

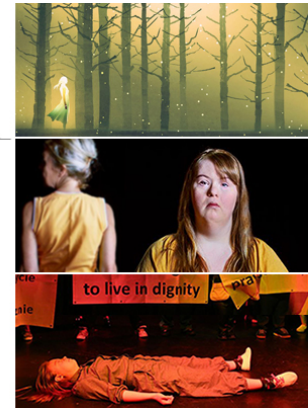


# TRASNA NA LÍNE

CROSSING THE LINE



Co-funded by the  
Creative Europe Programme  
of the European Union



## Trasna Na Líne, a European partnership project 2019 - 2023

**Trasna Na Líne** (which means Crossing the Line in Irish) is a partnership project co-funded by the Creative Europe programme, that comes out of the partnership **Crossing the Line (CTL)**. Crossing The Line is a network of six European theatre companies: all leaders in the field of working with learning disabled artists.

The network was founded in 2014 when the three theatre companies **Moomsteatern** in Sweden, **Compagnie de L'Oiseau Mouche** in France and **Mind The Gap** in UK joined together in a co-operative partnership to carry out the first Crossing The Line project over a time period of 2,5 years (Dec 2014 – May 2017), also co-funded by the Creative Europe programme of the European Union. Since then the CTL family has grown and now include **Blue Teapot Theatre Company** in Ireland, **Theater Babel Rotterdam** in The Netherlands and **Teatr 21** in Poland. The Trasna Na Líne partnership projects include the five theatre companies from Sweden, France, Ireland, The Netherlands and Poland.

Artistically led and committed to meeting the new challenges of producing and touring theatre made by learning disabled and non-disabled theatre makers, their aim is to bring their artists together to learn from and with each other; engage with creative and audience development processes; develop connections with a wider network of European theatre companies with a focus on learning disabled artists; and create a showcase festival.

### *What is TNL?*

Trasna Na Líne (TNL) started in 2019 and was supposed to finish in 2021, but due to the pandemic the end date of the project was moved forward till the start of 2023. TNL provided learning disabled & autistic (LD&A) theatre makers with new skills, competences and know-how to strengthen their access within the performing arts market. The five companies in the partnership represents some of Europe's leading theatre companies making professional touring work with LD&A artists and brings a profound understanding of the challenges lying ahead as

they aim to break down barriers and shift preconceptions about learning disabilities, within the wider cultural sector. By consolidating resources, exchanging experiences and imagining new scenarios across five European territories, TNL aimed to provide all involved parties and their extended networks with a new degree of interconnectivity and solidarity. Within the framework of this project, artists developed their skills through international exchange via artist workshop residencies, making and touring productions and come together as a showcase at a Crossing The Line Festival. In the original project plan this festival would be hosted by Blue Teapot Theatre Company as part of Galway European Capital of Culture (ECOC) 2020. Due to the pandemic the festival had to be cancelled just weeks before the opening and instead became a digital online theatre festival.

### ***Why this project?***

Art made by learning disabled artists has historically been largely associated with therapy or advocacy; relating to outcomes primarily associated with health, well-being politics or justice. TNL concentrates uniquely on professional theatre made with LD&A performers. This work is unequivocally artistically-led. These companies tour professionally both in their own countries, and, increasingly abroad. The partnership combines companies which are relatively new (10-15 years old), with others more experienced (30-40 years old). Some operate with permanent ensembles, some run academies, some work as part of a wider social inclusion mandate; but all are led by the art. The TNL project was a chance to show the art to a wider audience in European context.

The first CTL project piloted workshop residencies which provided experience for LD&A artists of working in a different cultural context. TNL responds to specific artist requests for skills development in certain areas. The workshop residencies also enable partners to observe how different artists combine collaboratively through relationships made with each other over time. This is an innovative solution as to how to collaborate meaningfully through a developmental process that works for our performers, to create transnational mobility of both people and product. Skilling up professionals is vital to raising the quality of the work these companies make; so while the productions that are done show what can be achieved, the workshop residencies help to challenge and inspire the partners through encountering different ways of working.

The festival showcase (Crossing The Line Festival) would have given the partnership a unique and significant pan-European platform on which to amplify both the work and also wider engagement with that work, including festival audiences, invited programmers, critics and other stakeholders such as other companies and academics working in the field and wider EU policy makers and funders. A lot of this was lost due to the pandemic, but the reinvention of the partnership during the hard times of Covid, into a digital festival, also showed the creativity, determination and professionalism of the companies and artists included in this partnership.

# Transnational Mobility of learning disabled performers, the companies and their work

Trasna Na Line (TNL) activities were structured around:

## 1. **4 performing artist workshop residencies.**

The first two, in Poland and Sweden, were carried out as planned. The third was to be part of a festival in France, but was cancelled due to the pandemic. It was replaced by a residency in Ireland that was co-hosted by the French partner, which turned out to be a successful way of creating a workshop residency. The fourth was set in The Netherlands, just as originally intended but a year later than planned.

## 2. **4 national dissemination activities.**

To ensure that each company's work reverberated outwards nationally four dissemination events were planned to happen in connection to the workshop residencies. Therefore the Polish and Swedish dissemination events were carried out, but the last two (planned to be at the NEXT festival in France and at the CTL festival in Galway) became digital activities, shown online and spread through the digital festival and social media.

## 3. **The presentation of 5 live touring theatre productions.**

Each company created (at least) one new production during the TNL project. These were planned to be shown at the CTL festival in Galway, but instead they were successfully presented within their own national contexts and/or digitally.

## 4. **Crossing The Line Festival.**

The planned festival as part of Galway 2020 European Capital of Culture (ECOC) was the clear focus for the TNL transnational mobility. Given the extraordinary amount of work our Galway partner Blue Teapot Theatre Company put into making this first ever Learning Disabled and Autistic (LD&A) festival of professional performance in Ireland, it was heart breaking to have to cancel this and replace it with a Digital Festival 18 months later.

Thus the intended movement of, and employment opportunities for, professional learning disabled performers across at least 5 nations was contained to each partners' own domestic labor market. The vulnerability of so many of LD&A actors, coupled with the very different approaches taken by each country to the pandemic, meant that health and wellbeing had to be prioritized. The 4 artist workshop residencies had been intended to feed in to and out of the

festival in Galway, and provide mobility for the artists via focused opportunities for relationship building. Replacing this Galway festival with a digital festival meant that TNL did get to showcase the work of the artists, but inevitably the intended extension outwards to reach other professional LD&A performing arts organisations, international Festival programmers, industry journalists, funders and policy makers with the aim of extending mobility further still was significantly curtailed.

As was, the partnership sought ways to connect digitally and via the residencies. The residencies have helped to challenge, inspire and develop skills. The digital festival became a way of reaching out to audiences all over the world, but was also a learning experience for each company about how to create digital performing arts.

## Capacity Building – Training and Education

Responding to the articulated needs of the LD&A artists within the partnership, 4 artist workshop residencies provided unique skills development opportunities varying in artform, theme, duration and scale to foster new skills, ambitions and collaboration opportunities. These allowed the creative development of professional learning-disabled artists, skills transfers and peer to peer collaborations. The fostering of artists and the cultural operators that work with them – their creation, productions, their mobility, training and employment – is central. The mobility of the companies' LD&A artists remains dependent on the mobility of the partner companies, as they have the requisite support expertise embedded into their operating systems.

While learning from the TNL project was shared via the digital festival for all those interested in the work of the companies, the intended benefits to a broader international network of organisations and artists, was inevitably limited by the autumn of 2021, as many people were experiencing digital realm fatigue. However, the 4 artist workshop residencies did provide unique skills development:

### **1. Workshop residency in Warsaw**

The subject of the workshop was inspired by the performance “Revolution That Never Was” at Teatr 21; to expand this and to include an international context. Through artistic collaboration the participants examined the rights of people with disabilities, their quality of life, art as a space for self-fulfilment and theatre as a workplace – in different European countries.

### **2. Workshop residency in Malmö**

The workshop at Moomsteatern in Malmö focused on the Orest method. A physical education theory that develops the posture and gait of the actor, focused on the individual artist.

### **3. Workshop residency in Inis Oirr**

The originally planned workshop in France was cancelled, but during the time of locked borders a new idea took form... Compagnie de l'Oiseau-Mouche had a collaboration with Zone Poème, a dance and theatre company based in Lille. Zone Poème are fascinated by French dramaturg Antonin Artaud and had visited the Aran Islands in Ireland where Artaud stayed in the 1930s. The Aran Islands are situated near Galway, home of Blue Teapot Theatre Company. From there, a three-way conversation started between Zone Poème, Blue Teapot Theatre Company and l'Oiseau-Mouche. The three partners decided to organise a workshop shared by BTTC and l'OM actors and led by Zone Poème on the Aran Islands. The workshop was deeply rooted in the three partners shared artistic vision but also created an opportunity to repurpose a part of the budget that was initially allocated to the Galway festival and the workshop l'Oiseau-Mouche was supposed to host in December 2020 but couldn't due to covid restrictions. Joined later on by Teatr 21, the partners gathered in Galway in October 2021 and, literally, embarked on a once in a lifetime experience. Following the footsteps of Antonin Artaud and led by Zone poème, 10 artists from France, Ireland and Poland settled on Inis Oirr in Aras Eanna theatre for a four-day workshop that finished with a showcase open to the inhabitants of the island.

### **4. Workshop residency in Rotterdam**

The partners from TNL were invited to submerge themselves into Theater Babel's way of working. During the workshop artists and management from the different theatre companies were mixed together creating five groups, each working with a creative facilitator. In 4 days the group and the creative facilitator would make a small performance which was shared at the end of the week with all the other groups. LD&A artists have little possibility to exchange experiences with people from outside their own company. Working in mixed groups enabled the artists from different companies to work together and to get acquainted with each other, both personally and professionally. This helped tremendously to build their professional confidence, reflecting back to them that their practices were part of an international movement with peers in other companies throughout Europe.

## Dissemination events

The 2 National dissemination events, which pre-dated COVID – held in Warsaw and Malmö – both achieved their objectives focusing on particular areas of knowledge and reaching out to organisations across the partner countries, but of course these were unable to feed into of the critical fora, panels with key industry personnel originally planned as part of the Galway 2020 CTL festival. In lieu of the other 2 planned dissemination events, the additional films made about the working processes of the 2 host companies in Ireland and The Netherlands served as suitable substitutes, again as a result of COVID limitations.

As so much moved on-line our dissemination plans also, inevitably, changed. In addition to maximising the on-line reach with our Digital programme; the Project dramaturg invested time in working with alternative outlets. These include the European Arts and Disability cluster, following on from the inaugural meeting in The Hague in December 2019 (4 TNL Partners participated in the EU Creative Europe Platform bid, led by ShareMusic in Sweden, in Autumn 2021, which was unfortunately unsuccessful); the Inclusion Diversity Equality and Access (IDEA) working group of the IETM - and a face-to-face presentation on Trasna Na line and the work of the partnership to Italian colleagues in Lecce in October 2020.

In November 2019, we created/participated in the *Visible / Invisible* panel which took place at the POLIN Museum in Warsaw. The panels discussed the situation of artists with disabilities in various contexts. Are the realities and strategies of social inclusion in art in Eastern and Western Europe very different? Guests in the Panel included: Nele Jahnke, graduate of the Zurich University of Arts and part of Theater HORA in Switzerland, whose members are people with intellectual disabilities. Filip Pawlak, talking about the Creative Europe program “Europe Beyond Access” implemented by the British Council. Jonathan Meth, curator and founder of The Fence – an international network of playwrights and cultural operators, and a Project Dramaturg for the “Crossing the Line” partnership and expert of the UK charity organization Ambitious about Autism. Ulyana Roy – lectures at the Department of Theater and Acting at the Department of Culture and Art of the National Ivan Frankov University in Lviv. Ulyana introduced us to the theatre scene of disabled people in Ukraine. Katarzyna Żeglicka – feminist and activist for the rights of women with disabilities. Katarzyna told us about the challenges she faces as a disabled person and performer in Poland today. An audience of about 80 people from various countries listened to the panel discussions and presentations.

In January 2020 we met in Malmö for two seminars called “Academy - and for what?” and *Are we ready for a change?*, inviting creative professionals from Sweden to attend discussions about how the cultural landscape can be changed to include artists with LD&A. We gathered Petal Pilley, artistic leader of Blue Teapot Theatre, Annabelle Mailliez, development officer at Compagnie de l'Oiseau-Mouche and Per Törnqvist, artistic leader at Moomsteatern to talk about how they have chosen to recruit and educate their actors. What challenges they face and what their future plans are. The second seminar gathered professionals from the Swedish Art’s sector to ask: As the Swedish art field is working towards a larger diversity on our stages, will this

include artists with disabilities? What are the obstacles and possibilities? What structures would need to change? The panel included: Kjell Stjernholm, coordinator at Studieförbundet Vuxenskolan, Kajsa Giertz, Artistic director & CEO at Helsingborgs stadsteater, Tanja Mangalanayagam, project manager at Skånes Dansteater, Barbara Wilczek Ekholm, senior lecturer at Malmö Theatre Academy, University of Lund, Sandra Johansson, executive director at Moomsteatern and Jonathan Meth, freelance project dramaturg for Crossing The Line and based at Goldsmiths, University of London. The audience consisted of about 60 people from various countries, but mainly creative professionals from Sweden.

Owing to the changes that had to be made and the lengthy decision-making processes involving eg ECOC, meaningful and sustained ongoing communication about a project which tried very hard to hold onto, but ultimately had to reimagine its centre piece, communications became inevitably fragmented, and focused around when individual activities could be delivered. For example: *The Festival That Never was: The Celebration That Is*, Blue Teapot's series of short films about everything leading up to the CTL festival; *Prophecy* the film made about the Artaud workshop residency on Inis Oirr; and of course the *Digital CTL festival*.

As part of the originally planned Festival, Blue Teapot had intended to run 4 daily round tables covering: Mainstream programmers programming LD work – partnering the Galway Festival; the conversation started at the Warsaw conference in 2019, around Dramaturgy and Pedagogy, by the time we reached activity in Rotterdam over 2 years later, the conversation was no longer a live thread. However, the partnership has continued to debate among itself: Arts as a subject in Mainstream Academies; how to train LD actors; how to train theatre practitioners in inclusive theatre arts, opportunities for LD people in higher education. However, Teatr 21 created five conversations over Zoom that were recorded and shown at the Digital Festival: *Accessibility of Artistic Education* is a series of talks which aim to present various strategies for including people with disabilities in mainstream artistic education and theater life. They aimed to look at how the policy of equal access to education and representation of people with disabilities in cultural institutions, especially in theaters and universities preparing them for acting, is implemented in various European countries.

# Crossing The Line Festival

In March 2020 Blue Teapot hosted a TNL Board and Comms meeting in Galway. Day 1 was specifically focused on Festival delivery including partners tour of their respective performance venues, festival marketing strategy, access supports and a discussion re Festival launch in May (see attached schedule). Crossing The Line Festival branding was visible in Galway’s Latin Quarter from this weekend. The excitement was tangible amongst us all as the Festival was just two months from going live. Day 2 was focused on the TNL project management of all partners. Literally one week after the Galway meeting, the global pandemic hit and two weeks later Ireland was locked down. When Blue Teapot realized that it was not going to be possible to reprogramme the CTL Festival for Galway ECOC 2020 they had to accept that 4 years of work would not come to fruition. The Blue Teapot team worked tirelessly to rescue the CTL Festival for six months but it became apparent that Covid wasn’t going away.

The festival became a digital programme running online from September to November 2021. The online festival showcased more than 25 events – including theatre performances, documentaries, talks and feature films – from six companies across six European countries. The main language of the festival was English and performances in French, Swedish, Dutch and Polish were also subtitled in English. All events in the online festival were free of charge and by the end of the TNL project the festival content had more than 16 700 views.

Find out more about the digital Crossing the Line Festival and the content of the festival here: <https://www.crossingtheline-festival.com>





## **Unexpected benefits & impacts from the TNL project**

Freelance LD&A actors are disproportionately reliant on mothership companies if they are to achieve meaningful transnational mobility, as there are simply too many administrative, financial and access barriers to negotiate as unsupported freelancers in the overwhelming majority of cases. This means that companies staying open – and growing – provides the best opportunity for continuity and the possibility of enhanced employment. The main part of the years in this project became not so much about new opportunities, but dealing with everything being postponed and making sure there were no skills lost. Unsurprisingly the main skills development gain across the partnership has been around Digital learning: Digital rehearsals. Digital workshops. Digital meetings. Digital audience development. Digital performing arts.

For **Teatre 21**, this was their first major transnational collaboration. This has been key in capacity building the company, growing experience and enabling participation in 3 further EU projects. This in turn has made T21 a more attractive proposition to partners and funders. They are at an important point in their development, so looking at how different companies tackle challenges has been extremely useful.

For **Theater Babel**, TNL allowed learning from other companies to understand how productions get made and toured. In addition, the opportunity to learn more about other companies' business models – this is particularly important for when their founder retires at the end of 2023. Just like for Teatre 21 TNL has increased Theater Babel's profile and accreditation in The Netherlands. The capacity building of the company's digital reach and practices became a huge and unexpected benefit from the project as Theater Babel took the lead on creating the Digital festival.

For **Blue Teapot**, the perception of being international theatre meant invitations to engage in projects / other ECOCS. A raised profile regionally and nationally and a strengthened profile with ECOCS constitutes capacity building the team towards becoming an Arts and Disability Regional Centre of Excellence. Some of the artists in the company has never been abroad before and simply going on a journey as artists cannot be underestimated. And even though the festival in Galway was cancelled this happened at the last minute – all the work leading up to the festival was done and an extremely important experience to the company.

For **l'Oiseau Mouche** one unexpected development was learning from partners about audience development through social media. The Aran Irish workshop residency, not originally planned: generated a synergy between L'OM / BT / ZP / T21 and presented a new model of co-hosting residencies. l'OM was part of the original CTL partnership and has seen it grow of these years, despite the pandemic. For the artists at l'OM the partnership is very important and something they proudly talk about in local events.

For **Moomsteatern**, as for the others, the digital learning was huge. Not only in a digital sense but also in an artistic: Creating the performance *A Silent Storm*, which was not a pre-planned production, by finding ways of coming together with partners in Sweden and abroad despite not being able to meet. Creating the play *The Erased* to become a performance that can be shown in any country with any language. This will be useful in the future. Also, to see the partnership growing stronger despite our obstacles.