

House on Fire at Maria Matos Municipal Theatre



Qualitative evaluation of some initiatives presented by the network



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1.

Object of the evaluation

The object of this study is a qualitative evaluation of the way people perceive and value the programming of Maria Matos and its political positioning. For this, the theatre chose three initiatives presented by the network House on Fire, of which it is a member, namely:

1. The performance “A Hundred Wars to World Peace”;
2. The performance “The discreet Charm of Marxism”;
3. The debate “When the Light Goes Out: integration of refugees and common futures”.

The means used for this evaluation were:

1. Interviews with the curators of the series Utopia, in order to define their objectives in presenting these initiatives;
2. Consultation of interviews and articles written by the artists, in order to understand their objectives and expectations;
3. Interviews with the Association of Refugees in Portugal, in order to understand their objectives, expectations and to do a post-debate evaluation;
4. Self-administrated questionnaires before and after the initiatives (performances and debate), in order to understand the participants’ motivations, expectations and possible impact on them;
5. Telephone conversations before and after the events, in order to understand the participants’ motivations, expectations and possible impact;
6. A focus group discussion after the performance “A Hundred Wars to World Peace”.

2.

Maria Matos Municipal Theatre's positioning: The art of thinking about how we are going to live together

In the opening of the 2016-2017 season, Portuguese journalist Alexandra Prado Coelho interviewed Liliana Coutinho and Mark Deputter, curators of the series "Utopia" of the Maria Matos Municipal Theatre. Right in the beginning, Prado Coelho questions whether the option to place utopia at the centre of the programming is a political act, as well as if it is appropriate for a municipal theatre to get involved in politics.

Mark Deputter clarifies that the choice of themes and the way they are being approached does not follow an agenda in terms of party politics, but it is born out of a vision regarding the world. And he adds: "Public theaters are generally considered to be neutral spaces, which make possible the contact between the artist and the audience, but do not take a stand. We wish to promote another way of providing this public service, by creating, together with the artists, more thinking regarding the world."

Liliana Coutinho states that there is a responsibility to keep thinking and that, as curators and citizens, we have the possibility not to adjust to the state of affairs. "It is necessary that this political space becomes increasingly transversal. There is an urgency in making these connections, in realizing how we can do politics beyond the usual spaces, because it is something that concerns us all. Politics is the art of thinking about how we are going to live together."

The two curators wish to create a space where the way we live may be debated. They aim to create bridges between artists and other agents in civil society, organisations, activists, thinkers. And they know from previous empirical experience that, by creating these bridges, they help bring new people to the theatre, people who decided to come not so much because of the artistic side of the programme, but because of its political and social concerns.

Things to consider:

- **How successful has the Maria Matos Municipal Theatre been in reaching these objectives?**
- **Is its political positioning clear for its audience?**
- **Does its audience appreciate this positioning?**
- **Is the theatre one more space where politics may be discussed or there is something special in it?**

3.

The performance “A Hundred Wars to World Peace”

The evaluation tools used in relation to this performance were:

- An interview with the curators regarding possible success indicators;
- An analysis of the interview given by artist Christoph Meierhans to Evelyn Coussens, regarding his objectives and expectations (see References);
- Phone conversations before the performance with 10 people who had bought tickets (Annex 1);
- A self-administered survey before and after the performance (Annex 2);
- A focus group approximately two weeks after the performance (Annex 3);
- Phone conversations approximately three months after the performance with three people who were at Maria Matos Municipal Theatre for the first time for Meierhans’ performance, regarding their relationship with the theatre (Annex 4).

For the curators, possible indicators of achieving their objectives would be:

- An audience that might not normally look for contemporary theatre coming to see this performance because of the subject;
- People coming to see the performance, but considering that this is not theatre.

The artist is interested in the mental opening that emerges when expectations are not met. He considers this moment to be a moment of grace. This particular performance aimed to make people think about the tension created between the wishes of the individual and of the group. He aimed to question whether, when making choices, consensus is essential for a community to function well and whether we are conditioned by what is socially acceptable.

The phone conversations before the performance

Most people we talked to before the performance (8/10) come frequently to Maria Matos Municipal Theatre. Half of them (5/10) said that they were mostly interested in the format (participation / interaction) and 3 said that they were interested because there was food involved.

Regarding the concept of consensus, half (5/10) believed that it is not necessary for a community to function well. Three said that it depended on the situation.

The self-administered survey

Based on the survey carried out before and after the performance, we would like to point out that:

- 35% of the people who answered the survey were at Maria Matos Municipal Theatre for the first time;
- 27% of the people who answered the survey came to see the performance invited by someone else (54% of whom were coming for the first time to Maria Matos Municipal Theatre);
- 46% of the people who were coming for the first time wished to see this performance because of the subject; only one person said that he came because of the format;
- 43% said that the performance made them think;
- 30% said that the performance made them think whether there can be democracy without consensus (before the performance, 57% said that consensus was not necessary for a community to function);
- 11% changed their mind during the performance (they came to believe that consensus is necessary).

The focus group discussion

Despite our efforts to achieve a balanced panel of newcomers and frequent patrons, only one participant was at Maria Matos Municipal Theatre for the first time for this performance, invited by a friend. In total, we had 7 participants.

The focus groups discussion allowed us to explore both the participants' relationship with Maria Matos Municipal Theatre and their experience in the performance.

Regarding the reason why they wished to see this performance, there was a more frequent reference to the format/curiosity about the format.

“The proposal seemed original (eg format and food)”

“A friend invited me”

"I had seen the other Meierhans performance, I realized that he is a person who wants to take a stand."

"I was curious, I found the trailer creepy."

"I do not like the interaction in the theater, it did not come with the intention of participating. But it was a good experience."

When asked about the need for consensus in society, most participants seemed to think it is necessary:

"There have to be majorities, otherwise we do not walk in the same direction."

"Consensus is not majority. But you have to reach a point where everyone agrees."

"There is no consensus in a society [in the sense of being impossible to achieve]."

"There has to be consensus regarding a common system: for example, the rule of law."

"There needs to be consensus. And to question the consensus. There have to be several consensuses. A certain peace is necessary, however."

We also wished to know what impact the performance had on them regarding their views on the topic of consensus. Most participants did not answer directly, but mostly commented on the behaviors they were able to observe on stage, namely the fact that some people took the initiative to do what had to be done, while the rest just watched, feeling content that things were being taken care for. There seemed to be a tone of criticism on behalf of some participants regarding this behavior.

One participant mentioned that the performance was a reflection on the rules and their role in society. Another said that she went back home arguing with her partner about what they had seen.

"They exhibited various social behaviors."

"There was a reflection on the rules and their role in society."

"It was possible to observe human behavior. At first people were shy, then they became more loose, and we could feel the personality of each one. It's not simple to do something together."

"At first everything was very orderly. This worked because some people made the decision to intervene and to do what had to be done. The rules give some structure, but they are not enough for things to work out."

"The personality of each one stands out in relation to how to implement the rules."

"The rules exist to create a context."

"We realized what it is to live in society. When the girl was asked to give the first plate of food to those who needed it the most, she gave it to her friends."

"I went back home arguing with my partner. He found it all very 'easy'."

Of particular interest and relevance for this study was the discussion around the participants' relationship with Maria Matos Municipal Theatre. The reasons why they value this theatre have to do with the programme it presents and with the way it treats patrons.

In relation to the programme, they praise the intention to take risks, to break the norm, to be unconventional, to discuss contemporaneity. Someone said "At times I even come without even knowing what I am going to see, I accept the challenge".

With regards to the treatment of patrons, locals mention the **pricing and reservation policies** that make them feel at ease. Here, they make comparisons to other cultural venues in Lisbon, clearly favoring Maria Matos Municipal Theatre.

Phone conversations with newcomers three months after the performance

Three months after the performance, we were able to talk to three newcomers. Their relationship with Maria Matos Municipal Theatre was quite distinct, but, at the same time representative of reality:

- The first person keeps receiving information about the programme, through the school, but hasn't been back since the performance (he lives in the suburbs and it's not easy). He is not aware of the Utopia series. He believes that theatre has the responsibility to spread the word, but in a way that is different from that of other media, as it has got a less usual and more captivating way of doing it.
- The second person had also participated in the focus group. Invited by a friend to see the performance, he receives information about the programme, but hasn't been back since. He believes that theatre has got a political role in society.
- The third person developed a great interest for the theatre programme after she got information about this performance and the Utopia series. She continues to receive information, she wasn't able to come back after the performance, but is planning to attend a number of initiatives coming up in the Utopia series. She believes that there is a great need for theatre to assume a political role, she is very enthusiastic about this programme and stated: "I support Maria Matos Municipal Theatre 100%!"

Things to consider:

- **More than 1/3 of the people who participated in the performance were newcomers;**
- **Among newcomers, the main reason to see the performance was the subject; more than half of the newcomers came invited by a friend;**
- **Overall, the main reason for seeing the performance was the subject**
- **Almost half of the people said the performance made them think;**
- **Three people (one firstcomer) didn't consider this to be theatre;**
- **Regarding the concept of consensus, comparing the answers during the telephone conversations, the survey and the focus group, before the performance, most people didn't believe that consensus is needed for society to function well. After the performance, more people seemed to believe that we need to think about consensus or felt the need to think about it;**
- **We cannot define whether "a moment of grace" took place during or because of the performance, but 1/3 of the people who answered the survey said that it made them think about the need for consensus in a democracy and 4 people changed their minds.**
- **Newcomers continue following the theatre's programming, but don't necessarily come back;**
- **For frequent patrons, this theatre is a much needed space for political discussion.**

4.

The performance “The Discreet Charm of Marxism”

The evaluation tools used in relation to this performance were:

- An interview with the curators regarding their expectations;
- An analysis of the text written by Bojan Djordjev and published in Utopias- Arquipélago COMUM (3/6) (see References);
- Phone conversations and emails after the performance with 8 people who attended the performance (Annex 5).

Once again, for the curators, possible indicators of achieving their objectives would be:

- An audience that might not normally look for contemporary theatre coming to see this performance because of the subject.
- People coming to see the performance, but considering that this is not theatre.

The artist did not share any special objectives regarding expected or desired outcomes.

All the people who agreed to talk to us were frequent patrons or had come to Maria Matos Municipal Theatre before. We did not manage to identify any newcomers in this performance. Not all people had a good knowledge of the Marxist theory.

The topic was once again the main reason why people wished to see the performance (4 people). Food and the format of the performance were also mentioned (3 mentions each). It is perhaps important to mention here that two people were positively surprised with the way the performance was structured, they did not expect it.

Everyone we talked to considers that theatre has a political role in society, although three people wished to clarify that by “political” they didn’t mean “partisan”. One person clarified that theatre must intervene in the public debate regarding social issues.

Things to consider:

- **Should we have expected that this particular performance, referring to a specific political theory, would not attract newcomers?**
- **Noone questioned whether this was theatre, but there was a positive feeling of surprise regarding the performance.**

5.

The debate “When the Light goes Out – Integration of Refugees and Common Futures”

The evaluation tools used in relation to this performance were:

- An interview with the curators before and after the debate;
- An interview with members of the Association of Refugees in Portugal before and after the debate;
- A self-administered survey given to those who participated in the debate (annex 6).

Interviews before the debate

The curators defined the following objectives:

- To give the refugees room to talk about their experience;
- To give the people the opportunity to listen directly to the refugees and not to intermediaries;
- To produce a didactic element and bring certain issues to a wider audience;
- To contribute to the opening up of the debate;
- Through the discussion, to make people think about the present and the future;
- To think about the next step, after the debate, another time and another way of discussing this theme.

For the representatives of the refugees, the objectives were:

- To talk about the difficulties and the promises that were made;
- To give the refugees a voice;
- To make people know what the refugees wish to talk about, what questions they want to ask;
- To create an opportunity for an exchange of feelings, advice, sharing, transmitting to others what has gone right and wrong.

The representatives of the refugees believe that this can happen in a theatre because theatre is an action of transmission of what is true. Theatre can convey what is right.

During the debate

The main issues raised by the refugees were:

- Lack of information in the Guide for Integration;
- There is no information regarding labour laws and fiscal norms;
- The language is a barrier
- Interpreters at Health Centres
- Online language courses
- Little refugee participation in the planning
- Is there a plan? Are there going to be jobs?
- Ideas of employment
- The subsidy is very small

From our observation during the debate:

- The refugees on stage spoke little and mainly about the subsidy;
- The refugees sitting in the stalls did not get involved in the debate;
- The NGO's spoke the most and, at times, used technical language regarding work processes, as if the refugees were not present, which didn't seem very appropriate;
- There was no space to debate the specific role culture may play in the integration and inclusion of refugees given that the debate was organized by and taking place at a theatre;
- There were some concrete proposals from the audience (both on-site and via livestreaming) that were not registered via survey and which are mentioned further down.

Post-debate evaluation

a. Participants: self-administered survey

The debate was rather long and many people left before it was over, so we got very few answers (15, when the participants were approximately 130). From the feedback we got from these 15 people, it is important to refer that the majority stated that:

- The debate made them aware of concrete needs (13);
- Allowed them to find out things they didn't know about (12);
- Made them think about what they can do next (12);
- Made them want to do something next (11).

Few people, though, made concrete proposals of what they could personally do next. In fact, there were two suggestions:

“For language learning: establishing protocols with public schools, where many of the children of the refugees study. Housing: articulation with GESAHS to propose the rehabilitation of the houses that have been

occupied, sometimes this can be done by the refugees themselves. Institutional support: train refugee teams who can support their compatriots in institutions.”

“I will be able to develop a glossary for my institution so that people may use the health service and then translate from Portuguese to English and their mother language.”

b. The curators

The curators believe that the objectives of taking these issues to a larger audience and of making us all think about our present and future were met. The coverage of the debate by the press and the livestreaming had a significant contribution. The audience was different, there were both people that have some superficial information about these issues, as well as professionals from different areas who are much more involved.

The format chosen (speakers on stage, audience in the stalls) did not create a comfortable space for debate. There was no real discussion. Many refugees are fragile and feel scared. Even though, they later said that they didn't feel stressed, they felt they were in good company.

There was an opportunity to discuss very practical questions, which are not normally talked about. It became clear that there is a long distance between public policy and the execution of concrete plans. There were concrete proposals from the audience, such as improvements in customer care at health centres; the creation of a network of organisations involved; people who offered to be volunteers via livestreaming.

The curators feel the need to think of future initiatives, of longer duration (perhaps 4 years). An annual meeting? What kind of format? What will the components be?

c. The refugees

The representatives of the Association of Refugees in Portugal confirm once again that most refugees are afraid and shy to speak in public. At the same time, some have been speaking since 2012 and not much has happened. The questions raised during the debate are not new for those refugees who have been here longer.

In future events, one must think of a methodology that will encourage participation.

Some useful contacts were made after the debate, during the cocktail, in a more informal setting.

Theatre used to be a space for the elites. There is a need to reach the elites and let them know what is happening and how their money is spent.

In the future, it would be nice to have a monthly cultural programming at the theatre, an intercultural project or a theatre course.

Things to consider:

- **All parts involved ended up thinking about the future;**
- **What format would encourage more participation and a real dialogue?**
- **There will always be a need to raise awareness among people regarding these issues, but how to deal with the lack of progress in solving problems that are well known?**
- **When the initiative comes from a theatre, doesn't it make sense to firmly question and reflect upon the role of culture in this process?**
- **What will the next step be in the relationship established with the refugees, in terms of the continuation of the debate, as well as their expectations regarding the theatre's programming?**
- **Which people have moved forward with the proposals they made in the debate and the ideas they got?**

6.

Considerations resulting from the evaluation

Being political

In recent years, the political role of cultural organisations is being intensely discussed. For too long a time, cultural organisations (especially those funded by the State, but not only) saw themselves as neutral, “safe” places. This has rather resulted in a conscious and “safe” option of not taking a stand, although staying away and not touching on certain subjects is actually everything but neutral.

This claim of neutrality is the result of a certain complacency, on one side, as well as of the fear of alienating part of the society if cultural organisations are perceived as “taking sides”. On the other hand, they never seemed particularly worried that, opting for this kind of “safety”, they might become “too safe”, irrelevant, and thus alienate a number of people with a more inquiring mind, needing to be challenged, to reflect upon and to question themselves and the world they live in. Furthermore, the mission of cultural organisations is not only to engage in a dialogue with those willing to discuss in the first place (in other words to “preach to the converted”), but also to promote critical thinking in the society in general, finding ways of involving people who would normally stay away - either as an option or because they didn’t think this is for them or because they didn’t know about it.

For many artists, as well as artistic and cultural organisations, this has turned into a permanent concern. In recent years, they have increasingly been claiming a role in the public debate regarding a number of political issues, taking the risk of being “safe places for unsafe ideas”. Others have lately joined this “agora”, feeling the need and responsibility to respond to current developments, such as the refugee crisis, the Brexit referendum or the US Presidential election.

Are these organisations alienating part of the society? They might indeed alienate some. This seems to be a risk worth taking as, at the same time, they are providing a much needed space for others. Furthermore, cultural organisations which have taken a stand have actually experienced a rising support from the public, both in donations and visits. The vote of no confidence in the “official” political system and the feeling of impotence are being translated into a search for alternative places to do politics and to promote critical thinking and, eventually, active participation. Cultural organisations can and should indeed offer this alternative.

The case of Maria Matos Municipal Theatre

Maria Matos Municipal Theatre is a member of the HOUSE on FIRE network, which includes ten European theatres and festivals. In recent years, all ten members have shown an active interest or have even played a central role in the development of a new paradigm of politically involved cultural organisations. HOUSE on FIRE pursues an international programming and co-production policy, based on the conviction that the arts have an essential role to play both in the communication between people and in the development of thought and debate about problems and challenges that our societies and the world are facing.

Maria Matos Municipal Theatre's political involvement is not something new. The presentation of the series Utopia in the 2016-2017 season has, perhaps, made this position a bit more pronounced. In an interview given in the beginning of the season, the two curators of the series, Mark Deputter and Liliana Coutinho, said that there is a responsibility to keep thinking. They wish to create a space where the way we live may be debated. They aim to create bridges between artists and other agents in civil society, organisations, activists, thinkers. And they know from previous empirical experience that, by creating these bridges, they help bring new people to the theatre, people who decided to come not so much because of the artistic side of the programme, but because of its political and social concerns.

"It is necessary that this political space becomes increasingly transversal. There is an urgency in making these connections, in realizing how we can do politics beyond the usual spaces, because it is something that concerns us all. Politics is the art of thinking about how we are going to live together", said Liliana Coutinho.

Through this evaluation study, we attempted to understand how people perceive this positioning and if it is something they value. In order to do that, we concentrated on three initiatives chosen by the theatre: the performance "A Hundred Wars to World Peace"; the performance "The Discreet Charm of Marxism"; the debate "When the Light goes Out: integration of refugees and common futures". We carried our phone and self-administered surveys, organised a focus group and interviewed the curators of this programme.

The results presented in previous chapters may now be seen under the light of the Arts Council Quality Metrics. Quality Metrics is a sector-led project that uses self, peer and public assessment to capture the quality of art and cultural work. It is a set of statements, developed by arts and cultural organisations, that aim to help organisations understand what people value about their work, as well as allowing them to benchmark against similar organisations.

The Quality Metrics are:

- **Concept:** it was an interesting idea
- **Presentation:** it was well produced and presented
- **Distinctiveness:** it was different from things I've experienced before
- **Challenge:** it was thought-provoking
- **Captivation:** it was absorbing and held my attention
- **Enthusiasm:** I would come to something like this again
- **Local impact:** it is important that it's happening here
- **Relevance:** it has something to say about the world in which we live
- **Rigour:** it was well thought through and put together

The results in terms of the audience

In general terms, **we identify two main groups** among the people who participated in the study: newcomers and locals. Rarely did the people we got in touch with identify as occasional spectators.

Among the **newcomers**, the majority came invited by a friend, which is the most common reason why people decide (and some find the courage) to enter a cultural venue for the first time.

Among the three initiatives that were evaluated, the performance "A Hundred Wars to World Peace" allowed us to better understand the kind of relationship newcomers develop with Maria Matos Municipal Theatre, having used all the tools available to make this evaluation.

Apart from being invited by a friend, the second reason why newcomers decided to come was the **subject** of the performance, more than its actual format (being participatory and including a meal). After the performance, approximately half of the newcomers (46%) said that it had been different from what they had seen before, referring to the **format**. The majority (62%) left with a feeling that the performance had **something to say about the world we live in**, 54% said that it was an **interesting idea**, 38% stated that the performance **made them think**. These are things Maria Matos Municipal Theatre wish to happen with the kind of programming it proposes.

Three months after the performance, we were able to talk to three newcomers. Their relationship with Maria Matos Municipal Theatre was quite distinct, but, at the same time representative of reality:

- The first person keeps receiving information about the programme, through the school, but hasn't been back since the performance (he lives in the suburbs and it's not easy). He is **not aware of the Utopia series**. He believes that theatre has the responsibility to spread the word, but in a way that is different from that of other media, as it has got a less usual and more captivating way of doing it.
- The second person had also participated in the focus group. Invited by a friend to see the performance, **he receives information about the**

programme, but hasn't been back since. He believes that theatre has got a political role in society.

- The third person developed a great interest for the theatre programme after she got information about this performance and the Utopia series. She continues to receive information, she wasn't able to come back after the performance, but is planning to attend a number of initiatives coming up in the Utopia series. She believes that there is a great need for theatre to assume a political role, she is very enthusiastic about this programme and stated: **"I support Maria Matos Municipal Theatre 100%!"**

So, as it is natural to expect, people become more or less aware for the theatre's intentions. All three newcomers we talked to believe that theatre has got a political role in society. For some, this goes on as a relationship at distance, but for others, it becomes part of their life and eventually they join the "loyals".

In this sense, and in relation to Art Council's 9 Quality Metrics, **newcomers seem to particularly appreciate relevance, concept, distinctiveness and challenge.** Some also value the **enthusiasm** the programme provokes and might actually become frequent attendees. Maria Matos reached its objectives of making people question and think about the world we live in.

In relation to the group of **loyals**, even before analysing the data available, it was rather easy to understand how much they value Maria Matos Municipal Theatre's positioning. Something that could never be registered in a usual survey was the sigh given by a focus group participant when asked whether theatres have got a political role in society: **"[sigh] oh, yes, please...."**. We also kept meeting a number of the people who took part in the focus group in other performances and initiatives, so a feeling of **"companionship" or "cultural bond"** was developed.

So, the big majority of the loyalists we talked to or surveyed come to Maria Matos Municipal Theatre very often (**"much more than 5 times a year"**) and some actually mentioned that they purchase tickets for different performances in the beginning of the season. They are mainly interested in the **subject** of the initiatives proposed by the theatre, at the same time, more often than the newcomers, **they also refer to the format** (being participatory, including food).

Both from the self-administered survey and the focus group discussion we were able to conclude that this is a programming loyalists find **interesting**, it has **something to say about the world we live in**, it **makes them think**. They agree that cultural organisations must be **places of questioning** and must assume a political role. **Interest, curiosity, surprise** are words that frequently come up during the conversations.

Of particular interest and relevance for this study was the discussion around the loyalists' relationship with Maria Matos Municipal Theatre. The reasons why they value this theatre have to do with the programme it presents and with the way it treats patrons.

In relation to the programme, they praise the intention to **take risks**, to **break the norm**, to be **unconventional**, to discuss contemporaneity. Someone said **“At times I even come without even knowing what I am going to see, I accept the challenge”**.

With regards to the treatment of patrons, loyals mention the **pricing and reservation policies** that make them feel at ease. Here, they make comparisons to other cultural venues in Lisbon, clearly favoring Maria Matos Municipal Theatre.

They wish for an echo that might influence other theatres and the city in general.

In relation to the Art Council’s 9 Quality Metrics, **loyals value all or big part of them** (as no direct mentions are made regarding presentation and rigour, nevertheless, these are issues that came up in the focus group discussion).

It comes as no surprise that, when it comes to loyals, Maria Matos Municipal Theatre clearly reaches its objectives of promoting the thinking about how we are going to live together and of becoming an alternative space for this discussion to take place.

The results in relation to the Association of Refugees in Portugal

Maria Matos Theatre has a clear intention of inviting organisations of the civil society to be part of the work developed by the theatre. In this sense, the Association of Refugees in Portugal was invited to co-organise the debate “When the Light goes Out – Integration of Refugees and Common Futures”.

The theatre and the association had shared objectives: giving a voice to the refugees, creating an opportunity for them to speak in the first person and to raise the questions they feel should be raised. They both saw the theatre as an alternative and natural space for this to happen.

There is a need to concentrate on the post-debate evaluation, considering also the notes we took during the debate regarding public participation and the responses we got through the self-administered survey.

Everything indicates that the debate reached some of its main objectives, that is, it raised questions not normally raised, people heard things they had never heard before, and all sides were made to think of what they could do next.

The objective of giving the refugees a voice was probably one that was not totally met. Among the refugees on stage, the majority made a short initial intervention and did not participate more. The debate went on mostly with the representatives of the NGOs. The refugees sitting on the stalls preferred not to intervene. Both the theatre and the association consider that the format of the debate should be re-examined. Furthermore, there is a need to consider concrete steps for taking this partnership further, as well as the way to manage the refugees’ expectations regarding the role of the theatre and its programming.

In conclusion

How successful has Maria Matos Municipal Theatre been in reaching the objectives of becoming an alternative space for doing politics and promoting thinking about the world we live in and how we are going to live together?

The big majority of the people who attended the two performances and the debate said that they made them think, they had something to say about the world we live in, they got them to know things they hadn't known or thought about before. Some people leave the theatre having changed their mind or questioning previous assumptions. This is not necessarily a conscious change of heart, but it was something we were able to identify from the answers given before and after seeing a performance. Curiosity and surprise were mentioned more than once by the people we talked to.

The fact that in a performance like that of Christoph Meierhans more than 1/3 of the participants are newcomers indicates that specific subjects have the power to raise curiosity and attract new people, although being invited by someone they know is still a determining factor, one that allows newcomers not to take unnecessary risks. People who already come and love Maria Matos Municipal Theatre are its ambassadors and help this community grow.

The continuation of this relationship then takes different directions. Although people seem to continue following the theatre's programming, it doesn't mean they continue coming (for all sorts of reasons, many times practical ones – i.e. distance). The fact that newcomers seem to appreciate relevance, concept, distinctiveness and challenge is something the theatre can build on, in alliance, as mentioned above, with frequent patrons.

Regarding the political role of theatre, all people we got in touch with (through the phone or during the focus group discussion) seem to believe that it has a place in the public debate, although some feel the need to clarify that it shouldn't be partisan. The political position of Maria Matos Municipal Theatre is not clear to all as such, but it is definitely clear among frequent patrons and something they value a lot.

In what concerns the partnership with the civil society, in this specific case with the Association of Refugees in Portugal, particular thought must be given to the different phases of developing this relationship, especially in what concerns its evaluation and continuation in a way that will build trust and maintain both parts actively engaged.

A final point we would like to make here is that the quality of the relationship with patrons and partners does not only depend on the programme. It is the concerted action of programming, communicating and caring for people that makes the relationship last and this became clear during the focus group discussion.

Are cultural organisations neutral spaces? They are not, they never have been, even if they have lived under this illusion. Taking the risk of being political is taking the risk of being relevant. Some people will keep a distance, some will join. Perhaps what is more important is that cultural organisations may be truly democratic and able to handle the criticism that usually comes with taking a stand, maybe even integrate it in their programming.

7.

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8.

Credits

Elaboration of the study: Acesso Cultura | Maria Vlachou

Assistance: Hugo Sousa

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- Associação de Refugiados em Portugal
- Everyone who participated in the surveys and in the focus group

[Acesso Cultura](#) is a cultural, not-for-profit association based in Portugal, that promotes access – physical, social and intellectual – to cultural venues and the cultural programming. It organizes training courses, an annual conference, public debates, it carries out access audits and related studies. It annually hands two awards, the Access Culture Award and the Access Culture Award – Simple Language. A summary of the impact of the association’s work in the first three years may be found in the publication **[Access Culture 2013-2016: What’s changed?](#)**

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9.

Annexes

Annex 1

Phone conversations with people who had bought tickets for the performance “A Hundred Wars to World Peace”

(number of people interviewed: 10)

1: Is this your first time to Maria Matos Municipal Theatre?

(all the people we talked to had been at Maria Matos Municipal Theatre before)

2: If this is not your first time, how many times were you at the Maria Matos Municipal Theatre in 2016?

More than 5 times: 8

Less than 5 times: 2

3. Why do you wish to see this performance? (there can be more than one reasons)

- Because of the subject: 3

- Because of the food: 2

- Because of the format (interaction/participation): 5

- Invited by someone: 1

- Can't remember what the show is about, booked a long time ago: 1

4. A good community, a community that functions well, is a community based on consensus?

Yes: 2

No: 5

Yes and no: 3

Annex 2

Self-administered survey before and after the performance “A Hundred Wars to World Peace”

To fill in before the performance

1. Is this your first time at Maria Matos Municipal Theatre?

Yes

No

2. Why do you wish to see this performance? (you may choose more than one option)

I am interested in the subject

It seems to me that it is going to be something different

I was invited, I am not sure what this is about

Other (please indicate):

3. A good community is a community based on consensus?

Yes

No

I don't know

I never thought about this, I need some time to think

To fill in after the performance

1. The performance you have just seen (you may choose more than one options):

- Was an interesting idea
- Was different from everything I had seen before
- Presented me with new ideas
- Made me think
- Caught my attention
- It is important that it was presented in Lisbon
- Has got something to say about the world we live in
- I didn't understand what it meant to say
- Was not interesting for me
- Was not theatre
- Was a waste of time
- Other (please indicate)

2. Is there democracy without consensus?

Yes

No

I don't know

The performance made me think about it

Would you care to talk to us a bit more about this performance? If yes, please indicate:

Age

Telephone nr.

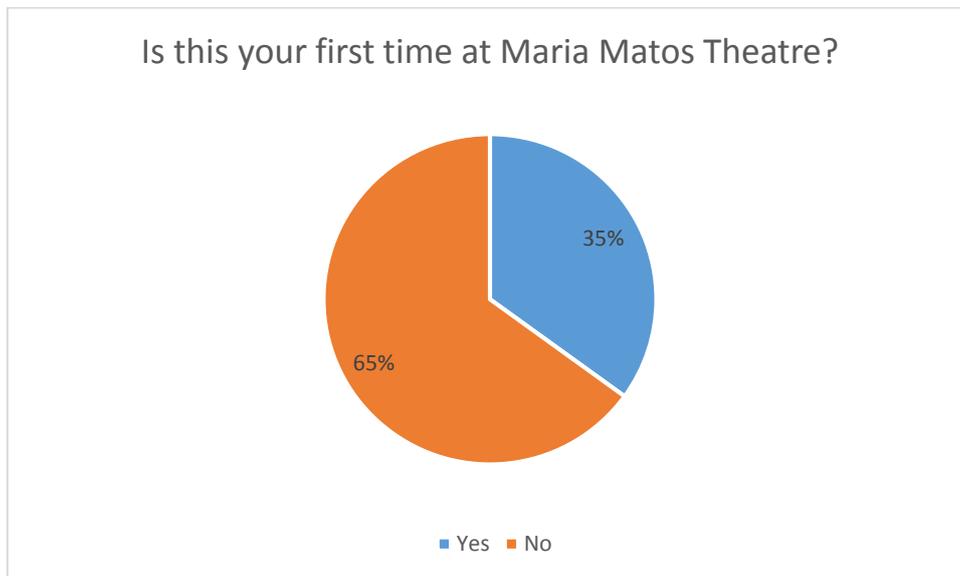
Email

Survey results

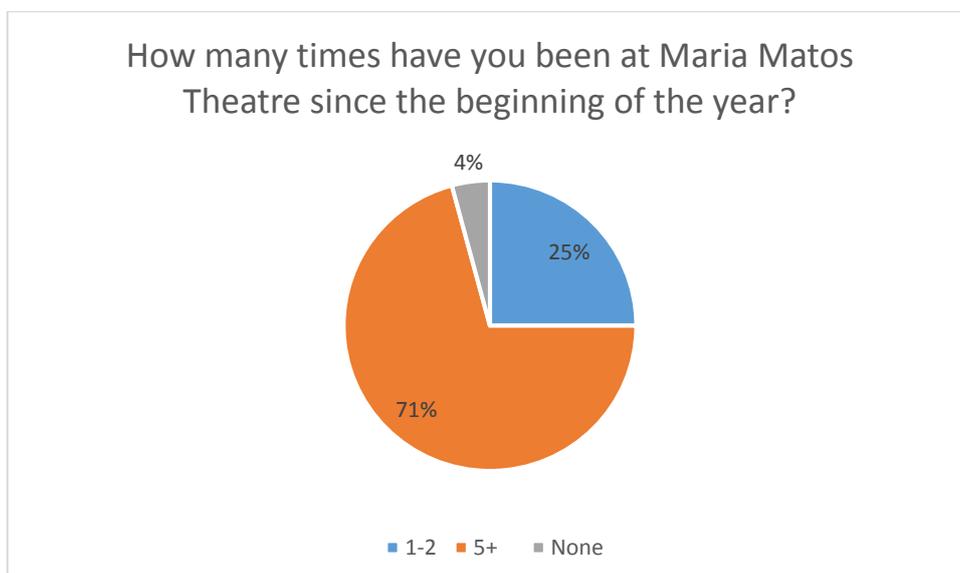
Number of participants in the performance: 59

Number of answers: 37 (63%)

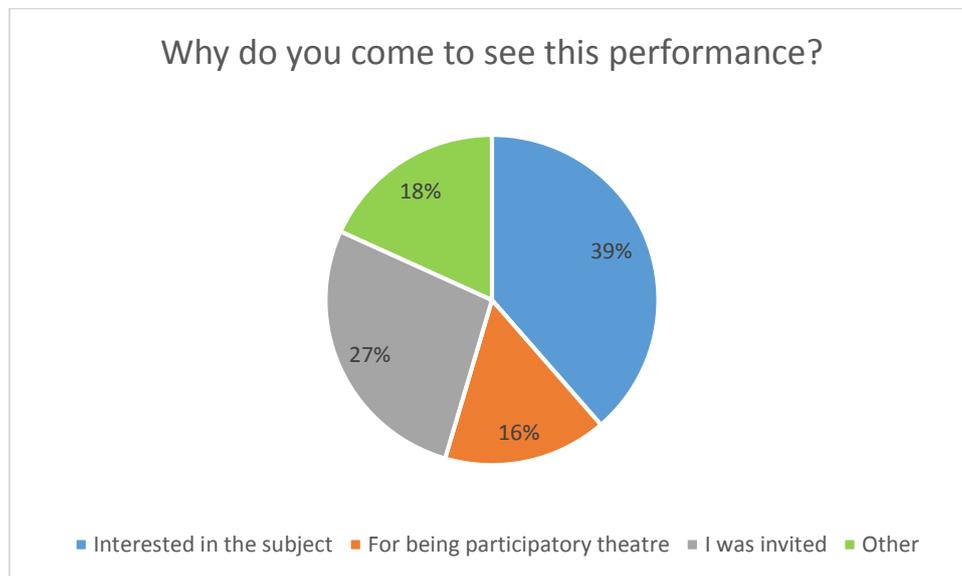
A. Before the performance



The majority of the people who answered the survey (65%) had been to Maria Matos Municipal Theatre before. Still, more than 1/3 were newcomers.

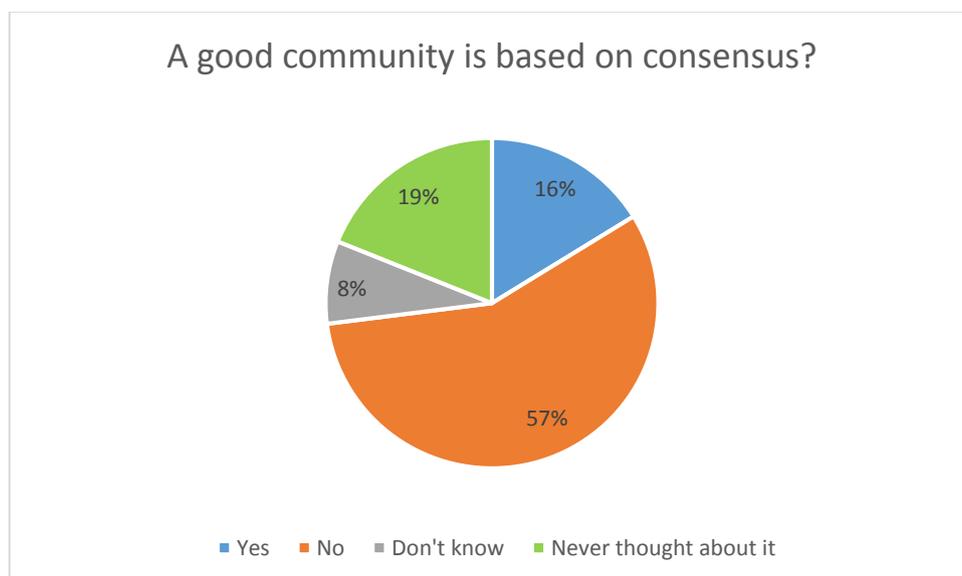


Among the people surveyed who had been at Maria Matos Municipal Theatre before, the majority attends very frequently (71% had been at the theatre more than 5 times since the beginning of the year).



* People could choose more than one option.

The majority of the people who came to the performance were interested in the subject (39%; 46% among newcomers). Another 27% were invited by someone else (54% newcomers). Most frequent patrons (47%) also came because of the subject, and 29% because of the format.



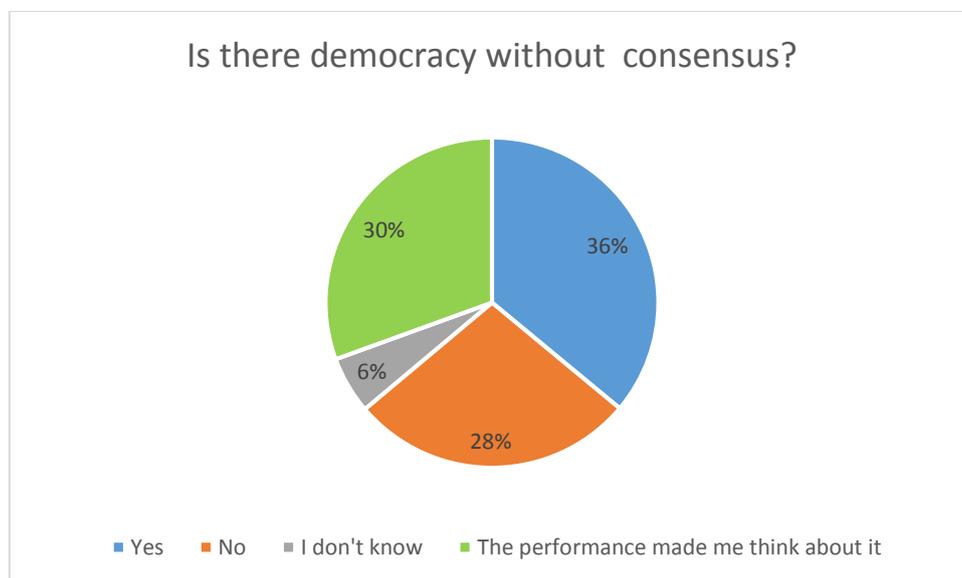
Before watching the performance, 57% believed that a good community – a community that functions well – is not necessarily based on consensus. At the same time, 19% said that they had never thought about this.

B. After the performance

Regarding the performance you just saw (you may choose more than one options):

	%
It was an interesting idea	62,2
Was different, the public participated	29,7
Presented me with new ideas	18,9
Made me think	43,2
Caught my attention	32,4
It is important that it was presented in Lisbon	16,2
Has got something to say about the world we live in	54,1
I didn't understand what it meant to say	
Was not interesting for me	5,4
Was not theatre	8,1
Was a waste of time	
Other	13,5

For the majority of the people who answered the survey (62%), this performance was an interesting idea (54% among newcomers). Apart from that, 54% said that the performance had something to say about the world we live in (61% among newcomers). Among the people surveyed, 43% stated that the performance made them think (38% among newcomers).



After the performance, 36% of the people who answered the survey said that there can be democracy without consensus. Another 30% said that the performance made them think about the issue of consensus in democracy. For 28%, there cannot be democracy without consensus (four of the people surveyed - 11% - changed their mind during the performance).

Synthesis

Most of the people who responded to the survey (65%) did not come for the first time to Maria Matos Municipal Theatre. Among these people, 71% are frequent attendees (they have come +5 times since the beginning of the year).

Among people who came for the first time (35%), the majority had been invited by someone else (54%) and 46% came because they were interested in the subject. Only 1 of these people (8%) said that they came because it was participatory theater.

Among the people who had already been at Maria Matos Municipal Theatre, 47% came because they were interested in the subject. One person reported that they had seen Christophe Meierhans' previous show.

Before the performance, 57% said that a good community - a community that works well - is not necessarily based on consensus. Also before the performance, 19% said they had not thought about this issue before. After the performance, 36% of the respondents said that there could be democracy without consensus; 30% said they did not know, that the show made them think about this issue. Four people (11%) changed their mind during the performance and came to believe that consensus is necessary.

Annex 3

Focus group regarding the performance “A Hundred Wars to World Peace”

The focus group took place on 17 November 2016 at Maria Matos Municipal Theatre. We tried to set up a group with a balance between:

- men and women;
- people who were going to Maria Matos for the first time and others who were regular members of the audience;
- people who went to see of Christophe Meierhans' performance because the public could participate and people who went to see it because it questioned our democratic system;

We managed to achieve this balance, except in what concerned first comers. Only one of the focus group participants was at the Maria Matos Municipal Theatre for the first time. We shall try to talk to a few more first comers of the phone.

We had questioned people in advance (through telephone calls and a survey before and after watching the performance) about the concept of consensus, so that we could see afterwards the what extent the performance made them think about it (this being one of the central questions indicated by the artist in an interview).

The script that would oriente the focus group discussion

- You are all frequent members of the audience of Maria Matos Municipal Theatre. What are you looking for and what do you find here?
- Do you know what the series Utopias is?
- Is it OK for a municipal theater to do politics?
- Why did you wish to see Christophe Meierhans' performance?
- What is your idea regarding the concept of consensus in the organization of the community, in a democratic context.
- What did you observe during the performance?
- What stayed with you after the show?

Transcription of the focus group discussion (in Portuguese)

Porquê o Maria Matos?

- a não-convencionalidade dos espectáculos e a sua linguagem contemporânea; o director artístico quebrou com a normativa
- o carácter político (não partidário) da programação
- o trazer o pensamento e o debate sobre questões contemporâneas para o teatro (por exemplo, através das conferências); às vezes nem sei o que é que vou ver exactamente, aceito o desafio lançado pelo teatro.
- lançamento de pequenas companhias
- a relação com os espectadores:
 - a existência do Cartão Maria & Luís
 - a política de preços para menores de 30
 - a flexibilidade para levantamento das reservas até 30 minutos antes do início do espectáculo (sendo que existe um limite para os convites serem levantados e depois os bilhetes são disponibilizados)

“Gosto da variedade da programação.”

“Projectos alternativos e diferentes.”

“Raramente saio desiludida.”

“É uma programação com um questionamento constante e tem uma linha orientadora.”

“Venho desde que há os bilhetes a 5 euros para menores de 30.”

“O Mark trouxe uma rutura enorme a uma programação [anterior] que era mais clássica.”

“Não há lugares onde se possa questionar em público. Espero que venha a ter eco. Nada do que o Maria Matos faz é panfletário.”

Os participantes fizeram comparações entre o Maria Matos e outros espaços culturais:

- a Culturgest, no que diz respeito à programação
- a Gulbenkian, no que diz respeito à relação com os públicos e à sua caracterização social (classe) e demográfica (idade).

O Maria Matos foi caracterizado como tendo uma programação que “não tem medo de arriscar”.

“Os espetáculos que vão à Culturgest são mais rodados, têm mais currículo.”

“Os espetáculos que vêm ao Maria Matos são mais arriscados.”

“Os públicos, e a forma como são tratados, são diferentes dos da Gulbenkian”

Cabe a um teatro municipal fazer política?

- os participantes acham que as instituições culturais devem ser locais de questionamento e devem assumir o seu papel político
- um dos participantes tinha ido pela primeira vez ao Maria Matos e não fazia ideia do lado político da programação, mas gostou.

“Sim, por favor...” (“sim” de alívio pelo posicionamento do MM)

“Não pode existir apenas um tipo de cultura, uma cultura ‘acitável’.”

Porque é que vieram ver este espetáculo?

- a proposta pareceu original (por exemplo, o formato e a comida)
- uma amiga convidou

“Já tinha visto o outro espectáculo de Meierhans, percebi que se trata de uma pessoa que quer assumir uma posição.”

“Fiquei curiosa, achei o trailer assustador.”

“Não gosto da interacção no teatro, não vinha com a intenção de participar. Mas foi uma experiência boa.”

Acham que uma comunidade tem de chegar a consensos para funcionar?

“Tem de haver maiorias senão não se caminha para uma mesma direcção.”

“Consenso não é maioria. Mas tem que se chegar a um ponto em que toda a gente está de acordo.”

“Não há consensos numa sociedade [no sentido de ser impossível alcançá-los].”

“Tem de haver consensos em relação a um sistema comum: por exemplo, o estado de direito.”

“É necessário haver consenso. E questionar os consensos. Tem que haver vários consensos. Uma certa paz é necessária, no entanto.”

De que forma o espectáculo vos fez pensar (ou não) nesta questão?*

- se expunham diversos comportamentos sociais
- existia uma reflexão sobre as regras e o seu papel na sociedade.

“Foi possível observar os comportamentos humanos. No início houve alguma timidez, depois as pessoas ficaram mais soltas, sentiu-se a personalidade de cada um. Não é simples fazer algo em conjunto.”

“No início estava tudo muito ordenado. Isto funcionou porque algumas pessoas tomaram a decisão de intervir e fazer. As regras dão estrutura, mas não bastam para as coisas funcionarem.”

“Sobressai a personalidade de cada um em relação à forma de implementar as regras.”

“As regras existem para criar um contexto.”

“Percebeu-se o que é viver em sociedade, resultou. Quando se pediu à menina para dar primeiro comida a quem precisassem mais, ela deu às amigas.”

“Fui para a casa com o meu companheiro discutindo. Ele achou tudo muito ‘fácil’.”

* Aqui descobrimos que apenas 3 pessoas chegaram a ver o espectáculo, as restantes tinham reservas mas não vieram.

Annex 4

Phone conversations with people who came for the first time to Maria Matos Municipal Theatre for the performance “A Hundred Wars to World Peace”

As we didn't have the chance to talk to more than one newcomer during the focus group (November 2016), we got in touch with some of them in February 2017, to find out what happened to them. We managed to talk to three.

#1

I found out about the performance through my school (he is a student in acting). I went to see it because I was curious about the meal and the interaction with the audience.

What I realised while watching the performance is that we don't work together, each one tries to carry out a task and get over with it.

I didn't go back to Maria Matos Municipal Theatre after this performance. I didn't have the time. I live in the suburbs and public transport is not very helpful.

I see the theatre's posters at the school and I receive information by email, again through the school. I also follow Maria Matos Municipal Theatre on Facebook.

I am not aware of the series Utopias, I didn't see the brochures when I was at the theatre.

I believe that theatre must spread the word, but in a way that is different from that of other media. It has got a less usual and more captivating way of doing it.

#2

At the time, we received information at the school. I loved the idea of the Archipelagos and I got curious about this performance, the first on the calendar after I found out about this programme. They also did a special price for us.

It's great that they are dedicating a whole season to the Archipelagos. We developed in everything, except in our mentality. We are still at the time of the Inquisition and slavery.

I did not manage to go back to the Theatre, but this month [March] I want to go back for the Archipelago of the Affections.

I fully support Maria Matos Municipal Theatre!

I now get information by email.

#3

(this person came in late for the focus group)

I watched Meierhans' performance invited by a friend. I haven't been back to the theatre since, but I follow their programming.

Annex 5

Phone conversations with people who attended the performance “The discreet charm of marxism”

8 participants

Why do you wish to see this performance?

The topic: 4

The format (participatory): 3

The food: 3

Invited by a friend: 2

Trust in Maria Matos Municipal Theatre’s programming

Special interest in the Utopia series

I like theatre

Are you familiar with the marxist theory?

Yes: 4

Kind of: 3

How do you receive information regarding Maria Matos Municipal Theatre’s programming?

Website: 4

Brochure: 4

Newsletter: 3

Cultural Agenda: 2

Through friends: 2

How many times did you go to Maria Matos Municipal Theatre in 2016?

More than 5: 3

Less than 5: 3

1-2: 1

0: 1

What was the last play you saw at Maria Matos Municipal Theatre?

Mateluna: 3

Can't remember: 2

Does theatre have a political role in society?

- Yes and Maria Matos has been working well on it, through their positioning, and the thinking and conferences they propose.
- Yes, just like Maria Matos is doing now with this performance, it forms our conscience. Theaters may join other institutions and claim rights.
- Not political, as such, but that of a social intervention. Plays that make us think about the way we are. When we were young, these subjects formed a shiny future. It is good to see that there are young people today who continue to care, even if from another perspective, it is very important. Theatre makes us stop to think, to continue reflecting on great themes. So, back to your question, this is a political action, yes. There were a lot of people at the performance, maybe it's not a problem if a municipal theatre takes a political stand.
- Yes, since theatre is integrated in society.
- Theatre does not have to promote the positions of those in power. But it intervenes, it forces us to intervene, to listen to different opinions.
- Certainly. All cultural programming is, by definition, political.
- It depends on the concept of political, but yes, I think that the programming should contemplate spaces / plays that allow us to think about our contemporary world.

Other relevant comments

I buy several tickets at the beginning of the season.

This format was a surprise.

I was interested in the topic and the format seemed interesting. The show was a positive surprise.

Annex 6

Self-administered survey after the debate “When the Light goes Out – Integration of Refugees and Common Futures”

The questionnaire

In relation to the debate you have just participated: (you may choose more than one answers):

- I had never listened to the refugees before speaking live about their experience
- It allowed me to know things I didn’t know about
- It allowed me to know a different situation from that I knew through the media
- It made me aware of concrete needs
- It made me think of what I could do next
- It made me want to do something next
- It made me conscious that this is a situation that is difficult to solve in Portugal
- It didn’t bring anything new
- Other (please specify)

So, what shall we do next?

If you are available to answer some more questions, please leave your contact:

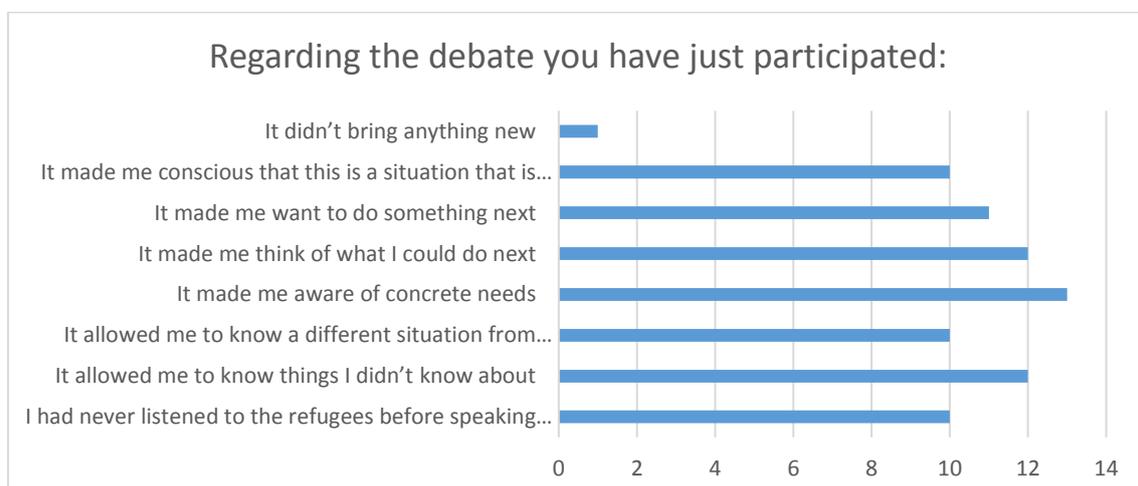
Name

Email

Telephone

The results of the survey

Out of approximately 130 people that attended the debate, only 15 filled in the survey. The debate was very long and many people left before it ended.



So, what do we do next?

- Continue working and spreading the information. Work and change are part of civil society, as Prof. Cristina Santinho pointed out.
- We should overcome our complexes as a people, a society and a bureaucratic state. Behavioral, social and state formalism is of no use to us and, worse, it blocks progress. Unfortunately, it is a problem that affects everyone and in particular the refugees and it will take too long to be solved. For now, I have no idea.
- For language learning: establishing protocols with public schools, where many of the children of the refugees study. Housing: articulation with GESAHS to propose the rehabilitation of the houses that have been occupied, sometimes this can be done by the refugees themselves. Institutional support: train refugee teams who can support their compatriots in institutions.
- I will be able to develop a glossary for my institution so that people may use the health service and then translate from Portuguese to English and their mother language.
- Bring these debates to schools, companies, so that this reality is known to all.
- Pressure on the political power to establish a more realistic, more humane, and more satisfactory reception and integration / inclusion policy for those who arrive here - continuing the debates, etc.
- Don't know. The problems vary a lot. The biggest must be unemployment. I do not know how to solve it or limit it.
- Would it be feasible to look for sponsorship in order to help with the first needs; to create posts where refugees may find support in various parts of the country and to train volunteers, for example? The Portuguese population needs an intensive training course in order to be clarified.
- Contribute to clarification.
- Now let us all work together to improve the situation of refugees and beyond.