

Gábor Takács: Participation in focus – Theatre of the Participant (ARS) – the performative methodology of Káva

The concept of Theatre of the Participant (**A Részvevő Színháza – ARS**) is based on the English Theatre in Education (TIE) method and the practice of Káva, where we prepare complex theatre in education performances for children and youngsters. Our method is connected to the field of applied theatre and to participatory theatrical genres.

A complex theatre in education (TIE) performance is a programme in which scenes, scene sequences prepared with theatrical tools, discussions connected to them, and processing of a topic through interactive work methods form an organic dramaturgical whole. The topic of these performances is always a moral/social issue which examines the participant as a being living in community. It is a genre where participants are in focus and where the core method is the creation of a participatory presence. In these performances, the main purpose is not the direct delivery of a prepared message, but the discussion of a dilemma placed in the centre. The creators try to raise questions and discuss issues to which a more focused thinking and observing from different aspects is inevitable. They create a forum where opinions can be shared in order to give space for discussions between participants. Discussion between classmates from the same class with different values, opinions, discussion between adults and children. These performances can be considered as performative social interventions, too.

The performing method we use – based on the inclusion of the audience – often – quite consciously – blurs the border between performers and spectators, ensuring that participants can shape the events and create their own relation to the focus point to a greater extent. We believe that if a man can make choices and decisions in his/her imagination or in a fictitious world, he/she can do so in real life, too. Our performances focusing on a certain problem make it possible – with the help of conversation and action based on collective thinking – for participants to know themselves and their environment better and to see the world not in static motionlessness, but as a course of proceedings. An organic part of our work is the pedagogical approach, but we try to avoid didactic questioning and instead we try to query schematic answers and clichés.

We think of ourselves as people who place particular emphasis on innovation. For us, experimenting and encounters with different artistic fields, the rethinking of theatre in education forms and contents has a huge significance. We would like to avoid being canonized, we believe in the creative power of fusions and cooperations.

Our artistic and pedagogical activities are summarized in the expression *Theatre of the Participant (A Részvevő Színháza – ARS)*, which reflects on our dynamic, back and forth relationship with the audience-participants.

The founding members of the company belong to the most experienced theatre in education experts with 25 years of experience. We consider our task to exploit the possibilities in the method, enrich

the Hungarian theatre in education system with experimental forms and create meaningful and effective complex programmes.

One important advantage of our work is audience development, since our complex theatrical performances draw the young audience's attention to the significance, usability and pleasures of the living contemporary theatre through their own experience. In other words, our work puts theatre in education and theatre pedagogy side by side (instead of confronting each other).

Our work is about the valid connectivity of art and pedagogy without ideologies. We try to prove in practice and in theory that the connection of these two fields is a fertile cooperation which induces creative thoughts and new knowledge. We consider drama and theatre in education as methods which can help us form new ways of thinking with the help of emotions. In some special moments, theatre in education performances become open, artistic forums for thoughts in which equal people (adults and children) have discussions for issues important and relevant for all of them. We work to reach these special moments. With our performances we concentrate on 3 main fields, all our topics can be channelled to one of the following:

- social disadvantage
- democratic citizenship
- the world of school.

We pay special attention to the group of disadvantaged children and youngsters. We believe, and based on proofs of a significant and internationally relevant research¹, that our performances are able to increase social sensibility and public activity and at the same time offer the opportunity to integrate disadvantaged children. 25% of our performances at the capital, and almost all of our countryside and transborder performances are for socially and/or culturally disadvantaged groups. Our company's work both fulfills and generates demands. We do our work irrespective of gender, ethnic background, social status, religion. We try to keep close contact with schools, which, concerning feedbacks and the afterlife of our performances, the development of new programs and community financing, is extremely important.

Over the last 12 years, Káva also functioned as a research workshop, where research programs accompany the participatory theatrical processes. Since these are social science research programmes, in these cases participatory theatre is relevant as an art-based social intervention.

Our researches question how a social issue or phenomenon becomes visible through analysis, how it is examined critically, how common values (or interests) are discovered, how personal and collective actions can be identified and tried during the participatory theatrical process. Our researches² examine the effectiveness, the influence and reception of theatre in education, and more specifically the social usefulness of the method. Our work is connected to current scientific endeavours dealing with micro- and macro-social issues and pedagogical suggestions, too.

¹ <http://dramanetwork.eu/hungarian.html>

² In cooperation with Anblokk Cultural and Social Science Association and Parforum Participatory Research Workshop.