

## **JOIN IN CONFERENCE**

**Cornerteateret Bergen, Sep 30 - Oct 2 2021**

As the Covid- pandemic gave us a slight break from lockdown, the international cooperation network "Participate in your life" (PIYL) thankfully got to organize the conference JOIN IN on Sep 30th - Oct 2nd, 2021 at Cornerteateret, Bergen.

After 2 years of sharing and working together in the PIYL network, the partners gathered their extensive knowledge and experience to organize the JOIN IN Conference about interactivity and participation in theatre for youth and children.

JOIN IN had already been postponed once due to Covid-19, as the original conference was planned for March 2021. All international partners contributed both in the planning and execution of the conference, as well as playing a big part in the academic and artistic part of it. The Norwegian partner, K:13 scenekunst was the local host in close cooperation with the network's producer, Hjørdis Steinsvik of Syv mil AS who led and administered the conference.

The "Participate In your life" network consists of 5 partners from the countries Norway, Lithuania, Iceland, Hungary and Sweden. Our Swedish partner, Teater Allena by Lars Åkerlund was unfortunately unable to attend the conference due to challenges of the pandemic. Sweden's contribution to the network was therefore represented digitally at the conference.

At the conference it quickly became evident that people were hungry for culture and professional input and inspiration and it was a true relief and pleasure to see so many people attending performances, debates, workshops and even parties without having to keep social distance, wear face masks etc. It turned out to be a surprisingly social event with mingling like pre-corona times, which led to good discussions, networking and a fruitful milieu with the feeling of normality for just a little while. The importance of the conference and of theatre in general, became very clear to all attendees and even if all the performances' target group were children and youth, the relevance was high for all who attended.

However the administration was well aware of the potential outbreak of the infectious virus so all precautions were naturally taken. We had masks and antigen tests available and of course antibac. We also had a plan B and a plan C in case of restrictions, to make sure we were able to go through with the conference.

One of the precautions was to make a digital version of the conference, both in case of possible cancellations due to corona, and for foreign guests that were not able to travel. The digital program included the official welcome ceremony, speeches, the keynote speakers and discussions as well as the different debates. Due to the high expenses, we decided not to show the performances digitally. However all the PIYL

partners and the additional companies in the conference program, presented their work through short introduction videos specially made for the digital conference program.

All the performances included a set number of seats for the children and youth in the target group. In addition we had room for a certain number of observers. These seats were filled by the conference attendees, including theatre directors, actors, academics and also the different partners watching each other's performances and having the opportunity to discuss them afterwards. This gave good insight and value for the further work in the PIYL network, especially leading into the networks' next project, which is the collaborative performance "The Tower of Babel", being produced in 2022.

The partner performances shown at the conference were:

"Romeo & Julie" by K:13 ccenekunst, 13+, Cornerteateret

"Based on a true story" by Kava, Hungary, 12-14 yrs, Cornerteateret

"King of the Hill" by the National theatre of Kaunas, Lithuania, 12-14 yrs, Cornerteateret

"SPOR" by Bird & Bat, Iceland, 4+, Kunsthuset Wrap

In addition we had the performances:

Den sorte skygge" (The black shadow) by Eventyr i parken, 6+ in Nygårdsparken

"Tigerbussen" (The Tiger bus) from Tigerstadsteateret, 6+ in Tigerbussen

All the performances were attended by children and youth from local schools, kindergardens, families and youth groups, combined with the partners and the conference attendees.

In addition to the performances, we had a number of workshops and debates as well as keynote speakers. The companies' approach to different methods of interactivity and participatory theatre created a starting point for the keynote speakers and debates throughout the conference, thus creating a professional atmosphere where the thematics met the artists' experience in an exciting way.

Our different contributors to the program were:

*Key note speakers:*

Ine Therese Berg, "The boundaries of participation"

Lise Hovik, "From interactivity to intra-activity"

Kristian Nødtvedt, "Theatre Mediation programme" (Assitej Norway)

Hilde Brinchmann, "The actor in the immersive theatre"

Chris Cooper, "Moved to connect"

Ragnhild Tronstad, "Interactivity that matters" (Kulturtanken)

*Debates:*

“Democracy in performing arts” with moderator and subject manager, Ragnhild Freng Dale

“Interactive and immersive theatre for a young audience” with moderator and subject manager, Mariken Lauvstad

*Workshops:*

“Moved to connect”, Chris Cooper (x 2)

“The actor in the immersive theatre”, Hilde Brinchmann

“The Labyrinth”, Gábor Takács

The mayor of Bergen, Rune Bakervik, came for the opening ceremony and the former cultural minister, Abid Raja sent his greeting digitally. The partners in the PIYL network presented themselves through a Pecha Kucha presentation.

We also managed to present some of our local artists in the program and had both physical and digital contributions from Bergen Borgerscene and Musikaljentene. At our final banquet, singer Bodil Lunde Rørtveit performed and Dj Brut kept the dance floor active throughout the evening.

The conference was visited by both Bergen’s local newspapers BA and BT as well as by Judith Dybendahl for Periskop.no. Dybendahl applauded the initiative and said, among other things in her review:

*“Konferansen lyktes spesielt godt med å gi rom for utøvernes perspektiv og førstehåndserfaringer fra kunstnerisk arbeid. Det internasjonale tilsnittet er forfriskende.”<sup>1</sup>*

Dybendahl also encouraged the PIYL network to let the JOIN IN conference become a tradition. She described it as a great platform for establishing collaborations throughout the field and to contribute to a fruitful conversation about theatre for children and youth in the future.

The pandemic backdrop created an extensive amount of extra work in the planning of the conference. The international collaboration and participation and the insecurity around traveling, as well as the balance between physical vs digital attendance at the conference, were factors carefully considered throughout the entire process leading up to Sep 30. Because of sudden changes in restrictions, not only in Norway but in the partner countries as well, we had to wait longer before we booked tickets and made final arrangements. This caused an increase in expenses and we also had

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<sup>1</sup> “The conference was particularly successful in providing space for the performers' perspective and first-hand experiences from artistic work. The international aspect is refreshing.”

a few unforeseen situations which caused delays, rebookings and changes which affected the budget.

In addition to PIYLs main producer and coordinator, Hjørdis Steinsvik from Syv mil AS, we hired two more producers from Syv mil (Charlotte Faaberg-Johansen and Gunnbjørg Johannessen) to the administration, both in the preparatory phase of the conference as well as hands on staff at the conference. We engaged Emilie Fanor-Fontaine as our volunteer coordinator, who was responsible for over 10 volunteers throughout the conference.

Sunniva Vik was responsible for coordinating all meals at the conference. Cornerteateret helped us set up a tent outside for the meals, where we set up tables and chairs that we borrowed from TIF Viking. The food was from Greasy Reeseys food truck, Lerøy seafood and Allehjørnet Thai.

The venues used were Cornerteateret, Kunsthuset Wrap, Møhlenpris skole, Vitalitetssenteret, Nygårdsparken and the parking space outside Cornerteateret, on GC Riebers property. For the digital conference program we had Jarle Moe as our streaming technician and an extra person on filming (2 cameras). Jan Holden was in charge of lights and sound and had support from Aiste Vejai Galvoj, Elaine Maltezos and Christer Hjelmeland. The PIYL partners brought 37 people to the conference, including actors, technicians, administration, producers, directors and other crew. All promotion material, including logo, posters, conference passes, stickers and program booklets, was designed in Kaunas and printed in Kaunas and Bergen.

We are grateful that we, in the midst of a pandemic, were allowed and able to organize a physical conference and that it turned out successful. It resembled a festival more so than a conference. Many local actors and the theatre community in Bergen attended and we also had visitors from Karmøy Kommune, Teater Vestland, staff from Theatre studies at the University of Bergen and Høgskolen på Vestlandet. The experience of doing this together and presenting the PIYL network to an audience within the theatre field, has given us solid ground and new experiences that will be used actively in phase 3 of the collaboration, in building the performance "The Tower of Babel".

*A total of 282 children and young people and 106 adults participated interactively as audience in the performances. The performances had a total of 237 observers.*

*The workshops had a total of 61 participants.*

*There were a total of 120 conference participants, including 28 digital conference passes and 37 free passes*