

Cluj-Napoca Babeş-Bolyai University
Faculty of Theatre and Film

Field: Theatre and Performing Arts

**COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION.
PERFORMATIVE INTERVENTION AT
CREATE.ACT.ENJOY ASSOCIATION**

DOCTORAL THESIS

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Summary

The thesis *Community participation. Performative intervention at Create.Act.Enjoy Association* investigates the way that the socio-cultural program *Art therapy by Create.Act.Enjoy* emerged almost accidentally and led to an applicable method in its own right, whose results are consolidated and sustained both by scientific arguments and qualitative and quantitative measurements. The main objective of the study is represented by measuring the social and cultural impact of community performative artistic interventions realised by the Create.Act.Enjoy Association between 2012 and 2021¹ in the field of *art therapy* in Romania, through counting, analysing and evaluating all available formal and informal resources. The narrative, as well as the numeric information, are further detailed throughout this work in: the analysis of the context in which the intervention emerged and its evolution throughout the years; the description of the applicability of an artistic approach and its evolution into a unique method nation-wide; the quantification of the impact and its results among the beneficiaries, artists and cultural workers involved, as well as the community; the conclusions regarding the success rate and the replication of the activities among the beneficiaries in hospitals and, consequently, the community.

Being at the junction between art and health, the initiative proposed as a research topic proves that interactive and participative cultural interventions could achieve a therapeutic function, generating long-term shifts in the Romanian mentality, as long as one principle is followed – the *well-being* doesn't exclusively mean the absence of the illness, but also the need of a balance between the physical, psychological and emotional planes.

The emergence, evolution and the resistance over time of the performative intervention *Art therapy by Create.Act.Enjoy* bring forward the need of taking urgent measures *to increase the Romanian quality of life*, especially when it comes to vulnerable groups. Over the years, the Create.Act.Enjoy methodology has involved both the creation of specific frameworks to investigate the work processes and included critical reflections on its implementation, as well as its documenting and correlation with similar practices. Also, the impact resulted from the participatory activities has been, on several occasions, questioned in an extended contemporary

¹ According to the Create.Act.Enjoy website, last accessed on May 13, 2022: <https://createactenjoy.com/terapie-prin-arta/>.

framework in order to provide practical continuity. Following the functional principles of adaptability, flexibility, the desire for innovation and the acceptance of vulnerability as a form of professional ownership, the purpose of the intervention has been constant – to increase *the well-being* of the members of a community through participatory artistic forms.

The theoretical notions of this thesis are sustained by the practical approach, the main research methodology being *practice as research*. The artistic practice (a fundamental part of the process) offered new perspectives on existing studies, evolving over the years in new artistic forms, which have been implemented in several micro-communities. *To perform*, in this case, is regarded as the way to understand the role and functions of the intervention, having the advantage of creating new perspectives that can be used for better understanding the analyzed socio-cultural phenomenon.

The current paper is structured in five chapters. Prior to these, the introduction presents and justifies the choice of the research subject, taking into consideration both the trends of the current social-cultural context and the uniqueness of the intervention. The chapters of the paper define an innovative method, proposing a substantiated analysis through three qualitative and quantitative case studies.

The first chapter analyzes the context in which *Art Therapy by Create.Act.Enjoy* emerged, highlighting the importance of adaptability in relation to the specific identification of the needs in the hospital micro-community, the development of artistic and organizational creativity, as well as the resistance over time of an NGO's initiative.

Taking into account the fact that cultural participation can create benefits in terms of increasing *the quality of life* and the *well-being*, as well as the fact that new forms of cultural infrastructure are needed to facilitate access to cultural events for vulnerable or disadvantaged groups, *Art Therapy by CAE* proposes a simple solution – interactive and participatory artistic interventions, in unconventional spaces – the hospital, brought to life with the support of the community – artists, cultural workers and volunteers, in order to meet the needs of the target group – patients, visitors, medical and auxiliary personnel.

Chapter I also takes a look at *Create.Act.Enjoy* over its nine years of activity in Romanian hospitals and presents a qualitative and quantitative evaluation, emphasizing the artistic principles and values that have contributed to the complexity and sustainability of the intervention – adaptability, the participatory and socio-cultural character. The performative intervention has

become, through its complexity, viability and the proposed artistic approach, the largest action of its kind in Romania, created by our association in partnership with over 40 representatives of the public sector (health, education and cultural institutions, local and national authorities) and the private sector (associations, foundations, small and medium-sized enterprises, mass-media). Throughout its nine editions, the executive team, the artists and the volunteers of Create.Act.Enjoy interacted with over 60.000 beneficiaries (patients, visitors, medical staff, administrative and auxiliary personnel), in hospitals, units assimilated to hospitals and specialized ambulatories in Cluj-Napoca, Alba Iulia, Râmnicu Vâlcea and Zalău.

Last but not least, the author of the work discusses how the lack of predictability, especially in the case of an experienced organization, can seriously affect the work of the artists and all those involved, often leading to the impossibility of strengthening and keeping the teams together.

The second chapter provides a detailed perspective on the methodology underlying the activities carried out by artists in hospitals, highlighting through its complexity the impact that the performative intervention has on all categories of beneficiaries present in hospital units, with the help of several scientific studies and empirical evidence. The solution proposed by Create.Act.Enjoy during its nine years of practical activities carried out in hospitals contributes to improving the *well-being* of the individual and to increasing the *quality of life* in the community, focusing on two main directions:

- educational-informative, which is based on promoting among the beneficiaries (as well as the general public and the authorities) the overall support needed for prevention, and the importance of increasing the quality of life and the acceptance of art therapy as a stand-alone practice in Romanian hospitals, to raise awareness of its short, medium and long term benefits;
- practical, based on performative activities carried out with the direct participation of the beneficiaries, having the purpose of developing inter and transdisciplinary artistic approaches in an unconventional space, as a complementary form of conventional therapy.

Created with the idea of allowing the access of all audience profiles in the hospital, the activities carried out – participatory workshops, itinerant performative interventions, concerts, performances, multimedia and/or immersive installations – are an opportunity to discover and

develop personal skills for all those involved, whether they are patients, visitors and hospital employees, young artists and cultural workers invited to take part in the project (actors, directors, musicians, photographers, videographers, plastic artists, coordinators etc.) or volunteers (pupils, students, corporates etc.) During its nine editions, CAE has collaborated with over 260 volunteers and 180 artists from different artistic areas, such as theatre, film, dramaturgy, performance, classical and experimental music, dance, digital art, painting, drawing and crafts.

The chapter highlights the advantages of a transdisciplinary approach in creating socio-cultural programs that aim to increase the well-being of the individual, in the context of the contemporary society. The direct collaboration and experience-sharing between the artists invited to take part in the project and the synergy between the artistic, scientific, educational and health areas stimulate the development of cross-disciplinary approaches. The work process is essential in the contemporary society not only for gaining knowledge, but also for creating innovative methodologies and solutions, under the imprint acknowledging that the humanity is facing more and more serious problems, which can no longer be solved and understood by a single discipline. The diversification of the therapeutic activities through the integration, for example, of virtual reality workshops or interactive installations that can be controlled and activated by patients, as well as the remodeling of the existing space, also relies on the exploration of transdisciplinary possibilities – which contribute to social development, using an integrative approach to cultivate a safe environment for self-discovering and expression.

Chapter III presents the quantitative and qualitative results of the documentation and research activities carried out on the chosen target group by Create.Act.Enjoy in the 2016 – 2019 timeframe. CAE had realized several research activities, in order to support the principle of personalized activity implementation, both according to the needs of the beneficiaries and the specifics of the hospital units in which they have been carried out. CAE also aimed to measure the qualitative and quantitative impact of the performative intervention *Art Therapy by Create.Act.Enjoy*. The documentations in 2016 and 2018 were carried out independently by the Create.Act.Enjoy Association, whereas the research activities in 2019 were realized with the support of partners, which contributed to structuring, centralizing and interpreting the data in the questionnaires. The author of the work also presents the detailed structure of one of the main activities of the program – the *Theatre and performing arts workshop*, exemplifying the methodology and practical exercises that it is built on.

At the same time, the chapter highlights the importance of self-evaluating the work as a form of improving the intervention over time and, as a method of specifically developing the participatory activities that can respond to the identified needs – the self-evaluation of one's work is a tool that helps identifying the weaknesses and the qualities a working methodology can have. The documentations and researches carried out by Create.Act.Enjoy over the years have been the basis for developing personalized activities, designed to respond as specifically as possible to the needs of the target group. With each passing year, the overall results have been a constant barometer of the quality of our work and the efforts to improve the quality of the team.

The fourth chapter begins with the presentation of the *burnout* phenomenon and the effects it has on the individual on an emotional, physical, and psychological level. Described as "the result of the unsuccessful management of *chronic stress* in the workplace"², the *burnout* is characterized by three main dimensions:

- exhaustion or the feeling of having a complete lack of energy, experienced on psychological, emotional and physical level;
- depersonalization, manifested by an increased degree of mental distancing, causing cynical or negative attitudes in relation to one's work or working partners;
- the absence of personal or professional fulfillment, accompanied by a feeling of hopelessness, decreased productivity, low effectiveness, and reduced self-confidence.

The chapter continues to analyze the impact of performative activities on the reduction of *burnout* symptoms, occupational stress, and anxiety, based on two case studies conducted between 2020 and 2021: the intervention *Cultural prescriptions for burnout* carried out by the Cluj Cultural Center and a series of *Creative workshops for reducing burnout symptoms among medical personnel* in hospitals in Cluj-Napoca and Zalău.

The *burnout* topic, more and more present in the contemporary society, will be on the researchers' agenda for a while – there's a need for a clear definition of the fields and the contexts that contribute to its emergence. One of the certainties of the phenomenon, which several studies

² „Burnout is a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed.”, „QD85 Burnout”, *International Classification of Diseases-11*, last accessed on February 2, 2022:

<https://icd.who.int/browse11/l-m/en#/http://id.who.int/icd/entity/129180281>.

confirm, is the presence of exhaustion, especially the emotional one, along with the recognition of the effects produced by long-term exposure to factors of intense work. Even if the research is still far from being completed when it comes to provide a clear picture of the areas in which *the burnout syndrome* is prone to occur, it is certain that its presence among employees who work directly with patients or clients has led to a shallow introduction of policies and measures for combating or preventing it.

Chapter V focuses on the impact that the intervention has had on the community level, especially among the volunteers with whom Create.Act.Enjoy has worked over the years. Involving in volunteering activities can produce positive effects not only on beneficiaries or on organizations that work with volunteers, but also on those who practice it. Health benefits include the improvement of mental and physical health, the increase of well-being and self-esteem, the alleviation of symptoms of depression or the increase of the ability to manage one's own emotions. Moreover, there are arguments that state the concomitant involvement in several types of volunteering can increase the well-being of the volunteer.

Also, the chapter reveals the impact of the intervention on the community, *Art Therapy by Create.Act.Enjoy* standing out in the national socio-cultural context as an important model of good practices.

In the last part of the paper, the author concludes that art (through its wide range of instruments) can generate complex interventions that contribute both to the increase of the well-being among the people whose health is affected, as well as to the development of raise-awareness campaigns to maintain the quality of life at a comfortable level. Moreover, according to the World Health Organization, art can have a strong impact within communities by supporting the processes of integration or reintegration into society and encouraging the action of individually understanding its potential. The artistic activities stimulate and perfect the understanding, accepting and self-managing processes of an individual, with the aim of improving health – which is seen as a dynamic mechanism in a permanent transformation.³

The *Art therapy by Create.Act.Enjoy* intervention represents a community example of using the performing arts in multiple forms, with the sole purpose of increasing the state of well-being. Developed within the hospital's unconventional framework, the CAE methodology (which

³ Daisy Fancourt, Saoirse Finn, *op.cit.*, p. 2.

has *participation* as its basic principle) represents both a form of diversifying the experience of the artists and cultural workers, as well as a practical example of how interactive artistic forms support health – the method has the potential of being easily replicated outside the space where it was created. This thesis, with the help of the qualitative and quantitative analysis it presents, highlights the degree of practical applicability of an artistic approach which has resulted in a unique method at national level over the years. With short, medium and long-term effects among both the beneficiaries, the artist and cultural workers involved and the community, the *Art Therapy by Create.Act.Enjoy* intervention represents a model of good practices that is essential to be replicated and developed in order to improve *the quality of life* – both at the level of micro-communities and the city as a whole.

The works referenced in this paper have contributed to the scientific argumentation of the proposed subject, bringing together theatrical and performative studies with works from different areas, such as culture and cultural management, psychology, medicine, occupational therapy, architecture, anthropology, and sociology, focusing in particular on recent and very recent titles, considering the actuality of the matter and its continuous development.

The annexes include a series of photographs documenting the methodology and the case studies analyzed throughout the paper.

Keywords: performative intervention, participatory, art therapy, community art, burnout, hospital, wellbeing