



DECIDES EUROPE

Preventing Gender-Based Violence, the Youth Outlook.

Handout: Forum Theatre on Gender-Based Violence

This handout provides basic information and suggestions on how to conduct forum theatre workshops for young people to prevent and encounter gender-based violence. This is a comprehensive handout draft by Interarts Foundation that includes a selection of the two separate handouts produced by the organizations Trabe (Spain) and Transcena (Romania), and presents the methodologies used as best practices. For further information, visit <https://decideseurope.net/en/>



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Introduction

This hand-out has been prepared to provide basic information, reference and tips to teachers, workshop facilitators and trainers to help them in the development of forum theatre as a tool to address gender-based violence (GBV) and related issues: gender equality, women's empowerment and domestic violence.

The content is based on the experience of the consortium, which has more than 30 years of experience in the defence of women's human rights and social transformation through the arts in different countries of Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, among others in the framework of the [DECIDES Program](#) (Cultural Rights for Health Promotion and Development).

This handout has been written in the framework of [DECIDES Europe](#), a project that aims at contributing to reduce Gender Based Violence (GBV) in three European countries, Denmark, Romania, and Spain. Started in September 2018, it seeks to contribute to the prevention of gender-based violence (GBV) by improving the awareness of young people about all forms of GBV, its causes, consequences and providing tools to prevent, recognize and counter.

The handout gathers the methodologies that have been used in schools in three cities: College Matei Basarab in Bucharest (Romania), Instituto Bernat Metge in Barcelona and ElBrot Madrid (Spain). The beneficiaries of the project are young students, aged 15 to 18, school staff, such as teachers, counsellors and school managers, parents, and vulnerable groups such as young people and young migrants. In addition, the dissemination of the project outputs, including the theatre performances, the exhibition, the videos, the international conference and also the talks with parents, and the campaign through the social media increases the awareness of sexual and GBV of young students and their environments.

DECIDES Europe has been designed under the DECIDES program framework. DECIDES (Derechos Culturales para Impulsar el Desarrollo y la Salud, in Spanish) is a program created by Interarts Foundation and focused on improving the health and well-being of people, through cultural cooperation for development and the generation of spaces for reflection based on the capitalization of the experiences developed in the field.

DECIDES Europe is a project implemented by Interarts and Trabe (Spain), Transcena (Romania) and Kvindemuseet (Denmark) and co-funded by the European Union within the Equality, Rights and Citizenship program.

Objectives of forum theatre

The aim of forum theatre is to raise awareness about social issues through social theatrical techniques. Within the scope of the DECIDES Europe project, we can outline the following objectives:

General Objective:

To identify and raise awareness about gender inequalities and violence experienced by women in their daily lives through techniques from a social theatrical experience.



Specific Objectives:

- Recognize gender conflicts, imagine, and experience possible solutions through body creativity practices.
- Generate processes of social and personal transformation through corporal and discursive tools.
- Activate collective training processes based on accompaniment and mutual support practices.
- Acquire knowledge about artistic methodologies and creative physical expression that help analyse the gender component in everyday life situations.
- Generate a space for empathetic and active listening with trust, complicity, and security between the companions.
- Deeper peer learning as a strategy to move towards a 'culture of learning and collaboration' and as an element that strengthens leadership.

What's forum theatre?

Forum theatre is, originally, a tool for reflection and social transformation that uses theatre to achieve social aims. It is a form of theatre that encourages audience interaction and explores different options for dealing with a problem or issue. Forum theatre is often used by socially excluded and disempowered groups. Due to its participatory characteristics, forum theatre is an exceptional tool to work with young people to create awareness about and tackle social problems. The young people are able to explore the problems related the GBV that they may face in their lives in a safe space and try to overcome them through a participative theatrical tool.

Also known as 'popular theatre' or 'participatory theatre', it is a form of participatory arts and is, at base, theatre as democratic political forum. It is a variation of the *Theatre of the Oppressed* method developed by Augusto Boal; an interactive theatre form invented in the early 1970s. Boal's aim was to help audience members identify their 'internal oppressions' in order to begin to overcome them.

The audience is shown a short play in which a central character (protagonist) encounters a form of oppression or obstacle which s/he is unable to overcome. The subject-matter will usually be something of immediate importance to the audience, often based on a shared life experience.

When the play has been performed, members of the audience can take to the stage and suggest alternative options for how the protagonist could have acted. The event can be used to rehearse for an imminent occasion, or to uncover and analyse alternatives in any situation, past, present, or future.

In this way, spectators are transformed into 'spect-actors', not only observing but truly acting to change the scenes they are presented. The actors explore the results of these choices with the audience creating a kind of theatrical debate, in which experiences and ideas are rehearsed and shared, generating both solidarity and a sense of empowerment.

**actor* + spectator = SPECTACTOR*

The forum theatre performance has rules:

- The forum theatre scenario is created from the participants' life experience.
- The script has clear characters and situations, so that viewers can recognize them.
- The situations are proposed by at least one protagonist and must contain at least one conflict of social origin in order to be relevant for the "forum" type discussion.
- The format of the script can be in any kind of drama (realism, symbolism, expressionism, etc.) except for the surreal and the irrational because the purpose of the show is to discuss specific situations and problems.

Tips for facilitators:

The whole process should start with creating a cohesion by warming-up with games & exercises with the participants (non-actors) which are based on emotion, muscular, sensory, memory and imagination games (e.g. musical chairs, the mirror, the puppet & puppeteer, imitating others etc.).

During all the steps of forum theatre these games should periodically be introduced by the facilitator and make them together with the actors. The facilitator should ideally be a person who has experience with the forum theatre methodology; and will play a neutral position/role during the representation. During the representation, there might be some difficulties like:

- Spectators reinforcing stereotypes and being verbally violent
- Spectators who do not want to finish the intervention and want to stay until the end of the play

For this, the facilitator should always be able to find solutions on the spot, so that the actors are capable of cooperating with the spectator for a fast solution, even at the time of the situation, so as not to assault the rest of the public.

Each group creates its own rules based on the principles of well-being, freedom, and collective responsibility for every member of the group. It is also to be made clear that we reflect on violence but do not accept any form of violence.

Examples of group rules

•
All members have an equal position in the group. this group equality is reflected in the circle setting during the group discussions. we have a decent posture on the seat, on the foot or on the feet.

•
We listen to everyone's opinions. each member of the group has the right to make proposals for the group. we offer feedback.

•
We do not use emotional, physical, or verbal violence. we do not use exercises and improvisations to mask violence. we do not use ironies, offenses, not even with the excuse that they are joking.

•
We speak in turn, expressing verbal, assertive, dissatisfaction

It is also important to keep in mind a few limitations to ensure effective implementation and execution of the forum theatre:

- The leader is not the author. The scenario is a collective creation based on the proposals of the protagonists.
- The role of the artistic director is to produce a show in which protagonists and the public recognize the theme and the problems. On the other hand, however, if the problems in the scenario are portrayed in a way so extreme that it cannot be prevented, it leaves no room for intervention and leaves the play with a sense of helplessness and loss. For example, when one shows the protagonist being held at gun-point.
- The process of the script for the performance cannot be prejudiced. It is impertinent to remember that all oppressions are of equal importance, and so are the people who are being subjected to them.

Addressing the limitations and reflecting on the role of the facilitator requires continuous efforts to ensure achieving the goals set in the beginning of the process.

Workshops

As a conflict of social origin is at the heart of the concept of the theatre forum workshops, we address the issues surrounding Gender based Violence for the purpose of these workshops with school students. The following methodology has been used, adapting to the needs and the environment for young people:

The sessions are divided into two parts: the introductory sessions, and the creation of dramatic script and improvisation. The first introductory part aims to form a connection with the students and establish group rules. This part is dedicated to body dynamics and warm-up games to get used to body language and create a space for complicity among the participants. This helps the students ease into the second part of the workshops where the aim is to develop a dramatic script based on and validated by the experiences of the participants of the forum theatre workshops.



It is important to consider that the process of the forum theatre workshops is a very fluid concept that needs to be always adapted to the needs of different groups based on their group dynamics, responses to situations and answers regarding the dramatic script.

In the beginning of the process, the team of facilitators should ensure that the students can adapt to the group. There will be some who are shy and conscious in a large group. The use of warm up routines is very important in this step.

Warm-up routines, also known as physical warm-ups, and warm-up games are full-body physical, facial, and vocal exercises that help the participants get ready to perform. A good warm-up will help the students get into proper physical, mental, and emotional form to get

on stage and to work well with other participants onstage. It helps them relax, get rid of any anxieties, and also helps in training their voice for performance.



Students from INS Bernat Metge (Barcelona) during the workshops

Some of the warm-up techniques that can be used during these sessions include vocal exercises like humming, tongue twisters, lip trills and flutters and physical warm-ups like stretching, movement exercises and breathwork.

To actively involve the group of students, fun brain activation games can be used to grab their attention and warm-up their bodies. One of the most common games to focus students' energy is to form an energy ball along with the other students and feel it throb and pulse at the energy grows.

Theatre exercises are integrated from the beginning as it is important to distinguish that it is after all, resulting in a dramatic performance. They also help students in keeping their energy up and aids them to develop the ability to improvise as a character on stage.

Along with the theatrical techniques, it is also important to work on the concept of gender-based violence with the students. In the context of gender-based violence, a game of role reversal can be crucial to introduce the themes of feminine and masculine roles in the society.

Depending on the group of students, these exercises shall be repeated over and over in the sessions to ensure that the students are comfortable and invested in the process with their body, mind, and feelings.

The dramatic script starts to build once the participating students are more accustomed to the themes of gender-based violence and the forum theatre as a process. The facilitators ensure that the scenes are authentic to the experiences of the students. The students are aided by the facilitators to identify certain themes and put themselves in the place of the characters thereby developing the main context of the plot.

These sessions build up on the dramatic script by analysing and reviewing it from time to time and discussing the existing conflict and the motivations of the subjects.

They only have a few fixed lines and know when they enter a scene, when they leave the scene, or when the conflict is at its peak. They are encouraged, from these few lines, to create scenes and can create new lines and change them depending on how they feel.

Developing the behaviour of improvising is key to forum theatre exercises. It is the role of the facilitator, to encourage the participating students through the use of leading questions.

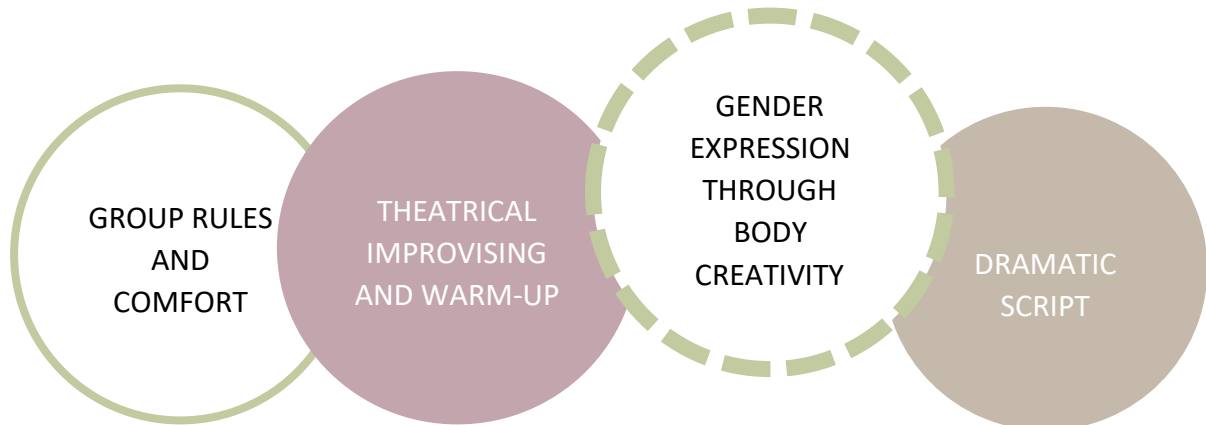
Through the use of these questions, it is important to create a space to talk about specific situations, specific cases and about how young people feel, and to see whether a problem really exists or not. It is crucial to ask these questions and create a safe space for the participants.

Within this script development, it is important to continue the dialogue about gender-based violence, gender-based discrimination and stereotypical gender roles to understand the ideas, and the motivations behind them.

EXAMPLES OF LEADING QUESTIONS

- Think about a time you were prevented from doing anything you wanted to do / or were forced to do something you did not want.
- Why do you think you acted like this?
- What can you do to change the scenario?
- Let's discuss how this affects your feelings as a woman.

Human beings think with their entire body and the entire body must be involved in the search for alternatives to the unresolved conflicts the participants are experiencing. The games for body and voice relaxation must be carried out whenever necessary during the process.



The methodology of the forum theatre has been ideal for the awareness of the participants. Sometimes the students were able to express personal conflicts and received the support and understanding of all the classmates, creating a space of great solidarity and strong ties between all of them. The sharing of personal conflicts also caused the breakdown of some of them in some sessions, showing the need to expose intimate issues and the lack of spaces available to young people to deal with them in their educational context.

Definitions

Gender: A social and cultural construct, which distinguishes differences in the attributes of men and women, girls, and boys, and accordingly refers to the roles and responsibilities of men and women. Gender interacts with, but is different from, the binary categories of biological sex. Gender-based roles and other attributes, therefore, change over time and vary with different cultural contexts. The concept of gender includes the expectations held about the characteristics, aptitudes and likely behaviours of both women and men (femininity and masculinity). This concept is useful in analysing how commonly shared practices legitimize discrepancies between sexes. (2017; UNICEF)

Gender refers to the roles, behaviours, activities, attributes and opportunities that any society considers appropriate for girls and boys, and women and men. Gender also refers to the relationships between people and can reflect the distribution of power within those relationships. Gender interacts with, but is different from, the binary categories of biological sex. Gender intersects with other drivers of inequities, discrimination, marginalization and social exclusion, which have complex effects on health and well-being. These intersectional drivers include ethnicity, class, socioeconomic status, disability, age, geographical location, sexual orientation and sexual identity. (2018; WHO)

Gender accommodating: Similar to the concept of gender sensitivity, gender accommodating means not only being aware of gender differences but also adjusting and adapting to those differences. However, gender accommodating does not address the inequalities generated by unequal norms, roles, and relations (i.e., no remedial or transformative action is developed). (2017; UNICEF)

Gender-Based Violence (GBV): Gender-based violence is an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will and that is based on socially ascribed (gender) differences between females and males. The nature and extent of specific types of GBV vary across cultures, countries and regions. Examples include sexual violence, including sexual exploitation/abuse and forced prostitution; domestic violence; trafficking; forced/early marriage; harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation; honour killings; and widow inheritance. (2017; UNICEF)

There are different kinds of violence, including (but not limited to) physical, verbal, sexual, psychological, and socioeconomic violence.

Physical violence: Physical violence is an act attempting to or resulting in pain and/or physical injury. It includes beating, burning, kicking, punching, biting, maiming, the use of objects or weapons, or tearing out hair. At its most extreme, physical violence may lead to femicide, or the gender-based killing of a woman. Some classifications also include trafficking and slavery in the category of physical violence because initial coercion is often experienced, and the young women and men involved end up becoming victims of further violence as a result of their enslavement.

Verbal violence: Verbal abuse can include put-downs in private or in front of others, ridiculing, the use of swear-words that are especially uncomfortable for the other, threatening with other forms of violence against the victim or against somebody or something dear to them. Other times the verbal abuse is related to the background of the victim, insulting, or threatening her on the basis of religion, culture, language, (perceived) sexual orientation or traditions.

Sexual violence: Sexual violence includes many actions that are equally hurtful to every victim and are used similarly in the public and private sphere. Examples include rape (sexual violence including some form of penetration of the victim's body), marital rape and attempted rape. Other types of forced sexual activities include being forced to watch somebody have intercourse, forcing somebody to have intercourse in front of others, forced unsafe sex, sexual harassment, and, in the case of women, abuse related to reproduction (forced pregnancy, forced abortion, forced sterilization).

Psychological violence: Psychological violence can include, for example, threatening behaviors that do not necessarily involve physical violence or even verbal abuse. It can include actions that refer to former acts of violence, or purposeful ignorance and neglect of the other.

It is about intimidating and instilling fear in women with behaviours such as breaking or throwing objects, driving recklessly, putting family life at risk. The consequences for women are intimidation and fear, emotional suffering and / or alteration of sleep rhythms. Psychological violence may also be perpetrated through isolation or confinement, withholding information, disinformation, etc.

Socio-economic violence: Socio-economic violence is both a cause and an effect of dominant gender power relations in societies. Some of the most typical forms of socio-economic violence include taking away the victim's earnings, not allowing her to have a separate income (forced 'housewife' status, working in the family business without a salary), or making her unfit for work through targeted physical abuse. In the public sphere this can include denial of access to education or (equally) paid work (mainly to women), denial of access to services, exclusion from certain jobs, denial of the enjoyment and exercise of civil, cultural, social, or political rights.

Spiritual Violence: Underestimating or diminishing the importance of satisfying moral-spiritual needs by prohibiting, limiting, ridiculing, penalizing the aspirations of family members, their access to cultural, ethnic, linguistic or religious values, prohibiting the right to speak in the mother tongue and to teach children to speak in the mother tongue, imposing adherence to unacceptable spiritual and religious beliefs and practices, as well as other actions with similar effect or with similar repercussions.

Violence by Proxy: Gender-based violence by proxy is a type of abuse in which symptoms are manufactured remotely by the offender, who, using the judicial system, replicates complaint after complaint, in order to harm the victim, keeping her busy in responding

to the multiple judicial requirements, in a permanent state of alert and anxiety, and with the consequent economic wear and tear, turning his life into a coming and going from court to court without being able to retake his own life.

Domestic Violence: Domestic violence, also known as ‘domestic abuse’ or ‘intimate partner violence’ can be defined as a pattern of behaviour in any relationship that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner.

Abuse is physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. This includes any behaviours that frighten, intimidate, terrorize, manipulate, hurt, humiliate, blame, injure, or wound someone.

Domestic abuse can happen to anyone of any race, age, sexual orientation, religion, or gender. It can occur within a range of relationships including couples who are married, living together, or dating. Domestic violence affects people of all socioeconomic backgrounds and education levels. Victims of domestic abuse may also include a child or other relative, or any other household member.

Gender-based violence in emergencies (GBViE): In emergencies, such as conflict or natural disasters, the risk of violence, exploitation and abuse is heightened, particularly for women and girls. At the same time, national systems and community and social support networks may weaken. An environment of impunity may mean that perpetrators are not held to account. Pre-existing gender inequalities may be exacerbated. Women and adolescent girls are often at particular risk of sexual violence, exploitation, and abuse, forced or early marriage, denial of resources and harmful traditional practices. Men and boys may also be survivors. GBV has significant and long-lasting impacts on the health and psychological, social, and economic wellbeing of survivors and their families. (2017; UNICEF)

Gender blindness: The failure to recognize that the roles and responsibilities of men/boys and women/girls are given to them in specific social, cultural, economic, and political contexts and backgrounds. Projects, programmes, policies and attitudes which are gender blind do not consider these different roles and diverse needs, maintain status quo, and will not help transform the unequal structure of gender relations. (2017; UNICEF)

Gender Discrimination: Any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on the basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.

Discrimination can stem from both law (*de jure*) or from practice (*de facto*).

- de jure discrimination e.g., in some countries, a woman is not allowed to leave the country or hold a job without the consent of her husband.
- de facto discrimination e.g., a man and woman may hold the same job position and perform the same duties, but their benefits may differ. (2017; UNICEF)

Direct discrimination: Where one person is treated less favourably on grounds of sex than another is, has been or would be treated in a comparable situation. In addition, the

European Court of Justice has established that as only women can become pregnant, a refusal to employ or the dismissal of a pregnant woman based on her pregnancy or her maternity amounts to direct discrimination on the grounds of sex. On the basis of this principle, the Court has further held that any unfavourable treatment directly or indirectly connected to pregnancy or maternity constitutes direct sex discrimination. (2010; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights & Council of Europe)

Indirect discrimination: The situation where a seemingly neutral provision, criterion or practice would in particular disadvantage persons of a particular sex with respect to persons of the other sex, unless this provision, criterion or practice is justified objectively for a legitimate purpose, and the means to achieve this goal are appropriate and necessary. (2010; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights & Council of Europe)

Gender-roles: Social and behavioral norms that, within a specific culture, are widely considered to be socially appropriate for individuals of a specific sex. These often determine the traditional responsibilities and tasks assigned to men, women, boys, and girls. Gender-specific roles are often conditioned by household structure, access to resources, specific impacts of the global economy, occurrence of conflict or disaster, and other locally relevant factors such as ecological conditions. (2017; UNICEF)

Gender-stereotyping: Ascribing certain attributes, characteristics and roles to people based on their gender. Gender stereotypes can be negative (i.e., women are bad drivers, men cannot change diapers) and benign (i.e., women are better caregivers, men are stronger). Gender stereotyping becomes harmful when it limits a person's life choices, such as training and professional path, and life plans. Compounded gender stereotypes occur when layered with stereotypes about other characteristics of the person, such as disability, ethnicity, or social status. (2017; UNICEF)

Sexism: It is an attitude of a person of one sex that he or she is superior to a person of the other sex. For example, a man thinks that women are too emotional. Or a woman thinks that men are chauvinists. (2005; US EEOC)

Sex Discrimination is a behavior. It occurs when employment decisions are based on an employee's sex or when an employee is treated differently because of his or her sex. For example, a female supervisor always asks the male employees, in a coed workplace, to move the boxes of computer paper. Or, a male supervisor always asks the female employees, in a coed workplace to plan office parties. (2005; US EEOC)

Sexual Harassment: Any unwelcome sexual advance, request for sexual favour, verbal or physical conduct or gesture of a sexual nature, or any other behaviour of a sexual nature that might reasonably be expected or be perceived to cause offence or humiliation to another. Sexual harassment may occur when it interferes with work, is made a condition of employment or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive environment. It can include a one-off incident or a series of incidents. Sexual harassment may be deliberate, unsolicited and coercive. Both male and female colleagues can either be the victim or offender. Sexual

harassment may also occur outside the workplace and/or outside working hours. (2005; UNHCR)

Sexual harassment includes many things such as actual or attempted rape or sexual assault, unwanted pressure for sexual favors, unwanted sexual teasing or remarks, cat calls and whistling at someone, unwanted deliberate touching, leaning over, cornering, or pinching etc.

Unwelcome Behavior is the critical word. Unwelcome does not mean "involuntary". A victim may consent or agree to certain conduct and actively participate in it even though it is offensive and objectionable. Therefore, sexual conduct is unwelcome whenever the person subjected to it considers it unwelcome. (1992; BNA Communications Inc.; SDC IP .73)

Violence against Women: Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life. It encompasses, but is not limited to physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation; physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere; trafficking in women and forced prostitution; and physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the state, wherever it occurs. (1993; UN)

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