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## **Inclusive Planning through the Theatre of the Oppressed**

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Inclusive planning means that people are considered with their specific needs, no more as an homogeneous group (in which the adult male point of view prevails and other people – not males and/or not adults – have to adapt themselves), but as a plural group. It means a change of paradigm: no more people have to adapt to the plan, but planners have to find way, policies and tools to satisfy the most different people, with their own points of view.

The first problem for an inclusive planner is to get to know all these requests and desires. Here is suggested that the Theatre of the Oppressed is one of such methods.

The paper are presents three branches of the method (invented by Augusto Boal in the Seventies.), useful for planning (the branches are: Image Theatre, Forum Theatre, Legislative Theatre); then are briefly described three examples of TO used for solving spatial conflicts. Finally some characteristics that make the method useful and powerful are listed .

## Living the Bodies

Everybody is different: we are male or female, child, adult, young or elderly people, we have ethnic differences, cultural differences, and so on. Notwithstanding everyone can experience the differences during his or her all life, planning is not so sensitive. Urban planning (both in socialist or capitalist society) descend from Enlightenment, so the objective of plans is to build a rational city (Sandercock, 1998). In doing that, people are treated like an homogeneous group, as users with homogeneous needs, they are no more man or woman, they have no age, no culture, they are all “Users” or “Citizens” or “Inhabitants”.

In the last decades some urban movement emerged to make planners and politicians aware of their specific needs, left unsatisfied:

*“It’s necessary to substitute the paradigm of the male made architecture with the idea of architecture and planning modulated on movements and wishes of a thousand plural bodies that inhabit the city, in their diversity and richness.”*

(Paba, 2010, p.11)

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## The Theatre of the Oppressed

The Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) is a theatrical method that was invented by Augusto Boal in South America during the Seventies. The method is based on the Pedagogy of the Oppressed by Paulo Freire and political theatre by Berthold Brecht.

The Thought of Freire was that:

*“Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift. It must be pursued constantly and responsibly. Freedom is not an ideal located outside of man; nor is it an idea which becomes myth. It is rather the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion.”* (Freire, 1970, p. 47)

In this way the Oppressed is no more only a victim, but a person who can conquest freedom by himself or herself. Recognizing the role of people in self liberation and the responsibility in Oppression bring to an authentic empowerment of subjects that can discover their competences, abilities and power.

The Theatre of the Oppressed is a method trough which people can find ability and strategy in a safety way (like in a training ground). About the method Boal said:

*“TO, by different way, is an expression of a constant research of dialogue forms: theatrical forms that can communicate with social actions, pedagogy, psychotherapy, politics”* (Boal, 2002, p.14)

TO comprises different branches that aims at making people aware of oppressions, and let people try different strategies for managing and solving conflict and in order to conquer their freedom.

## Tree of the Theatre of the Oppressed

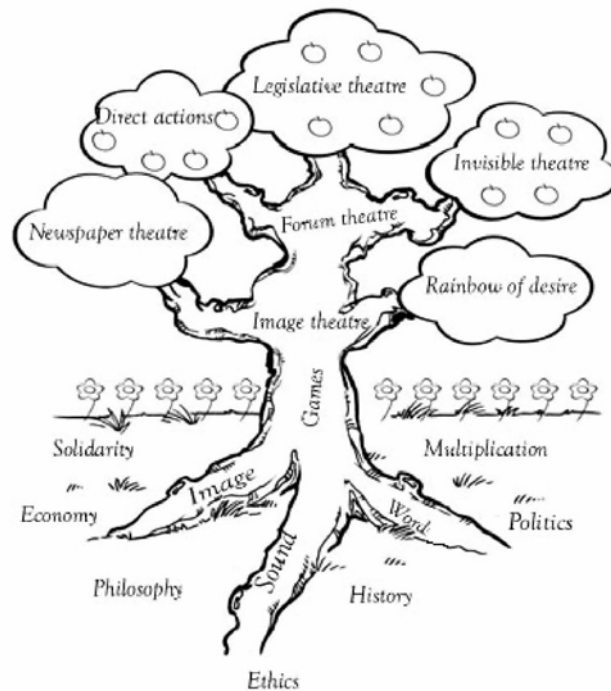


Figure 1 | The Tree of the Theatre of the Oppressed

### Branches of the Theatre of the Oppressed

The Theatre of the Oppressed has been invented in the Seventies in Brazil, and since that moment it began to spread all over the world. Boal developed different branches, to be used for different objectives.

As it is drawn in the figure *The Tree of the Theatre of the Oppressed*, the method has roots in the Social and Cultural Ground made by Politic, Economy, History, Ethics, Philosophy and relationships between people. The roots of the method are the theatre typical roots: words, sound, images (and one of the branches is based properly in the power of the images and the emotions that body can convey). The trunk of the tree is composed by games, that are used for relaxing people and generate non-judging and trusting relationships, but also for making participants free from social mechanizations, and in that way more inside their mind and emotions.

Image Theatre and Forum Theatre are the most important branches of the method (in the upper part of the tree) and they are described in the following paragraphs. Based on these branches there are four other parts: Newspaper Theatre (that aims at making people conscious of the power of the media, the social contradictions and the mechanisms through which news are noticed and told), Direct Actions (theatrical actions for sensitize people), Legislative Theatre (described in a following paragraph), Invisible Theatre (a theatrical action in a place where people don't expect to see one. Spectators aren't aware of participating in the performance. The action is a spark to involve people in the action and also in debates generated by the action, to make people conscious about oppression and injustice that are inside everyday life), Rainbow of desire (a groups of technics that aims at making people visualize oppressions -and oppressors- inside them).

### Image theatre

*“Words are emptinesses that fill the emptiness (vacuum) that exists between one human being and another. Words are lines that we carve in the sand, sounds that we sculpt in the air. We know the meaning of the word we pronounce, because we fill it with*

*our desires, ideas and feelings, but we don't know how that word is going to be heard by each listener. IMAGE THEATRE is a series of Techniques that allow people to communicate through Images and Spaces, and not through words alone.*" (Augusto Boal, Rio de Janeiro 2004, cit in [www.theatreoftheoppressed.org](http://www.theatreoftheoppressed.org)).

Boal theorizes that not only words are significant to communicate emotions and thoughts, and he sustain that actions, images, spaces and body can make it even better. This technique is used most for exploring deep though and for managing conflicts.

## Forum theatre

For having an idea about how Forum theatre does work, it is useful to know how was it born:

"In the 1960s, Boal developed a process whereby audience members could stop a performance and suggest different actions for the actors, who would then carry out the audience suggestions. But in a now legendary development, a woman in the audience once was so outraged the actor could not understand her suggestion that she came onto the stage and showed what she meant. For Boal this was the birth of the spect-actor (not spectator) and his theatre was transformed. He began inviting audience members with suggestions for change onto the stage to demonstrate their ideas. In so doing, he discovered that through this participation the audience members became empowered not only to imagine change but to actually practice that change, reflect collectively on the suggestion, and thereby become empowered to generate social action. Theatre became a practical vehicle for grass-roots activism." (Patterson, 1999, p. 1, cit. in Sanders, 2004, p. 225).

A Forum theatre begins with the representation of an oppressive situation, and spectators are invited to go on the stage to try different solutions:

"FORUM-THEATRE presents a scene or a play that must necessarily show a situation of oppression that the Protagonist does not know how to fight against, and fails. The spect-actors are invited to replace this Protagonist, and act out - on stage and not from the audience - all possible solutions, ideas, strategies. The other actors improvise the reactions of their characters facing each new intervention, so as to allow a sincere analysis of the real possibilities of using those suggestions in real life. All spect-actors have the same right to intervene and play their ideas. FORUM-THEATRE is a collective rehearsal for reality." (Augusto Boal, Rio de Janeiro 2004, cit in [www.theatreoftheoppressed.org](http://www.theatreoftheoppressed.org)).

While people are involved and go on the stage for propose their own idea, they also realize the challenges that putting in practice their strategy entails. In this way they are more empowered that if they remain sit in the comfort of their seats.

The other people are also involved in commenting the action, remarking changes, goals and weakness of the strategy and giving their opinion about the workability and the reality of the action. One of the strongest points of the method is making everybody feeling to be in a laboratory, where people can freely experiment their idea and everybody can learn something, as everybody is involved in some way.

This can be considered the most important technique of the method, as people can really try to change reality and solve problems, that are (or can become) their own problems. In the scene different personages play different roles, with different point of views and wills, that are explicit. So the solution has to be found taking in account the satisfaction of everybody.

## Legislative Theatre

Legislative Theatre is a way to build rules and laws from the bottom, giving voice to the citizens:

"LEGISLATIVE THEATRE is the utilization of all forms of the Theatre of the Oppressed with the aim of transforming the citizens legitimate desires into Laws. After a normal Forum session, we create a space similar to a Chamber where laws are made, and we proceed to create a similar ritual of lawmaking, following the same official procedure of presenting Projects based on the spect-actors interventions, defending or refusing them, voting, etc. At the end, we collect the approved suggestions and try to put pressure upon the lawmakers to have those laws approved." (Augusto



Boal, Rio de Janeiro 2004, cit in [www.theatreoftheoppressed.org](http://www.theatreoftheoppressed.org)).

Basically it is like a Forum Theatre, in which some common problems are presented. During the play people can participate both with substitutions of actors (as in a classical Forum Theatre) and writing proposal of rules or laws. After the play all these proposals are discussed and transformed in Legal Actions (Referendum, popular initiative laws, and so on). Maybe this is the technique more usable in participative processes and planning.

## **How Theatre of the Oppressed can be used as a tool for inclusive Planning.**

### **Two examples and three stories.**

TO can be used as a method to make people aware about problems, solve conflicts, try strategies, debate. As there are no restrictions about topics people can approach through TO, it can be really useful for example in space conflicts, or in policies design, or also in space design.

Three examples are here briefly described: the first one and the second one are two scenes of Forum Theatre used for solving some conflict about the uses of the courtyard of some buildings in the periphery of Milan, the other example is a Legislative Theatre used for debating about a little park in the periphery of Modena and what Municipality should do for the safety of the park users.

The first two scenes were the result of a workshop named “Stadera città aperta” (Stadera open city – Stadera is the name of the neighbourhood). The group of participants was composed by neighbours and community professionals working in the area.

The scenes that were played were true stories of people living in the area: the first one was about a tailor, working at home, with no more costumers because they were scared by a pusher standing in the courtyard of the tailor's home. The woman was scared too, and prevented her daughter from going in the courtyard to play with the other children living there. So nobody was in the courtyard but the pusher. What happened was that the most of spect-actors were children that recognized as oppressed not the jobless mum (as it was supposed by the actors), but the child forced to stay at home. During the Forum many strategies were tempted, but finally the best one, approved by most of people, was a parent who involved all the children to go to play in the courtyard; on consequence of the presence of the children in the area, the pusher went away. Unfortunately we don't know which was the courtyard of the story, neither if children now are playing in every courtyard to keep away pushers. What we know is that that night everyone learned that there were some solutions to the problems, and that they were allowed to move for change their neighbourhood.

The other story was about different inhabitants needs: the courtyard of another building was full of children playing in every hours of the afternoon. Children playing means lot of noise, that disturbed an old woman living in the ground floor of the building. As the woman complained very often for the noise, children started making much more noise, playing football just under her windows, and so on. Finally in a fit of rage the old woman hit a little girl and was beaten herself by the girl's parents. The story was very well recognized as real by the spectators: in this case it emerged that in the most of the courtyards there were conflicts like this one, because courtyards were spaces suitable for babies and children, but no more for adolescents. So it was clear that a major need of the neighbourhood was to have a place where adolescents could meet and stay together.

This second case is a very good example to understand how the Theatre of the Oppressed can be a good method for an inclusive planner: in this case the role of the professional is to help the community to find the rules for using the space in the courtyards (which games, which hours, which age) naturally involving children, that have emerged as actors in the competition; planner has also to help people to find a place where adolescents can stay together and children can do noisy games.

The case of Modena was another space conflicts in a little park in the periphery of the city. The park was used by elderly people to sit in the bench and going for a walk, by children, by young people to stay together, by other inhabitants going with dogs and so on. The problems were that the park was very bad equipped

for activities (young people using trashcans as basket) and very dirty. During the night people were scared to pass there because there were pushers and other villains. The drama tells about all these conflicts. The spect-actors were involved both as actors in the substitutions and giving suggestions to the Municipality. After the scene a debate took place about all the suggestions, with some legal experts giving law suggestions. In this case a planner can be involved both in giving suggestions, but also in giving expertise about tools of place control and regulations.



Figure 2 | The Flyer of the Legislative Theatre in Modena

## Conclusions

- As written in the first part, everybody is different and has different needs and points of view. TO is a very useful tool for letting all these needs and views appear and for involving people in the research of a solution. We can recognize some characteristics of TO that make it powerful:
- TO makes people aware of problems, injustice and other points of views;
- TO is a method in which every contribute is welcome and there are no prejudices. TO also welcomes mistakes as a method for learning;
- TO can involve a very large number of people, avoiding speechifying, but enhancing every contribute;
- TO gives the opportunity of try also wrong ideas and to taste which challenges are entailed in realizing a strategy or an idea;
- TO facilitate the comprehension among participants, actors, spect-actors and other people;
- TO makes people sense the possibility and the urgency of moving against oppressions and injustice (also the spatial ones); TO activates people: *“TO must always bring people to futures actions: the topic of the performances are real and necessary. The research of solutions, or at least alternatives, are played minding that there is the*



concrete possibility of living these situations in real life. It's non sufficient knowing that the world must be transformed: people must do it!" (ass. Livres Como o Vento);

- TO can be used for every topic, as long as they are real and relate to real-life situations.
- For all these characteristics we can say that TO is a very useful powerful method that can be used in inclusive planning.

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The association *Teatrindifesi* ([www.teatrindifesi.org](http://www.teatrindifesi.org)) created and presented “Parteciparte. L'arte della partecipazione” to every frequenter of the Park XXII Aprile in Modena. They also presented the scene during the TO Italian National Festival (Bologna - Modena, 2011).

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