



# Arts & Sports as Resolution Media

Slovenia/Research Report

WP8

September 2023

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**Reference:** D.RAD [D8.1]

This research was conducted under the Horizon 2020 project 'De-Radicalisation in Europe and Beyond: Detect, Resolve, Re-integrate' (959198).

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## List of Abbreviations

ST

Street Theatre

CDM

Creative Dance and Movement

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all the participants who engaged in art activities in this research for inspiring me.

I would also like to thank Romana Zajec for her kind and professional support in implementation of this research and in delivering this report.

## About the Project

D.Rad is a comparative study of radicalisation and polarisation in Europe and beyond. It aims to identify the actors, networks, and wider social contexts driving radicalisation, particularly among young people in urban and peri-urban areas. D.Rad conceptualises this through the I-GAP spectrum (injustice-grievance-alienation-polarisation) with the goal of moving towards measurable evaluations of de-radicalisation programmes. Our intention is to identify the building blocks of radicalisation, which include a sense of being victimised; a sense of being thwarted or lacking agency in established legal and political structures; and coming under the influence of “us vs them” identity formulations.

D.Rad benefits from an exceptional breadth of backgrounds. The project spans national contexts including the UK, France, Italy, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Finland, Slovenia, Bosnia, Serbia, Kosovo, Israel, Iraq, Jordan, Turkey, Georgia, Austria, and several minority nationalisms. It bridges academic disciplines ranging from political science and cultural studies to social psychology and artificial intelligence. Dissemination methods include D.Rad labs, D.Rad hubs, policy papers, academic workshops, visual outputs and digital galleries. As such, D.Rad establishes a rigorous foundation to test practical interventions geared to prevention, inclusion and de-radicalisation.

With the possibility of capturing the trajectories of sixteen nations and several minority nations, the project will provide a unique evidence base for the comparative analysis of law and policy as nation states adapt to new security challenges. The process of mapping these varieties and their link to national contexts will be crucial in uncovering strengths and weaknesses in existing interventions.

## Executive Summary/Abstract

This national report presents research conducted in Slovenia on how arts and sports can contribute to social inclusion. The research examines how activities, organised in two artistic fields - Street Theatre during international youth exchanges, and Creative Dance and Movement within the Cycle of Creative Dance and Movement Workshops, foster resilience among youth residing in the region of its capital, Ljubljana.

Data were collected through participant observation during Street Theatre and Creative Dance Movement activities, in non-formal conversations, during two Art interventions that included public performances and performances in front of other participants, and in four focus groups. The results indicated that through these artistic activities, participants increased their resilience by raising their self-confidence, enhancing self-acceptance, developing their self-expression, building trust with other participants, and experiencing support and collaborative strength within the group. Participation in these activities equipped them with practical and experiential skills and tools not only to foster a stronger sense of belonging but also to promote it in everyday life, leading to an equal and inclusive local community.

# Arts & Sports as a Means of alleviating Social Exclusion

## 1. Introduction

Embodied practices of expression and collective physical experiences implemented through art and sports can often reach beyond verbal expression and experiences, delving further and deeper into creating group inclusiveness and social inclusion.

This national report outlines research, adhering to the WP 8 guidelines, on how arts and sports can foster more resilient communities in an urban context, increasing social inclusion and preventing social isolation and alienation that might lead to radicalisation.

The research conducted in Slovenia by Zavod APIS illustrates how activities in two artistic fields - Street Theatre and Creative Dance and Movement - became expressive mediums to promote social inclusion among young people in the Ljubljana region, the capital of Slovenia. The analysis demonstrates how resilience was fostered among participants at both individual and collective levels, by recognising one's inherent strength and value, and by understanding the power of collective action and supportive group dynamics. Among the 11 research participants, various reasons for potential social disadvantage were identified. However, there was also a shared aspiration among them to be acknowledged, recognised, respected, and included as equals in the local community.

## 2. Literature Review: Art & Sports as a means of alleviating social exclusion

Arts, creativity and sports reportedly have great power to strengthen social inclusion. When attempting to analyse the impact evaluation criteria to better assess their impact, core measures, as we defined them, often include participation rates of marginalised groups within their activities. The underpinning of such activities should focus on cultivating constructive personal growth, resilience building, fostering belongingness, promoting social cohesion, and addressing injustice.

The inclusion of socially vulnerable groups in shaping art and sports activity is essential for impact. Inclusion of participants who experience or are at risk of alienation, and/or feelings of injustice or grievance, including those facing economic disadvantages, discrimination, or other challenges, is essential. This type of inclusive programme design where participants feel safe, valued, supported and empowered is of high importance (Haudenhuysse, Theeboom, & Nols, 2013).



Involving vulnerable populations promotes aspects of social inclusion and builds community resilience against anti-social behaviours by providing access to positive programs (Morgan, H., Parker, A., & Marturano, N., 2020; Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011). Morgan (et al), argue that the development of life skills gained in group (sport and art related) activities include various personal and social competencies that are beneficial beyond the sports context (Morgan et al., 2020, Gould & Carson, 2008). Developing skills through activities in a group along with self-expression can increase confidence, emotional regulation and self-esteem among marginalised groups. Fostering these intrapersonal qualities aids in constructing resilience and preventing negative behaviours by meeting basic psychological needs, and consideration of these factors must be given to programme structures that best enable this individual development. It is well documented that the arts provide key channels for self-discovery, emotional regulation and meaning-making beneficial well beyond artistic spaces (Stickley et al., 2017; Dissanayake 1995; Backos & Pagon 1999; Creek 2002; Schmid 2005). Creative practice also builds prosocial competencies like perspective-taking, social skills and nonviolence, fostering engaged citizenship, and so activities and programmes focused on imagination, problem-solving and resilience equips marginalised groups with tools for wellbeing and civic participation.

Fostering feelings of belonging, kinship and peer support constitutes a pivotal criterion in evaluating an activity's impact on marginalised participants. Jonas and Mummendey emphasise the importance of joint tasks or goals to facilitate successful contact that enables support within the group (Jonas, K. J., & Mummendey, A.,2008). Acknowledging the 'politics of belonging' by creating safe, identity-affirming spaces that respect the diverse ways individuals negotiate belonging are crucial to successful activity design. This approach shifts the focus from the macro-sphere of national and international politics to the micro-sphere of individual identification processes, boundary drawing, and formal politics of membership. Such a nuanced understanding of belonging empowers marginalised youth/population to effectively navigate and counter experiences of exclusion, recognizing that their means of belonging are subject to individual negotiation and expression (Mattes, et al., 2020). Activities that facilitate vulnerable self-expression allow deep reciprocal understanding to emerge. Safe, identity-affirming spaces prepare marginalised youth to counter exclusion. As Pettigrew & Tropp show, trust grounded in mutually affirming exchanges is essential before bridging across societal divides (2006).

Both Hutchins and Spaaij argue that any attempt to use sport to promote community engagement and settlement must be informed by a critical awareness of its strengths and limitations as a social practice and cultural form (Hutchins, 2007; Spaaij, 2013). Intergroup contact can nurture a supportive environment within groups, which is necessary for creating safe spaces where solidarity can flourish. This bonding also serves as a foundation for 'bridging' across differences (Jonas and Mummendey, 2008). Positive experiences created within the ingroup, or 'established group' (Elias & Scotson, 1994) help form a superordinate identity that includes both the ingroup and

outgroup, moving beyond mere tolerance of outgroup members to fostering genuine relationships and cooperation.

Participatory art including community engagement and partnerships are known for addressing structural inequalities. They emphasise the critical role of creative activities, like Photovoice and street theatre, in raising awareness and fostering active civic participation among marginalised groups. Collaborative and participatory creative methods such as these can successfully empower vulnerable groups to express, critically and constructively reflect on their realities (Wang et al., 2006). Moreover, these methods can also engage policymakers and community leaders effectively to critically examine and confront the root causes of inequality. Datoo and Chagani's (2013) street theatre program with marginalised youth highlights how such collaborative efforts can facilitate critical thinking and dialogue on social issues, promoting understanding and reform. This criterion underlines the importance of arts in empowering oppressed communities to identify and address social challenges, thereby contributing to structural change and reducing marginalisation.

By exploring above mentioned criteria into account, this report will examine two practices from Slovenia through the lens of the discussed criteria, including inclusive participation, creative growth, belonging, shifting attitudes and addressing injustice can help leverage arts and sports for social inclusion.

### 3. Challengeing Otherness Through arts and Sports: Cultural and Political Context of Arts and Sports as Collaboration & Resolution Media

#### 3.1 Introduction

In the Slovenian context, the potential of arts and sports as mediums for collaboration and resolution is yet to be fully realised at the institutional level. While the specific national programmes that recognize the transformative power of arts and sports for social inclusion are missing, grassroots initiatives and NGOs have taken the lead. These organisations have identified the arts and sports as potent tools for fostering social cohesion, bridging the gap between established locals and vulnerable populations, and promoting cultural diversity. However, their efforts often face discontinuity due to financial constraints. Given the limitations of public institutions in their formal roles, it becomes imperative for the government to support these NGOs, ensuring that arts and sports are leveraged as effective mediums for social inclusion. To harness the potential of arts and sports in fostering social inclusion, it is essential for the government to understand and engage with the 'emotional landscapes' of communities, especially those that are underrepresented or socially excluded. This requires a proactive approach, where the government collaborates closely with local

practitioners and NGOs, understanding the unique challenges and needs of the community. By funding grassroots projects that have shown promise and ensuring their sustainability, the government can create a more inclusive environment. This commitment should extend beyond project funding. It involves employing individuals with a rich experience in community-level projects, including those coming from disadvantaged groups, ensuring their active participation in community dialogues, events, and in decision-making processes.

Furthermore, understanding these emotional landscapes means recognizing the multifaceted challenges faced by community members. For instance, several participants of foreign nationality mentioned that their feeling of exclusion was fueled by local municipality procedures as being long, difficult, and sometimes disrespectful which also importantly shapes “emotional landscapes” of these members of the community. Addressing these administrative challenges is not just a matter of efficiency but is crucial for shaping positive emotional landscapes and fostering genuine social cohesion. Activities and programmes should be designed to be inclusive, ensuring that they address the needs of diverse groups and avoid the pitfalls of segregation. By doing so, the likelihood of young people becoming involved in divisive or exclusionary narratives is reduced, promoting a more cohesive and less polarised society.

### 3.2 Case Studies: Analysis of Use of Arts and Sports as Media to Challenge Othering & Forge Intercultural Dialogue and Shared Identities

This section explains how activities, organised in two different fields of art - Street Theatre and Creative Dance and Movement - were used as media to build **resilience** and, consequently, encouraged **social inclusion** among youth residing in the Ljubljana region. Through this, they also fostered ontological security among them. In this research, we specifically address how physical and emotional resilience among the research participants was heightened.

The analysis uses Paulo Freire’s concept of “critical consciousness” to indicate where these changes occurred. Through this concept, individuals raise awareness that change is possible in given situations where participants “reinterpret their situation and develop strategies for improving it and can envision solutions involving individual and collective action” (Jemal, 2017: 8). Moreover, as stated by Hernandez et al. (2010), through the development of critical consciousness, individuals become more aware of their active role in relation to others as well as within the group.

When the critical consciousness and, consequently, the resilience of the individual is raised, and that of the group too, identifying shared identities and creating shared

narratives in a safe and supportive environment can lead to the individual taking concrete action in their everyday life towards an active role in society.

The section identifies this at two levels:

a) at the individual level, where participants were learning to accept and understand themselves, and to express themselves through creating and voicing their self-narrative by performative individual actions (ST activities), embodied practices (CDM activities), and verbally ("I am" exercise, non-formal conversations).

b) at the interpersonal / group level, where participants built on meaningful interactions, identifying shared identities, and creating shared narratives through performative pair / group actions (ST activities, CDM activities, Street Theatre Art intervention), embodied practices in pairs / groups (ST activities, CDM activities), by words (non-formal conversations, focus groups), and by performing in public space and interacting with the local community (ST Art intervention).

## **Methodology**

In this section, we look into the methodology underpinning our research, offering a comprehensive view of our recruitment strategy, participant selection, and the varied approaches we adopted in the process. This multilayered methodology comprises a strategic blend of participant observations, focus groups, and art interventions, all aimed at deepening understanding of the participants' experiences and perspectives in the contexts of Street Theatre and Creative Dance and Movement activities. By reading the following subsections, the reader will gain a clear insight into how each component contributes to the broader objective of understanding social inclusion through the lens of the arts.

### Recruitment strategy

The research participants for the Street Theatre (ST) activity were chosen based on their participation in the Erasmus+ Youth Exchange "izPOSTAVI se V javni PROSTOR 4" (translated as "EXPOSE yourself IN public SPACE") held in Ljubljana, Slovenia. The exchange was orchestrated by Ana Monro Theatre, a nationally and internationally renowned theatre with over four decades of expertise in public space performance, production, and education within the realm of Contemporary Performative Street Arts.

To source participants for this exchange, the theatre initially reached out to youths who had previously engaged in their programmes. Subsequently, a public call for participation was issued. Over three months, international youth exchanges were

facilitated in Slovenia, Croatia, and Serbia. Our principal attention was directed to the inaugural exchange, "Izpostavi se v javni PROSTOR 4", taking place from 26th June to 4th July in Ljubljana, synchronised with the Street Theatre Festival, Ana Desetnica. Besides Slovenian participants, youths from Croatia and Serbia also partook. These exchanges comprised skill-acquisition exercises spanning Street Theatre and video production in Slovenia, Performative Vocalisation in Croatia, and Contemporary Circus in Serbia. A distinct merit of the exchange was its commitment to fostering dialogue, challenging stereotypes, and furthering social inclusion, exemplified by the involvement of hearing-impaired participants. For the Creative Dance and Movement (CDM) activity, research participants were identified through the social networks of Zavod APIS, the non-governmental organisation Institute for African Studies (with whom Zavod APIS collaborated), and the researcher. Additionally, a public invitation was extended for the Cycle of Creative Movement workshops, disseminated via Zavod APIS's social media channels, targeting women, ideally from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Excluding the core research participants, all of whom were under 27, several women beyond this age bracket also joined the workshops (though they weren't part of the research).

The Cycle of Creative Movement encompassed four workshops, all led by the researcher. All attendees were required to confirm their availability and commitment prior to embarking on the Cycle. A few of them had previously participated in Zavod APIS's programmes before the CDM activity.

### Case Study 1: Street Theatre Activities

The Street Theatre activities provided workshops and exercises in the fields of physical theatre, circus, contemporary dance, contact improvisation, and acrobatics. These sessions were led by professional artists performing at the "Ana Desetnica" festival. Throughout the day, participants engaged in the aforementioned activities and, in the evening, they attended street theatre and contemporary street art performances as part of the festival. These activities furnished participants with artistic tools for self-expression and collaborative creation. As Dattoo and Chagani (2011: 22) explain: "Performance arts offer a potent representational mode to express and address individual and collective self and identity. They engage a variety of senses; kinaesthetic and visual intelligences, which influence our emotional intelligence and lead towards positive social changes (Training Manual, n.d., p. 5).

### Case Study 2: Creative Dance and Movement activities

The Creative Dance and Movement activities encompassed a variety of exercises for individual, paired, and group work. The workshops employed multiple techniques and tools from somatic exercises, tension release exercises, improvisational dance, Street

Theatre, and Dance Movement Therapy. Each workshop began and concluded with opening and closing circles, allowing participants to share their impressions, comments, and questions. Activities in this artistic domain were selected not only because physical activity generally promotes positive mood and well-being but also because these specific tools facilitate the desomatisation of symptoms. This refers to the “understanding of bodily experiences, such as the use of body awareness and grounding techniques”, and kinaesthetic empathy, which involves “attuning to others by witnessing and observing movement, dance, and gesture, for instance in the application of movement circles and mirroring techniques” (Verreault, 2017: 121).

## **Individual / Group level**

### **a) Individual level**

At the individual level, research participants' "critical consciousness" was elevated by:

#### Breaking the Negative Self-Image

On several occasions research participants broke the negative image of self in physical and performative exercises or through conversations. Interviewee 10 broke the negative image of self at the first CDM workshop, where she danced for the first time in front of anyone, she said that until then she danced only alone in the room. Breaking the negative image of self connects also to self-acceptance, where the acceptance of one's own body and of connection with other bodies through touch was observed also in Interviewee 10. At the beginning she felt uncomfortable touching her face, neck, stomach and legs, as well as involving touch with another participant. In the second CDM workshop she attended, she touched her body and cooperated fully with other participants through touch. Furthermore, Interviewee 2 addressed self-acceptance through learning to accept her own mistakes through ST activities, especially juggling where when the ball falls down and one just picks it up and continues, even if it's in front of a public. Breaking the negative image of self through getting more self-confidence through activities, gaining skills in the group, public performing happened for Interviewee 1, who said that the experience of ST activities really helped him to relax and lose fears at his DJ-ing music performance at another Festival that took place 3 weeks after, as he said “I do not know if I could do it without” this experience. Raising self-confidence was identified in Interviewee 8, at stopping the comparisons to others, namely women in her case. She expressed several times during the period of the activities that by being more connected to her body and self as a woman, she stopped comparing and competing with other women and feels more compassion towards them.

Through exercise “Ruy - Onda” that works with voice and movement gestures, researcher observed that Interviewees 5, 6, 8 and 9 developed their assertiveness by making their movement gestures clearer and voice louder every passing workshop, breaking their negative image of having a quiet voice and not standing for themselves.

Interviewee 8 said that she implied that in the conversation with her gym trainer, when she said to him “I do not care!” When he was telling her something that she felt was not appropriate to say at that time. Moreover, she told the trainer that in the athlete competition she is attending, they should give the same amount of money for winning men and women. She explained then: “I used to not talk, but now I started to talk more.” Research participants also broke the negative image of self by self-expressing through improvisational dance exercises conducted at CMD workshops. Interviewee 8 and Interviewee 9 stated that they felt they developed self-confidence through those exercises which showed as implied practice through video Interviewee 8 posted on social of her dancing freely during the period of CMD workshops, something she said she was wanting to do for a long time, but did not dare.

### Being Aware That the Change is Possible

Realising that change is possible was a significant breakthrough for the research participants, especially through the active voice release in tension-relieving exercises. Interviewees 5 and 6 both found value in this, incorporating it into their daily lives as a means to manage anger. Interviewee 5 acknowledged her capacity to react differently to anger. She adopted the technique of actively releasing her voice when alone, challenging her previous notion that such vocal expressions (like screaming) were unsuitable for women. On the other hand, Interviewee 6 felt more in control of her anger after practising voice release at the CMD workshops. She noticed a general reduction in her anger levels. This translated into real-life situations; for example, she remained composed when unjustly reprimanded, choosing to address the issue calmly. Additionally, she began to use simple tension-relieving massages in her daily routine.

Interviewee 11 mentioned feeling generally less anxious after the CMD workshops, attributing this change to the tension release exercises. Similarly, Interviewees 1 and 2 shared that the juggling skills they acquired or improved during the ST activities helped decrease their anxiety, and they've been incorporating this into their daily routines.

During the CMD workshops, Interviewee 8 had her own realisation that change was within reach. She ceased her habit of nail-biting after her first CMD session and subsequently scheduled her first manicure appointment.

Several participants expressed the transformative power of these activities. They shared that they learnt the ability to transition from feelings of anxiety and worry to sensations of carefreeness and liberation. Interviewee 5 captured this as “enjoy, have fun, don't worry about others' opinions.” Interviewee 8 described it as “The more you let go, the more you enjoy.” Both Interviewees 2 and 3 summed up the sentiment with “Let it go.” Interviewee 3 further expressed experiencing a sense of “freedom” after the

ST exchange, linking it to her acceptance of herself and adjusting to situations when needed.

## **b) Interpersonal / Group Level**

For an individual developing resilience to also progress towards social inclusion, it's vital that their self-expression and narrative are not only observed and heard but are also acknowledged by society and shared amongst its members. As highlighted in the Project literature (UNODC, 2020), young people view social inclusion as “self-realisation, acceptance, and acknowledgment of their potential by society (UNODC, 2020)”.

At the interpersonal / group level, research participants' “critical consciousness” was raised by:

### Connecting with others in similar Situations

Research participants experienced meaningful interactions and connections in various ways: with fellow research participants, other participants in the group, and with external individuals.

Interviewee 1 and Interviewee 2 found their interactions with their partners (both exchange participants from Croatia) meaningful when dancing contact improvisation at the public performance (Street Theatre Art intervention). They both mentioned they continue to stay in touch through text messages with them.

At the initial CDM workshop during a tension release exercise, Interviewee 8 felt a meaningful connection when another participant held her head. This led to a strong emotional release, subsequently addressed by the facilitator. She described feeling entirely vulnerable, sensing her companion's support and equating the connection to the bond between sisters.

During the CDM workshops, five participants felt their most significant connections during specific exercises: Interviewee 4, Interviewee 6, Interviewee 7, and Interviewee 9 during the floor tension release; Interviewee 8 during the active voice release and the “heart hug”; and Interviewee 6 in the “group acknowledgment touch”. For Interviewee 10, the “Name dance” exercise, where she collaborated with Interviewee 5, was the most impactful. They performed together publicly for the first time, and pairing made it easier for both.

Interviewee 1 drew inspiration from a juggling artist leading the Street Theatre activities, with whom he played music. He now regards this artist as a source of self-realisation and he also said that he admired Interviewee 3's artistic performances.



While participants interacted outside the activities, the most poignant connections occurred during the CDM and ST exercises, invariably involving physical touch.

Research participants also enhanced their “critical consciousness” by identifying shared identities. Particularly in the first focus group of CDM activities, a shared identity forged a strong bond between them. Participants identified with the same gender category of being female and the ethnic categories of being international, having mixed ethnic origins, or migrant experiences. These ties strengthened when they shared experiences of prejudice and injustice related to these categories. Recognising cultural and physical similarities, the participants prompted the researcher to create a WhatsApp group named “Multinational sisters”.

In ST activities, participants bonded with exchange members from Croatia and Serbia, identifying shared identities. Connections extended beyond ST activities, incorporating informal conversations where they learnt each other's languages and discussed cultural similarities and differences. Recognising these shared national and linguistic identities has been crucial for framing ST activities as a means of reconciliation, given the turbulent history in the Balkans during the 1990s as tensions still persist among nationals from Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, and Bosnia.

Creating and sharing shared narratives emerged as a more potent tool than merely identifying shared identities. In the ST activities, sign language integrated into the shared narrative, as a deaf young person and a hearing-impaired mentor actively participated in the exchange. Participants undertook two brief sign language courses, and sign language was used also in two physical theatre and dance workshops as a means of expression. Participants also gave themselves sign language names, indicative of personal traits. This communication method sometimes eased interaction also between hearing participants in informal settings, as Interviewee 1 noted, sign language facilitated dialogue. Sign language also played a pivotal role in the ST public performance/ST Art intervention, serving as an interaction medium.

### **Being Aware of Collective Strength**

Research participants in CSD activities became aware of their collective strength when they identified that they could build trust within the group. This sense of trust enhanced their feeling of belonging, especially when in a vulnerable position. Interviewee 4 identified this during the “trust circle” exercise, and Interviewee 9 in the “blind walk” exercise, where in both cases the participants leading the group had their eyes closed.

In the ST group, Interviewee 1 and Interviewee 2 highlighted the collective physical experience of creating, preparing, and performing in the public performance / Street Theatre Art intervention. This experience was pivotal in fostering feelings of support and belonging to the group. Interviewee 2 described that it made them feel “supported”

by each other so that "no one was scared", and Interviewee 1 said, "we became like a little family" where "everyone had a role" because they underwent this experience. Interviewee 3 saw strength in the cooperation between group members during the performance and identified it as a new learning for her, as she usually performed solo.

A dominant element in realising the collective strength was also emotional intimacy. Interviewee 2 felt "acceptance and love from the participants" throughout the activities in the exchange. Similarly, Interviewee 5 reflected on the intimacy within the group when working with touch. She described how she learnt "how powerful is the touch" and that she did "not realise how important it is in our life". She felt that when a person in the group touched her, it was "to receive love," saying, "I understand you, I am here for you, I am your friend." In a similar vein, Interviewee 8, talking about the same exercise, said she realised the intimate power of a woman's touch: "Women's touch was different. I felt appreciated. I felt loved. I felt enough."

### 3.3 Discussion of sports/arts engagement and dinners as focus groups.

#### **Dinners and eating together**

The ST research participants shared together one meal at their last focus group. The first focus group was limited to drinks because the youth exchange dinner was organised right after. The CDM research participants shared two meals together, at their first and second focus groups.

In the initial CDM focus group, food played an important role in facilitating interactions among the women who were meeting for the first time. After the food was served and consumed, the course of the conversation ran more quickly, and the atmosphere at that time became less formal and more relaxed. The food served as a medium of conversation between them, facilitating sharing of personal information about each other's food preferences and as a medium of cultural exchange since cultural practices and traditions were explained and shared. At the second CDM focus group, when participants were even more comfortable with each other, they also offered each other their meals to try. When they finished their meal, all participants in the first and second focus groups stayed and continued the conversation, which indicated their increased comfort in the group in both cases. At both meals, future plans were being spontaneously made among the participants. At the first focus group, the idea to connect through WhatsApp was raised. At the second focus group, plans were being made also around the food; about meeting at the next dinner when one of the participants would cook for everyone, or to come taste her food at the restaurant where she had started to work.

At the second ST focus group, the conversation about food brought humorous moments into the conversation, which relaxed participants even more. They asked to try each other's food and laughed when one of the participants was cutting the meat to give it to the other two participants to try, making fun of the situation as being “a father” who cuts the pieces of meat to give to his children. After the meal, these participants stayed and continued the conversation, which also indicated that they felt relaxed and connected with each other.

Eating together encouraged intimacy and trust among participants and importantly contributed to the creation of a safe and supportive environment of deep connection. The intimacy of the experience was indicated in the situation which was compared to that among family members. Furthermore, trust was built among participants eating together not only through conversations that became more intimate because of the shared experience of eating together but also through trying each other's meals. How eating together deepened the relationships was also indicated by the fact that participants started to make future plans to meet again only during or after the dinner, and not before.

### **“I am” narratives**

I am' narratives in this research encouraged research participants to form and voice / perform their self-representation and self-narration. Through these narratives, they developed resilience at an individual level as individuals who express themselves freely, and at the group level - ensuring that this self-narration is then heard, seen, supported, and, if necessary, discussed in a supportive and inclusive environment/space of the group.

'I am' narratives have been used in the research in two different ways: a) through written and spoken word, used for participants engaged in Street Theatre activities, and b) embodied - through dance, movement, and performative elements, used for participants in Creative Dance and Movement activities.

### **Street theatre activities**

“I am” narrative exercise was conducted with research participants of Street Theatre activities two times: at their first focus group and at their second focus group. The reason the researcher decided to conduct it twice was to compare the self-narration pre- and post-activity.

Interviewee 1 presented themselves at the first self-narration among others as “nudist”, “pianist”, “model”, “wannabe everything”, wanting to learn to paint, and “still searching”. In the second self-narrative, however, he spoke more openly about his

emotions (feeling “sad”), which indicates an increase in the feeling of trust and relaxation within the group. Furthermore, he also revealed his worry regarding fitting into the music industry and about his career. In the first narration, he indicated a scattered sense of belonging (“wannabe everything”, “still searching”), while in the second, he openly addressed his vulnerability regarding fitting into society.

Interviewee 2, in both “I am” exercises, described herself as “changing” (indicated with “changing environment”, wearing “different masks”, “confusion”, “chaos”), which relates to her stating that she struggles with belonging to a specific group because she is engaged in so many. In both “poems”, she also used words of identification with various real and imaginary objects and beings (“tree in an exotic forest”, “stone”, “boat”, “fairy”, “pre-bird”), which might indicate her rich spectrum of understanding different parts of herself. In the first “poem”, she identifies as an “actress”, the desired industry she wants to work in, whereas in the second poem, this is the first thing she identifies with, which might suggest that after the ST activities she feels even closer to her desired role in society.

Interviewee 3 provided the researcher with just the second “I am” “poem”; she did not want to share the first one. In the “poem”, she described herself as liking to enjoy a quiet evening by a lake alone, feeling “happy”, “excited” about life, but also “unhappy” because they will always be sorry for something, “younger than I really feel”, “proud of what I was able to accomplish”, and “grateful for the people” around her. Enjoying the alone time could reflect the way she has been accustomed to performing so far, primarily with solo performances. The rest of the “poem” highlights a range of feelings that she trusted to share with the group.

### **Creative Dance and Movement activities**

The “I am” narrative among participants of this group, which also served as an Art intervention for this group, was executed not through words but using movement, dance, and performative elements as tools. It was conducted via the “Name dance” exercise, where participants created a short choreography that visually represents the letters of their names in various creative ways. This also conveyed the story of their identity, history, or present moment. Once participants crafted their “Name dance” choreography, they were invited to display it to each other in pairs, then explore it through different movement qualities, and later add a “prop” (object used in performance) - a piece of clothing or something similar that holds significance for them, and which they wanted to incorporate in their choreography. At the end of the last CDM workshop, each participant performed in front of the rest of the group and subsequently discussed their dance and performance.

The reason the researcher chose to implement the “I am” exercise in this manner was due to an issue that emerged spontaneously in the first focus group: the consistent

misspelling, mispronunciation, or incorrect gendering of participants' names. Thus, the “Name dance” exercise provided participants with the chance to present their name and themselves exactly as they wished. The “Name dance” exercise involved 5 research participants out of 7 in this group, as one was absent due to travelling, and another had to depart early.

Interviewee 6 mentioned in the focus group that she greatly enjoyed the process of creating and performing the “Name dance”. She rehearsed it at home and also selected accompanying music. She danced for several minutes wearing an old childhood T-shirt, which she put on and took off multiple times during the performance. She explained that the dance symbolised parts of her old self and her new self, encapsulating the transformation she felt she was undergoing, as she was still maturing as a teenager. Her performance exhibited her gentler side through fluid and continuous movement, complemented with the assertive and resilient stance she displayed during the focus groups.

Interviewee 8 opted for workout gloves, which she wears daily for her athletic training, as her performance prop. She blended the gloves and certain athlete training postures, like handstands, into smooth and interconnected movements. Similarly to Interviewee 6, the performance unveiled a gentler aspect of her character.

Interviewee 9 demonstrated a captivating choreography performed with precise and defined movements, using no props, which primarily visually showcased the letters of her name.

Interviewee 5 and Interviewee 10 inquired if they could jointly execute the “Name dance” as they felt too timid to perform solo, having never done so previously. While co-creating their performance, they conversed, laughed, and nearly opted out of performing, but eventually presented a brief, innovative choreography together. Interviewee 5 later highlighted this performance in the focus group, emphasising its importance to her as it fostered feelings of connection and group belonging.

This exercise allowed participants to express themselves in ways that words couldn't fully capture, revealing perhaps more “vulnerable” or “gentler” facets of their personalities. In subsequent informal dialogues among participants, the “Name dance” was frequently brought up and discussed. The anecdote about selecting performance music for the “Name dance” (between Interviewee 5 and Interviewee 10) elicited laughter and was a prominent topic during their second focus group.

### 3.4 In relation to I-GAP Spectrum

The above mentioned programmes have been presented through five criteria that relate to the D.RAD I-Gap spectrum and literature review from the previous chapt

### Criteria 1: Participation rate among marginalised groups

This criterion evaluates the effectiveness of arts and sports activities in reaching and engaging marginalised communities, such as vulnerable youth, migrants and refugees, minority groups, or other underrepresented and vulnerable populations. By providing opportunities for these groups to participate in positive activities, it can prevent them from engaging in anti-social behaviours, violence, or extremism, and promote social inclusion and resilience.

Within the frame of I-GAP spectrum, Criteria 1 addresses the "injustice" element by seeking inclusion of those facing barriers and inequality. By doing this, it counters risks of "grievances" by fostering community resilience. Furthermore, it mitigates "alienation" by ensuring inclusive programming design.

### Criteria 2: Skill Development, Personal Growth, and Creativity

This criterion covers the themes of social inclusion and resilience, as it looks into the sports and creative activities through the lens of opportunities for skill development, personal growth, and creativity, such as confidence, self-esteem, leadership skills, and self-expression. We consider those important in building resilience and promoting positive behaviours that can contribute to preventing anti-social behaviours, violence, or extremism.

Within the I-GAP framework, this aspect addresses grievances, feelings of injustice, and by equipping participants with skill sets to emotionally regulate better and express themselves, which further mitigates alienation.

### Criteria 3: Feeling of Belonging, Support Within the Group

This criterion falls under the theme of belongingness, as it assesses the extent to which arts and sports activities create a sense of community, support, and belongingness among the participants. It considers factors such as the development of social connections, mutual support, positive relationships, and a sense of purpose and personal fulfilment. By promoting a sense of belongingness, it can create a sense of connection and support among the participants, and provide spaces that facilitate experiences of mutual respect, trust, and belonging.

Within the IGAP spectrum, we understand that Criteria 3 is aimed at understanding how shared experience counters "injustice" perceptions, how affirming spaces address shared "grievances" and how trust grounded in support limits risks of "alienation".

### Criteria 4: Sense of Community, Support and Belongingness

This criterion evaluates the impact of arts and sports activities on the broader community and its potential to promote social cohesion and challenge differences. It

considers factors such as increased social connections, community engagement, positive perceptions of the activities (within and in-between communities), and the promotion of diversity, equality, and human rights (through programmed activities). Such factors can contribute to preventing anti-social behaviours, violence, or extremism by creating a sense of belonging and purpose, and bridging the gap between different groups.

On the I-GAP spectrum, this criteria builds bonds to counter "polarisation" between groups. Furthermore, bridging across groups counters risks of "alienation".

#### Criteria 5: Addressing root causes of injustice and grievances and encouraging dialogue and understanding

This criterion evaluates if and how arts programs move beyond interpersonal change to spark advocacy dismantling root causes embedded in sociopolitical systems. It examines activities fostering critical consciousness of injustice as well as collaborations with stakeholders to impact policies and practices enabling marginalisation. Tracking the cultivation of creative tools for civic participation illuminates arts spaces' role in solidarity building for structural reform.

This criteria's goal is to look at each action through the lens of addressing root "injustices" fueling grievances, channelling "grievances" into constructive action, and to better understand the role of partnerships to better tackle systemic causes of "alienation". Criteria aims at assessing initiatives through the activities related to building partnerships with relevant stakeholders. Therefore it looks how to bridge the gap between impacted vulnerable groups and decision-makers, it further explores constructive pathways fostering alliances across societal "polarisation".

#### **Findings in relation to IGAP**

In synthesising insights from the Slovenian national report, it becomes evident that the case studies examined support the thesis of the transformative potential of arts and sports in fostering social inclusion and resilience. These case studies were evaluated against a set of criteria derived from the literature review on role of arts and sports activities for mitigating I-GAP spectrum related perceptions and responses (Injustice, Grievance, Alienation, and Polarisation), emphasising the effectiveness of the programmes in engaging underrepresented communities, enhancing resilience, establishing inclusive social networks, and, to some extent, especially in longer term activities, addressing broader societal impacts.

The key findings from the evaluation of the four programs under study reveal insights into the transformative impact of arts and sports activities on vulnerable participants and marginalised communities. Firstly, the programs demonstrated a notable capacity

to engage different marginalised groups effectively. They provided these groups with opportunities to participate in constructive activities, which plays an important role in preventing anti-social behaviors and fostering social inclusion and resilience.

In terms of personal growth and creativity, the programs were instrumental in facilitating substantial development in these areas among participants. Those programmes that were followed through focus groups from start to end of activity, clearly showed patterns of enhanced self-confidence, self-acceptance, and better capacity for self-expression, underscoring the programs' effectiveness in building resilience.

A notable outcome of the programs was the creation of spaces that fostered inclusivity and support within groups. These environments were tailored to ensure that participants felt valued and understood, thereby significantly mitigating feelings of alienation. This approach was effective in strengthening the participants' sense of connection and trust within their communities.

In the realm of community impact and social cohesion, the long term programs and international youth exchange under review exhibited a notable capacity to bridge divides between various societal groups, contributing to social cohesion to varying extents. This impact was primarily achieved through the creation of meaningful partnerships with relevant stakeholders which enable youth from post-conflict areas to create new narratives through creativity.

Additionally, the longer-term programs extended their focus beyond interpersonal change, aiming to address systemic issues that underpin social dynamics. By facilitating critical consciousness and fostering advocacy, some of the long term programs attempted to target the root causes of injustice. This comprehensive approach contributed to societal change, underscoring the programs' effectiveness in tackling deep-seated societal challenges and establishing a more socially inclusive community framework.

## 4. Conclusion

This research has shown how engagement in art activities - namely, activities using Street theatre tools and methods, and Creative Dance and Movement tools and methods - encouraged physical and emotional resilience amongst youth living in the region of Ljubljana, Slovenia. By physically being involved in these art activities (including performing in front of other participants and performing in public spaces - ST and CDM Art interventions), as well as taking part in non-formal conversations related to these activities and by eating together at focus groups, 11 research



participants did not just gain new artistic and social skills and experiences. They also acquired a new awareness of their own strength and capacity as individuals, and a heightened consciousness of the power of the collective experience.

They broke the negative self-image by dancing and performing in front of others for the first time, and through accepting their own body and acts, even if they were perceived as mistakes. They became aware of their own strength, for instance, by overcoming the fear of public performance as an artist, and as women by ceasing to compare themselves to other women. They learnt about their own capacity by allowing their voice to be louder and their movement gestures clearer, not only during art exercises but also later in real life when they stood up for themselves. Furthermore, they gained an understanding that change is possible by learning how to actively release tension in the body, how to actively release their voice, and also how to juggle, subsequently employing these skills when feeling anxious or angry in everyday life, leading to more constructive conflict resolutions. Participants also discovered how meaningful interactions with others, especially built through touch and physically "vulnerable" situations (like having eyes closed) created emotionally intimate spaces between them, which then influenced them being more open to connecting with people in general.

They also understood how identifying cultural, personal, and experiential similarities, as well as sharing experienced injustices and discussing them constructively, connects and unifies them, and also builds bridges where, due to historical and political contexts where tensions still exist. They recognised that expressing themselves in the same or similar narrative might unify them even more than merely sharing similarities; for example, sign language becoming a common ground for inclusive dialogue amongst all participants.

They realised that all this newfound awareness further amplifies the feeling of connection and belonging to the group and consequently to the local community. The new categories of belonging were identified at the end of the activities, and participants often equated the group dynamics to feelings of "love" and "family". Such changes are achievable, even in a short span. These subtle yet potent emotional landscapes at the individual and group level are tangible. And they can decisively guide towards effective social inclusion. Now, it is the responsibility of all of us to nurture and protect those places, activities, and environments from which they emerge - not only through active cooperation between local practitioners and governments but also by actively involving young community members in creating structures for it, as well as ensuring their sustainable implementation in local communities.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Visual Material of the CDM group

Link: <https://youtu.be/w57ZpXTZ8yw>

### Appendix 2: Best Practices in Arts & Sports Activities/Programmes Across Each National County

Name	Place	Organisation	Activity	Aims	Target Group	Link
Kick Racism (is part of a wider, non-formal and self-organised initiative)	Ljubljana, Zagorje	Self organised	Football Tournament	Combat Intolerance and Promote Solidarity  Encourage Grassroots	Football Enthusiasts  Divers	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/brcnimo.rasize/m/?locale=sl_SI">https://www.facebook.com/brcnimo.rasize/m/?locale=sl_SI</a>

				ots Organiz ation Foster Internati onal Collabor ation  Engage Diverse Teams  Promote Commu nity Engage ment	e Cult ural Gro ups  Asy lum See ker s  Adv oca tes for Anti - disc rimi nati on and Soli dari ty Loc al Co mm unit y Me mb ers  You th and You ng Adu lts	
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Equality in Focus	Ljubljana	APIS Institute	Photo and video workshops	Promotion of Diversity and Inclusion  Empowerment through Artistic Expression  Community Engagement and Collaboration  Public Awareness and Advocacy	Migrant and Romani women	1) <a href="https://apis.center/podobe-enakosti-equality-focus/">https://apis.center/podobe-enakosti-equality-focus/</a>  2) <a href="https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLL6zd6SqsGcPdLgkd1P6HOWScfIZ7EDcy&amp;si=SXuDRM3JYe18zxOi">https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLL6zd6SqsGcPdLgkd1P6HOWScfIZ7EDcy&amp;si=SXuDRM3JYe18zxOi</a>
"Skozi oči begunca" (Through the Eyes of a Refugee)	Ljubljana, whole Slovenia, different locations	Humanitas	Interactive and experiential theatrical play	Empathy and Understanding  Awareness and Education  Challenge Stereotypes  Promote Solidarity	- Youth and Adolescents  - Educators  - General Public  - Policy Makers and Activists	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/humanitas.drustvo/videos/skozi-o%C4%8Di-begunca-do%C5%B5ivljajska-gledali%C5%A1ka-igra-video-bo%C5%A1tj/1096685690409463/">https://www.facebook.com/humanitas.drustvo/videos/skozi-o%C4%8Di-begunca-do%C5%B5ivljajska-gledali%C5%A1ka-igra-video-bo%C5%A1tj/1096685690409463/</a>

Music on the Move	Vinica, Slovenia	Zavod APIS / APIS Institute	Youth Exchange recognised as a good practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Foster Intercultural Dialogue through Music</li> <li>- Unite EU Citizens and Refugees in Collaborative Music Creation</li> <li>- Enhance Skills in Composition, Lyrics Writing, and Performance</li> <li>- Introduce Aspects of Music Production, including Organization and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Youth from Greece, Croatia, Italy, Romania, Slovenia, and the United Kingdom</li> <li>- EU Citizens, Refugees and New Citizens</li> <li>- Young Individual</li> </ul>	<a href="https://youtu.be/p_7ExSU4DvU?s_i=czR_xoZCpmsj8csp">https://youtu.be/p_7ExSU4DvU?s_i=czR_xoZCpmsj8csp</a>
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				Promotion	uals Interested in Music Production	
Migracije / Migration	Ljubljana, different locations across Slovenia	Zavod APIS / APIS Institute	Transmedia Exhibition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Highlight Migration Narratives</li> <li>- Promote Cultural Understanding</li> <li>- Innovative Artistic Expression</li> <li>- Engage Youth in Migration Discourse</li> <li>- Encourage</li> </ul>	<p>Contributors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Slovene Artists</li> <li>- Artists who immigrated to Slovenia</li> <li>- High School Students</li> </ul> <p>Target Group:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Youth</li> <li>- General Public</li> </ul>	<a href="https://migracije.si/">https://migracije.si/</a>

				Youth Participation in Art		
Assistance in accommodation and care for applicants for international protection in the asylum home	Ljubljana	Institute for African Studies (IAS)	Theatre, Theatre of the Oppressed, and Dance and Movement activities	empowerment, stress release, trust building, social inclusion	Asylum seekers, Refugees, local residents, Asylum seeking and Refugee women	<a href="https://www.routemagazine.com/omc2020-5-dance-asylum">https://www.routemagazine.com/omc2020-5-dance-asylum</a>
ArtCaffe	Postojna	Forestry, Wood Technology and Nursing School (in cooperation with Government Office for the Support and Integration of Migrants)	Music workshops, Dance workshops, Photography contest, Drawing workshops	Social inclusion through mutual learning between unaccompanied minors and local residents	Unaccompanied Minors, Local residents	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/people/ArtCaffe-Postojna/100040013697170/?pipv=0&amp;eav=AfbWL9ey5eVTHQBHi0AGRRsm-TtCWC0nIZI5YF6fz0rh7eu3DVbMdyedhTlzUUc0KP4&amp;_rdr">https://www.facebook.com/people/ArtCaffe-Postojna/100040013697170/?pipv=0&amp;eav=AfbWL9ey5eVTHQBHi0AGRRsm-TtCWC0nIZI5YF6fz0rh7eu3DVbMdyedhTlzUUc0KP4&amp;_rdr</a>

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