



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

# STAGE OF mind

## INTEGRAL REPORT

Elaborated by Angels of Joy

## **Table of contents**

- 1. Introduction and methodology**
- 2. Summary of the evaluation reports of participants**
  - 2.1. Participants' overview
  - 2.2. Participants' evaluation: Phase 1
  - 2.3. Participants' evaluation: Phase 2
  - 2.4. Self-manage a professionalized theatre group
  - 2.5. Evaluation of the activities, programme design and facilitators
  - 2.6. Witnessing of participants evaluation as an Advocate for social inclusion and combat stigma
- 3. Qualitative overview of the organization and the implementation of the workshops in all partner countries**
- 4. Recommendations**
- 5. Conclusion**

## **ANNEXES**

1. StaGe of Mind - Performances' plots
2. Workshop evaluation (template for facilitators)



*Part of the StaGe of Mind project team at the final transnational meeting in Dublin*

# Integral report

## 1. Introduction and methodology

The purpose of this report is to present the preparation and application of the training programme developed in the framework of the StaGe of Mind project, its strengths and weaknesses, its impact on participants of the training process and performances as well as assumptions and recommendations for future implementation.

The Erasmus+ StaGe of Mind project had a two-year duration (May 2021 - April 2023) and was implemented in Spain, Greece and Ireland with the participation of organizations from the mental health and performing arts sectors: Fundación INTRAS (Spain), RAYUELA (Spain), Society of Social Psychiatry P. Sakellaropoulos (Greece), Angels of Joy (Greece), Housing Association for Integrated Living (Ireland), Smashing Times Theater Company Limited (Ireland). These six organizations joined forces in order to work with people with prolonged and severe mental illness and co-create an educational-artistic programme which was later implemented and evaluated. The project which was originally intended to address at least 45 people, eventually included 62 beneficiaries, all of them service users with psychosocial disabilities living in the community or housed in community care housing structures, in Athens, Dublin and Valladolid.

The StaGe of Mind training workshops were divided into two phases, the preparatory and the creative one (Phase 1 and Phase 2), to end up with the production and presentation of a musical theater performance. The beginning and the completion of each phase differed in each country (e.g. in Spain the workshops started in November of 2021, in Greece in January 2022 and in Ireland in April 2022). During Phase 1, participants had the opportunity to receive tailor-made training from performing arts professionals on various art disciplines. During Phase 2, the participants actively participated in the design and creation of a play from scratch through an experimental and creative process, under the artistic direction of performing experts.

The StaGe of Mind educational-artistic training programme aimed to pursue the development of competences such as: memory-concentration, artistic skills of speech production, communication, social skills, creativity and imagination, planning and organization, persistence, physical expression, etc. This programme was the result of the collaboration of the three performing art experts' groups, along with the mental health professionals. All of them together designed an innovative educational-artistic methodology that uses a variety of performing arts - theater, dance & choreography, music - adjusted to adults with severe and chronic mental illness and psychosocial disabilities. The training programme was designed and evaluated by all partners.

The methodology used to prepare this integral report is based on the qualitative evaluation of both Phase 1 and 2 of the StaGe of Mind pedagogical tests, according to the feedback received by participants, trainers/facilitators and mental health professionals involved in these activities. The partners decided to use an evaluation form that would be filled in by the performing arts experts/facilitators to evaluate each workshop. The form was a tool to keep track of participation, to write down the objectives of each workshop, recommendations for the following sessions and a general evaluation of what went well and what needed to be changed. In addition, an evaluation questionnaire was developed for participants to fill in periodically and was used to collect information on their enjoyment of the sessions, clarity of the information, motivation and comfort level, perceived improvement in skills such as concentration, creativity, resilience, the impact of the training on their daily life, what they found most beneficial and most challenging, etc.

## 2. Summary of the evaluation reports of participants

### 2.1. Participants' overview

The initial aim was to have 45 participants across three countries, that is 15 participants per country. Finally, 62 participants were engaged in the project.

*Unique Participants in Phase 1, 2 and Final Performance*

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Performance (backstage & on stage)	Video Participants*	Total trained	Total incl. video participants
<b>Spain</b>	14	22	12		32	32
<b>Ireland</b>	10	18	18		18	18
<b>Greece</b>	12	11	7	35	12	47
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>97</b>

\*Unique participants are considered those who participated in the weekly workshops. However, for reasons that served the plot of the Greek performance, 35 additional participants from different parts of Greece created short videos that were incorporated into the play. Those could be considered as “video participants”, but they did not participate in the training phases.

### *Participants' Gender*

	Male	Female	Other
Spain	12	20	0
Ireland	10	8	0
Greece	9	3	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>0</b>

### *Participants' Age*

	<20	21-35	36-50	51-65	66+
Spain	1	10	8	13	0
Ireland	0	4	6	6	2
Greece	0	3	4	5	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>2</b>

Participants were aged between 21 to 70. There were shared challenges expressed in the recruitment and engagement of participants and some participants withdrew from the process for various reasons, some noting their discomfort with a public performance. For others, their housing situation changed or challenges with their mental health recovery impacted their ability to participate. Participants are not a consistent group across the full timeframe of the project to date.

## **2.2 Participants' evaluation: Phase 1**

The analysis that follows is based on the findings of the evaluation of the StaGe of Mind programme by its participants in all three countries. Within this analysis we looked at the impact of the training programme on development of transversal competences: comprehension, language/communication and cognitive function including memory, attention, perception.

In the initial phase 1 of the project, participants identified a positive impact of the project on their mood and emotional state. In addition, they identified the positive impact of the project on their behavior and on their cognitive function including thinking and decision making, and they all agreed that the project had a positive impact on their life skills, independence and how they live their daily lives.

In the evaluation of the Greek group participants reported difficulties that had to do with: a. movement and synchronization, b. anxiety about being exposed publicly, c. ability to turn ideas and decisions into actions which was getting strengthened, but by the end of phase 1, leadership skills improved. On the second evaluation at the end of the phase 1, participants focused on a. the ability to express imagination and creativity, b. signs of stress, c. improvement of self-confidence. It is noteworthy that at the beginning of the first phase they reported difficulties with movement and synchronization, while at the end of it they only reported stress, and that at the beginning of the first phase they were anxious about being exposed in public, but they didn't report the same difficulty at the end of the first phase.

At the beginning of the project in the Spanish group there were 14 participants. Among them, besides mental health service users, there were also some homeless people, users of the Valladolid Municipal Shelter managed by INTRAS, who for different reasons were not able to follow the programme with constant presence and stability. Although most of them did not participate from the beginning, they managed to take part in the performance. In the first months the facilitator insisted on warm-up games and improvisations, by the end of phase 1 special activities on writing, dialogue and movement combined with live music were incorporated. After leaving the classes, it was very evident for the MH professionals that participants were much more open and receptive and much more willing to talk. And at the end they managed to create a strong connection among the group members in order to aim for the final presentation of the play in the Calderon theatre. By the end of phase 1, facilitators of the Spanish group mentioned the need for more time on workshops and that the movement and dance-based exercises were more enjoyable for the participants.

During phase 1, 10 participants were engaged by the Irish team. The participants responded positively to working collaboratively and showed development across the targeted learning areas with particular improvement in social confidence, communication skills, physical expression, and creative story and character construction. At the completion of phase 1, the participants had mapped out a story, identified the characters and action points within it, and were committed to developing their ideas into a one-act play.

The commentary that follows refers to all three countries summarizing the common elements of workshops during phase 1. The evaluation process focused on how the training programme impacted participants in their daily lives. Participants indicated that they were more functional and able for daily tasks. Concerning the impact on their **every-day life**, all beneficiaries noted that participating in the programme motivated them to maintain their routine and personal care. They noted that engagement in the StaGe of Mind programme contributed to the structure of their week and indicated that this was because they had a specific purpose or role within the project. Participants indicated that the StaGe of Mind programme provided a new and purposeful aspect of their regular weekly routine. A solid routine supported participants to avoid engaging in older self-harmful or self-neglect behaviors. A positive impact on their mood is mentioned together with increased feelings of happiness, while feelings of uncertainty or discomfort were also mentioned especially when activities or tasks of the training pushed them out of their comfort zone. Some participants report ongoing stress/distress during their

period of participation, but despite their discomfort with memory-based exercises, they noticed improvements in the cognitive goals of this process. These findings will be further analysed in the following chapter.

Concerning their **physicality**, all beneficiaries identified the value of the workshops in developing connection to the self and their own physical body, as the physical movement often impacted their mood, and brought exhilaration and laughter. They also noted an increased awareness of physical ability through the specific exercises in the programme, as they used exploration of physical space and movement of the body to express feelings they could not verbalize. Challenges around physical interaction and synchronizing movement with the peers led to the evaluation that the observation of cues and the investment of energy in order to tune in to one another and predict one another's movements created connection and team building.

On the other hand, some challenges to participation around physical movement and mobility were particularly noted by some of the older participants and some participants that disclosed physical disabilities, but it is mentioned that facilitators adapted the programme to their needs, thus contributing to self-consciousness impacting self-expression in a physical way. Participants noted great levels of satisfaction when these frustrations were overcome and, in many cases, expressed that this was a skill that was developed as the workshops progressed. Some participants reported initial challenges regarding proximity and the movement of other bodies close to theirs. This was particularly significant for some participants that disclosed historical physical or sexual trauma, as they recognized that there was flexibility in the delivery of the programme to accommodate their needs. As the first phase progressed, participants noted that they felt more comfortable and safer in the workshop space to participate in physical exercises.

Concerning issues of **focus and memory**, they reported that the training supported them to be present in the moment and leave thoughts or concerns outside the session. This supported participants to be mindful and present. Being present allowed participants time to focus attention and develop awareness around attention. Some participants noted that this helped them manage distraction. For some participants, challenges with memory were stressful. Participants reported concerns about their ability to memorize and retain information for several reasons; the impact of medication on their short-term memory, ongoing experiences of anxiety contributing to divided attention or an inability to focus and remember and particularly performance anxiety.

Concerning **creativity and risk taking**, the action of being fully present in the moment allowed participants to be creative and they were "enjoying learning something new" and found the workshops "motivating to take risks and try something new". There were some expressions of perfectionism reported around fears of getting things wrong, making mistakes and not feeling good enough to participate. This suggests a lack of confidence for some participants as they took a risk and tried something new. However, as the sessions progressed making mistakes was normalized as participants saw there was no right or wrong way to express themselves



and participants became more comfortable and playful in the activities in the training programme.

On **group interaction and social connection**, teamwork within their workshops and the collaboration between participants in the session provided new ways to communicate. The workshops provided a shared task and a common goal for participants to focus their interaction. As they worked in a collaborative and equal way, they reported that they learned not only from the facilitator but from one another's experience. The interaction gave space to reflect, imagine and create in new ways of being, by discovering new interests and new aspects of self thus gaining new social contacts. Through this process they were supported to develop new social connections and friendships, increasing the frequency of social connections outside the family or mental health services bubble. These were fundamental for the second phase of the project.

Some participants felt there could be additional trust work within the group sessions and more time with an increased number of sessions to develop confidence. They also reported that the integration of more music and musical exercises or games would have been useful at this phase of the project. This was developed further in the second phase of the project.

Across three countries beneficiaries reported that facilitators/trainers are supportive, encouraging, motivating and bring energy to the workshops that encourage positive risk taking and creativity. Facilitators/Trainers were noted for creating safe space, warm atmosphere and trust. Facilitators/Trainers are reported as well informed and able to communicate clearly the exercises and the purpose of the programme, as authentic and genuinely interested in the project, respectful and able to inspire confidence and self-consciousness to all participants.

### **2.3 Participants' evaluation: Phase 2**

The analysis of **phase 2** is focused on integrating the learning from phase 1 and the experiences from phase 2 into an analysis of the project's primary objectives. The feedback illustrates that phase 2 was a deeper and richer experience for the participants in terms of achieving objectives and a great positive impact regarding positive physical, cognitive and social developments. Some challenges persist in phase 2, particularly those around memory and these are explored below.

Concerning skills and competences and especially **focus and memory**, most participants agreed that the programme improved their memory and concentration. Common fears were reported regarding memorizing and performing despite reporting improvements in short term memory. Participants felt memory exercises were useful and some fears expressed in phase 1 around this were reduced in phase 2. Participants reported an incremental improvement in memory that they found challenging but highly valuable. This experience particularly intensified in later stages of phase 2.

Participants report positive developments also in relation to focus and indicate that they feel more able for daily tasks and indicate that this development of memory and focus supported them to manage specific symptoms associated with their mental health or learning diagnosis. Participants report that improvements in attention and comprehension allowed them to be mindfully present and that the training supported their development of focussed attention. Participants identified value in listening and response activities in the programme and the activities involving taking ideas and decisions into actions together. This collaborative and incremental approach supported the goals of the project.

Positive evaluation on communication skills was reported more intensely in phase 2, as trust and relationships were established within the groups, the groups were formed and participants expressed a sense of safety around taking risks in communicating. It is noteworthy that there was a number of participants presented with a diagnosis that impacted their participation in some way, some participants disclosed speech impairments and some were limited in their verbal capacity or were non-verbal. However, all participants felt included and contributed to the group. In relation to language/communication, an inclusive approach was implemented by trainers to ensure all participants were part of the process. There were a mixture of verbal and non-verbal exercises and support around use of voice and diction which helped them feel supported and increased social interaction and opportunities for all members to express themselves.

Some participants particularly enjoyed the exploration of vernacular through their characters. Most participants were not previously engaged in drama programmes and for them, characters with their own language and way of speaking were an important vehicle of expression and a significant endorsement of the cultural value of their vernacular. They expressed that theatre did not have to be elite in this way but instead, validated their own language and made their plays accessible and real to others.

**Physicality:** The non-verbal expression part of the programme allowed participants to express themselves in a creative way. Thus, they report exploration of subjective perception, acknowledging that we do not all perceive our reality or social situations in the same way. Through this they developed an increased ability to read physical cues. An increased physical awareness is also reported in the second phase, on the use of space, on where and how their body is, on how they move and control their movement, on a comfort with physical proximity of others in contrast to phase 1. A positive impact on the breath and physical stamina is also reported as they feel stronger, fitter and able to manage their breath when speaking. There was a notable decrease in reporting of difficulties associated with movement and synchronization of movement with other group members in phase 2.

**Emotional Exploration:** A significant area of impact reported by participants, particularly as they progressed into phase 2. Participants report that the workshops allowed them a space to listen, to reflect, imagine. They reflected on their own historical emotional responses and imagined new alternative responses and ways to engage. They found the programme helped them to accept their feelings and that acceptance supported them to reframe them in a new

way. Participants noted love, rejection, grief, excitement, anticipation and that the process was very therapeutic as the integration of self and character was an important aspect. The discovering of new aspects of self here was unanticipated but highly impactful for participants.

**Access to Cultural & Arts Scene:** In addition to impact on the individual cognitively, socially or emotionally, this programme sought to have a cultural impact on its participants. In the implementation it was revealed participants did develop new insights into the arts. Many participants initially expressed that they felt somewhat alienated from the arts and had not participated in anything like this programme or attended a play. Many participants attended plays and arts festivals or cultural events for the first time. Some did this as individuals and some did this as a group with their peers from the training programme. In many cases the participants *encouraged their peers also to access the cultural & arts scene by inviting them to a play*. Participants report that they developed an *increased confidence to connect with culture and the arts*. They expressed that they felt *decreased stigma and felt less alienated from the arts after participating in the programme*.

Through the programme, in each country participants worked with different combinations of theatre experts. Participants had sessions with costume designers from national theatres, they worked with professional stage managers and learned about set design, props and scene changes, they worked with lighting professionals and discovered how to use all the theatre codes in order to tell their story. In some cases, the participants report that they began to develop relationships and links with other community groups using community arts and specifically drama to maintain their learning and development through drama and to support local and community theatre.

## **2.4 Self-manage a professionalized theatre group**

Participants report that they developed confidence, leadership and an understanding of some techniques and skills to deliver a group, but they all agreed they need further training and expertise in order to deliver a self-managed group. In some cases, they have taken responsibility and ownership of some parts of the sessions and are confident to deliver those activities. Some participants are interested in becoming drama facilitators as a result of their participation in the programme and are interested in integrating their lived experience into their practice, but some others do not even mention this possibility in their speech. Initially participants were very tired after the performance, physically and emotionally as the process of performance and the preparation involved was very demanding. Early feedback indicated that they did not want to do another live stage performance but they indicated that the process of getting to that point and the implementation of the training programme brought connectivity and new ways to communicate around a shared task and common goal. Participants identified the development of a collective identity as a group with peer support and learning from one another's experience at the core and noted that they developed teamwork approaches and skills, collaboration and co-production necessary to lead a group. Last but not least, they identified that the StaGe of Mind workshops provided a safe place for

participants to take small risks to lead in parts of sessions or processes and develop the leadership skills that are necessary to run a peer led self-managed theatre group.

Participants acknowledged that they would like to have a long-term presence in drama and cultural events and to be part of a durable arts community. Participants reported that the distance between themselves and the arts community was decreased as a result of the performance process. They felt part of this community and no longer distanced from it. The objective to promote long-term presence on the artistic stage and create a durable community with an intrinsic sense of belonging has been partly achieved although there is need for further support and training to progress this further.

## **2.5 Evaluation of the activities, programme design and facilitators**

Participants particularly enjoyed the low focus exercise and became more comfortable with high focus ones, increased exposure and visibility as the programme progressed. They gave particularly strong and positive responses to energy circles, improvisation and image work.

Participants recognized that facilitators adapted the training programme to the needs of the group and acknowledged the need for facilitators to be trauma informed and use recovery-oriented language. Participants recommended the programme be extended over time to include more time and more sessions to develop confidence. They also recommended the integration of more music and musical exercises and games as this was not universal.

In the second phase of the project, relationships and trust facilitators deepened as a warm atmosphere and a safe, comfortable and playful space was established between them. Facilitators/trainers were perceived as perceptive and in tune with the group needs, supportive of group members, encouraging of participants to engage actively and motivating. Participants noted that facilitators bring energy to the workshops. They described that that energy encourages positive risk taking and creativity in the programme. They also reported that they trusted their Facilitators/Trainers as they were well informed and communicated clearly the purpose of the programme and sessions, they were inspired and motivated to continue by facilitators as the latter were genuinely interested and authentic and respectful of them, particularly around confidence, self-consciousness and memorisation.

## **2.6 Witnessing of participants evaluation as an advocate for social inclusion and combat stigma**

Participants feedback that the StaGe of Mind project facilitated an opportunity for them to develop an awareness of both the external stigma impacting them in their daily life and in their engagement in the arts, and also the internalized stigma that they realized that they had integrated into themselves. Some participants noted that they had integrated their diagnosis or symptom and other people's perceptions of them into their understanding of themselves.

This project provided an opportunity to lift that veil and evaluate who they were beyond the stigma. The rehearsed readings, dress rehearsals and final performances for participants were identified as a “Showcase of ability” or a way to demonstrate and illustrate their competence, skill and creativity. Although nervous about performance in phase 1, all participants expressed confidence in being visible and to represent the community, acknowledging that the programme had a label of mental health. This illustrated a shift from the beginning of the first phase where they were anxious about being exposed in public, this was significantly reduced in phase 2 when the focus shifted to concerns around memory and the practicalities of the show itself. Participants indicated that they were released from stigma in some ways and shifted from a “service user” or “client” to a “leader” or “performer”, capable of taking initiative. Through the character work in the programme participants had integrated parts of themselves with their character. When showcased in performance, the participants reported that they felt empowered by the endorsement of the audience's response and the acceptance from the audience. This further contributed to reframing what they previously perceived as weakness or deficit as an asset and “a story worth sharing”. In the final performance, the presence of their own support networks, participants were proud to showcase their achievement, and this was more important than any shame around labels.

### **3. Qualitative overview of the organization and the implementation of the workshops in all partner countries**

The project envisaged the close cooperation of the 6 partners for the smooth coordination and implementation of the complex prerequisite actions. The six partners worked together in the three countries in pairs consisting of a mental health organization and an organization with action and experience in the performing arts and animation, to organize the three shows that took place in Athens, Dublin and Valladolid. The smooth flow of feedback was ensured through the digital governance of the programme, through regular scheduled meetings, reports to partners and to the coordinator. During the two-year duration of the StaGe of Mind Project, all partners delivered the following:

- a) A complete training programme and educational material tailor-made for training people with serious psychosocial difficulties through performing arts. The training programme is divided into 10 units that refer to the bases and fundamental principles of all disciplines of the performing arts necessary for the production of a play, such as creative techniques of script writing, acting, dance, basic principles of stage design and production, etc.
- b) Various project dissemination activities: a blog that hosts articles produced by the six organizations about the connection between art and mental health. A final article about the impact of the project.
- c) Three original musical theater performances -play, music, sets, costumes, directing, etc.- in which the skills developed during the first phase of the educational workshops were used. The StaGe of Mind's interdisciplinary training process culminated in the collaborative production of a collective art project per country, the videos of which will be uploaded on the online portal of the programme.
- d) The development of a dedicated online portal, where the educational material of the programme will be permanently hosted so that other organizations working with this target group may be able to replicate the programme and contact the project partner organization in case of needing further support.
- e) The present integral report that presents the strengths and weaknesses of the programme, as well as recommendations for future use.

- f) A participants-based evaluation report that presents the feedback of the people who took part in the project activities. Their impressions were periodically collected through questionnaires and focus groups to evaluate the programme.

The overview that follows refers to both phases 1 and 2 of the StaGe of Mind project with a special focus on the outcome of the final performance.

During **Phase 1** of the programme all teams worked in a gradual and patient learning process, respecting the pace of all participants so that they did not feel overwhelmed by a large amount of information. In Spain, 14 people were totally engaged in the programme, although not all of them took part in the entire process. This phase ended with a session open to external audience where participants after some warm-up activities carried out an improvisation exercise in which all participants had one minute to step into the shoes of another person and do a short monologue. Despite some initial uncertainty, all participants performed this exercise.

In the Irish group, 10 participants were engaged in this phase, although also in this case, not all of them participated in the entire programme. The participants responded positively to working collaboratively and showed development across the targeted learning areas with particular improvement in social confidence, communication skills, physical expression, and creative story and character construction. At the completion of phase 1, the participants had mapped out a story, identified the characters and action points within it, and were committed to developing their ideas into a one-act play.

At the beginning of the programme within the Greek team the formation of the group was 12 participants with different levels and qualities of interest and attention to participation, who worked harmonically and with gradual exposure to the difficulties of the training programme. Facilitators of the Greek group followed the programme and activities of the training units but also added a special focus on warm-up sessions, by insisting on simple physical actions (working with speed versus immobility, eye focus and contact and nonverbal theatre exercises accompanied by live music), as some of the participants were not fluent in speech. By the end of the phase 1, 4 members had quit the group for different reasons. The completion of phase 1 came up with a plot and its basic structure, but the aim for its short presentation/open day in front of a small audience was not fulfilled.

The commentary of **Phase 2** consists of the summary of local reports given by the facilitators of all three countries which conclude to the following key-points:

- All countries followed an **open structure** at work with the dynamics of the group, as well as on dramaturgy and devising, thus integrating the absences/drop outs of participants etc. This structure gave the freedom to comment and improvise freely, while working on the objectives of team work, on characters and on the play.

- Facilitators preferred to follow the **dynamics of the group** rather than the structure of the programme, therefore all final story boards were fixed by the end of January, one or two months before the final shows.
- All groups insisted on the **use of games and physical involvement** in acting/rather than verbal aspect of devising/acting.
- The **use of music functioned in all groups** in many ways:
  - a) **main agent** for the warm-up of the group
  - b) main agent of **singing**
  - c) **reminder** (underlining the cues, the door-bells for the entrance, highlighter of group reactions etc.)
  - d) **“supporter”** of physical presence. Many participants commented that through the use of live music "they felt more secure", i.e. a supplement for the lack of confidence and the body-image.
- **All elements/materials of dramaturgy** were extracted by the participants through improvisations and discussions within the group (plot, dialogues, roles, poems/lyrics etc.)
- The **themes of all performances** helped integrate issues of loneliness, existential questions, need to socialize and sing and need to share all “human needs” in an open and light way. The narratives revealed issues/taboo of participants not easily expressed outside of the aesthetic space of theatre.
- A **tendency of overprotection** by facilitators was apparent sometimes, as the border between safety and risk is a line not easy to define.
- The process of devising did not provide a stable text/story-board, disturbing the repetition and the memorization process.

At this point we also mention an initiative of the Greek group, in response to the dramaturgical needs of the devising process of the team (together with the need to incorporate as many people as possible). During the process of rehearsals of phase 2, the facilitators came up with an idea to use video in order to involve the artistic teams of the Society of Social Psychiatry P. Sakellaropoulos (EKPSE) which operate across the four geographical regions where the organisation offers mental health services, namely, Attica - Capital, Alexandroupolis - Northern Greece, Fokida and Fthiotida - Central Greece. In this way they achieved a multiplier effect for the performance, the stimulation of the project artistic group through the interconnection with other artistic groups of the organization, the expansion of the number of beneficiaries of the programme and the utilization of the programme for the benefit of as many of our mental health service users as possible.

## 4. Strengths of the StaGe of Mind training programme



The strengths of the StaGe of Mind training programme were summarized by the findings identified by all the trainers and mental health professionals involved in the pilot experience, together with additional points identified while reviewing the participants evaluation report.

The main strong points evaluated by all partners throughout the experience of the two-years programme can be outlined to the following points:

- **Innovative and absolutely useful programme:** participants in all three countries absorbed the privileges of the StaGe of Mind programme and formed groups which managed to create authentic dramaturgies and moving spectacles of devised theatre, which also functioned as social events of highly inclusive dynamics against stigma.
- **Enhancement of participants' cognitive, physical and social skills:** all participants mention they felt progress on cognitive skills (memory, concentration and focus, use of speech/dialogue/imagination), social skills (team work, stress and public anxiety control), physical skills and self-image.
- **Training process and successful devising process:** although all three countries had difficulty in forming coherent and stable groups, participants and facilitators managed to create groups that lead to performances.

During the creation of the training programme (September 2021 – December 2021), all partners realized the need to include a specific paragraph regarding the specific difficulties that people with mental health difficulties face. Therefore, a list of potential issues was introduced through which all partners could preview issues that might arise in order to minimize them and assure participants' comfort level. This list refers to social anxiety, effects of medication, low fitness level, sexual trauma, physical contact, sensory issues and literacy difficulties. This intervention during the initial designing of the training curriculum is considered as a main strong point of the project, as it provided facilitators with the attention needed when working with people with mental health difficulties.

Another strong point of the experience of mental health and arts professionals is that they were free to create an open dialogue between theory and praxis, as they were able to revisit the training programme and adjust it to the needs or special incidents (such as the drop-out of people). This dialectic approach between theory and praxis provided all facilitators with a non-authoritarian context and the flexibility needed in order to apply the drawn guidelines.

The weak points collected throughout all partners' evaluation of the implementation of the programme consist of the following common points:

- There was a common agreement that more time, in both phases, would be beneficial while addressing the potential difficulties that summer time break may bring.
- Difficulty to form and apply scheduled outlines of the training units of the programme, as participants needed more movement-based activities and music rather than verbal acting during phase 1, and a devising process rather than written text from theatre repertoire during phase 2.

- Difficulties on working with participants who cannot form stable groups and have psychosocial issues of a wide range, leading to a need for a subtle and at the same time flexible design because of drop-outs or absences of participants.
- Lack of time and activities related to the familiarization with the audience.

## 5. Recommendations

The following improvements are suggested by all trainers and mental health professionals involved and refer to aspects of the training programme that can be improved, together with suggestions for future uses of the training programme. Throughout each country it was clear that participants enjoyed the experience of engagement in the StaGe of Mind project and they indicated improvements in physical, social and cognitive functioning in line with the key objectives. These personal improvements were noted particularly in relation to the training and creative programme, and not so much in relation to the final performance.

In terms of a future adaptation of the project, a video-based project similar to what was implemented by the Greek partners in this process could support a less stressful level of exposure, focus and visibility for participants who cannot resolve issues of social anxiety. It is proposed that the latter could work with professionals to develop relevant drama and recording/editing/sound skills to create a short film. A training programme engaging experts in the field, similar to the StaGe of Mind Programme, could be developed. A future development of the training process of the project could also include visits to arts and cultural events, and other mental health providers in order to integrate participants in social and cultural life of their cities and give them creative stimuli for their work within the project.

The following key-points are provided for reflexion and evaluation that could possibly help to assimilate the data given by the implementation of the StaGe of Mind programme:

- Expand inclusivity through image and non-verbal theatre techniques so as to integrate non-native speakers, immigrants and people with difficulties on speech.
- Consult families/caregivers where possible on how to be supportive on the project.
- Adjustment on activities of the training programme in order to encourage participants interested to engage in co-leading.
- Incorporation of live music during the workshops.
- Backstage and video art activities for participants who choose not to be exposed in order to encourage their level of involvement.
- Suggestion of 2-hour workshops duration through a gradual prolongation of the initial 90 minutes time schedule.
- More facilitators of arts experts and fitness instructors should be engaged: this recommendation is based on the experience of the Greek team, in which the constant co-facilitating of music experts together with the support of the physical fitness

instructor of the group proved to be very helpful for the physical and mental performance of participants.

- Open workshops for various needs of the project: a) at the beginning as part of the open call for participants b) during both phases 1 and 2 of the project in order to work on social anxiety and, c) as part of scientific events and for the future development of the project.

## 6. Conclusion

The StaGe of Mind project provided a framework of work on relationships and self-image, in which all participants were invited to reflect on their past, to imagine on alternatives for new and unexpected ways of problem solving and to possibly project these alternatives on their future. These ambitions were tested within the aesthetic and transitional space of the stage, in a rehearsal time/space protected and supportive, in terms of potential and possibilities in communication and expression.

Participants explored these possibilities within the terms of theatre game and under the constant underlining of the present space and time, in order to introduce and keep a safe distance between fantasy and reality.

Therefore, the StaGe of Mind programme became a tool for investigating self, emotions and aspects of mental life that had been inaccessible or forgotten for years. By employing techniques such as role play, the use of myths and fairy tales, dreams, and traditions, participants were able to revive and address their personal experiences in a more direct manner. While working with metaphor and role for the dramaturgy of the show, participants were free to develop inner dialogues and perspectives on real life challenges.

The inclusive power of creation in the frame of performing arts once again proved redemptive. It served as a reminder that the StaGe of Mind project provided space for individuals to reclaim their lost pride, faith and hope. It also provided a space to envision and strive for what each person deserves, both individually and socially. This encompassed everything that everyone deserves without exception.

## ANNEX 1 - StaGe of Mind Performances' Plots

In the following paragraphs a short description of the devised performances created by the groups of StaGe of Mind programme will be presented.

**Dublin, Ireland. Performance title: AWAKENING A WAKE.** 'Families are complicated, even when you're dead'. "In "Awakening A Wake" we meet Mike, a recently deceased Dubliner, whose fate in the afterlife will be judged by how he is remembered by his family, friends and neighbours. Guided by the Angel of Death, Mike has three days to learn from what his family and friends think about him. His spirit observes his family and friends talking about him at his wake, and a kinder side of Mike is revealed. The play concludes with an opportunity for redemption, will Mike ascend or descend. The angel of death reminds him that he made his own hell on earth, now it is the time for Mike to make a decision on the journey he will take next. His fate is in his own hands..."

The play is set around the great Irish tradition of 'wake'. The Irish wake is a celebration of life, a final party, a final song and a final toast in honour of the deceased. According to this tradition, loved ones deserve a loving exhumation of the dead and as a ceremony moves down memory lane. Irish people laugh and cry as they reminisce during the wake about some of their most cherished moments with the deceased.

The original theme came from an experience of grief and loss of the beloved father of one of the beneficiaries of the StaGe of Mind programme in Ireland. For him, the loss of his father was the beginning of the shock of his mental health. The StaGe of Mind workshops provided the participant with a safe space to name and explore this experience. Despite the initial embarrassment, the Irish team agreed to work with this theme and offered him the staging area and the theatrical means to enact it with accompanists and eyewitnesses from all the team members. Building trust and exploring the powerful and interesting representations of people grieving, they were surprised, when the story finally came out, to face another truth: even in death, families can be complicated.

**Valladolid, Spain. Performance title: "Una fiesta de despedida" (A Farewell party).** A "farewell party" is a musical work with which its participants say goodbye to the pressures, invalidation and exhaustion of a norm that neither listens to them nor gives them a voice. They become protagonists and writers of their own history. A farewell party is a plea to resilience. The performers prepare the stage space and the party in which they will participate. They dress in their best clothes and tell dare to shout the

painful truths of their society: “according to the INE (Statistics National Institute in Spain) there are 3.4 million empty homes and 28,552 homeless people; that sometimes you have to stop, build a nest and cry in solitude; that there are times when your wings are clipped and after a year of freedom you wait 5 to recover your flight; that anger turns into sadness and your happiness does not depend on you, but on the opportunities you have or the people you meet that day; that there is a wall that prevents them from passing, deciding if they want to walk, fly or both”. Since the wall is still there, they return to their shelters. They see the Harry Potter saga or the football game on duty, watch the sea from the shore, listen to music in the room or on the stage and have a farewell party, with lights, chocolate with churros, lots of golden clothes and their ideal Playlist ...”

The participants faced intense insecurities, fears and doubts until in the end, the cast managed to captivate and move the audience. In the performance, they manifested themselves with confidence and self-confidence that none of them previously thought they had. "A Farewell Party" is a simple, but smart and modern project. One of the most important achievements of the creative process of its origin was that a need emerged in the participants that they did not have before or did not know they could have: that of being in front of a microphone and discovering that, in addition to being therapeutic, it is also valuable and important to live the shelter for a while and share life experiences with other people who might feel the same way.

**Athens, Greece. "The Cafe of the Shy People"** "The "Cafe of the Shy People" is a daily meeting place, in a neighbourhood of Athens, like Kallithea and in an era like ours. This Sunday, however, is different... What is hidden behind Mr. Fotis the shopkeeper's bad mood? How is a song written? And how can an innocent game lead to the recognition and reunion of two lost brothers? The shy people who gather there come closer than usual and witness both the loneliness and isolation that dominates life against our will, and the power of human communication when it blossoms in acceptance, respect, celebration and the joy of coexistence..."

The Greek performance was also the result of teamwork. From the title of the work to the plot and the characters, the composition of the action belonged exclusively and without exception to all the members of the group, even those who did not make it to the end of the journey, whose presence and imprint are nevertheless registered in the scenes and phrases of the play. No one auditioned to participate in the Cafe of the Shy People. A simple invitation brought together mental health service recipients, therapists,

artists and volunteers, equal members of a large group with a common purpose—kind of like what communities of people should be: different people, with different abilities who brought what each had in the wise supervision of the group. They decided to say a resounding "yes" to life against "no". Every trial and rehearsal were a test and trial between these two forces. Their great allies were Art and especially Music, enhancers of human expression. They accompanied, accepted and praised everyone's words and gradually led them to celebrate what they all created together. Within this temporary and more ideal little community they shared the reality of departures and transitions. They eventually acquired a common code and became supporters of each other. And in the end, they managed to celebrate shyly or less shyly in the soul, the important fact that the goal was achieved.

## ANNEX 2 - Workshop Evaluation (template for facilitators)

Evaluation Form				
Performing Arts Experts (PAE)	Mental Health Experts (MHE)	Project	Date	Workshop No
		StaGe of Mind		

A) STATISTICS				
Facilitators				
Number of Participants		Names		
New Participants				
MHE / PAE Personnel (Participation: Yes/No)			Live Streaming	Yes / No
Volunteers (Participation: Yes/No)				

B) WORKSHOP STRUCTURE		
WORKSHOP GOALS		
USEFUL MATERIALS		PHOTOS/SOUND/VIDEO RECORDING: YES / NO
WORKSHOP PLANNING		IMPLEMENTATION (WHAT HAPPENED)



Thoughts for Next Time	

C) FACILITATORS' EVALUATION	
What went well?	
Something that did not function well?	

D) EVALUATION OF GROUP						
SKILLS	1	2	3	4	5	OBSERVATIONS
<b>COGNITIVE SKILLS</b>						
FOCUSING						
MEMORY						
LITERACY						
LISTENING AND SPEECH SKILLS						
COOPERATION AND PROBLEM MANAGEMENT						
ADAPTATION AND COMMUNICABILITY						
<b>CREATIVITY</b>						
IMAGINATION - CONCEIVING AND IMPLEMENTING IDEAS						
SYMBOLIC THINKING (METAPHOR AND INVENTION)						
<b>PHYSICAL EXPRESSION</b>						
BODY AWARENESS - COORDINATION - FORM						
<b>ORGANISATIONAL SKILLS</b>						

TAKING DECISIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES						
TIME MANAGEMENT AND CONSISTENCY						
<b>ARTISTIC SKILLS</b>						
VOCAL - PHYSICAL SKILLS						
PERFORMANCE - COMPOSITION						

1. to a very small extent
2. to a small extent
3. to a moderate degree
4. to a large extent
5. to a very large extent

<b>E) ASSESSMENT OF TECHNICAL MEANS</b>	
Technical Difficulties	
<b>F) COOPERATION WITH PARTNER</b>	
Relationship with other Partner (pros and cons)	



FUNDACIÓN  
**Intras**

 **HAIL**  
Housing Association for Integrated Living

 Society of Social Psychiatry  
P. Sakellariopoulos

**RAYUELA**  
PRODUCCIONES TEATRALES

 **SMASHINGTIMES**  
INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR  
THE ARTS & EQUALITY

*Giving joy wherever there is need*  
**ANGELS  
of JOY**

The support of the European Commission for the production of this publication does not constitute the endorsement of the contents, which reflect only the views of the authors. The Commission is not responsible for the use that may be given to the information contained in the post.