

Prison Theatre in Austria

A Report for the EU project „Teatro e Carcere in Europa“

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1. Introduction

In October 2005, the Austrian association “Kunstrand” (“Margin of Art”), headed by Sabine Sandberger, accepted an invitation by the Italian association “Newo” at the EU program Socrates “Teatro e Carcere in Europa”, which was called into being by the Italian organisation “Carte Blanche” in order to substitute the former Spanish partner “Teatro Yeses”, which had dropped out of the program.

Due to the late entry into the current program, a suitable design for the questionnaires had to be made in a relatively short term, and the first appointments for qualitative interviews had to be made. So far, still not all questionnaires have been returned to the author, and some qualitative interviews are still missing. Nevertheless some essential comments on the scene of prison theatre in Austria can be made, which will happen in the following report.

In the author's opinion, however, it would be important to make more qualitative interviews and to analyse them with differentiated, but unfortunately also very time- and personnel-consuming methods of evaluation, in order to get a deeper insight into the actual effectivity of theatre work in prisons. In her own experience the author is convinced of the power and effect of such projects. In a continuing paper also possible risks as well as ethical preconditions should be illustrated more closely. Though this would be beyond the scope of "Teatro e Carcere in Europa", it would surely be a necessary and meaningful venture for the future.

2. The Austrian judicial system and its legal foundations for the realization of theatre projects in prisons

The number of imprisoned people in Austria has risen continuously in recent years. Latest statistics from the year 2005 show nearly 9000 people in prison (at a total population of about 8 million). Although there were attempts in the past years to introduce alternatives like e.g. the “extrajudicial compensation of criminal offences” or, lately, the “electronic legcuffs”, more and more people in Austria are sentenced to imprisonment. So, most prisons are overcrowded, with a lack of staff. Exactly this is mirrored partly also in the results of the studies. Some projects failed or were not even started, for lack of necessary local and personnel preconditions. But also the readiness and the interest in installing theatre projects in prisons are not always existent. Many see these projects as useless strain without effect, which, however, does not correspond with reality, according to the experience of the author and the results of the qualitative interviews.

Situated all over the Austrian federal territory there are 29 prisons that can be essentially divided into three categories:

- 1) **“Court prisons”**: These are prisons attached to courts, housing predominantly inmates who are still expecting trial, who have not been sentenced yet, or who have been sentenced to imprisonment of less than 18 months. These are the prisons at Feldkirch, Innsbruck, Salzburg, Linz, Ried, Steyr, Wels, Klagenfurt, Graz-Jakomini, Leoben, Eisenstadt, Korneuburg, Krems, St. Pölten, Wiener Neustadt, and Wien-Josefstadt.

- 2) **“Penal institutions”**: These prisons are for people who have already been sentenced to imprisonment of more than 18 months up to life-long sentences. These are the prisons at Garsten, Suben, Graz-Karlau, Gerasdorf (male

juveniles), Hirtenberg, Schwarzau (women), Stein, Sonnberg and Wien-Simmering.

3) **“Penal institutions for measures”**: These are prisons accommodating people because of “psychic deviancy to a higher degree” (§ 21/1 und § 21/2 StGB), for their addiction to drugs, alcohol or pills (§ 22 StGB) or because they were rated as “dangerous recidivistic offenders” (§ 23 StGB). Among these prisons there are Göllersdorf (§ 21/1 StGB), Wien-Mittersteig (§ 21/2 StGB), Wien-Favoriten (§ 22 StGB), and Sonnberg (§ 23 StGB).

The legal basis regulating the social life in Austrian prisons is the so-called penal system law (“Strafvollzugsgesetz” - StVG). In search of possible standards for carrying out theatre projects, merely sections of the fourth sub-chapter, which regulates the “educational care and activities of the prisoners”, could be found. The following sections could be of suitable relevance:

§ 56/1 In the execution of all measures of the penal system an educational influence on the prisoners is worthwhile. In addition, the prisoners shall receive special educational care in single and group counselling as well as in other suitable ways.

§ 56/2 In prisons, where it does not, with regard to the average number of the prisoners housed there and to the average length of their sentences, contradict to the principles of an economical and effective administration, those prisoners shall also be treated psychohygienically and psychotherapeutically for whom this appears to be effective to reach the educational goal of imprisonment (§ 20 section 1 StGB).

§ 58/1 The prisoners are to be motivated to make meaningful use of their leisure time and to be guided in this, if required. For this purpose they have to be given especially opportunities to read, to participate in the reception of broadcast programmes (radio and television), to sports activities or, regardless of § 30 section 2, to party games.

3. Methodology of inquiry about theatre activities in Austrian prisons

In order to get a survey of the past and present theatre activities as well as attitudes and opinions, but also effects and risks of such projects in Austrian prisons, the author has designed two different questionnaires and has also made some qualitative interviews on this topic.

3.1. "Questionnaire on theatre activities in Austrian prisons – general part"

This questionnaire is divided into two parts:

Part A serves to get general data of the institution.

Part B asks concrete questions about the theatre projects:

- 1) Have there ever been theatre projects in your prison?
Are there current theatre projects?
- 2) Structure of the theatre projects
(Who takes part in this project? Who heads the project? Since when, how often, how many persons...?)
- 3) Participants
(How were they selected? Is the group steady or does it change continuously? Motivation of the participants?...)
- 4) Intention resp. aim of the theatre project
(Performance? Leisure time activity? Artistic creation? Therapeutical learning?...)

5) Concrete project

(Which methods were applied? Is a performance intended? What is the basis of the production? Which artistic skills are stimulated? What personal skills are promoted? Time span of the entire project?...)

6) The performance

(Where did performances take place? Who were the audience? Who participated in the realization? Was there a tour? How many performances took place?)

7) The head of the theatre project

(Sex? Internal or external? Original profession? What other theatre activities outside prison?...)

8) Premises and temporal conditions

(Where take rehearsals place, when and how often? Are there interferences?)

9) Financing

(How and by whom are projects financed?)

10) Problems

(What problems occurred during the realization of such theatre projects? What are the reasons why there has never been such a project?...)

Others

3.2. "Questionnaire on theatre activities in Austrian prisons – personal part"

With the second questionnaire the author wanted to find out the personal opinions on theatre projects of various occupational groups in a prison, by

asking 4 questions:

- 1) What, in your opinion, could theatre projects achieve in your prison?
- 2) What could be possible risks or dangers of theatre projects in your prison?
- 3) What, in your opinion, are necessary preconditions in order to realize theatre projects in your prison?
- 4) What, in your opinion, could be reasons why a realization of theatre projects is not possible in your prison?

This questionnaire should be filled in three times in every prison: Once by someone from the management level, once by someone from the social services (social worker or psychologist), and once by someone from the judicial guards staff (command, leisure time representative,...)

Both questionnaires were sent out to all 29 Austrian prisons. Of these, 25 have returned the completed questionnaires to the author so far. It might well be that a few still missing questionnaires will arrive in the coming weeks; logically these must be disregarded in this report.

As a first result it can definitely be stated that in 15 of the 24 prisons that have answered, a theatre project has never taken place so far. In 10 prisons there was a theatre project at least one time. Currently only in 7 Austrian prisons theatre activities are going on.

3.3. Qualitative interviews

So far, the author has done 3 qualitative interviews with Garsten prison inmates who took part in a past theatre project as actors; at the time of the interview one of these persons was released for 8 months, which means that the interview took place when he was free. In addition, 2 interviews were made with civil servants of the Federal Ministry of Justice who are essentially in charge of leisure time activities and care of inmates.

4. The history of prison theatre in Austria – from the past to present

Unfortunately there is practically no documentary of theatre activities in Austrian prisons in the past. There were occasional reports about former art events in Austrian prisons in the interviews, but in most cases exact data and details as regards content could not be found out any more. Solely the project “Kultoknast” in the Wien-Josefstadt prison, and the theatre activities of the “Kleinen Theater am Platzl” in Garsten prison, which were initiated and headed by the author, are well documented.

4.1. Theatre activities in different prisons

One of the Federal Ministry of Justice civil servants in charge of leisure time activities remembers that in the past there were, again and again, theatre projects in **Gerasdorf prison**, the only prison for juvenile male delinquents with longer prison sentences. According to statements in the questionnaire there were theatre projects from 1990 to 1991, headed by two internal female social workers. In 1995 “Don Quichote” was produced by inmates and external actors together and performed in the prison. This project was financed and run by the “Mobile Youth Information” and the “Ministry of Youth”. At the moment there is a new theatre project going on. It is run by an external female director in collaboration with students from the Academy for Social Work. They intend to put on a show, but do not know yet, when this is going to happen. This project is co-financed by the Culture office of the local Lower Austrian government.

Due to a report of the current head of Garsten prison, Dr. Norbert Minkendorfer, there was also a theatre group in **Wien-Mittersteig prison** in the past. This is a

so-called special institution for prisoners detained according to § 21/2 StGB: The special situation of these inmates is that they were sentenced to a so-called “measure” in addition to their temporal sentence. This means that psychotherapeutical care shall be made possible on the basis of a diagnosed “mental or psychic deviance of a

higher degree”, but also that somebody can be kept detained beyond his temporal sentence if his “psychic deviancy” is not diagnosed as having improved in the course of his prison sentence. That prison in Vienna is said to have had its own theatre group. But at present there is no theatre activity, due to a 2004 Federal Ministry of Justice report on the “educational care and activity of inmates in their leisure time”. Unfortunately the questionnaires on this topic have not been returned to the present day.

Schwarzau prison, the only prison for women, can look back on a long, active time of prison theatre. The initiative was taken by a committed female judicial officer who put plays on stage with the women for many years. Due to the memory of a judicial psychologist, in some of the projects also a female judicial psychologist took part. In the questionnaire still in these days is a very lively theatre activity documented. Again it is a female judicial officer who manages to set up sometimes even three shows a year with the inmates and show them to the public. Again and again also female students are involved in these projects, who take care of e.g. make-up, costumes, foto documentary etc. Priority is given to the fields of musical and sketches. Again and again there were attempts to involve external experts from the theatre in the projects. But mostly this failed or did not even start.

At **Innsbruck prison** there was twice the attempt by employees to establish a prison theatre. According to the questionnaire, the first initiative, about 6 to 7 years back, originated by two judicial officers, who rehearsed sketches with a mixed group (men and women) and presented them internally. The second initiative, by a young female judicial psychologist, happened in 2003. She worked together with an actor of the theatre in Innsbruck with inmates of the drugs-, juvenile- and female department in one group aiming to make new experiences possible for the inmates by sensitizing their empathic skills,

conveying zest for living and strategies for conflict solving. The involved female psychologist talks about the experience that this group enhanced the self-esteem of its participants enormously and in addition it was fun. The setting was intended to be therapeutical, and so there was no public performance aimed at. Unfortunately there is no current theatre work at Innsbruck prison. At present this

kind of activity is allegedly not supported or even made impossible, although there is readiness for a new project within the participants.

According to the annual report of the Federal Ministry of Justice about “educational care and activity of the inmates in their leisure time” from 2004 there were theatre activities at **Korneuburg prison**. Due to returned questionnaires and reports of involved students, an external directrice together with students of the Academy for Social work started a theatre project, but broke off after three weeks on account of the strong fluctuation of the inmates, and the problems to motivate them adequately.

It is owing to the commitment of a female social worker and a female psychologist that at **Göllersdorf prison** first theatre activities have come into being since 2002, with the patients housed there. As mentioned above, this prison is especially intended for people who were sentenced according to § 21/1 StGB. This means that a lot of the inmates, according to diagnoses of ICD-10 belong to category F2 (schizophrenia, schizotypal and psychotic disorders) resp. to category F7 (reduced intelligence). Understandably enough this demands from the heads of the project an adequate sensitivity and experience with humans who suffer from psychic diseases like these. There has been a corresponding commitment since 2002. Due to the questionnaire, every year around Christmas improvised plays, which are rehearsed with the two heads of the group twice a week for about three months, are performed in front of inmates and judicial employees.

Linz prison dared a completely new project at the external branch at Asten – a theatre-therapeutical group in English with African inmates. This project has been headed by a female psychotherapist with training in Expressive Arts Therapy. The elements of this work come from the field of theatre, but the basic idea of the group is a therapeutical resp. sociodramatic one. So there is no performance aimed at; rather that the way is the goal.

At **Klagenfurt prison**, in spring 2005, there were two times one week of intensive theatre workshop, accompanied by various persons of the Catholic educational institution at Klagenfurt, which also financed this project. The head, a sociologist and theatre pedagogue, wants his work to be understood as artistic creation as well as sociopedagogical and therapeutical learning. His kind of access is the forum theatre by Augusto Boal, which he, due to answers in the questionnaire, dedicated thematically to aggression management in these workshops. There is also a current theatre project at Klagenfurt prison.

Wien-Favoriten prison, a so-called “penal institution for measures”, accomodates male and female inmates to disaccustom them from their addictions to drugs, alcohol or pills (§ 22 StGB). Over the years there have been theatre projects again and again. Unfortunately an exact documentary of the past projects is not existing. Since 2002 there are projects at the females department on a regular base. These are headed by an external actress; rehearsals take place twice a week to an extent of 3 hours. The work comprises methods from improvisational theatre as well as meditation, physical theatre and voice training. Financial support comes from the “People’s University”.

4.1.1. The project “Kultoknast”

A probably extraordinary project of the past was the long-term activity of the association “**KULTOKNAST**”, brought into being in 1989 at **Wien-Josefstadt prison** by two young, committed judicial officers (Manfred Natowicz and Martin Schuster). With the support of the head of prison they founded the music- and theatre-group “Kultoknast”, with which they wanted to offer men and women in prison the chance to experience being in a group and cooperation in a playful atmosphere free of fear. As the two judicial officers sensed that in this group activity there happened a lot of examination of the personality, they acted professionally und enlarged their team with psychologists and social workers in order to work interdisciplinarily further on. In December 1989 and January 1990 in a total of 7 performances on the internal stage the first sketch parade was presented, and then they went on tour to other prisons. In 1990 “Kultoknast” became an association. Highly motivated after returning from their tour, the two judicial officers dared an attempt: They placed the first draft of their self-written play “Spring awakening” in all departments, asking for creative literary work on the existing text. Unfortunately there was little echo. Now the two of them were not sure if they had not passed on the idea well or if the reason was to be found in resistance against the project by colleagues. Nevertheless, “Spring awakening” was, after a short time, performed internally as well as at other prisons with broad media response. In autumn 1990 rehearsals for a music performance began, which was staged in December of that year internally and went on tour to other prisons again in spring 1991. In the same year a play under the title “Der pflegeleichte Haflinger” (= the easy-care inmate) was written. For the first time “Kultoknast” performed also outside prison walls in the “House of encounter”, where a three day festival was organized. Also shown to the public were theatre productions of Schwarzau prison (“Chief Evening Wind”) and of Mittersteig prison (“The Kiss of the Spider Woman”), and the music group of Göllersdorf prison took part too. In 1992 the next music production was planned,

accompanied by a grandiose stage decoration. In 1993 the self-produced play "The Diary" was performed with little approval. Following this, Natowicz and Schuster decided to reactivate the well-trying play "Spring awakening" and involve an external professional director for the first time. After she had quit for temporal reasons, she recommended a colleague, who accepted the project with a

lot of commitment and gave professional drama lessons for the whole ensemble. The play was performed prison-internally and externally in the "House of encounter" at the end of the year. In 1994 the two judicial officers for the first time went beyond the Austrian borders and accepted an invitation to an international congress in Milan, with the result of the foundation of the "European Association of Theatre and Prison". In 1995 there was again work under professional direction. The play "Schillers Räuber endlich hinter Gittern" developed from Schiller's "Die Räuber". In 1996 the second congress of the "European Association of Theatre and Prison" took place in Manchester. At this international meeting the name of the association was changed into "International Network of Theatre and Prison", in order not to discriminate non-European members. In autumn 1996 there was the first attempt to integrate the medium film into the creative work. After technical preconditions had been managed, filming began at Wien-Josefstadt prison in 1997. The interconnection between theatre and film in the performance of the last play "A Stund am Tag" (= One hour a day), dealing with the rejection and integration of "criminals", met high approval and was praised by many sides. In 1998 the head of prison retired. His successor no longer supported the project "Kultoknast". Natowicz and Schuster moved to a different prison and have made no theatre project any more so far.

In the year 2004, at Wien-Josefstadt prison, there was three times a one week intense theatre-therapeutical workshop with juvenile females and males and young African inmates. It was made with a therapeutical background and did not

aim at a performance. In 2005 there was a 10-week-theatre-project in Wien-Josefstadt prison, headed by an actress of the "Theater der Jugend". They worked on improvised scenes that were finally performed internally.

4.1.2. Das "Kleine Theater am Platzl"

In **Garsten prison**, where the author has been heading a theatre group since 1999, five public performances took place so far. But everything had begun much earlier. The author experienced that in countless self-experience lessons within the framework of her postgraduate studies for clinical and health psychologist and psychotherapist no such direct and emotional access to her own self was possible like she was allowed to experience in theatre and dance. So she also wanted to make this experience possible for the inmates of the prison where she is working as psychologist and psychotherapist. At the beginning the resistances from the employees against an innovative project like this were very high. But after she kept boosting this idea, she finally managed to found a house-internal theatre group with prisoners of Garsten prison in January 1999. First the rehearsals were locally quite limited: At the beginning they took place in the author's office. For this, every time tables and chairs were evacuated in order to provide at least some little space. Gradually a room could be found, which was first without electric light and any equipment. Nevertheless the theatre group bearing the name "Ruhestörung" (= Disturbance of Peace) rehearsed busily each week. Training comprised interactional and group games, as well as body- and voice training, exercises on sensitizing and improvisations. After the room had been fairly adapted, the author, with the support of the officer in charge of the leisure time activities in the ministry, and by the economic administration of Garsten prison, even managed to get their own stage with curtains: This was the birthday of the "Kleine Theater am Platzl". Then, in June 2000, there was the first production entitled "So etwas", which explored (sometimes very philosophically) emotional themes like wishes, hopes, fears etc. of the people. The scenic texts were written by inmates or worked out in improvisation. All in all three times the play was presented to an invited public as well as to the other prisoners. In several media, papers as well as radio, there was a big and very positive echo. In the year 2002 the second production of the

“Kleinen Theater am Platzl” after the play “Indien” by Hader and Dorfer was performed successfully several times. The third and so far biggest production, “Dein Wille geschehe oder In Hiob Bauern sei Ölend” was written by an inmate of Garsten prison and produced by the author with prisoners. The basis of the play is the biblical story of Job which was

transferred into the rural present time. At this time also the new name of the ensemble “Theaterensemble Ups!” (=United prisoners on stage) was created by a participant of the theatre group. The ensemble of 12 acted in February and March 2005 successfully with broad attention at a total of 6 times in the “Kleine Theater am Platzl” for invited guests, prisoners and employees. And for the first time in Austria there was also the option for relatives of the acting inmates to watch the play. Highly motivated and after manifold praise the author is now tackling a somewhat different production with her ensemble: Around Christmas a performance was staged in Garsten prison church with elements from body theatre with neutral masks, together with musicians, for invited guests and prisoners, which was highly praised. Now, in 2006, the author is working on a new production. As working basis the play “Kunst” by Jasmina Reza is used. For this, characters and texts around the topic of “art” are created out of improvisation.

4.2. Results from the “Questionnaires on theatre activities in Austrian prisons – general part” and examples from the “qualitative interviews”

If you try to express the theatre scenery in Austrian prisons in numbers, you see that there have been no theatre projects so far in 15 prisons. In 10, at least one time in the past a theatre project took place; currently 7 prisons are active in theatre. As the questionnaires, sent out to all 29 Austrian prisons, were only returned by 25 of them, it remains unclear if and when theatre projects took place in the remaining 4 prisons.

The “theatre active” prisons are court prisons, as well as penal institutions, as well as special institutions, such as prisons for measures; i. e. in this respect no conclusions can be drawn. It seems that individual initiatives of employees rather than the kind of penal institution are responsible for such projects. Also the participating prisoners are highly varied: juveniles, women and men in custody and prison sentence, the author assumes that they are mostly Austrian prisoners or inmates who are in command of the German language, as language barriers are frequently quoted for disabling the production of such projects. Solely the project at Linz prison and the week-workshops at Wien-Josefstadt prison, which were headed by the author, were specially aiming at African, English-speaking inmates.

The heads of the projects came from outside as well as inside. In their regular professions there was a varied mixture of actor/actress, director/directrice, theatre pedagogue, psychologist, social worker, psychotherapist, sociologist, and judicial officer. Most of the project heads were on average between 30 and 40 years old. Striking detail: all except one were female.

Rehearsal times stretched from one to five times per week with about 3 – 4 hours per session. Times between the start of the project and the performance

differed widely – from one week to 1.5 years, which might correlate with the expectations towards the results. After week-workshops e. g. there were little internal final presentations. On the other hand big productions that were performed in public up to six times and included a team of 10 – 12 inmates took place.

The social and personal skills that were supported - in the opinion of the theatre makers - again varied: team work, social competence, frustration tolerance, self-confidence, handling aggressions, strategies for solving conflicts, feeling of responsibility, sharpness of perception, development of personality, perception of the body, voice training, verbal skills, etc. Artistically, acting was in the foreground, in singular cases also dance, clowning, mime and music. The choice method in the theatre project was clearly improvisation. Apart from this, interaction games, rhythm training, body work, vocal training, breathing- and speech exercise/techniques, meditation, and also methods of forum theatre were applied. As basis for the performances mostly texts out of improvisation, as well as self-written texts by inmates were used. Only in singular cases existent plays or novels were used as inspirations.

Most people involved saw the intention and meaning of such theatre projects in the artistic and creative production per se and in sociopedagogical and therapeutical learning. By far more seldom the theatre activists wanted to regard their projects as leisure time activity. This is especially interesting, as in the personal questionnaires the question, what theatre projects can achieve, was most frequently answered with “a meaningful leisure time activity”. Also the one in charge of leisure time at the ministry understands theatre primarily as leisure time activity. This could be connected to the fact that it is also formally named as such in all statistics and reports of the justice system.

In the interviews with the inmates the creative production, the therapeutical self-

reflection, and a meaningful and active leisure time are mentioned directly and indirectly. A central argument is the feeling of normality and of freedom, as well as "...a kind of home that you experience, namely home also meaning being together with people, where you feel good and can create something", "...a surely positive event of being active in the group, with people you appreciate ...and there is really a common production". But also the feeling to transport something, to have a voice and at the same time presenting oneself in public for the first time was mentioned, last not least also the confrontation with oneself, such as when "playing roles that go quite deep into the souls and the persons".

Not all projects aim at a performance, but the major part does. Performances most frequently took place in front of inmates and employees, sometimes for invited guests, one time even for relatives of the participating inmates. Only most rarely there were tours, and then mostly only to other prisons and not on external stages.

Wherever projects have been taking place, there are appropriate premises, although this was felt to be the biggest imaginable problem in the realization of theatre projects. The majority of the active theatre makers, however, regard high fluctuation and very short terms of sentence as the main reasons for a possible failure.

Such projects were and are financed to the largest degree by the justice itself, but occasionally there are subventions e. g. by the "Cultural office of the Lower Austrian government", the "Catholic educational institution at Klagenfurt", "The circle of friends Schwarzau", the "People's University", the "Mobile youth information" etc.

4.3. Results from the “Questionnaires on theatre activities in Austrian prisons – personal part”

As mentioned above, the author wanted to find out personal opinions and attitudes towards theatre projects from the most different professional groups at a prison, by asking four questions which should be answered (per prison) by one person from the management, one person from the social services (psychological service, social service, etc.) and one person from the judicial guard staff (command, leisure time representative etc.).

A total of 52 questionnaires were returned to the author, which means that on average only about 2 questionnaires per prison were filled in. One prison, however, was very committed and sent back even 4 questionnaires. The professional groups involved were very varied. Big interprofessional differences in the answers cannot be made out, but rather a different trend was visible: If there were very exact descriptions and a lot of entries, a similar pattern was found in the other questionnaires from the same prison. This could have happened by learning on the model, but more than this suggests the conclusion that in some prisons projects or at least considerations of such projects are much more present than in others.

In the following part the author will try to categorize the answers to one question each. Exceptions are the questions 3 and 4, which the author summarizes in her analysis, as this was already done by the interviewees in very many questionnaires.

Question 1: What, according to your opinion, could theatre projects achieve in your prison?

There were more than 200 answers, which can be categorized roughly like this:

1st category: Personality development and support of the social competence of inmates (>100 answers):

More than half of all answers can be summarized in this group. Among them, there are supposed improvement of communication, development of a feeling for the group or the team spirit, learning group skills, enhancing self-confidence, improvement of persistence, concentration and discipline, improved empathic skills, improvement of self-reflection, reduction of aggression, enhancing frustration tolerance, learning of strategies for solving problems, taking over responsibility, arrangement of values and norms, and also therapeutical support in general.

2nd category: Improvement of the quality of life and activity (> 40 answers):

In this category there are, after all, still one quarter of all answers to question 1. The most frequently mentioned components are diversity, activity, escaping everyday monotony, as well as joy, fun, and a good mood. Also relaxation, as well as awakening of interest, and support of motivation appeared here among others.

3rd category: leisure time activity (> 20 answers):

About one eighth of all answers referred to the category of meaningful and

active free time.

4th category: education and learning (> 20 answers):

About one eighth of all answers referred to this category, which expect lingual and intellectual support, political and cultural education, learning about literature, and dealing with the arts.

5th category: positive effect for the prison

Among these there were only single answers any more, such as a general improvement of the climate, better understanding, more trust, and improvement of the communication between the staff and the prisoners, as well as a possibility of representing the prison positively to the outside.

One answer that the author could not place in the five categories described, was the chance of criticising bad state of affairs.

Question 2: What could be possible risks or dangers of theatre projects in your prison?

There were less than 100 answers to this question. This means that the positive options of theatre projects are recognized much more than risks or dangers are feared. Interesting, too, that more than half of all the answers on this question did not see dangers or refer to dangers that lie beyond the inmates.

1st category: Risks and dangers that could originate in the theatre group and the involved inmates themselves (> 40 answers):

On the one hand, this refers to general doubts of safety according to the alleged danger of inmates, like abuse, violent quarrels, revolts, taking hostages, smuggle, danger of appointments, appointments of accomplices with prisoners in custody, as well as danger of escape at external public performances. These risks sound very well-known, as they partly make up the penal system law (StVG) and often are frequent terms in a prison. One quarter of all answers to question 2 refer to this area dealing with the dangers for safety and order of a prison.

The second big area inside this category are rather supposed intra- and interpersonal dangers for the inmates, such as e. g. competition among each others, conflicts and quarrel in the group, loss of reality, false hopes, frustration, as well as a lack of persistence, motivation and interest. Some of these fears reappear also in questions 3 and 4.

2nd category: Risks and dangers that do not originate in the theatre group and the involved inmates themselves (> 30 answers):

In this category very many answers can be found that reappear in questions 3 and 4. This makes me assume that the questions were not put clearly and precisely enough. On the other hand it was also the idea of the author to leave a certain scope of interpretation for the interviewees.

This category is also made up by the high fluctuation of inmates, no suitable staff, no suitable inmates, too short terms of sentence, bad organisation, bad cooperation between the vocational groups involved, no acceptance with the staff, a lack of finances, etc.

3rd category: No risks and dangers (> 20 answers):

In this category we find almost one third of all answers to question 2, that do not suspect risks and dangers.

Question 3 (and 4): What, according to your opinion, are necessary preconditions in order to be able to realize theatre projects in your prison?

As answers to questions 3 and 4 were frequently combined by the interviewees, the author has tried to categorize all answers inside question 3. All in all there were again more than 200 answers, that can roughly be classified like this:

1st category: Inmates (>60 answers):

As being important for the success of a theatre project the selection of suitable inmates is regarded. It might be difficult, if the participants have very short terms of sentence, but also if little interest, motivation and wish towards an activity like this exist.

2nd category: Staff (>60 answers):

The most important preconditions perceived in this category are qualified and suitable heads of groups with relevant experience, as well as the resources of staff in the prison, the commitment of the participants and the acceptance of such projects by the prison management and the employees. Also a good cooperation between external and internal participants of the project is seen as important.

3rd category: Framework conditions – time, room and means (>60 answers):

At the peak, not only in this category but also in the whole questionnaire with a total of 32 (!) answers, there is the question concerning suitable premises. This might be such a present topic, because the number of inmates, as mentioned above, is rising continuously and nearly every prison suffers from overcrowding and acute lack of room. Besides, in this area there are also questions on temporal resources, material for performances, as well as financial means.

4th category: Other preconditions (>10):

A good concept, a good organisation, a suitable selection of plays, as well as awareness of the aims, and regard of interests of the inmates in working on the content are mentioned here.

4.4. General remarks on the results

As it became obvious in the few qualitative interviews with those involved, the power and effect of such projects are enormous for the individual. Also members of staff who had had no contact to such projects so far, gave numerous supposed effects in the questionnaires, that are actually corresponding to what involved persons describe. Due to the author's opinion it would thus be necessary and meaningful to accompany such processes scientifically and to explore them more deeply, with the final aim of getting also more understanding and support in the realization of prison theatre projects, because the fact that it makes sense and has presumably a positive effect too, was shown in this study.

5. Concluding remarks by the author

For me personally, theatre work in prisons has always been a very powerful experience. I understand it as a privilege that I may, for people in extreme situations, where personal freedom is reduced to the extreme minimum, create a forum in which practically everything fits in: their wishes, hopes, phantasies, but also fears, aggressions, disappointments and much more. I estimate myself lucky to be allowed to be part of a process in which humans meet each other, tell their stories, profit mutually, grow together and finally create works of art, in order to get into a dialogue with people who normally to reach would be very difficult or virtually impossible.

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