The C Project

Puppetry

by Thalia Teatro (Slovakia)
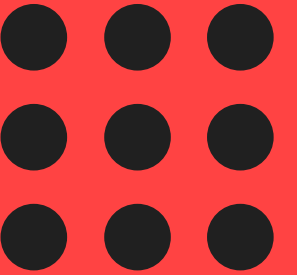
About The C Project

The C project is a joint initiative created by 3 international partners: *Fundacja Innowacyjnej Edukacji* (**Poland**), *Thalia Teatro* (**Slovakia**) and *Creative Reflex* (**Denmark**).

Throughout three international mobilities, the project aimed to empower youth to use training methods within three different, yet overlapping, theatrical fields: clowning, mime and puppetry, and to apply these theatrical methods specifically to empower young people to raise awareness and act on environmental and climate change-related issues in a creative way.

The non-verbal performative art world is often unexplored among young people, so the idea of the project was to introduce unorthodox techniques of talking about the environment to young audiences, and to strengthen the participants' communicative and performative skills.

Clowning, mime and puppetry have the power to poke and move people, and as they are an ancient performative art of storytelling with the inherent power of social change. These techniques have the potential to engage the audience to think and act differently.

The aim of the project is to develope competencies of youth workers in the field of youth empowerment at local level; to act strategically towards impactful climate action through the performative art of improvisation, mime, clown and puppetry.

The project is funded by Erasmus+ programme.

THALIA TEATRO

Fundacja Innowacyjnej Edukacji (Poland) was created as a response to the needs of social inclusion, fighting against xenophobia and promotion of human rights. In its educational programs it uses methods based on non-verbal communication, theatre, drama, mime and physical theatre. The Foundation also organises scientific-based workshops and activities that increase ecological awareness, using a non-formal approach to learning.

Thalia Teatro (Slovakia) is a professional theatre from central Slovakia led by Monika Necpálová, established in 2013. It works both as a theatre and an educational institution that offers a unique experience of learning by playing for children, youth and adults. Thalia Teatro also organises workshops for different target groups on improvisation, storytelling, puppetry, mask, commedie dell´arte, preparation and implementation of performances. The organisation works also internationaly.

Creative Reflex (Denmark) is a social company founded in 2019. It started out as a network of creatives that offers and promotes the power of creative empowerment and active citizenship. Creative Reflex has supported artists in creating a community within clowning and facilitated the delivery of several clown workshops and shows for environmental change.

Puppet IT

The second training course of The C Project took place in Murzasichle (Poland) and was dedicated to puppetry methods in raising awareness of deforestation. The mobility was developed and organised by the Slovak professional theatre Thalia Teatro and featured skilled lecturers with an experience in puppet theatre, Monika Necpálová a Evgeny Ibragimov.

The course covered a broad spectrum of activities involved in puppetry. The participants were to understand the nature of a puppet, practice its manipulation on the stage, learn the aspects of storytelling with a puppet and go through all the stages of the process of puppet creation. For trainers it was important to show why puppetry and masked theatre is a great tool to talk on climate issues and raise environmental awareness.

The C

The main aims of the course were to deepen the participants' theoretical and practical understanding of puppetry techniques as a methodology for youth empowerment and to encourage usage of puppetry to promote eco-awareness, environmental protection and anti-deforestation actions through peer learning.

Puppet IT objectives:

- To develop participants' competences in using puppetry methodology for work with youth;
- To deepen participants' understanding of puppetry as a methodology for youth empowerment;
- To learn and practice puppetry theatre performing skills;
- To promote youth empowerment and environmental protection and to encourage youth to take climate actions, particularly in the field of anti-deforestation;
- To discover and promote experiential learning, peer learning and non-formal education.

The C Project

Activities of Puppet IT
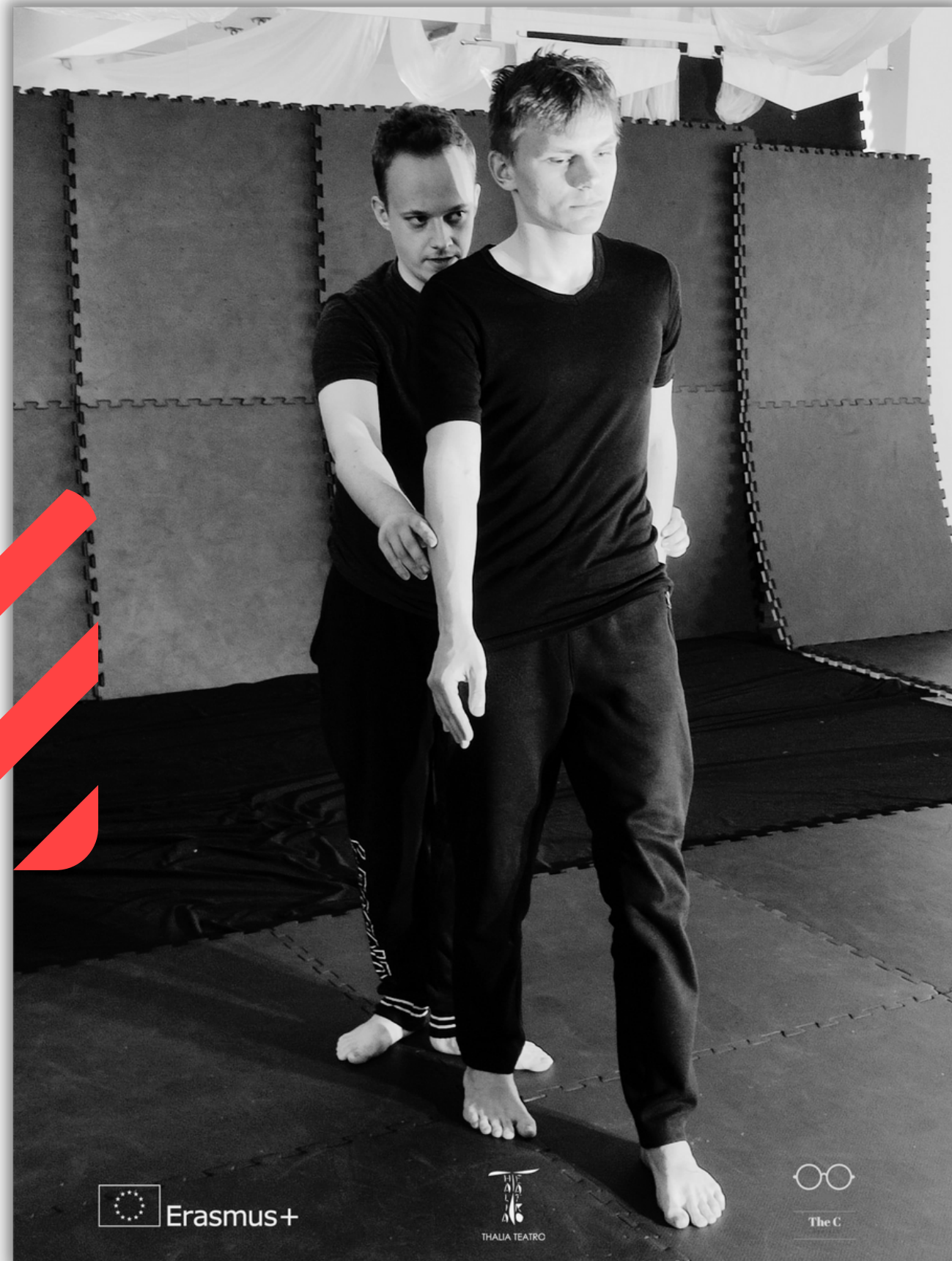
During the week-long training, the participants took part in various theoretical and practical activities. Puppet IT had a two-tier structure:

In the first part of the training, participants developed their skills in puppetry. It included all aspects of puppet animation of puppets: movement, voice, and puppet character creation. Participants focused on the animation of puppets individually, as well as practised animation in the group. Group activities involved interaction between several puppet characters on the stage, as well as animating a puppet that requires more than one puppeteer to function. Participants learned to animate different types of puppets. Also, during the human puppet training, they learned to manipulate each other as puppets.

THALIA TEATRO

The C
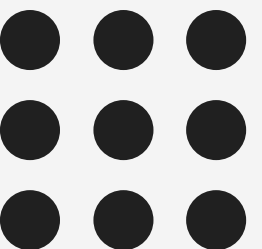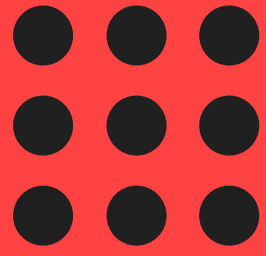
In the second part of the training, participants had the opportunity to create puppets and masks from ecological, recycled and recyclable materials. They went through the whole process of puppet creation, including concept development, choice of materials, making a puppet and using it in a performance. They learned to understand a puppet's nature, to manipulate it, develop interactions between puppets and use them as tools to engage youth into ecological actions.

All puppets and masks that were created were used in the puppetry performance (series of etudes with puppets) called The Tree that tackled the issue of deforestation - anti-deforestation. Participants worked together on the dramaturgy of the performance, tested their skills as actors and directors during the rehearsal, and performed the play to the audience. The performance was broadcasted live on the Facebook social network.
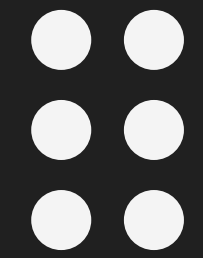
Methodology

Anima is a Latin word for a soul. To animate a puppet means to create a soul for it. Learning the process of the animation includes comprehension of the puppet's nature and understanding puppetry as an artistic method not just for children and youth, but also for adults.

We assume that puppetry is one of the best ways to communicate ecological issues from stage to the audience. We see puppetry as an opportunity for every performer to express important topics connected with climate actions and climate problems and to reach audiences, inspiring them to be more concerned about deforestation in their countries.

Each puppet is an alive and valid character. The magic of puppetry opens the door to new characters, otherwise possible only off-stage in classic drama, such as wind, trees, air or water, planets, stars, even nature itself. These characters can be animated, so they can talk and interact with human actors and each other, which looks very natural and appropriate in a puppet theatre performance. To animate means to make an object alive using movement and voicing. The voice includes speech and other sounds. The movement can consist of breath, manipulation of body parts, and movement in theatrical space. The way a puppet moves depends on the particular puppet's nature, as well as on the performer's imagination.

The poetry of puppetry is indeed a magic of the theatre, when nonliving things - objects and puppets - become alive.

Puppetry is a physical activity for the artist. Some puppets require more than one person to animate it. In this case, puppetry transforms from an individual work to a teamplay. Coordination of movements and voicing becomes very important. In addition to that, the coordination of interaction between this puppet and other entities on the stage still requires attention, so the task becomes even more advanced and requires additional theory and practice. In exchange for that, such a complex puppet enables more complex behaviour and thrilling interactions.

At the same time, we assume that every puppet regardless of its complexity can be a persuasive character and provide a unique experience to the audience. Keeping that in mind, our methodology on this training involved making our own puppets of trees using waste, recyclable and biodegradable materials, which had helped emphasise the ecological approach to the whole activity.
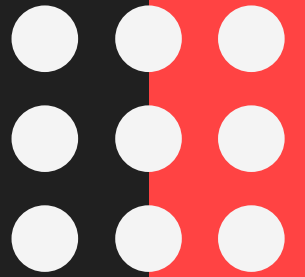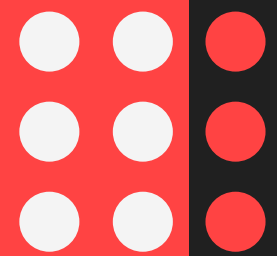
Methodology

Working with puppets: useful tips

What to pay attention to when working with a puppet? We have some practical tips based on the puppetry theory and real puppeteers' experience!

- **Get to know your puppet well.** A puppet is like a musical instrument for the puppeteer. It is crucial to invest time and effort to understand its mechanics and physics. That is why making a puppet yourself is a good practice: you will understand each centimetre of the handmade puppet, and be aware of its full capacities and immanent restrictions.

- **No two puppets are alike.** Different kinds of puppets behave and look differently: marionettes, rod puppets, dummies, hand and finger puppets require different manipulation techniques and skills. In general, performers should clearly understand what they want to say with the puppet, and have a constant inner monologue to coordinate their own intentions and thoughts with the movement of the puppet.

- **Look with your puppet's nose.** While human actors use their eyes to look, puppets cannot afford it. Instead, they look with their noses. The nose of a puppet should always point at the direction of the object or another character the puppet interacts with. The same rule works for masks which are believed to be an element of the puppet theatre. As for the puppeteer's eyes, they should always look at the puppet to establish and maintain physical and mental connection with it.

- **Express what you can without words.** Although it may look different, a puppet does not require a lot of text. Skilled puppeteers convey any mood or thoughts through a way the puppet moves and interacts with objects, other puppets or parts of its own body. Despite the minimalist and non-verbal nature of this approach, a puppet can be understood without an actor speaking for it. At the same time, nobody forbids a puppet to talk to other puppets, actors, or to address an audience.

- **No rush.** As we already know, a puppet can express a lot with its pose and gestures. It is hard to control a puppet that moves fast: it shakes and creates an unnecessary fuss, so it is hard for a spectator to understand that any interaction is happening. That is why you should operate a puppet slowly, carefully position it in space and give sense to its every gesture.

Methodology
Looking for an ecological topic

We have learned that puppetry is a great way to raise ecological issues and to spread awareness among young audiences. You know how to make a puppet and are eager to learn how to use it. And so, you finally decide to create a puppet performance! But how do you choose what to talk about? Ecology is a broad topic, and it may be hard to come up with where to start.

Our main landmark here will be our target audience. To begin with, you can guess or find out what is going to be interesting to your spectators. It is often connected with the locality where you are planning to perform. For example, Thalia Teatro held several local activities in small towns and villages of central Slovakia. This region is historically connected with forest protection, forestry, and timber industry, so forest is a nice eco topic to work with there. People will be engaged in the narrative that is directly related to their experience.

Another way to approach your target audience's specifics is to choose an unusual problem to talk to them, so a story and an issue behind it will be completely new to them. For example, during some of the workshops of Thalia Teatro in central Slovakia a problem of microplastic in the ocean was discussed. For most young people in the mountain landscape of central Slovakia that has no access to the sea it was an unusual issue to think about, but they had an opportunity to broaden their horizons and get involved in global problems.

Last but not least, it is important for the ecological topic to be interesting to you, the lecturer, tutor, or performer. What bothers you the most right now? Maybe you have come across an old plastic bottle with no signs of decomposition on your forest stroll this morning. Or you love stocks, and recently became interested in how the European emission trading system works. If a topic resonates with you, a puppet performance will be destined to succeed.

Methodology

Dramaturgy of environmental puppet performances

Puppet theatre allows performers to speak to their audiences about ecology in both metaphorical and direct ways. That is why the dramaturgy of an eco puppet play depends mostly on your imagination. But, there are several important things to keep in mind.

In puppetry, puppets and human actors are equals. We should understand that birds, fish, flowers, trees and other puppet entities can be main characters of the play, and it is on us to get the most out of it. While in classic drama theatre it is hard to imagine characters talking to trees, let alone trees speaking to characters, in puppetry trees and other elements of nature talk, interact with human actors and each other. In the performance The Tree, which was a result of the puppetry training course during The C Project, forest was a living being, as well as every single tree was a character itself.

The presence of puppets that represent natural phenomena, plants and animals does not exclude puppets representing humans, for example if your idea is to show the relationship between people and nature. Ecology means knowledge about home, and this home can address people directly through puppetry. By saying people we mean both human characters and your spectators. In puppetry, each of these interactions will look very natural.

A director should pay attention to the place of puppeteers on the stage. They are allowed to interact with their puppets directly, or they can wear masks to become other characters. If a puppeteer is not a part of the plot, it can be eliminated by proper work with light on the stage and wearing dark clothes.

Methodology

How to motivate learners to create environmental puppet and masked performances?

One of the main focuses of The C Project was peer learning. It means that the participants learned from one another and encouraged the same approach among the people they conveyed the knowledge to. After the training, the participants organised workshops and performances on the local level, often working with people with pedagogical background, explaining the advantages of puppetry to them.

Our mission is to convince as many learners as possible to use puppetry methods while talking about ecology with their students. If you have read our articles, you are believed to be convinced already. But how do you convince others?
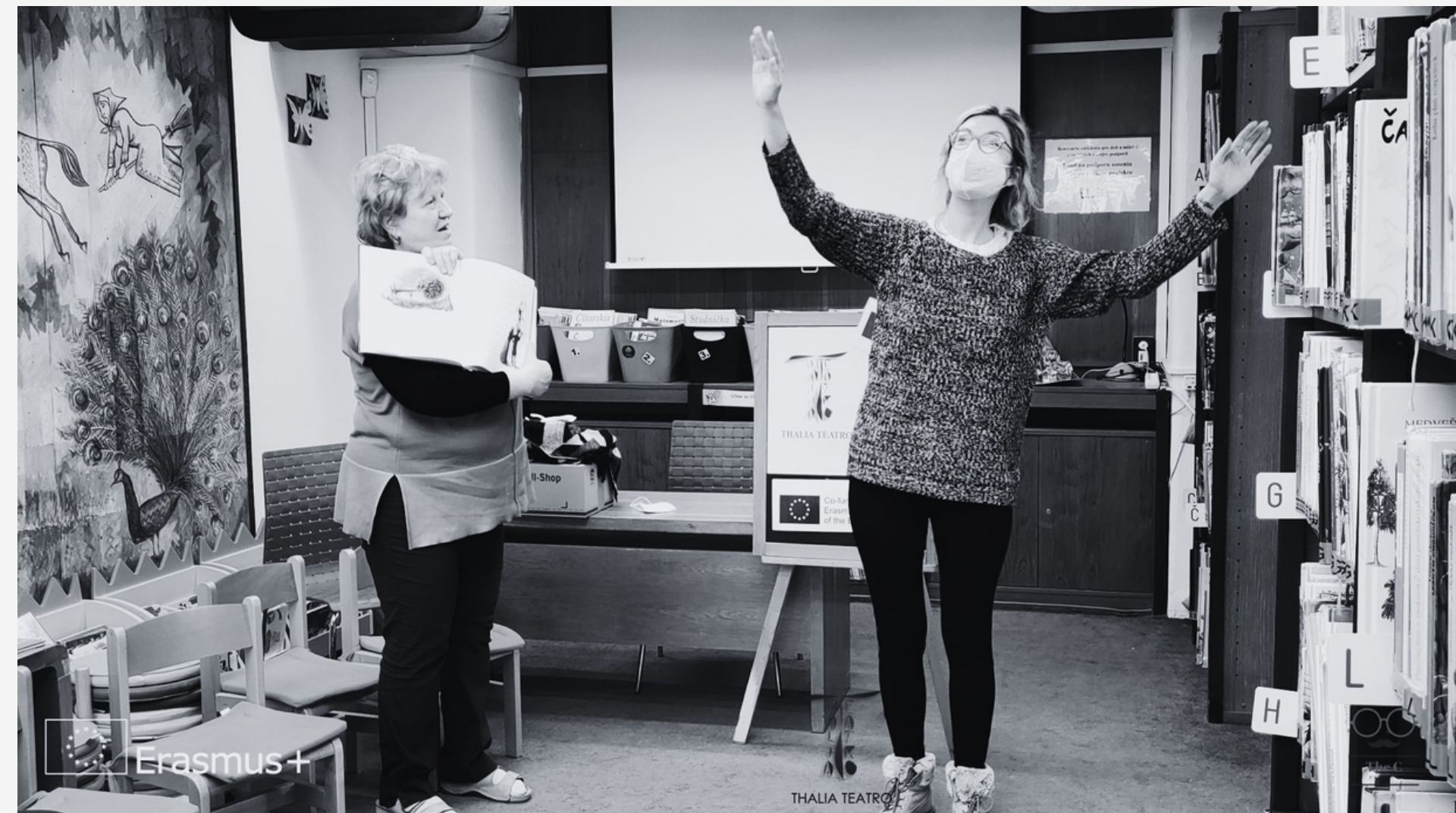
Explain how puppetry and masks can help convey ecological messages. From the previous pages, you know that masks can transform actors into completely different entities, and puppets can create fantastic landscapes where trees, forests, Sun or Earth are characters who can walk, speak and interact with each other or with audiences. You have to show the potential lecturers the magic of puppetry and some examples of environmental plays that involve these methods to persuade them that puppetry is, without doubt, one of the most convenient, suitable and impressive ways to raise ecological awareness.

Find an interesting ecological topic. You already know how to choose an ecological problem to cover with the performance. Encourage the tutors to search for the topic that is close and interesting to the lecturer and relevant to the target audience of his performance or workshop. The potential lecturer should be into this topic, and many ideas of how to use puppetry while talking about it will come to his or her mind.

Show that professional props or expensive materials are not needed. In other words, all props will look professional if made with love and manipulated with belief and joy. Great masks and puppets can be created on your own from cheap and ecological materials, even from waste. Show the lecturer how to make his or her own puppet or mask and learn how to understand it and to use it together for the prop to look persuasive in the lecturer's hands.

Let imagination run free. You should explain that puppets and masks are impressive theatrical props that have a unique impact on audiences. They don't even require complicated text or professional writing, because non-verbal approach is suitable for this kind of theatre. The lecturer should focus on how to convey the idea, emotion or the atmosphere, and the audience will believe it.
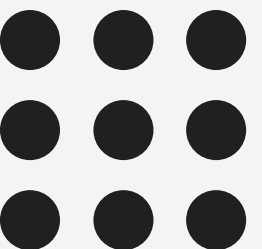
Local Activities

Participants of the second training course of The C Projects have increased their competences in puppet storytelling, developing verbal and non-verbal puppet performances, and creating plays engaging the audience for active observation and reflection during the performance aimed at the promotion of environmental protection and eco-awareness, as well as promoting the eco-actions focusing on pro-climate actions. After the mobility, the participants have had an opportunity to test their knowledge and to spread it further by organising a series of local workshops in Slovakia that involved puppetry and tackled environmental issues.

The workshops by Thalia Teatro aimed at different groups of people. Our workshops were held in the Regional Library of L. Stur (Zvolen). One of them was called We are all forest and consisted of various educational and entertaining activities for children and youth to learn about forest, its inhabitants and its connection to the world of humans. Illustrated books about forest helped the children to understand forest better, while modelling clay helped to create elements of the environment and to use it as puppets and theatrical props.

Another workshop was for adult employees of the library. The participants created theatrical masks (which are a part of a puppet theatre, as we remember) and used them during a discussion about historical, geographical and political aspects of ecology in the regional context.

THALIA TEATRO

thaliateatro.sk
facebook.com/ThaliaTeatro
instagram.com/thaliateatro

Fundacja
Innowacyjnej
Edukacji

fundacjainnowacyjnejedukacji.eu
facebook.com/FundacjaInnowacyjnejEdukacji
instagram.com/fundacjainnowacyjnejedukacji

CREATIVE REFLEX

creativereflex.dk
instagram.com/creative_reflex

The C
PROJECT

Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union