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Inspiration for Deliberative Theatre: The Giufà Project and a Study Visit to the European Youth Event 2025 in Strasbourg

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In search of inspiration for the CEMORY project, I traveled to Strasbourg to attend the European Youth Event (EYE), one of the largest youth gatherings held every two years at the European Parliament in Strasbourg. EYE is aimed at people aged 16–30 and brings together young participants from across the European Union and importantly, from beyond its borders, providing a space to debate with Members of the European Parliament, meet activists, content creators, and experts. During EYE2025, held on 13–14 June 2025, around 9,000 participants representing as many as 160 nationalities came together to discuss the future of Europe. The program featured 450 live activities, including panel discussions, interactive workshops, quizzes, tours, networking sessions, and artistic performances. These activities took place both in the European Parliament and in the EYE Village a creative and inclusive platform co-created by youth and community organisations, ensuring a diversity of voices and perspectives.

The purpose of the trip to Strasbourg for the European Youth Event (EYE 2025) was to seek inspiration and best practices for developing the concept

of deliberative theatre as part of the CEMORY project. Participation in this event made it possible to directly explore diverse and up-to-date forms of civic dialogue and its main themes, exchange experiences with community leaders, and observe innovative methods of engaging participants in debates on key social challenges. The experience and contacts gained are a valuable source of knowledge for creating a model of deliberative theatre that combines art, education, and civic participation in the context of human rights and the remembrance of genocides. Deliberative theatre in the CEMORY project is an innovative method that integrates art, education, and civic dialogue, inspired by deliberative democracy and the philosophy of Bruno Latour, as well as elements of Augusto Boal's theatre of the oppressed and Paulo Freire's emancipatory pedagogy. It uses forms of performative engagement, debate, and public consultation in combination with exhibition spaces and expert seminars to provide a safe and multi-dimensional environment for discussing challenging topics such as genocide, human rights, and combating discrimination. Participants, equipped with substantive knowledge and open to interaction, collectively analyse complex issues, confront perspectives, and co-create recommendations for educational policy. The process is based on experiential learning, promotes empathy, critical thinking, and long-term civic engagement, and transforms participants into ambassadors of the values of dialogue, equality, and mutual respect.

The Giufà Project is an example of an international artistic and educational initiative that combines participatory theatre, intercultural storytelling, and youth activism to explore themes of migration, identity, and inclusivity. Drawing inspiration from Giufà, a Mediterranean folk hero and trickster who challenges established social norms, the project brings together young people, artists, and community leaders from across Europe to create performances and workshops based on personal narratives and collective memory. Initiated within the framework of *The Complete Freedom of Truth* (TCFT) program by the UK-based organisation Opera Circus, the project is led by Italian director Laura Fatini, together with Redi Asabella and Francesco Pipparelli, in collaboration with Nuova Accademia degli Arrischianti. Activities within the project have involved youth, artists, and mentors from many European countries, from Italy and the United Kingdom to the Balkans and Central and Eastern Europe.

Before the main presentation of the project, there was a spoken-word and musical performance followed by an open discussion entitled *Dialogue with the Enemy in the Heart of Europe*, which took as its starting point dialogical inspirations and moral reflections arising from the



reading of *Letters to a German Friend* by Albert Camus. The discussion focused on inspirations for new forms of social dialogue and creative practices related to building empathy, resilience, and democratic dialogue among diverse youth communities. Participants from different countries shared their own thoughts on war, peace, contemporary Europe, and its future.

The next part of the presentation was a theatre practice session. The project's working methodology is based on co-creating performances and workshops drawing on participants' personal narratives, family histories, and collective memory, which aligns with the principles of deliberative theatre built on equality of voices, dialogue, collective reflection, the adoption of different perspectives, and the creative process. Deliberative theatre, together with improvisation, movement, and collective storytelling workshops, demonstrates how theatre can become a space for confronting difficult topics while creating conditions for constructive and egalitarian dialogue.

An understanding of the theoretical foundations of The Giufà Project and the observation of its practice show that deliberative theatre can draw inspiration from three thematic areas present in this initiative. The first is the use of personal narratives as authentic material for joint reflection, enabling participants to assume not only stage roles but also the role of co-authors of the message. The second is openness to diverse cultural and linguistic perspectives, which helps to break down communication barriers and build trust in ethnically diverse groups. The third is the use of a symbolic figure that unites ethnically diverse European societies and beyond. Thanks to its universality and ambiguity, the figure of Giufà has become an interpretative tool that opens a space for conversation on migration, identity, and relationships in a world full of tensions, enabling the adoption of other, different, and distant perspectives. Seeking elements that are not necessarily universal but that universalise perspectives and points of reference, even in a symbolic dimension, becomes an interesting starting point for deliberative action.

This approach sets aside, for the purposes of deliberation, mental participation in broad ideological doctrines and instead allows for the search for shared elements that equally concern all participants, forming topics for discussion. The project also has a clear therapeutic and social dimension, which is important in the context of deliberative processes. Theatre, as a form of expression, can help alleviate the effects of trauma (for example, related to migration or culture shock), strengthen a sense of agency, and build psychological resilience.



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