

# Mapping

## *A Map on the aesthetics of performing arts for early years*

December, 1st, 2018- November, 30th, 2022

*A project selected between the Cooperation projects (Category 2 - Larger scale cooperation projects), supported by Creative Europe, Sub-programme Culture - Call 2017*

### MAPPING

**Mapping** is an artistic research project focused on creating a sensory-based relationship with very young children, from 0 to 6 years, through performing acts. In particular, it explores the idea of “children-spectators”. Spectators of today and not only of tomorrow.

### AN AESTHETIC FOR PERFORMING ARTS FOR EARLY YEARS

Can we talk about **Aesthetic** when referring to Performing Arts for early years?

Yes, if we go back to its original meaning.

The modern meaning of Aesthetic is not the same as the one of the Classical period, where a particular aspect of knowledge that regarded the use of our senses.

Indeed, the Greek verb from which the contemporary term derives means “to perceive through the senses”. When we make a connection between the word “Aesthetic” and “children”, perhaps we can reconsider the sense-related experience - because children, especially the youngest ones, are “new subjects of the world”, they are still discovering it, as much as they are discovering themselves. They have not established specific classification criteria yet, but they perceive what is aesthetic at any level of representation.

By observing them carefully and stubbornly as adults and artists, we can detect the signs, the **aesthetic moments** experienced by the children during those times when they are “extremely sensitive”, that is, in harmony with what they perceive.

The children’s **aesthetic moments** reveal themselves through long silences, wide eyes, imperceptible sounds, sudden excitement, surprise, unexpected laughter, and stances that display the total involvement of their senses.

**A process full of questions that generate other questions**, and this is the starting point to map the **aesthetic dimension** of very young children, trying to detect the tracks, the many **aesthetic moments**, that children reveal during the artistic relationship and the underlying reasons.

### WHY A PROJECT FOR THE VERY YOUNG?

Children live in the peripheries of culture, and the youngest ones tend to remain stuck in the outmost periphery, because - according to popular sense - they don’t understand, they are “unable”, untamable or not ready to be tamed yet.

And yet, artists who work with children soon realize that they are a potentially extraordinary audience, and that focusing their artistic research work on them is definitely worth the effort.

Small children watch and listen to learn, to discover the world and perceive its innumerable details, and the many experiences the partners of **Mapping** have collected during their journey with the little ones are proof of it. Young children have their own cultural dimension and their own way of perceiving and feeling, as well as their own pace.

They think in a complex way and feel in ways we do not know yet.

We might not understand them, but with them we can establish strong sense-based relationships.

## THE MAP

**Mapping is a research work on the audience of early years in its different age groups**, because an 18-month child will share his or her sensitivity with the artist differently as compared to a 4-year-old kid.

An experimental map, a piece of fieldwork to identify recurrent and specific elements, keeping in mind the age and the different situations in which the young spectators watch the show.

The **Map** will be created by exploring **four Key Elements**, crucial to the relationship between small children and artists:

- **Contact**

If no contact is established, no **aesthetic moment** will be revealed, because if the audience is not open to perception, the creation of a **sensory-based connection** cannot take place.

- **Proposal**

It offers audience and artists - strangers to one another before the artistic encounter took place - **the surprise of perceiving themselves as “close and communicating”**.

- **Reaction**

The **aesthetic moment** might be one of the possible reactions, to be revealed by each child in very different ways and with unexpected reactions - clearly perceptible or hidden and imperceptible, personal or shared with the other children.

- **Balance**

Balance is necessary for the artist to feel the sensory-based connection at its fullest, without losing control of the artistic proposal, so that they can measure out the inputs and avoid the easy “looking-for- approval” way.

The research will be developed by intersecting the **Key Elements** with **four Filters**, four basic components of performing arts:

- **Sound**

Sound in all its aspects: music and words, songs and silence, research on rhythm and the sounds produced by natural materials...

- **Word**

Voice, which is made of words and sounds; tales and songs; text and improvisation...

- **Movement**

Dance, physical theatre, body language, the movements of the puppeteer, the attention to detail, energy...

- **Image**

Light, objects, puppets, set designs, choreographies and bodies in the scenic space..

## HOW TO CREATE THE MAP

Four working groups, into which all the Partners will be divided, will explore all the four **Key Elements**, mainly focusing on one of the four **Filters**.

Therefore, a group will work on *Sound*, the others on *Word*, or *Movement*, or *Image*.

This will lead to a number of different reflections on the Key Elements, **20-30 powerful, generative questions to be shared during the project: The Map**.

Three artists from each partner will take part in the Working Group, for a total of 12-15 professionals per group.

They will constantly interact over the four-year period of the project, together with a researcher of ITYARN (International Theatre for Young Audience Research Network), teacher in the field of performing arts for children and young people.

## THE RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

The research work on the Map will lead to four concrete results, visible developments of the work carried out over the first years of the project:

- 1) **The common co-production process** : **16 new productions** for early years
- 2) **The Map, Research book**. The four researchers of the ITYARN will take the 20-30 “points of the Map”, as their starting point to write as many short papers.
- 3) **The Map, illustrated book**. The 20-30 “points of the Map” will inspire the work of four international illustrators, co-ordinated by Bologna Children’s Book Fair: they will draw the illustrations for the Map, collected in the book.
- 4) **The Map, the Exhibition**.

There will also be other, equally important, **intangible results**.

The development of the research work on the Map will result in the identification of best practices and new approaches, useful for exploring the aesthetic dimension of very young children, giving young children more and more opportunities to access performing arts, improving the quality of artistic production for early years or opening new frontiers in the research work on children/spectators. A know-how to be shared, to be made freely available to other artists and theatres for children and young people in Europe and beyond.

## THE ACTIVITIES OF MAPPING

### The Map research

Fieldwork guided by the ITYARN researchers (International Theatre for Young Audience Research Network), who will regularly involve at least three artists of each partner.

### The co-production project

**16 different productions** created thanks to a shared productive project.

### The festivals

**Four or five festivals** in different European cities **every year**, totaling **19 festivals** of Performing Arts for Early Years over the four-year period.

### A New Audience

The research work and evaluation on the development of the audience

### Follow-up

Analysis on Direction & Dramaturgy in performing arts for early years. Focus seminars supporting the co-production project and the artistic research.

### The Final event

It will be held in the spring of 2022, it will involve all the partners and it will host all the shows produced, in order to share their work and experience.

### The Map illustrated in collaboration with Bologna Children’s Book Fair:

- **The Map, the exhibition** - Presented on the occasion of Bologna Children’s Book Fair 2022, it will then tour the partners’ cities.
- **The Map, illustrated book** - Four international illustrators will illustrate the content of the Map.
- **The “Children spectators” Exhibitions** - four exhibitions (one every year) of illustrations on this topic.

### The Map books. The project will be documented through the following publications:

- **The Map, Research book**
- **A New Audience Handbook**, notes on Audience development.
- **The Follow-up paper**, summaries and notes on the topic of direction and dramaturgy for the very young.
- **The Diary of the experience**, a diary written by the participants during the project.

## THE PARTNERSHIP

The **partnership** comprising theatres, institutions and artists who have established a deep relationship with early years over time, and who are willing to offer their specific know-how in developing this piece of research. The partnership, spread across the entire territory of the European Union, involves **18 partners from 17 European countries**:

|    |   |           |                |
|----|---|-----------|----------------|
| 1  | <b>La Baracca ONLUS - Project leader</b>          | Bologna   | Italy          |
| 2  | <b>Bologna Fiere/Bologna Children's Book Fair</b> | Bologna   | Italy          |
| 3  | <b>Toihaus Theater</b>                            | Salzburg  | Austria        |
| 4  | <b>Théâtre de La Guimbarde</b>                    | Charleroi | Belgium        |
| 5  | <b>Madam Bach</b>                                 | Odder     | Denmark        |
| 6  | <b>Dance Theatre Auraco/Kuukulkurit Ry</b>        | Helsinki  | Finland        |
| 7  | <b>Commune de Limoges</b>                         | Limoges   | France         |
| 8  | <b>Helios Theater</b>                             | Hamm      | Germany        |
| 9  | <b>Artika</b>                                     | Athens    | Greece         |
| 10 | <b>Kolibri Puppet Theatre</b>                     | Budapest  | Hungary        |
| 11 | <b>Baboro International Children's Festival</b>   | Galway    | Ireland        |
| 12 | <b>De Stillte</b>                                 | Breda     | Netherlands    |
| 13 | <b>Teatr Animaczy</b>                             | Poznan    | Poland         |
| 14 | <b>Teatrul Ion Creanga</b>                        | Bucarest  | Romania        |
| 15 | <b>Lutkovno Gledalisce Ljubljana</b>              | Ljubljana | Slovenia       |
| 16 | <b>Teatro Paraíso</b>                             | Vitoria   | Spain          |
| 17 | <b>Teater Tre</b>                                 | Stockholm | Sweden         |
| 18 | <b>Polka Theatre</b>                              | London    | United Kingdom |

### Associated Partners

The 18 partners will be actively supported by two international networks, as well as by several universities and cultural institutions, to whom the researchers who follow the project belong to.

- ITYARN (International Theatre for Young Audience Research Network), the international research network of ASSITEJ International..
- Small size, Network for the diffusion of the Performing arts for Early Years
- KJ TZ – Kinder-und JugendTheaterZentrum in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland.
- CRLI - Children's Literature Research Centre of the University of Bologna.
- University of Hildesheim, Faculty of Cultural Studies and Aesthetic Communication (Germany).
- University of Wisconsin-Madison, College of Letters and Science (USA).
- Korea National University of Arts, Drama/Theatre for the Young MFA (South Korea).