

## **PWS Formative & Creative Workshops**

### **Final report**

The project Poetry Wanders the Streets (PWS), co-funded by the Creative Europe programme, was carried out by partners from four European countries: the Civic Library of Cologno Monzese (It), the Centre des Arts du Récit en Isère (Fr), the National Archaeological Museum of Lisbon (Pt) and the Children's and Youth Literature Seminar in Guadalajara (Sp).

PWS has sought new audiences for poetry, especially among the youth. To do so, it took as a starting point the different forms of oral poetry: traditional forms (recitation, sung poems, rhymed improvisation...), as well as other forms that are closer to young people (polipoetry, rap, slam poetry...). The organizers decided to take these genres as the basis of their work because they could give access to poetry more easily than written poetic forms, and they also opened the way to more “cultivated” poetry.

One of the main points of the PWS project was a series of **Formative & Creative Workshops** aimed at the young sector of the audience (Primary and Secondary students, although other participants were accepted).

The workshops were carried out in the last months of 2016 and beginnings of 2017, and had a high level of participation: 42 schools of all educational levels (from kindergarten to university); 4,953 students and teachers participating in activities related to poetry; 25 artists performing oral poetry, and 26 professional and amateur performances. The workshops have therefore largely fulfilled the four objectives proposed:

- To make the different genres of oral poetry known among an ample audience.
- To attract new audience and create new readers of poetry.
- To encourage and provide tools for artistic creation.
- To conceive and organize a poetic great event the 21th April, World Poetry Day.

Although each of the four partners organised its workshops according to their characteristics and usual strategies, all of them have developed good practices that they would like to share with other organizations working in the same sector. The present report develops five aspects that have proven useful:

1. A dissemination effort.
2. Joining two kinds of work.
3. Awakening creativity.
4. Making poetry appealing.
5. Taking poetry to the streets.

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## **1. A dissemination effort**

When the PWS project was presented in its four locations, the organisers made an effort to stress that it was co-funded by the Creative Europe programme. Hosting a project endorsed by the EU's Culture Department was a source of satisfaction for the population of all four towns, something that undoubtedly contributed to the general success of the project and its workshops.

To disseminate the workshops, the organizers employed all the usual channels: mass media, social networks, partner websites, telephone and written communications... They also joined efforts with community institutions such as the towns' public libraries, which disseminated the project through their electronic bulletins. Support was also obtained from the educational authorities, who spread the information by means of letters distributed among all schools.

However, it is worth stressing the good results obtained by means of direct communication, which is somewhat forgotten at a time when many other channels are available. The PWS project demonstrated that direct visits to educational centers, and conversation with the teachers and management teams, are extremely effective to obtain complicity with these professionals, so often pressed by their work and their rigid curricula.

In view of the experience gathered by the PWS project, it is clear that addressing the target audience personally is a key tool. Using the spoken word is a logical strategy when the subject matter of the project is spoken poetry; however, it has also proven to be a veritable asset for the success of the workshops and the project in general.

## **2. Joining two kinds of work**

One of the key elements for the success of the workshops was the combination of two types of work. On the one hand, there was an approach to poetry inside the classrooms, guided by the teachers. On the other hand, there were encounters with poets who represented different kinds of spoken poetry: improvisers, "romanceros", rappers, slammers..., all of whom were selected on the basis of their high artistic quality. Along the project, there was a total of 26 professional poetic performances for students in the four participating towns. As the cycle progressed, the performances became more open to the public, encouraging those who attended to get on stage and take an active part in the shows.

According to the teachers, some of the artists became "stars" for the students after the workshops, on a level that can be compared to that of their favorite musicians or performers. The fact that this status was attributed to poets says a lot about the impact of the PWS workshops.

### **3. Awakening creativity**

The artists who took part in the workshops made great efforts to awaken the creative spirit of the students. Through their work, they tried to convey that their artistic medium was accessible, and they invited the audience to try. The students that accepted the invitation and tried to bring out their creativity were received with the utmost respect by the artists, thus provoking a similar respect among their own peers. Through the workshops, the teachers also learned simple and useful techniques to further stimulate the students' creativity in the classroom. This will hopefully have a long-term impact, since the project have supplied teachers with tools that they will be able to use throughout their careers.

In any case, if there was a clear outcome of the workshops, it was this: everybody has creative capacities. Some people find it easier than others to bring them to the surface, but poetry can find its way out of all individuals.

### **4. Making poetry appealing**

Cultural practices take root easily if they are cultivated in the early years of life. For this reason, the PWS workshops were primarily focused on children and youths, seeking audiences who could develop a long-standing loyalty to poetry.

This was not an easy task, considering that the school curricula too often take students away from poetry, instead of bringing them closer it. One of the workshops in Guadalajara provided an extremely graphic proof of this phenomenon: when the slammer Dani Orviz began his three successive encounters with students of Primary, Secondary and University, respectively, he made the same question to all of them: "Who likes poetry?". A great number of Primary students raised their hands. The number was significantly lower among Secondary students, and almost insignificant among University students.

However, the workshops managed to present poetry as an attractive artistic form, something that the organizers of the project attribute to several reasons:

- The mixture of different types of work, as explained in point 2.
- The fact that going out of school to attend the encounters with the artists was a welcome break of the daily routine for the students.
- The active implication of teachers, who ensured that the work was not interrupted between the encounters.
- The fact that the workshop sessions were attended by students from different schools, something that enriched the experience and provided an added value.
- The careful selection of the artists who offered the workshops.
- The diversity of the types of poetry that were explored.

Thanks to all of this, as the workshops progressed, students of all levels of education became increasingly interested in poetry, listened more attentively to the artists and began to create poems or share existing poems with their peers. We can but suppose that, once the PWS project is completed, if someone were to ask the participants "Who likes poetry?", many more hands would be raised, and they would be more evenly distributed by age.

## **5. Taking poetry to the streets**

In order to calculate the real scope of the workshops, we must take into account that the almost five thousand students who were directly involved shared their enthusiasm with their families; that all their teachers and peers participated indirectly; and that the media of all four towns disseminated what was happening, not only in the workshops, but also on World Poetry Day (a celebration that was partially conceived and designed in the workshops).

The whole community of all four participating towns –and especially the educational community– contributed to make the celebration of World Poetry Day a success, with 11,972 active participants and many more who enjoyed the 117 activities that were carried out. On 21 March 2017, a wave of poetry hit four European towns, flooding museums, markets, libraries, educational centres, squares, old people's homes, hospitals... It is very likely that, in the coming years, these four populations will no longer be able to resist this peaceful invasion.

The workshops have therefore created a craving for poetry in many students from these four European cities. This would be enough in itself; however, they also produced something else: a great cultural event to celebrate the World Poetry Day, an event in which the creative workshops –and the students who participated in them– played a fundamental role.