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Théâtre Montagne
Magique, Bruxelles

SUPPORTING THE FUTURE OF THEATRE FESTIVALS FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES

Results of the Research

By Wolfgang Schneider and Nicola Scherer (Research team BABEL project)

RESEARCH INSIGHTS

BABEL PROJECT (2022–2025)

Key Points

- EU Creative Europe large-scale cooperation project
- Led by Teatercentrum (Denmark) with 20+ partners
- Aim: multilingualism, inclusion, transnational collaboration



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RESEARCH FOCUS

Areas of investigation

“The study revealed that the design of these spaces significantly affects children’s sense of inclusion, autonomy, and engagement.”
(Schneider/Scherer, p. 14-15)

Festival spaces & participation

Listening as artistic/institutional practice

Curating for young audiences

Networking, cultural policy & transnational cooperation



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RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Case Studies and participant
observation at BABEL Festivals

Expert Interviews with Curators

Programm Booklets, opening
speeches and discussion events

BABEL Creation Groups



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“IF I HAVE SEEN FURTHER IT IS BY STANDING
ON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS.”

ISAAC NEWTON



Theatro Testoni Ragazzi
(Bologna, IT)



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Small Size, EU project
2006-2018



Baboró International Arts
Festival for Children
(Galway, IR)

“CHILDREN – MINORITY WITHOUT PROTECTION”

Aladin El-Mafaalani

- Minority in Numbers
- Life time in schools
- Ratification of CRC but no basic laws (Constitution)



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EXCERPTS FROM EXPERT INTERVIEWS



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FESTIVAL DIRECTORS

BABEL-project 2022-2025



Aislinn Ó hEocha

Barboró, Galway, IR

“The right of every child to participate in cultural life and the arts — and to have their voice heard — guides all of our decisions.”



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FESTIVAL DIRECTORS

BABEL-project 2022-2025



Bruno Frabetti

Festival Visioni, Bologna, IT

“Closeness is not only about physical distance, but about the attention we give. In theatre for young audiences, it is a political and poetic act — an act of care.”

“Listening, touching, and being close are essential gestures of our art. They remind us that theatre begins with human contact — with the courage to meet the other.”



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CO-CREATION GROUPS

BABEL-project 2022-2025



Brigitte Dethier

Director and Facilitator

“Through the arts for and with a young audience, giving this generation a voice by collecting their voices and either doing something with them or for them. [...], there is an exchange, and their opinions and voices are asked for. And that should not be underestimated.”



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CO-CREATION GROUPS

BABEL-project 2022-2025



Irma Unušić

Dancer and Facilitator

“For me, listening through the body is the first language. When we dance or move together, we already understand more than words can say.”

“Children feel this immediately — if you are truly with them. That is why listening is also a form of respect, a human right in art as much as in life.”



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CO-CREATION GROUPS

BABEL-project 2022-2025



Alex Byrne

Director and Facilitator



“Children’s theatre is political because it shapes how the next generation sees the world — the stories we tell them, and the way we listen back, defines the society we want to be.”

“We are building future citizens. Every performance is a rehearsal for democracy.”



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CO-CREATION GROUPS

BABEL-project 2022-2025



Greg Hall

Musician and Facilitator

“We have to build spaces where young audiences feel that theatre belongs to them — not something adults have made for them, but something they are part of.””

“It’s about creating a shared language — not only linguistic, but emotional — between artists and children.”



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THE BABEL PROJECT HAS SHOWN THAT TYA...

...if it does not shy away from the harshness of social reality, can make **meaningful use** of the **artistic space** of the theatre as a projection surface for **engaging with the world**.

Children and Young Audiences are **active interlocutors**, shaping performances through their presence, their responses, and their silences. The art of listening here means acknowledging their dignity, **treating them as equal partners** in the shared pursuit of truth.



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TYA IS...

cultural education

a medium of **social imagination**

a **school of seeing**

is an **experience of emotions**

is the **place for telling stories**



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BABEL FESTIVALS...

...contribute significantly to **social participation, empathy, and intercultural understanding**

...foster **listening as a social competence** – it creates spaces where difference is experienced as **dialogue, not division**.

...embody **transcultural listening**. International collaborations bring together artists and audiences from different backgrounds, **enacting solidarity** and empathy **across borders**

BABEL revealed the challenges of **unequal funding, postcolonial legacies**, and mobility barriers. Listening here means not ignoring these structural inequalities but naming them and **working against** them.



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THANK YOU FOR
LISTENING!



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THE BOOK!

EDITORS:
WOLFGANG SCHNEIDER &
NICOLA SCHERER



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 Pendragon

THE ART OF LISTENING IN THEATRE FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES



EDITORS
Wolfgang Schneider
Nicola Scherer

Research and Reflections
from Performing Arts Festivals

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