These are some of the answers the project has brought.

1) Challenge your preassumptions

Learning disabled people often don't get the chance to take the lead because their non-disabled colleagues assume that they won't meet the necessary requirements to participate in a steering committee or an advisory group. The Spanish partner in the project, however, turned this assumption the other way round: for them it's the non-disabled participants who miss out on some of the most vital requirements:

"All our services are led by a council and a board of directors. Both of them consist of representatives of the families, of staffmembers and of 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."
(Angeles Martinez, Spain)

In this project, preassumptions were challenged to. The application made a distinction between disabled learners and non-disabled teachers. But during the project, we learned that this distinction is irrelevant. We are all learners, just as we are all teachers. Disabled artists can teach others a lot about art. Just by being their creative selves. But also as a trainer or as a member of a steering team.

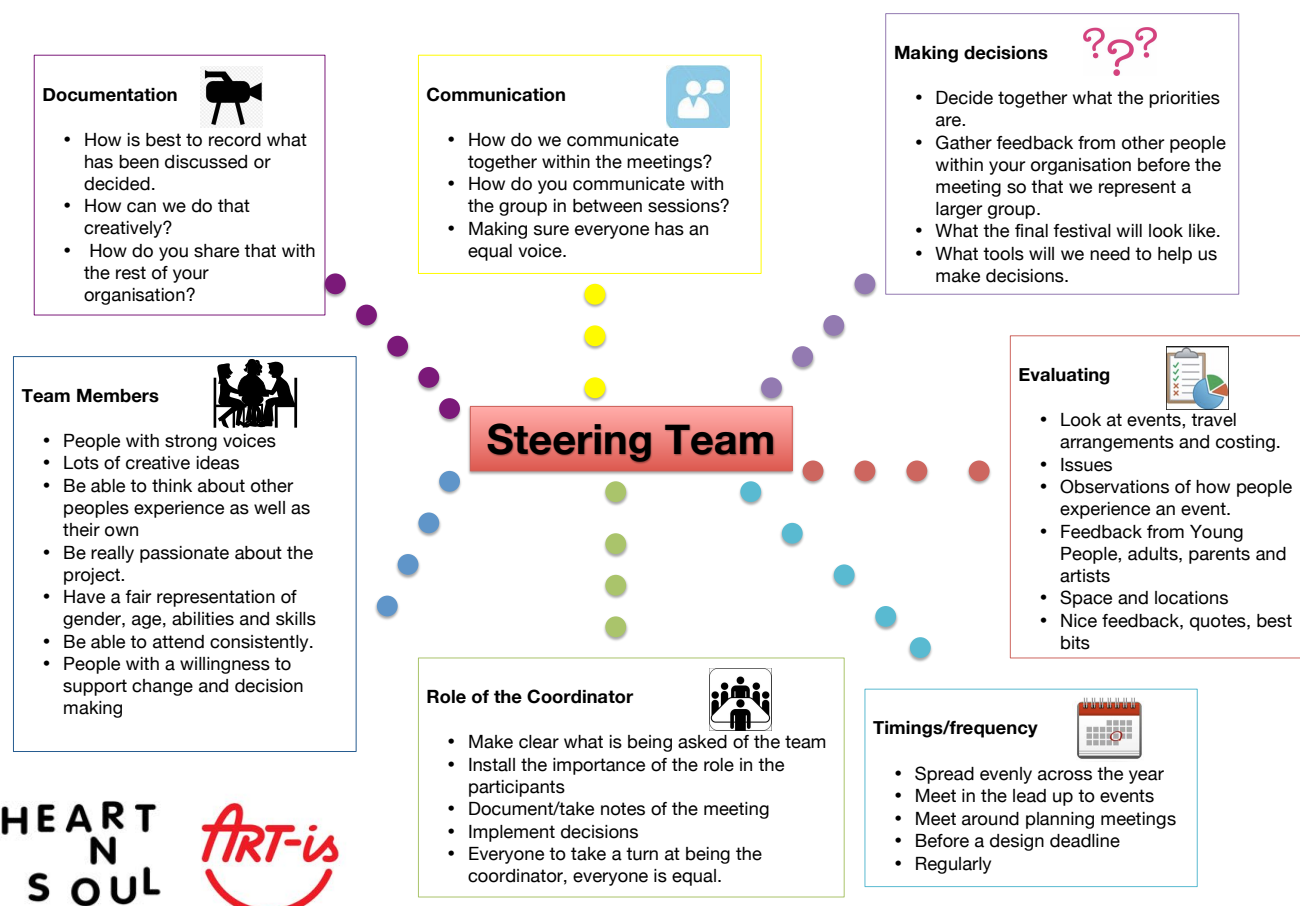
2) Invite them to the meetings

How obvious this might be, it takes a change in mentality, to actually invite the learning disabled artists to the meetings that organise and evaluate the exchange. Sometimes learning disabled participants are overseen quite easily. Also in this project it had to be explicitly addressed.

"It was acknowledged at the co-ordinators meeting that we need to ensure that 'co-production' is embedded in the project. – We all have something to bring and so 'learners' should be present at all planning meetings. We should subvert and challenge the word 'learner' – we're all learners!" (Paul Richards, UK)

3) Create good conditions for everyone to participate

Heart n Soul (UK) provide us with an overview of all the different topics, questions and conditions that need to be taken into account to make a steering team really inclusive. You can download the document [here](#).



The Spanish Partner, Afianas, also shared their inclusive strategies:

- We have created three mailboxes: one for compliments, one for complaints and one for suggestions. We've made these mailboxes very accessible by using images and easy to read words. This way, the disabled participants share their worries and ideas with their representatives.
- All our information has to be understandable for people with learning difficulties. Because if they don't have the necessary information, they can't participate properly in the decision making.
- We have also changed our way of organising meetings so that people with learning disabilities can participate: we discuss concrete topics, we

take turns when speaking, we limit the duration of the meetings. People with learning disabilities also receive the necessary support:

- they receive training to attend meetings and to represent others
- they receive information in advance to prepare themselves
- they can get an assistant who supports them to express their opinion

Special effort is put into communication. Again Heart n Soul gave us some good examples of accessible communication. Click [here](#) to download.



Heart n Soul's Allsorts is a place where adults with learning disabilities get the chance to take part in a range of creative activities and enjoy high quality art. There's also space to meet new people and make friends in a safe and friendly atmosphere.

Plus chill out in the Lucky Dip room and enjoy DJ workshops, the Open Mic and lots more!



"Thank you for another terrifically amazing Allsorts session!"

Tilly - participant



"It's a great way to meet new people"

Omish - participant



Lucky Dip

- 10am - 5pm
-

Session One

- 11am - 1pm
- and
- 2pm - 4pm
-

Session Two








- 11am - 1pm
- and
- 2pm - 4pm
-




Thursday 5 June	Thursday 12 June
<p>Soundlab</p> <p>Music</p>	<p>Songs of Love</p> <p>Open Mic</p>
<p>The Talk of Love</p> <p>Chat</p>	<p>All Around the Body</p> <p>Art</p>
<p>Poems of Love</p> <p>Poetry</p>	<p>Design for Love</p> <p>Art</p>

Don't worry! You can take part in both sessions on the day as they will be repeated in the afternoon.

4. EVALUATION

After the kick-off meeting in Iceland, the Spanish partner devised an evaluation plan. In this plan we aimed to put forward a questionnaire after each meeting. After the meeting in Finland, a first questionnaire was send out.

ART-IS	SOME QUESTIONS TO ANSWER AFTER THE MEETING
	1) What do you remember most immediately and vividly about the ART-IS meeting in Belgium?
	2) Describe a significant interaction you had with someone else during the event, that you found challenging, stimulating, engaging or otherwise memorable...
	3) What part(s) of your experience at the meeting made you feel included and able to participate ?
	4) Did you feel that there were any barriers to your participation at the meeting?
	5) Can you suggest any way(s) that might improve the management of future ART-IS meetings ?
	6) Will you use any particular learning/s from the workshops/event to improve your own practice ?
	7) Has your understanding of 'disability' been challenged in any way by the performances, workshops and events at the meeting?

	8) Was there any topic, issue, practice, incident or debate that provoked your interest in a way that you decided to spend more time exploring it?
	9) Will you carry out any further artistic endeavors as a result of the new experiences you had at the event?
	10) Did you develop any new contacts during the event, and if so, how will you follow them up?

This questionnaire proved far too difficult, so a second, more appropriate questionnaire was devised.

SOME QUESTIONS TO ANSWER AFTER THE MEETING
<p>1. Did YOU feel OK during this meeting? YES – NO – PARTIALLY</p> <p>YES: What made you feel OK? NO: What didn't make you feel OK? How can we make it better for you next time?</p>
<p>2. Did the GROUP collaborate well? YES – NO – PARTIALLY</p> <p>Yes: What went well? No: When didn't go well? How can we collaborate better next time?</p>
<p>3. Did you like the CONTENT of the programme? YES – NO – PARTIALLY</p> <p>Yes: What did you like about the programme? No: What didn't you like about the programme? How can we do it better next time?</p>
<p>4. Was the meeting well ORGANISED? YES – NO – PARTIALLY</p> <p>Yes: What went well? No: What didn't go well? How can we do it better next time? Would you like to mention something about the trip, the hotel or the catering?</p>

Since then, evaluation forms have been circulated at the end of each trip which ask questions in straight forward and accessible ways to enable learners to evaluate and feed back on their experiences. The answers were added to the report of every meeting. This report was send to all the partners in between two meetings, so the organiser of the next meeting could take into account the evaluation of the previous meeting. If we put all the results side by side, these are the main conclusions:

Positive elements:

- **Meeting new people and sharing experiences is great**

"I felt really well. I especially enjoyed making the movie, but I also enjoyed the food and the trips. I also liked meeting people from so many other countries."

"Yes, we enjoyed the opportunity of sharing experiences and moments with other people from different countries. It was really enriching."

- **The friendliness of everyone was so welcoming and supportive**

"The hosts were very nice and welcoming. It was lovely meeting people from other countries. I felt very included in the meetings."

- **Performing abroad is an uplifting experience**

"Negotiating with our learners around creating a 15 minute set meant we were able to properly 'co-produce' our artistic content. Putting together a band at really short notice also taught me a lot about not making assumptions about people's roles and also just how awesome our group of learners were in pulling an epic performance out of the bag. This alone did a huge amount for me in terms of boosting my confidence about what we're capable of as a collective of artists."

- **It was a warm and respectful group that collaborated well**

"The group has been very dynamic, responsive and friendly."

- **The accomodations (hotels, food,...) were great**

"We think it's the best hotel we've ever stayed in. All the meals were lovely, trying the traditional food and Staying Up Late in bars with the partners was always a lovely way to end the day. We were really well looked after and had another wonderful trip."

- **There were a lot of great opportunities to learn new skills and to get to know new practices**

"We learnt a huge amount from the experience around how we can run workshops without relying on language."

Negative elements:

- **Sometimes we missed one person who took leadership of the meetings and who could cement decisions**

"I think the group did collaborate well as everyone got on and listened to each other. However, next time I think one person needs to lead and let everyone know what is happening. I think this will help people to better understand what's required from them and at a practical basis, save time."

- **Sometimes the programme didn't leave enough space for learning disabled artists to take initiative and to share their own proposals and ideas**

"For next meetings, we suggest that the designers of the workshops would take into account the interests and preferences of the participants."