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Reproducing the dreams, the travels, and the traces of migrants in the theatrical scene
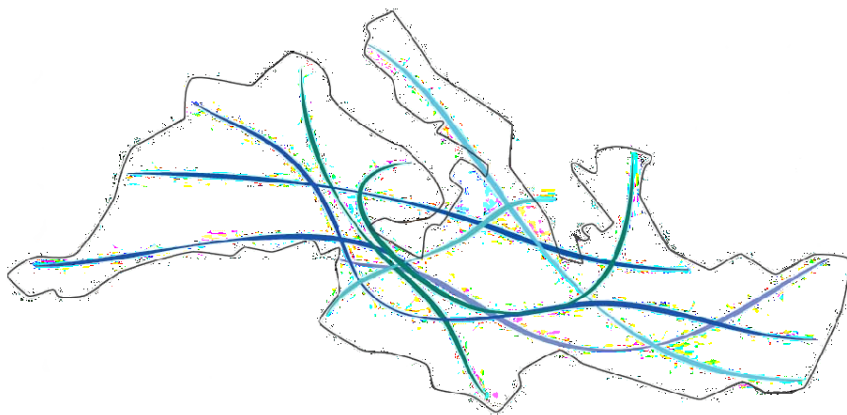
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Abstract

Dreams, Traces, Travellings, Containers is a European Theatre Project, born at the end of 2020, supported by the Creative Europe Fund of which Teatro Valmisa, from Senigallia (Marche, Italy), is leader. The project talks about the power of dreams, the strength to self-determine that has always pushed women and men to leave to be reborn.

In the theatrical imagery, the container is a kaleidoscope that houses the dreams of women and men of yesterday and today.

The containers -typical vectors of travel- will be stage space and moving will give life to a Theatre Festival in the five European countries involved project partners and will end in Brussels.

The project inspired by the United Nations 2030 Agenda on economic and environmental sustainability intends to honor and reaffirm a founding principle of the European Union of free movement of people and goods.

In this technical monitoring report will be summarized some general scientific aspects, phases of activities and the main results of the European Project currently in the closing phase.

Keywords: Migrants, Bodies, Theatre, Dreams, Containers

Reproducir los sueños, los viajes y las huellas de los migrantes en la escena teatral

Resumen

Dreams, Traces, Travellings, Containers es un proyecto teatral europeo, nacido a finales de 2020, apoyado por el *Fondo Europa Creativa* liderado por el Teatro Valmisa de Senigallia (Marche, Italia). El proyecto aborda el tema del poder de los sueños, y de la fuerza de autodeterminación que siempre ha impulsado a las mujeres y a los hombres a renacer.

En el imaginario teatral, el "contenedor" es un caleidoscopio que alberga los sueños de mujeres y hombres de ayer y de hoy.

Los contenedores –vectores típicos del viaje– serán espacio escénico y en movimiento darán vida a un festival de teatro en los cinco países europeos socios del proyecto y terminarán en Bruselas.

El proyecto, inspirado en la Agenda 2030 de Naciones Unidas sobre sostenibilidad económica y medioambiental, pretende honrar y reafirmar un principio fundacional de la Unión Europea, el de la libre circulación de personas y mercancías.

Este informe de seguimiento técnico resumirá algunos aspectos científicos generales, las fases de actividad y los principales resultados del proyecto europeo que se encuentra en su fase final.

Palabras clave: Migrantes, Cuerpos, Teatro, Sueños, Contenedores

Riprodurre i sogni, i viaggi e le tracce dei migranti nella scena teatrale

Sinossi

Dreams, Traces, Travellings, Containers è un progetto teatrale europeo, nato alla fine del 2020, sostenuto dal Fondo Europa Creativa di cui il Teatro Valmisa di Senigallia (Marche,

Italia) è capofila. Il progetto affronta il tema del potere dei sogni, della forza di autodeterminarsi che da sempre spinge donne e uomini a partire per rinascere.

Nell'immaginario teatrale, "container" è un caleidoscopio che ospita i sogni di donne e uomini di ieri e di oggi.

I containers – vettori tipici del viaggio – saranno spazio scenico e in movimento daranno vita a un Festival teatrale nei cinque Paesi europei partner del progetto e si concluderanno a Bruxelles.

Il progetto, ispirato all'Agenda 2030 delle Nazioni Unite sulla sostenibilità economica e ambientale, intende onorare e riaffermare un principio fondante dell'Unione Europea, quello della libera circolazione di persone e merci.

In questo rapporto tecnico di monitoraggio verranno riassunti alcuni aspetti scientifici generali, le fasi di attività e i principali risultati del progetto europeo attualmente in fase di chiusura.

Parole chiave; Migranti, Corpi, Teatro, Sogni, Container

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Introduction

The project *Dreams Traces Travellings Containers* was developed with the intention of analyzing, narrating and representing the concept of "dream" linked to the theme of human mobility, and of migrations in particular, in a world that is now interconnected and globalized.

The dream (from the Latin *somnium,* derived from, sleep") is a psychic phenomenon linked to sleep, in particular to the REM phase, characterized by the perception of images and sounds recognized as apparently real by the dreaming subject[1].

In the specific case of the project, we are faced with what scientific literature defines as "lucid dreaming", the exploration and attempt to actualize that form of thought born in our minds (Bernardi, 2004).

In this specific case the lucid dream is a project, a "life policy", to quote the sociologist Bauman (2000).

The desire to be or to do, to turn one's life upside down and (re)construct, modify or strengthen one's public and private identity is an objective/need that pushes people to travel, beyond the oneiric and cognitive dimension. This happens with the aim of improving oneself and networking with cultures different from one's own.

Stories, the telling of lives and diversity are fundamental tools from a pedagogical and socio-cultural point of view for a deeper understanding of the reality that surrounds us[2].

The empathic narration of the encounter, of the discovery of the Other, of the desire to grow and change has been a reference point within this

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[1] In *Treccani.it – Vocabolario Treccani on line*, Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana. "sógno" s. m. [lat. sŏmnium, der. di somnus "sonno"] https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/sogno/.

[2] Text at the link: http://teachingthroughthearts.blogspot.com/2012/07/storytelling-as-pedagogical-tool.html.

theatre project, developed using the three fundamental communication channels in human relations: verbal, para-verbal and non-verbal.

The words, rhythms, tones of voice and bodies of the artists are those individual mediums chosen to represent one of the most complex contemporary social phenomena: migration.

The focus of this project has been exchanged, the desire to be open to diversity and the challenges of the contemporary world. Accepting different perspectives (and dreams) in a complex historical period, where hatred, polarization and conflict seem to prevail on a global level, is an anthropological challenge.

In line with the objectives of the 2030 Agenda, the use and application of artistic forms and human communication, "staged" in a public environment such as the theatre, made it possible to recount the diversity and uniqueness of dreams.

The dream told through real stories of people who in their lives have chosen to change, or have had to mobilize for social, political, or economic reasons, is the lowest common denominator of a European project inviting institutions, associations, and the business world to actively participate in a process of awareness-raising and storytelling of an intercultural and global nature.

Theatre, through life stories, tales of everyday life and their translation through the bodies of the artists on stage, represents a non-judgmental way of listening, which favors understanding the feelings and fundamental needs of the Other (Grotowsky, 1970).

The subjects involved in the project have a history of "existential" research, artistic production, and growth in the social fabric of their territory, as well as experiences of international exchanges and collaborations.

A project such as this, which deals with a transnational theme such as migration, if tackled exclusively at a local level risk aligning itself with the cultural political orientations of the country itself. International collaboration was therefore fundamental to have a broader perspective, far from prejudices, clichés, stereotypes, and polarizations.

It is important to point out that despite the health emergency caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, which is still ongoing, the various actors actively involved in the project immediately began working and coordinating their activities, readjusting, or reinforcing certain scheduled work phases. Above all, those of collecting and analyzing data or setting the scene, which were obviously supported by digital technologies.

The Covid 19 pandemic emergency, which began at the end of March 2020, did not stop the Dreams Traces Travellings Containers team's "dream": to travel around Europe, making the theatre a hospitable space for growth, sensitivity, encounters, history, and culture, tackling the "burning" issue of migration without prejudice or fear.

The project succeeded in achieving its primary objective, i.e., to organize a Travelling Dreams Festival lasting 45 days, in continuity in the various project venues and allowing the stories collected to come to life through the kaleidoscope created by the theatre show, in various parts of Europe.

The festival included 5 stages: Senigallia (Italy), Heraklion (Greece), Seville (Spain), Holstebro (Denmark) and Brussels (Belgium). The partners performed during the festivals with replicas in the different locations, always welcomed in small or large historical theaters, typical of each town.

1. State of the art

In a new communicative cultural environment made up of exchanges, of fragmented and alternative models that owe their originality to a "new order" in the media, culture and socio-economics, it is possible to identify two opposing drives that constantly conflict: the tendency towards a single thought, which translates into typically assimilationist policies towards other cultures (global), and the tendency towards particularization (local), which accentuates cultural and identity differences. The former seeks to absorb and annul multicultural distances, the latter defends itself by reinforcing the regionalization of cultural content.

Electronic means of mass communication have radically changed the field of mass media and other media, offering new resources and new disciplines for the construction of 'imagined worlds'.

Mediation' (understood here as media communication or communication by mass media) has transformed everyday political, economic and social discourse while initially maintaining a sense of distance between event and observer and has become an important resource for experimenting with constructions of the self in all types of society and for imagining the self as an everyday social project.

Parallel to this evolution of communication processes, a change can also be observed with regard to the phenomenon of human mobility, in particular the sphere of migration, whether forced or voluntary, which is increasingly accompanied by the flow of mass-media images and the cognitive-emotional effects they create.

Information and migrant subjects are simultaneously in motion, intersecting in unpredictable ways, and it is this unprecedented form of connection that defines the link between globalization and the modern: the circulation of people and electronic mediation mutate the global scenario as technically new forces that seem to propel the work of imagination.

The transformation of everyday subjectivities becomes to all intents and purposes a 'cultural fact', imagination in the post-electronic world plays a significant role for three main reasons (Appadurai 2001):

1. the idea of living and working in places other than one's birthplace is normal today, and this idea is accompanied by a "right", that of being able to imagine new ways of life. The difference between today's migration and that of the past lies in the decisive role of images and narratives that pass-through mass media-action in its functional or realistic forms. The mass media imaginary, crossing national borders, influences the impulse to move to different environments and adaptation within these and the massive use of media undoubtedly produces "action";

2. distinguishing fantasy and imagination becomes a must in a connected world. While the former takes the form of a thought separated from projects and actions, based on a self-referential logic, capable of leading to indifference, imagination is accompanied by a sense of projection, creating ideas of neighborhood and nation, of job prospects abroad and moral economies.

3. another fundamental distinction is that between individual and collective sense. Imagination is a priority of collectivities and the collective enjoyment of media content, video, and film, creates sodalities of worship and charisma, 'communities of feeling'; capitalism, and the press, are key media for those groups of people who have never interacted face-to-face and can begin to enrich their cultural identity.

This new proposal/interpretative view of contemporary complexity and global flows, focuses attention on the processes of acceleration and communication and on the power of connectivity that merges the circulation of people with that of media and cultural content.

Within the framework described, a "new" migrant is configured, a de-territorialized subject who goes on to construct non-authentic ethnic identities but is now able to build multiform and contingent life projects, suitable for the interactions that characterize contemporaneity, useful therefore to inhabit the current world and adapt to it (Buoncompagni, 2021).

This complexity, social change, and the migrant's possibility of redesigning his or her life (first of all by imagining it), were told and represented in the project. It happened through the voices of the migrants and the bodies of the actors involved in the public space of the theatre.

Theatre and intercultural relations allowed this. Theatre, in fact, in its true essence encompasses what integration is, it is an art that is very open to the social, so much so that in recent years it has been expressly referred to as "social theatre" (Bernardi, 2004).

Social theatre deals with the interaction between people, the construction of personal identity and the change in daily life and thinking. It opens a door to taking care of oneself, of one's own feelings, enabling us to act to relate to others, making us the protagonists of our own existence and that of those around us, of those we dare to feel, sharing different situations and stories.

Through such relationships and sharing, we can recognize that each life story is closely related to the others, and since theatre is the social and inclusive art par excellence, it can work for socialization and the abandonment of personal and interpersonal judgment.

In a society in which everything is seen from a rational, sterile, almost aseptic point of view, in a trend of civilization that is almost hostile to integration, not open to true social relations, so much so that we are forced to wear masks that put us in a position to adapt in a context in which we do not feel free to express ourselves, the theatre can "eliminate these masks and theatre-making can create a way to achieve transparency of being and the ability to express and become aware of reality and truth" (Bernardi, 2004, p.25).

Culture and art have always been fundamental instruments of intercultural communication that emancipate participation in social life, lead to listening to and encountering the Other, and are creative instruments of social justice.

2. Research (objectives and methodologies) [3]

The project focused on the migration crisis and on the figure of the migrant, trying to raise awareness, from an artistic and social point of view, among the citizens and the European institutions on the theme of diversity and otherness, in order to foster the meeting between native and foreigner, between migrant and host community, working first of all on the communicative, cognitive and emotional level of individuals, as well as on their levels of perception and imagination before embarking on their journey.

The project mainly involved two operational macro-areas:

-Observation/theatrical representation of the human being and his "mobile" life. The aim was to tell the story of the migration project, especially in the initial phase of imagination and (cognitive) planning of the journey, and to communicate to the audience the migrant's desire/dream of improving his existence by moving to another place unknown to him, highlighting how this last aspect is an anthropological element common to all and recurring in the history of mankind:

-The creation of the "Archive of Dreams": an intercultural, multilingual digital archive containing the stories of migrants, constantly updated, and enriched with multimedia, informative, artistic and scientific contents, available to citizens also in the following months once the project is completed.

The project was built with several work phases in mind, but in particular this document will highlight the structure, the main social aspects and the methodologies of this one.

The latter was structured and carried out using mixed methodologies (quantitative and qualitative). From an operational point of view, the research work was structured as follows:

a.   Definition of a methodology
b.   Study of the literature to scientifically support the entire European project.
c.   Construction and sharing of online surveys.

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[3] Being a project leader, an Italian partner (Teatro Valmisa), most of the activity was carried out in Italy and considered the Italian migrant context. But, despite the health emergency, thanks to social and digital research methodologies and the use of telematic tools, it was possible both to involve subjects from other European countries (as regards the collection of life stories) and to study the historical and cultural characteristics of the contexts of the countries involved.

d.   Analysis and collection of migrants' stories in national archives, literature, and Italian and international newspapers.

e.   Analysis and collection of migrants' life stories and in-depth interviews in agreement with local associations and social cooperatives.

f.   Data analysis and drafting of a final report.

g.   Support in identifying institutional targets in social channels and communication activities during the ongoing theatre performances through their own contacts/social channels.

Each phase aimed to analyze and collect those stories useful to be part of the final play and to build the digital archive, called "Archivio dei Sogni": a virtual container made up of narrative material useful for the play.

The methodology that was chosen to be used was mixed, considering four factors: health emergency, type of public, project duration and project purpose.

It was decided to use so-called mix methods, supported by new digital technologies. Specifically, at first the literature on the theme of theatre and migrants was studied from a sociocultural, psychological, and anthropological point of view.

At the same time, a survey (in English) was created and distributed online to collect socio-demographic information about migrants and their stories.

The various sections to be filled out concerned[4]:

-Age: most participants were between the ages of 18 (10, 3%) and 22 (12, 8%).

-Origin country: Greece (30,5%); Romania (11,1%)

-Destination country: Poland (28, 4%); Greece (15,3%); UK (9,8%)

-Reason of travelling[5]

-Your story[6]

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[4]The total number of responses was 139, here only the highest percentages.

 Here the link to the track of the questionnaire via google moduli: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1JFntLpNzdaUHcchCgzr1_xK7naGV3qTcNv4uGRe_vHI/edit.

[5] We can summarize the answers in 5 key words: study; work; family problems; change of life and new expectations; reunion with relatives or partner.

[6] The 'life stories' section was constructed as an open-ended answer. This set no length limits and allowed respondents to freely enter all information (private and otherwise) about their family, the journey, and their current condition as migrants. Generally, three points in common emerged in reference to the "migrant dream": *-risk in leaving their country, but a deep desire to start again and redesign their life; feelings of fear and uncertainty; satisfaction and confirmation of that difficult choice that led them today to live a new life in a different community.*

-Contact

In a second stage, through methodologies such as textual analysis and in-depth interviews (or focus groups), about 30 stories were collected and 25 migrant subjects (immigrants and emigrants) were interviewed, mainly within the Italian context, with different socio-economic conditions, from european countries. The interviews took place via chat or platforms such as WhatsApp or skype, as the covid-19 pandemic prevented communication and meetings in person for many months.

At the organizational-operational level, historical archives, associations working in the field and local communities were actively involved in this phase of collecting stories, asking for their support or for the names of those who might be willing to tell contemporary and past stories.

The objective was the 'migrant dream', to understand what drove them to move in the first place.

At the end of the project the information will be made available to those who request it, when they register to future events or meeting online.

Since the completion of this phase, a further phase has been opened concerning the process of dramaturgical writing based on the material collected and then transformed into dramaturgical workshops, creating performances that come to life in the stage space inside 5 containers.

In the project, therefore, migrants are not the protagonists, but their stories and their dreams. Their words, as mentioned, have been translated by the moving bodies of the artists of the theater companies involved. Bodies that moved, communicating hope, or suffering within a limited context, that of the container.

Also, in this phase the scientific support provided was useful to advertise the events online, identifying within the Facebook, Twitter and Instagram platforms, the main audiences, and institutional targets (politicians, schools, families, third sector organizations).

Digital as a transparent public space allows interconnection, so it was necessary to invest time and resources not only in research but also in building an online public communication strategy to make the theatre project a success.

This aspect is confirmed by the primary need to build an official online site that is simple, clear, and brief from the first impact. In this digital environment all details and news, about the live shows during the last summer, have always been loaded in real time[7].

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[7] Official website: https://dreamscontainersfest.eu/.

Integration pathways, understood as complex and multidimensional processes, are not simply achieved through access to work and housing, but are above all based on the active participation of people and their dialectic with the host societies (Cesareo, 2004).

Artistic forms, such as theatre, can help achieve a positive outcome within these processes.

Through the project, migrant communities and social actors/artists implemented cultural and theatrical activities. On the one hand, the aim was to raise awareness to strengthen the culture of welcoming; on the other hand, additional critical tools were provided to understand the condition of otherness and diversity in the mobile society.

Informing the citizens about the real condition of those who flee from wars and persecutions, from poverty and climatic crises, about the history of emigration from their own country through music, images and the bodies of the actors is a historical necessity to strengthen public memory and extend collective cultural identity. It is through verbal, para-verbal, and non-verbal language that the theatre and its protagonists have created moments of encounter with the citizenship, paying greater attention to the social and relational needs of the most fragile people.

Theatre, within a european context strongly affected by a pandemic, was the perfect medium to create emotion and critical thinking, knowledge, and art, contact and vision of the future, courage and ideas to reduce inequalities, fragility and conflicts towards the Other that have characterized the past and present of our European history.

But the project in question did not "limit" itself to representing and recounting a historical and global phenomenon such as migration but

undertook to externalize that specific cognitive-emotional condition of the migrant before departure.

The theatre and the body of the actors told the dream, the imaginative path of the person who, out of will or necessity, wants to start a "mobile" life to explore the world beyond all borders and rebuild his future.

Imagination is a condition that draws in the mind of the individual the migration, the discovery, the challenge, the courage, the change, the difficulties (Grotowsky, 1970; Bernardi, 2004).

The possibility of being active within the cultural fabric of the host society also means allowing migrants to become protagonists of their history and actions once again; it means facilitating the enhancement of their resources so that they are no longer perceived as eternally vulnerable and in need of assistance from others.

In the process of (re)gaining their autonomy, the recreational dimension should not be forgotten, as it helps to strengthen self-esteem and lay the foundations for a (new) social life, which is just as urgent as finding a home and a job, especially for people who have experienced exile, forced separation from their homes, families, and affections.

The reconquest of a strong identity, the support of an affective and instrumental social network in situ, the possibility of cultivating a sense of belonging and of forging relationships based on trust and dialogue, are elements that affect the psychological condition and contribute to making the refugee an active interlocutor in the host society.

The possibility of regaining possession of one's own life, of being able to tell one's own story, is an important stage in the life of immigrant. Thinking of all the work that involves reconstructing one's history, the reasons for fleeing, necessary to re-elaborate one's own experience and to present oneself at the hearing with the Territorial Commission for the recognition of international protection.

Telling is an activity that gives coherence and meaning to experience, both individual and shared, and theatre is also (and above all) the telling of a story.

The choice of theatre, as a medium and public space, was a winning choice for many reasons.

It was an opportunity to socialize, a recreational moment that distracted the 'actors' from their daily worries. Above all, through the theatre, the protagonists were able to voice their frustration, to vent their malaise; they were able to be seen not only as asylum seekers fleeing persecution and war, but as protagonists on the stage of life.

The performances were successful in terms of participation (not so expected in the middle of the second wave of pandemic), especially thanks to the word of mouth of the public, who had the opportunity to get closer to the reality of local immigration.

In conclusion, the artistic process is therefore a way of realizing personal identity, a way of reconstructing the relationship between the person and his or her new community of reference.

This opportunity becomes a social necessity, especially during social and health crisis situations.

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