

## Performing arts as new frontier of cross-cultural communication. A possible dialogue between citizens and newcomers

This article represents an abstract of my bachelor thesis in Sociology of cultural and communicative processes (supervisor Prof. Pierluigi Musarò), which focused on *Atlas of Transitions. New geographies for a cross-cultural Europe*, a European project aimed at investigating the role of performing arts in promoting intercultural dialogue and alternative spaces of conviviality<sup>1</sup>.

Drawing upon the analysis of the festivals *Right to the City* (2018) and *Home* (2019), organized in Bologna by ERT Fondazione, Cantieri Meticci and the Department of Sociology and Business Law of University of Bologna in the frame of the Atlas of Transitions project, my research intended to examine the role of art in enhancing cultural diversity.

In particular, the empirical fieldwork has been developed into two phases:

- a first explorative qualitative research, where I assumed the role of participating observer thanks to an internship period on the field. This constituted an important aspect of the qualitative research, as I was highly involved and interacted directly with the organizers, the artists, the researchers and the audience involved in the festivals for a period of 15 days;
- a second quantitative phase, which involved the use of questionnaires whose aim was to identify the motivations and involvement of the participants. Specifically, a total of 233 questionnaires were carried out during the *Home* and *Right to the City* events.

The conceptual framework that guided my study was focused on the figure of the “active audience”. This concept refers to an audience that also takes part in the performances, following a process of *Audience Development*, able to enlarge and diversify the public, producing an improvement of the conditions of fruition. This perspective change refers not only to the quantitative sphere, namely, the increase of the number of viewers, but also the qualitative one, meaning the strategies aimed at improving the relationship with the existing audience.

Among the various definition of *Audience Development*, one particularly interesting is that adopted by Nobuko Kawashima, which refers to four different yet related processes: *Cultural Inclusion*, *Extended Marketing*, *Taste Cultivation* and *Audience Education*<sup>3</sup>.

The first process, also known as “Outreach”, describes the type of performance realized outside the classic spaces of the artistic production, hence realizing a process of de-institutionalization.

The second process, “Extended Marketing”, refers to the opportunity to expand the audience by involving people potentially interested in the theatrical performances, who however are unable to access them due to several reasons (i.e. the high cost of a ticket).

Finally, the processes of *Audience Education* and *Taste Cultivation* concern the opportunities to both introduce new artistic forms to the audience and to deepen a specific performance through workshops designed ad hoc<sup>4</sup>.

Starting from the first typology proposed by Kawashima, the analysis showed that the festival *Right to the City* was able to effectively involve many spectators and promote intercultural dialogue, thanks to the targeted strategy of de-institutionalization (Outreach).

Indeed, although the small number of submitted questionnaires does not allow generalizations, it was possible to observe that the artistic interventions have been a powerful information and education

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.atlasoftransitions.eu/about/>

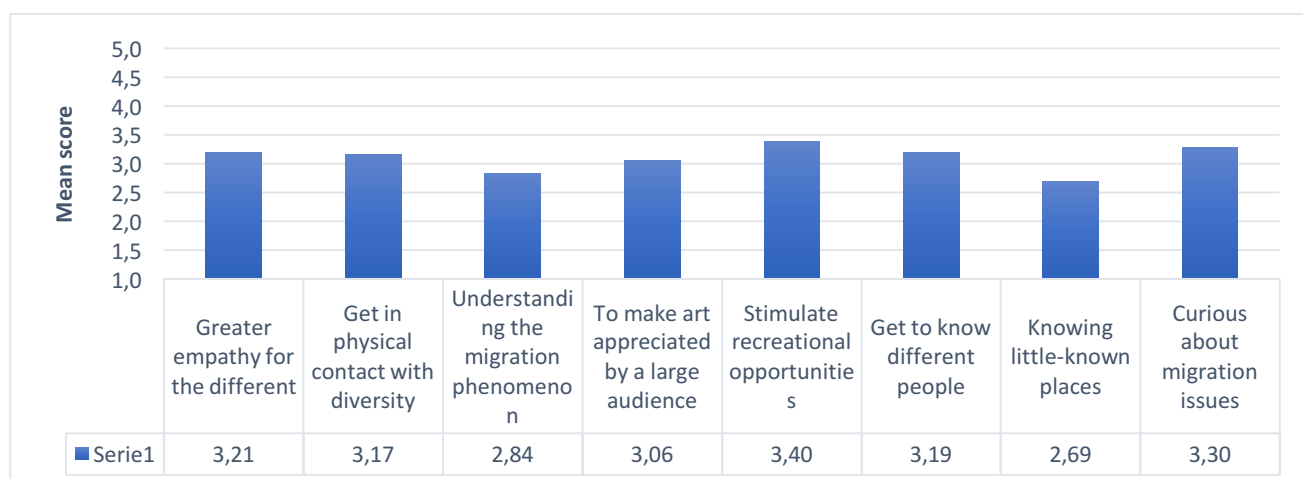
<sup>3</sup> [http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/35926/1/WRAP\\_Kawashima\\_ccps\\_paper\\_6.pdf](http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/35926/1/WRAP_Kawashima_ccps_paper_6.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Musarò, P. & Moralli, M. (2018). A scena aperta. Il teatro come esperienza collettiva per ripensare le comunità. *Sociologia della comunicazione*.

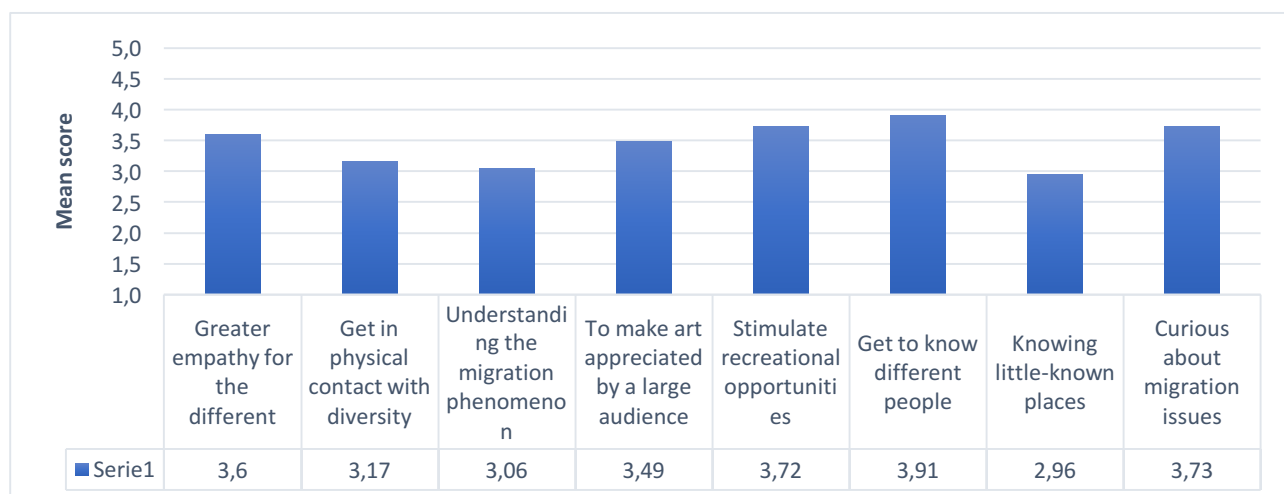
channel for cultural integration in both festivals, stimulating the desire to meet people from different backgrounds.

Such process was also facilitated using different communication channels, such as social networks, together with various *Audience Development* strategies, succeeding in the increasing and improvement of the interactions between different communities.

In addition, as graphs 1 and 2 show, the performances were particularly able to delete the fear of the diverse and to fuel that feeling of empathy, capable of promoting positive emotions towards cultural diversity.



Graph 1: Question no. 8 of the questionnaire related to the influence of the shows on certain significant aspects (Right to the city).

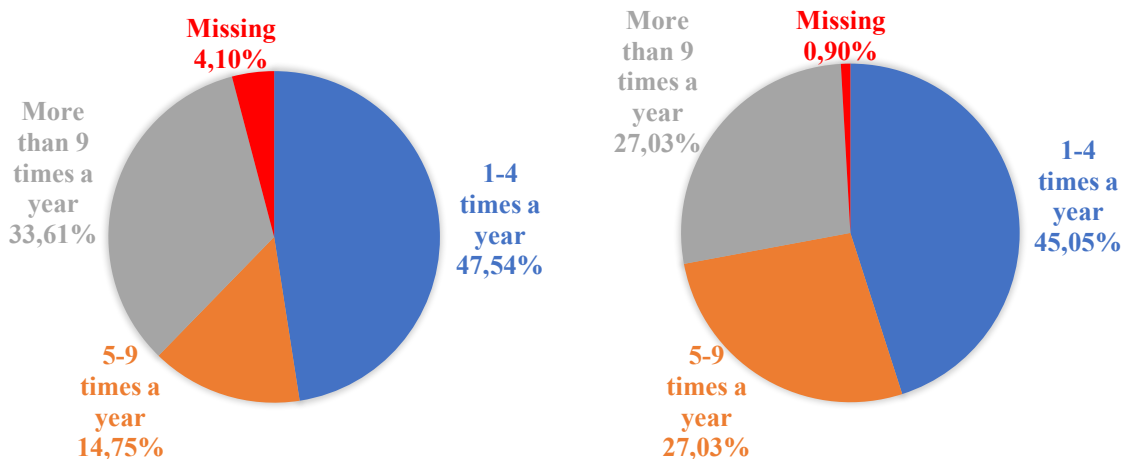


Graph 2: Question no. 8 of the questionnaire related to the influence of the shows on certain significant aspects (Home).

Which have been the most popular strategies adopted in festivals to increase the percentage of audience?

Unquestionably, one of the most important factor consisted in the free entrance to plays and workshops, which has led to an increase in the audience, also involving those who were not usually used to attend recreational and artistic ateliers.

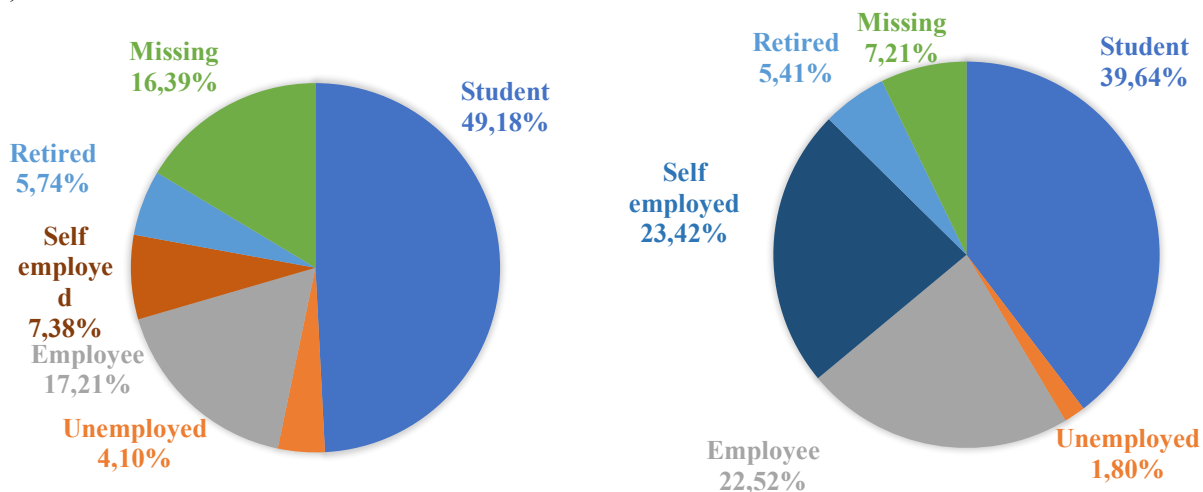
By analysing the questionnaires, it was possible to observe that in reference to the question "How many times a year do you go to the theatre?" the 45.05% of participants answered from 1 to 4 times a year in accordance to "Right to the City", while during "Home" the percentage rose slightly, reaching the 47.54% (graph 3).



Graph 3: On the left, the theatre attendance per year in the "Home" project, while on the right in "Right to the City".

A further complementary strategy consisted in the implementation of an Outreach process, meaning to "reach out", aiming at making culture accessible to everyone, also from a spatial point of view. Indeed during the "Right to the City" festival (2018), many performances were organized in public spaces, such as squares and outdoor places, making the artistic performances accessible to anyone. The same occurred during the festival "Home", where the shows were held free of charge at DAMSlab (Department of Arts of the University of Bologna).

The data of the quantitative survey proved that a small percentage of spectators, equal to 4.10% during "Home" and 1.80% during "Right to the City" was represented by the category of unemployed (graph 4).



Graph 4: On the left, theatre attendance per year in the "Home" project and on the right, in "Right to the City".

Even though data may not seem relevant, it is interesting to observe that there has been an increase in the percentage of the audience, consistent with the project aims.

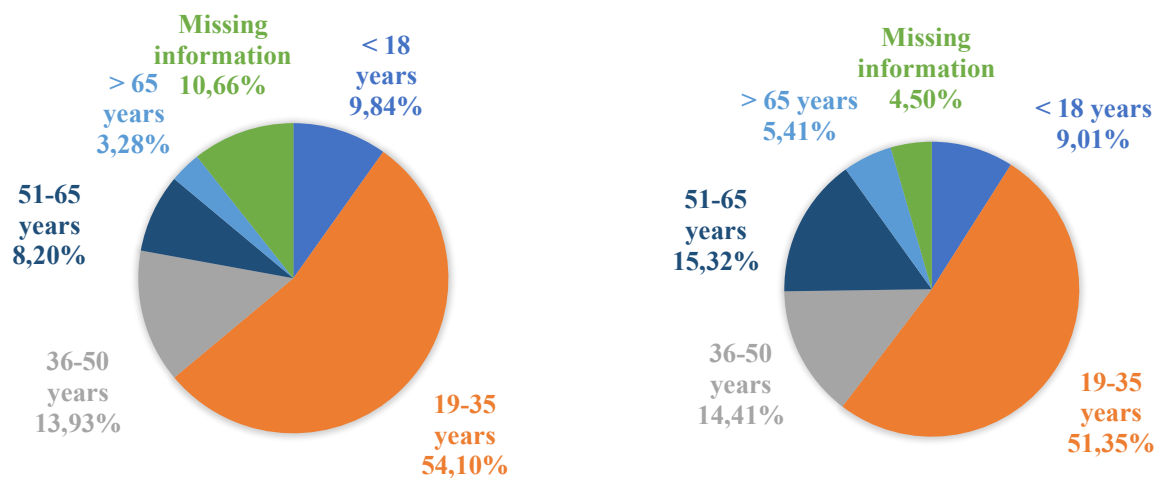
An additional strategy used during *Atlas of Transitions - Home* was the extensive use of social media as a mean of communication, able to reach even the youngest people who are not likely to attend this type of events, in favour of other gathering places, such as discos, stadiums and movie theatres<sup>5</sup>. Indeed, as shown in graph 4, survey results prove that the category of students reached the highest percentage of participation during shows, with a frequency of 49.18%.

<sup>5</sup> ISTAT, indagine multiscopo "Aspetti della vita quotidiana" (2016-2017)

Also in relation to the *Right to the City* festival, the statistical analysis of the questionnaires illustrate that the highest percentage of participants divided according to profession was that of students, equal to 39.64%.

Contrary to the other categories, these results can be explained through the great involvement of young people from schools in entering work-school programs, which allowed them to participate in the organization of the festivals and, therefore, being a sort of both active audience and promoters of events among their peers.

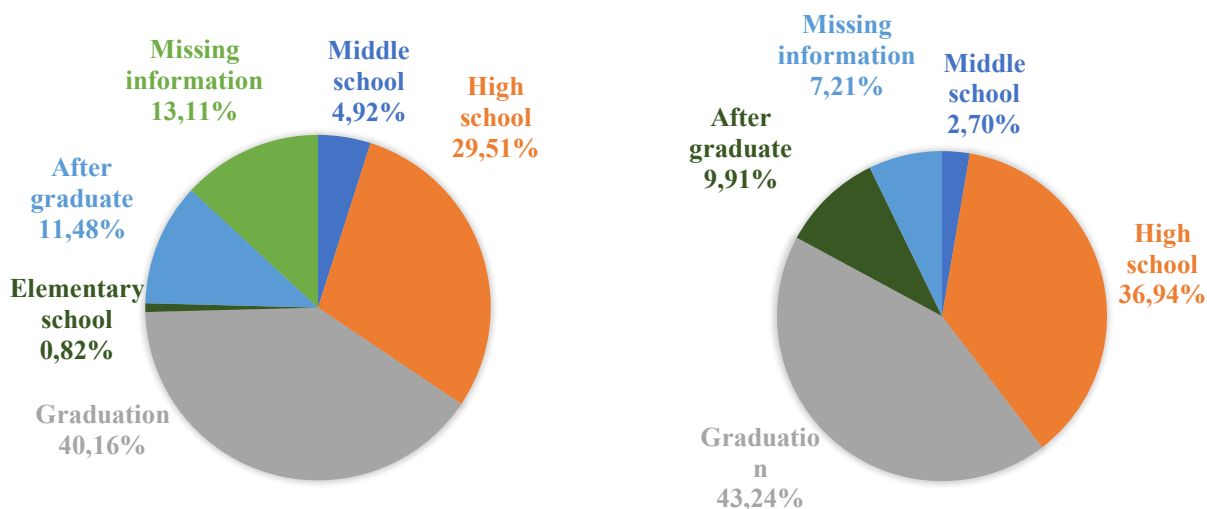
Continuing with the analysis of the audience of the *Home* festival, it is possible to affirm that majority of the audience falls into the age category between 19 and 35 years old (54.10%) (graph 5). Similarly, *Right to the City* has been attended more frequently by the age group between 19 and 35 years old, with a percentage equal to 51.35%, due to the large presence of many teenagers participating in the initiative as internists or voluntary collaborators.



Graph 5: On the left, Representation of the audience ages in the "Home" festival. On the right, data related to "Right to the City".

Considering the high attendance of the age group between 19 and 35 years old in both festivals, it can be assumed that the category "Level of Education" with the highest percentage is the one related to the university degree, equal to 40.16% in the case of *Home*, and slightly higher in *Right to the City* reaching the 43.24%.

To follow, it is possible to find the upper secondary school qualification, equal to 29.51% for *Home* and 36.94% for *Right to the City*, due to the presence of teenagers from the schools of Bologna involved in the work-school projects.



Graph 6: On the right, Educational qualifications of participants in the "Home" festival. On the left, data related to "Right to the City".

To conclude, the results of the questionnaires, together with the qualitative explorative research, showed that art can be considered an excellent tool for enhancing cultural diversity, as well as an opportunity for mutual learning and intercultural encounter. It has been particularly stimulating to observe how such an abstract concept had a significant role in connecting the different communities living in the territory of Bologna.

This empathic connection occurred thanks to the actors' capabilities to involve the participating audience, managing to avoid the so-called "fourth barrier" accountable for communication detachment.

The *Atlas of Transitions – Home* and *Atlas of Transitions - Right to the City* festivals have certainly achieved their goals, both creating spaces where migrants and local communities played an active role in promoting inclusion and peaceful coexistence, and establishing relational, symbolic and empathic ties with the audience - and thus establishing a dialogue capable of producing communicative bridges.

This allowed to go beyond the mediatic spectacle of the "other" overcoming not only the typical humanitarian frame, connected to a perception of the migrants as passive subjects and victims, but also the securitarian frame, connected to the image of migrants as illegal invaders or potential criminals

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