

**ASSITEJ ARTISTIC GATHERING
BELGRADE AND NOVI SAD
SERBIA**



AAG/2023

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International Association of
Theatre & Performing Arts for
Children & Young People



ASSITEJ SRBIJA

ASSITEJ ARTISTIC GATHERING TURNING POINT REPORT 2023

**20-24 NOVEMBER
IN BELGRADE AND NOVI SAD,
SERBIA**

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AAG 2023 TURNING POINT

In November 2023, ASSITEJ’s flagship international event – ASSITEJ Artistic Gathering (AAG) – took place in Serbia. As an extended international edition of the 5th Festival of ASSITEJ Serbia (FAS), it put the performing arts of Southeastern Europe countries into the spotlight. The event was called **Turning Point for many reasons**. It marked the first period of ASSITEJ’s community’s regeneration after the coronavirus pandemic which took many lives in the community, prevented its meetings in 2020 and 2021, provoked the creation of the ASSITEJ Manifesto (2020), and demanded new thinking on sustainability and future of TYA. It was also a key event for ASSITEJ Serbia, founded already in 1965 but struggling through the splitting of Yugoslavia, which regenerated and celebrated its new 20 years (2003-2023) by hosting the first AAG in Southeastern Europe.

As one of the executive members recently put it, it’s ASSITEJ’s super power, how can it not be, when we’re making work for, with and about children and young people. Re-generation is about recognising and welcoming the changes that are inevitable in new growth; we cannot return to the past however much we long for it, and new growth is surprising, it has different shapes, a new direction, a turning point.

Sue Giles, president of ASSITEJ International, welcoming the opening of the 5th Festival of ASSITEJ Serbia ‘Setting Sail’ and AAG 2023 Turning Point

Held in a liminal space between the old and the new reality, and in the region where half of the countries are still in political transition, AAG 2023 Turning Point was about **new generations** taking over to become drivers of development; **new technologies** refreshing the ways of telling stories and engaging the audience; **new forms of storytelling** exploring the field of communication between spectators and performers; and the overarching issues of **societal and ecological crisis** we must cope with. Inviting everyone to also reflect on their **turning points in personal and professional lives**, it was a framework for sharing those insights and aiding our collective understanding of a big shift.

Continuing its legacy with such topics on the agenda and putting the region of Southeast Europe in the spotlight this time, AAG 2023 Turning Point strongly advocated for putting TYA higher on the decision-makers agenda; introduced and supported the new generation of TYA artists to strengthen the intergenerational trust and cooperation; heard the diverse voices of the young to include them more in the decision-making processes; gave a new push to the sustainability of performing arts sector, and tested some new approaches.

Starting in Belgrade, the capital city of Serbia, and continuing in Novi Sad, the European Capital of Culture in 2022, **AAG 2023 Turning Point gathered ASSITEJ’s members and participants from 55 countries around six programme strands arranged into 50 slots:** 20 performing arts productions, ASSITEJ Artistic Encounters, conferences’ sessions, seminars, workshops, open market for new initiatives, etc. The programme was prepared in dialogue and cooperation with all ASSITEJ’s networks and realised by the executive committees of ASSITEJ International and ASSITEJ Serbia.

PARTICIPANTS FROM 55 COUNTRIES

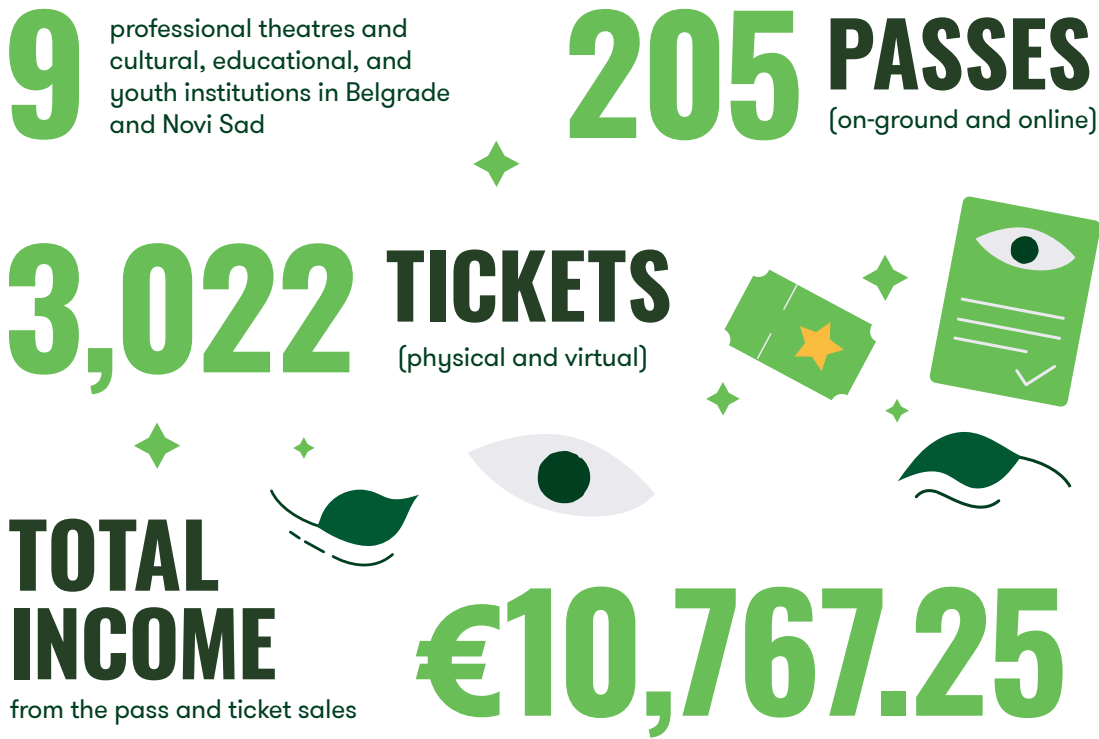
1.	Australija	29.	Malta
2.	Austria	30.	Mexico
3.	Belgum	31.	Montenegro
4.	Bosnia and Herzegovina	32.	Netherlands
5.	Brazil	33.	New Zealand
6.	Burkina Faso	34.	Niger
7.	Cameroon	35.	North Macedonia
8.	Canada	36.	Norway
9.	China	37.	Pakistan
10.	Croatia	38.	Palestina
11.	Cyprus	39.	Poland
12.	Czechia	40.	Romania
13.	Denmark	41.	Russia
14.	Egypt	42.	San Marino
15.	Estonia	43.	Serbia
16.	Finland	44.	Slovakia
17.	France	45.	Slovenia
18.	Germany	46.	South Africa
19.	Hungary	47.	South Korea
20.	Iceland	48.	Spain
21.	India	49.	Sweden
22.	Iran	50.	Switzerland
23.	Ireland	51.	Taiwan
24.	Italy	52.	Turkey,
25.	Japan	53.	United Arab Emirates
26.	Liechtenstein	54.	United Kingdom
27.	Lithuania	55.	United States
28.	Luxembourg		

Regrettably, war and poverty prevented some delegates and some of today’s most talented young performing artists from joining their foreign peers and gaining international support for their work in TYA. In October 2023, the delegation of ASSITEJ Israel cancelled its arrival due to the severe war raging in Israel, due to the same war circumstances, the representative of Palestine could not travel and participate in the conference on the Rights of Children and Youth in person, delegate from Burkina Faso was unable to secure a visa due to the slowness of the administration and the Next Generation Residency’s alumnus from Uganda, invited because he had much to share with this year’s residents, wrote that he cannot come because of financial problems.

We are at a turning point at this moment in time in multiple ways, facing manifold crises in our own societies as well as a global community. We hope that gathering all of these wonderful voices will enable us to think jointly, inspire us to find new ways to face these challenges, and illuminate the path forward together.

DIANA KRŽANIĆ TEPAVAC, president of ASSITEJ Serbia

The programme was attended on the ground, online, and in a hybrid form combining the two. Nine professional theatres and cultural, educational, and youth institutions in Belgrade and Novi Sad hosted the whole event. According to the statistics, which haven’t been sorted out manually, 205 (on-ground and online) passes and 3,022 (physical and virtual) tickets were issued (purchased and granted). Total income from the pass and ticket sales was 10,767.25 EUR.



AAG 2023 Turning Point happened more than a year after the first post-pandemic AAG in May 2022 at the 9th biennial Bibu Festival themed Leave No One Behind (Helsingborg, Sweden), and six months before the 21st ASSITEJ World Congress which is about to be held in Havana headlining Voices of a New World. It was somewhat postponed first because of the pandemics and then the long period of the technical government of Serbia during which some important decisions couldn’t be made.

In between the two long-awaited and huge events with greater political support, the Turning Point was a smaller but, again, very good and fruitful gathering. For the local and regional TYA scenes, it was solid proof of their resilience and an immense encouragement offering many new perspectives for the future. For the international community, it revealed the creativity of a less-known European region, introduced some novelties into the AAG’s programming, and showed that a smaller annual meeting, more manageable for everyone, may come as a relief and a regular element of the community’s dynamics.



To memorise AAG 2023 Turning Point as a true celebration of art, achievement and friendship, ASSITEJ Serbia made a video which is available [online](#).

ABOUT ASSITEJ SERBIA AND ITS FESTIVAL – FAS

ASSITEJ Serbia is the Association for the Development of Theatre for Children and Young People in Serbia. Our current membership of **24 organisations and 48 individuals** connects theatres, cultural centres, festivals, civil society organisations, and freelancers working professionally in the field. Our headquarters is in the Little Theatre “Duško Radović” in Belgrade, named after the poet, writer, and journalist famous for his **respect for children**.

Aiming to provide children and young people with theatre experiences of the highest quality and ensure sufficient public support for such provision, we are regularly informing our members about the possibilities for professional development, implementing professional programmes of our own, and organising events to raise public awareness of the importance of theatre for children and young people.

Working in the **region with multiple geopolitical identities** (Southeast Europe, Central and Eastern Europe, Balkans, Western Balkans) where many countries still do not have a national or affiliated ASSITEJ centre, we are helping the (re)establishment of ASSITEJ centres throughout the region (Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and North Macedonia) as we speak almost the same language and share common past and future. Our four countries, together with Croatia and Slovenia, were for more than 70 years parts and federal republics of the same country – the Kingdom of Yugoslavia which after WWII became the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, **one of the 20 founding members of ASSITEJ in 1965**.

As Yugoslavia was a non-aligned country (geographical and cultural borders were freely crossed) but under the rule of its Communist Party, we all have a lot in common with other countries in Southeast Europe politically aligned with the Soviet Union until 1989 – Albania, Bulgaria, Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and (East) Germany – but also with those which belonged to the Western Block.



With the splitting of Yugoslavia into sovereign states (1991-2003), which brought radical socio-political restructuring, **the federative branches of ASSITEJ Yugoslavia started turning into the national centres and affiliates (A)**: ASSITEJ Croatia (est. 1996), ASSITEJ Serbia (2003, with Montenegro until 2006), ASSITEJ Bosnia and Herzegovina (2008, A), ASSITEJ Slovenia (2013), and North Macedonia (2022). Other countries in Southeast Europe also went or still are going through the turbulent process of political transition and their **TYA changed in the same way** – public theatres struggled to survive due to the very small public budgets for arts (mostly spent on salaries), privately owned theatres and sole proprietorships appeared, and many artists made civil society organisations for socially relevant project-based work and professional development through international networking. Great work happens across the sectors (public, private, civil) but, with difficult conditions for work and different paths of sustainability in each, **mutual recognition and cooperation are still often missing**. That is why ASSITEJ Serbia is very proud of having members from all three sectors and being a uniting and associating organisation.

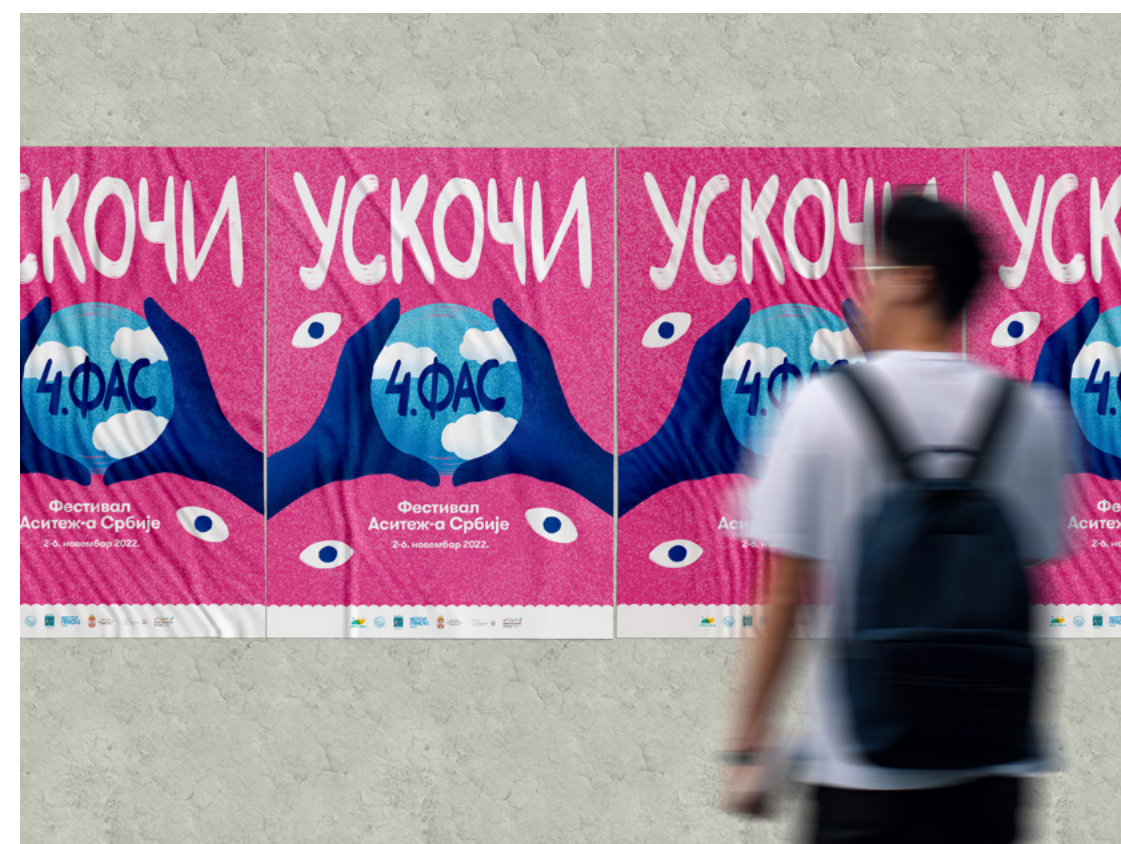
Festivals in Serbia and the region are places where we regularly meet with our colleagues, and we share information about the other opportunities for professional development as much as we can. In 2012 we initiated the ‘Europe 8+’ platform for making closer ties between ASSITEJ centres in Southeast Europe. and so far we had fruitful meetings. Iako je održano 7 fruitfull meetings , ova se inicijativa nije razvijala i donela željene rezultate. Ali to nije bila prepreka da se ne pokrenu drugi programi koji će čvršće povezati TYA profesionalce u regiji. Jedna od najuspešnijih je organizovanje Next Generation Residency for young emerging artist in region koja je nekolicinu učesnica inspirisala da pokrenu regionalnu platformu **From the First Step** koja je na AAG Turning Point bila važan partner i nosilac Next Generation rezidencijalnog programa na AAG Turning Point For all our efforts towards providing children and young people theatre experiences of the highest quality and advocating for dignified professional work in the sector, our longstanding president, Diana Kržanić Tepavac, served as the Executive Committee member (2011-2017) and has been awarded honorary membership in ASSITEJ International (2021).

To encourage the most conscientious theatres and artists working for children and young people in Serbia and create an artistic space enshrined with ASSITEJ values, **in 2019 we launched the Festival of ASSITEJ Serbia (FAS)**. As **the first showcase festival** in the region, FAS is addressing the professionals – theatre critics, festival curators, producers, artists, pedagogues, experts, municipal administrations, and local cultural institutions – all professions that can contribute to the recognition, continuation, and development of the best TYA in Serbia. The FAS awards are given by the juries of artists, children, and pedagogues, and ASSITEJ Serbia biannually gives the “Donka Špiček” award to memorise this great lady who built the profession of a cultural worker for children in Yugoslavia.



The first FAS was titled ‘Let’s start the story’ and the whole adventure indeed began very successfully. With the coronavirus pandemic, the next two editions were merged and saying ‘FAS Means Together’ to connect and empower the TYA community. The fourth FAS called ‘Jump In!’ onboarded many old and new friends who joined our course of action and brought their diverse legacies and perspectives. All that made our festival’s ship **full and ready for ‘Setting Sail’** in 2023!

Hosting the 8th ASSITEJ Artistic Gathering, the Festival of ASSITEJ Serbia (FAS) in 2023 became a true representation of our local, regional, and international engagement in **making TYA matter** – the Turning Point for its future in this part of the world.



SETTING SAIL

5TH
FAS

5TH FESTIVAL OF ASSITEJ SERBIA (FAS) ‘SETTING SAIL’ IN 2023!

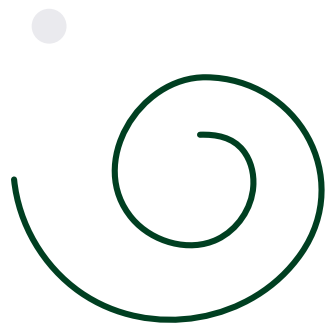
The 5th Festival of ASSITEJ Serbia (FAS) called ‘Setting Sail’ was the backbone of ASSITEJ Artistic Gathering (AAG) in 2023. It unofficially started with two stage readings as prologue – ‘Tickle Tickle / Les Chatouilles ou la danse de la colère’ by Andréa Bescond and Eric Metayer, coming from the contemporary theatre and dance project dealing with sexual abuse at a young age; and ‘Boys Will Not Carry Guns’ by Jelena Paligorić Sinkević, coming from the ‘Demilitarisation of Drama’ festival of stage readings of unperformed plays and won a regional anonymous competition ‘Eurodram’ award for 2020.



‘Boys Will Not Carry Guns’, stage reading performed by the members of the ensemble of the Little Theatre “Duško Radović”, Belgrade, Puls Theatre Lazarevac, the RCCM Children’s Club and the Two Angry Earthworms drama studio, Belgrade

Photo : Tatjana Drobnjak

Unlike previous editions focused on new productions in Serbia, the 5th FAS had two more selections – regional and international. It presented 11 productions from Serbia, 8 productions from other countries in Central and Southeast Europe, and [due to the festival's modest financial possibilities] only one production from other regions of the world. As a showcase festival, the 'Setting Sail' FAS brought together 250 performing artists from ten countries who came to Belgrade and Novi Sad to perform in front of the domestic and international professional community.



"The biggest reason for me coming here is to see performances. I often go to Europe to see performances but don't really have the chance to see Eastern European plays that much, so I was interested in seeing some Croatian or Serbian plays to see if I can include them in the festival. (...) While I am here, I am looking for non-verbal plays because the festival I'm holding is mostly attended by Japanese and Asian children who don't really understand English, so I want everyone to understand. I agree with the fact that there are ways to include subtitles in performances, but I estimate that children will only be looking at the subtitles and not the performances and so I think that non-verbal is the better option."

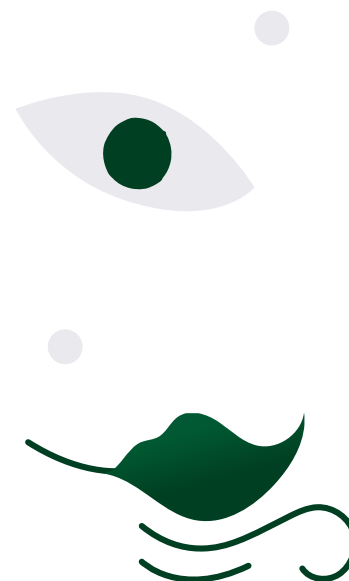
Hisashi Shimoyama, vice president of ASSITEJ Japan and artistic director of the *ricca ricca*festa*; interviewed by Melissa Hekkers, freelance journalist and author

Altogether, the productions showed bold and delicate approaches to taboo themes; new creativity in engaging the youngest audience; traditional theatres' steps forward to the nowadays topics; different languages of participative theatre; and much more. The productions from Serbia were selected by the TYA professionals from Croatia and Montenegro, while those from the wider region were invited by the professionals from Serbia. The one showcasing the state of the arts in TYA outside Southeast Europe was proposed by the representatives of ASSITEJ International.

(THE NATIONAL SELECTION)



It is a special challenge to select a program from an art space to which one does not belong and which one is not familiar with sufficiently. Although it was not completely unknown to us, our knowledge of the recent TYA production in Serbia has so far been selective and "refined" through theatre festivals, revues and special occasions. But it was only when we watched the 17 plays registered for the national program of the FAS - ASSITEJ Artistic Gathering 2023 (Serbia) that we got a more thorough insight into the current state of TYA in Serbia. Based on what we saw, we can conclude that, on the one hand, the theatres cherish the traditional expression with the story in the foreground, while on the other hand, they bravely and daringly explore the thematic, but also the performance



field, which to us seems to be particularly important. (...) Most of the selected plays start from the verbal layer, most often shaped as a narrative. But that narration does not take the position of a ruler that suffocates and destroys other elements of the play, but rather opens up spaces for visual and sound performance and (or) creates a dialogue with them. In the dialogue, the interlacing, and sometimes the humorous conflict, the plays grow, and in them the fun, cheerful and comical or tender, emotional and warm layers of the performance finely wrap around the idea itself, not underlining or imposing it, but playing with it and discreetly offering it to the small viewers. (...) Such a complex national program represents a combination of a well-formed story and a stage play in which the narration is only the driving force, that is, the best of the current TYA in Serbia, with a very interesting view towards tomorrow.

IGOR TRETINJAK, theatre expert and critic, lecturer in puppetry at the Academy of Art and Culture in Osijek (Croatia), the critics' team coordinator and editor on the regional platform *From the First Step*

PETAR PEJAKOVIĆ, director, professor at the Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Cetinje (Montenegro), longstanding general manager of the Kotor Children's Theatre Festival.



THE STOLEN PRINCE AND THE LOST PRINCES, stage play in Chinese manner, 5+, Little Theatre "Duško Radović", Belgrade, Serbia | **Photo:** Tanja Drobnjak

Combining different types of theatrical techniques from different parts of the world, an excellent performance is created. The great value of 'The Stolen Prince and the Lost Princess' lies in its successful avoidance of a patronising and didactic approach to the audience while teaching us about the importance of questioning tradition and dogmas from earlier generations, acknowledging that sometimes old customs must be transcended in a new context. All in all, the setting sail has begun very successfully. We can only wish for an equally smooth sea ahead.

Divna Stojanov, dramaturg, playwright and theatre critic

Source: Assitej International.

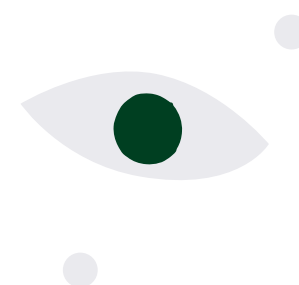
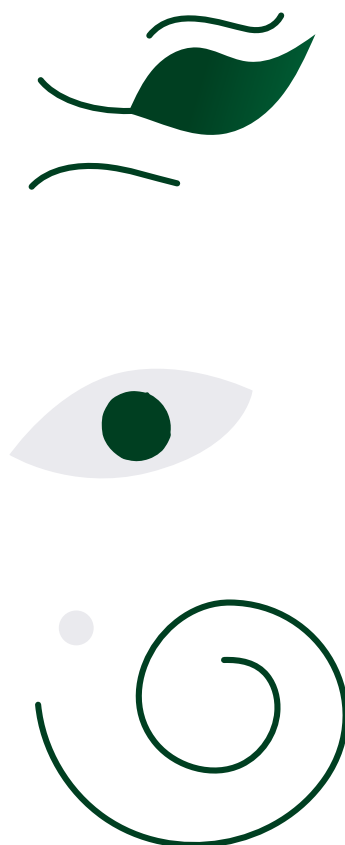
During my last year of studies, there was a casting at the 'Little Theatre Duško Radović.' Needless to say, castings are not an everyday occurrence, so I didn't hesitate about whether to apply or not. At one point, I asked myself if I knew enough about theatre for children, but I decided to approach it with the same passion and concentration as if it were a performance for adults. I was aware that I shouldn't underestimate the young audience, a mistake I've seen some of my colleagues make. In the end, I got the part.

Aleksa Jovčić, actor, portraying Joy, the Chinese prince and emperor

Source: Assitej International.



I AM AKIKO, monodrama, 7+, Cultural Centre Pančevo and the Festival of Ecological Theatre -FEP, Bačka Palanka, Serbia | **Photo:** Predrag Todorović



This was my first time sitting so close to the stage in the theatre. I was amazed how much I saw. Like I was watching through the microscope. And the orange smelt nice.

A boy (7)

I find the story of her father very interesting. And how she talked to the tree.

A girl (soon 12, but write it 12)



BAMBI, drama theatre 7+, Little Theatre "Duško Radović" (Belgrade) and Puls Theatre (Lazarevac), Serbia
Photo: Predrag Todorović



The play destigmatizes death, portraying it as traumatic, but an integral part of life. Another important message of the play is that people can simultaneously do both good and evil. The hunter, for example, shot Bambi's mother, but he helped Bambi's injured and sick friend recover. (...) In the context of regional children's theatre, plays that carefully and nurturably address taboos are rare, and that's why 'Bambi' is a precious example of how, in children's theatre, there are no forbidden topics; one just needs to find appropriate approaches.

Divna Stojanov

Source: Assitej International.



METAMORPHOSES, theatre of material and drama theatre, 15+, Youth Theatre Novi Sad and Academy of Arts – Novi Sad | **Photo:** Tanja Drobnjak

I didn't understand everything, but I couldn't stop watching. I was mesmerised!

Young woman, 22

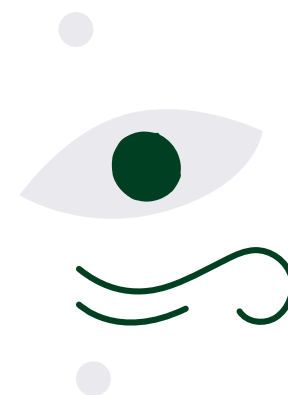
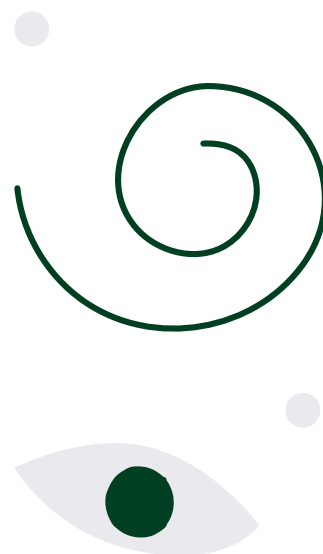
The sound [Filip Gotovac] and light design [Ratko Jerković] was brilliant! And what did they do with a single rope?! Man, I could not believe it was possible.

Young man, 19

'Metamorphosis' was the only puppetry [theatre of material] play. It was the only play of that form addressing the young audience, which is a very rare target group for a puppetry play. I am glad that this example was shown at the ASSITEJ Gathering, proving that the young audience enjoys this form.

Saša Latinović, the author

Source: Assitej Srbija



In the context of institutional theatre for children in Serbia and the 'Boško Buha' Theatre, this play was a turning point. Before this play was staged, five years ago, the theatre produced performances based on fairy tales, well-known titles of children's novels that attract audiences, plays with lots of songs and choreography. 'Kurt, Quo Vadis?' shifted the repertoire towards chamber plays based on less-known works for children. Also, it is very uncommon that plays for children have a grown-up person as a protagonist so we must recognise the bravery it took for this story to be staged.

Divna Stojanov

Source: Assitej Srbija



KURT QUO VADIS?, drama theatre 5-12 Boško Buha Theatre, Belgrade, Serbia | **Photo:** Jovana Semiz

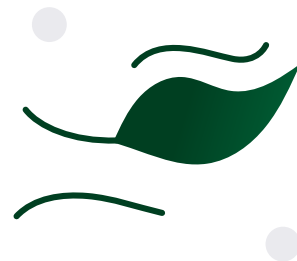




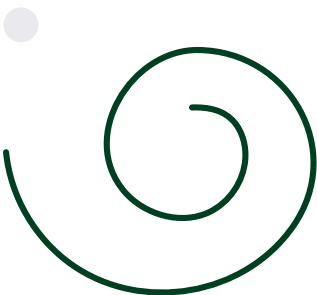
UNDER THE DROPLET, interactive dance performance, 8+, Stanica/Station – Service for Contemporary Dance, Belgrade, | **Photo:** Jovana Semiz

After the play, the children said that this was the first time they could talk while watching the performance, and they needed some time to get used to it and get used to the circumstances of being asked to do something with the dancers/actors. The fact that all the children helped clean the stage after it ended, shows that they felt as if they were an equal part of it.

Divna Stojanov



DO BIRDS HAVE THE CAPACITY FOR FUN?, theatre of objects, 12+, Bitef Theatre, Belgrade, Serbia
Photo: Jovana Semiz



I'm glad I went to see *Prehistoric Girl* as the last performance of the Artistic Gathering, for many performances throughout the festival required a keen eye to follow the translation in order to follow the plot. *Prehistoric Girl* is performed in a made-up language, a new language that the director and actors came up with as a conscious decision to poignantly prove that a language can be universal. [...] The actors also described the creation of their own language. As they rehearsed they had created some 30 words to work with, and eventually reduced them to around 10 words, a formidable exercise and insight into alternative means of communication.

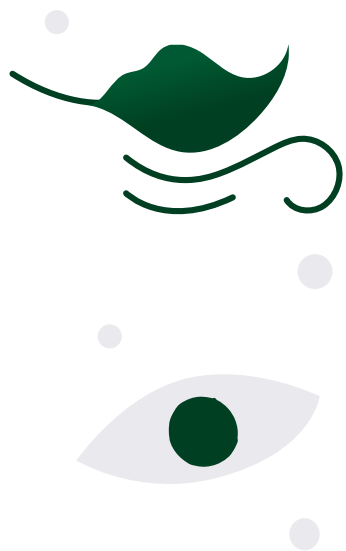
Melissa Hekkers





PREHISTORIC GIRL, puppet show, 6+,
National Theatre "Toša Jovanović" Zrenjanin,
Serbia | **Photo:** Jovana Semiz

(THE REGIONAL SELECTION)



While working on the selection of plays from the region to be presented at the upcoming ASSITEJ Artistic Gathering 2023 (Serbia), we saw more than 80 plays. The submitted plays responded in various degrees to the basic theme of the AAG 2023, which concerns sustainability and the use of new technologies in TYA. Apart from the relevance to the theme of the AAG 2023, an additional criterion in our selection was the general quality of the performances, as well as the mutual diversity of approaches. [...]

ANĐELKA NIKOLIĆ, theatre director, co-founder of the Art Group Hop.La!, founder of the Rural Cultural Centre Markovac, member of ASSITEJ Serbia EC in 2017-2021

TIJANA GRUMIĆ, playwright and dramaturg, Assistant Professor at the Dramaturgy Department of the Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Belgrade, co-founder of the regional platform From the First Step



BREATHE (SCHNAUFEN), dance theatre, 6-10, Mezzanin Theatre and TanzCompany ELLA, Graz, Austria
Photo: Jovana Semiz



WIND, Theatre of objects, 3+, Theatre for Children and Youth Kragujevac | **Photo:** Jovna Semiz



SOUNDBIRD, interactive play, non-verbal, 4+, Kolibri Theatre for Children And Youth, Budapest, Hungary
| **Photo:** Tanja Drobnjak



FOREST OF SONGS, musical, in English language, 4-8, Kuskus (Slovenia), Glej Theatre (Slovenia) and Children's Theatre Dubrava (Croatia) | **Photo:** Tanja Drobnjak

The play ‘SoundBird’ is an interactive, gentle and safe space for play. With the audience sitting on cushions on the floor, there is no boundary between the stage and the audience, and the entire hall becomes a place of sonic experimentation. After the (formal) end of the performance, the actress shares origami birds with the audience and allows them to try out her echo box, repeating voices and sounds, thereby exposing the complex mechanisms of theatrical technique. It’s not difficult to imagine that this enchanting experience captivates the youngest audience members and sparks a love for theatre.

Divna Stojanov

Source: Assitej Srbija



WHY DON'T THEY CARE ABOUT EARTH, drama theatre, non-verbal, 11-15, 16-18, Youth Theatre Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and Ka Productions (Montenegro) | **Photo:** Tanja Drobnjak

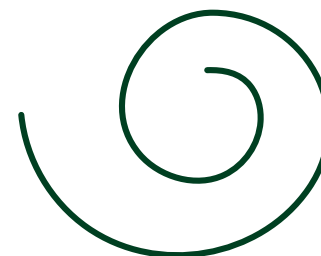
Usually when I work I can only concentrate on making the best photos possible and I am unfocused on the plot of the play. But this time, I was so smitten by the performance that I had to remind myself to take pictures.

Festival photographer



TUNNEL, material theatre, non-verbal, 5+, Ljubljana Puppet Theatre, Slovenia

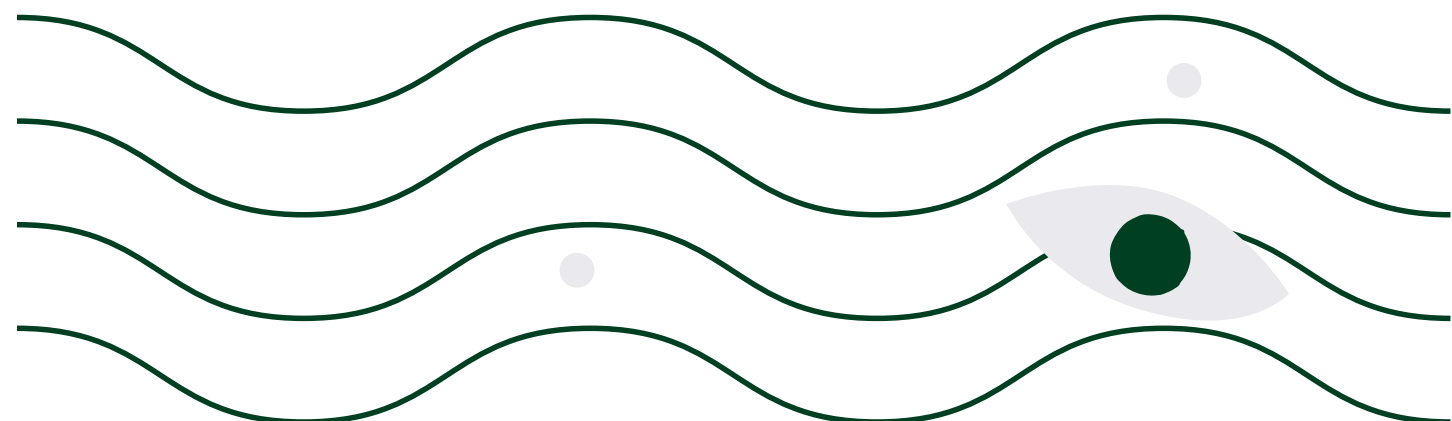
(THE INTERNATIONAL SELECTION)



'Yes Yes Yes' is a highly relevant theatre production for today's teenagers, fearlessly tackling the often-difficult conversation surrounding consent. This thought-provoking blend of confession, documentary, and open conversation gracefully navigates the minefield of consent with sensitivity and much humour. The inclusion of teenagers' voices, delivered through video, adds a crucial layer of authenticity and relevance to this powerful exploration of healthy relationships. This speaks strongly to the themes of Turning Point and the festival's focus on young people's experience of states of change.

SUE GILES, actress, writer, director and facilitator, artistic director and Co-CEO of Polyglot Theatre in 2000-2022, president of ASSITEJ International

VIGDÍS JAKOBSDÓTTIR, theatre director, artistic director of Reykjavík Arts Festival | Listahátíð Reykjavík, honorary member of ASSITEJ International EC.





YES YES YES, one actress text-in-forum performance, in English language, 14+, Aurora Nova/New Zealand, |
Photo: Tatjana Drobnjak

Language, themes, style, aesthetic wise play ‘Yes Yes Yes’ is a perfect example of how theatre for young people should look, sound and be like. Looking at the regional context, the topic of consent is a hot one because since two years ago we have a feminist movement similar to #metoo that brings another dimension to the local importance of this performance. How beautiful it is to have had the opportunity to watch it.

Divna Stojanov

CHILDREN AND YOUTH’S RIGHT TO CULTURE



THE RIGHT OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE TO CULTURE: 10 YEARS AFTER

AAG 2023 Turning Point started on the 20th of October, a World Children's Day, with an international conference 'The Right of Children and Young People to Culture: 10 Years After' held at the Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Belgrade.

The key takeaway that I would like to share with you today, as the leitmotif of this conference, is that change can happen only when we unite, in our voices and actions across different fields and continents. (...) When we were discussing how to outline the title for this conference, we could have placed the focus only on the right of children and youth to theatre and performing arts that are in the essence of our work. But we decided on purpose to reach out for a wider focus, precisely because theatre in its core provides a mirror which reflects the overall state of societies in which we live, with all the struggles that we as individuals, communities, and society face. Theatre is a joint, common act, and as such it should act as a uniting factor which illuminates the path to transformation. Today I know that we were on the right track, as this message resonates all around...

DIANA KRŽANIĆ TEPAVAC, president of ASSITEJ Serbia



FACULTY OF DRAMATIC ARTS, Belgrade, Opening day - Children and Youth Rights Conference
| Photo: Tanja Drobniak





The conference was there to **review the UN General Commentary on the Children's Rights to Culture** (Articles 13 and 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989) issued ten years before, in 2013. **More than 40 artists, experts and officials from 15 countries** presented their insights and discussed the responsibility of theatre in this respect, the relationship between the legal ideal and the reality, the role of arts in formal education, and the facts on cultural needs and cultural rights. In between the panel discussions, **13 examples of good practice worldwide** were also presented to the audience.





The idea is that we don't have a sense of how many young people and which kinds of young people (their demographic or ethnic backgrounds, if they have disabilities, what age groups they are, if they're part of different religions or other minority groups etc), are actually accessing theatre for young audiences.

LANORA CALLAHAN, researcher, University of Roehampton, ASSITEJ International's 'Building Collective Resilience' project



Thanks to this conference, we better understood that the **quality of TYA is a subject of the United Nations' legal obligation towards children**. The protectors of citizens' rights were reminded that **arts and culture for children and youth play an important role in the realisation of all of their other rights**. Professors of dramatic arts from the region started the discussion on how to **give more respect and space to TYA in the teaching programmes**. The conclusions of the conference, summarised by prof. Wolfgang Schneider (Hildesheim University) and Diana Kržanić Tepavac (ASSITEJ Serbia), are about to be distributed to all ASSITEJ members and networks.

The rights of children should be a process in a long-term project. [...] These wonderful people have the expertise as suppliers for the process, but why are they not, in the future, the motor of the society with all their knowledge? [...] Connect the convention of the United Nations for Children's rights to the convention of UNESCO for the diversity of cultural expressions. TYA will then be, once again, more and more intergenerational, international, interdisciplinary.

Prof. emer. **WOLFGANG SCHNEIDER**, Hildesheim University



VOICES OF CHILDREN AND TEENAGERS



VOICES OF CHILDREN AND TEENAGERS – NEW INSIGHTS

Within ASSITEJ International's project **'Building Collective Resilience' (2022-2024)** and the second year of the two related subprojects – 'Voices of Children' and 'Voices of Teenagers' – ASSITEJ Serbia started developing one group of children and one of teenagers to make them active participants in AAG 2023 Turning Point, especially the festival programme. Expressing their thoughts and feelings about the TYA in different ways, they enabled artists and professionals to better understand **what young audiences expect in terms of sustainability, participation, and creative feedback.**

Within the 'Voices of Children' project, the 'This Is What I Saw' programme engaged a group of 2 boys and 6 girls (aged 9-11) from elementary schools in Novi Sad. Guided by the idea of offering them thematic and genre diversity, as well as the chance to see productions which are not from their city, the mentors took the group to see 'Breathe' (dance theatre from Austria), 'Twisted Tales' (interactive storytelling with contemporary dance interpreting famous fairy tales in which the main characters are from vulnerable social groups), and 'Kurt Quo Vadis?' (drama theatre from Serbia). The work process included an introductory workshop, watching selected performances and talking with the performers, and the final workshop where the children created visual, dramatic, sensory, audio, or video responses to the works they saw.

Watching the plays was surely the key moment that the children were most looking forward to. Conversations with the participants and creators of the plays gave a special value because children got the opportunity to ask the authors about something they did not understand, or anything else about the creative process. (...) For example, after the non-verbal dance performance 'Breath', several children stated that they 'didn't understand anything'. However, in the discussions and drama activities during the final workshop, it turned out that they actually understood a lot both on the conceptual level and the story level. (...) The children's reactions after the performance of 'Twisted Tales' were also very interesting. (...) ... due to the interactivity of the performance, they experienced it more as a workshop, so at the end we got the comment: 'And when will we watch the play?'. (...)



... the children feel very well the moments of the plot and its climax, and that they identify themselves very much with the main hero/heroes of the story. That is why they usually rate the resolution as the most exciting moment in the plays – the moment when the events turn into the benefit of the main character.



Regardless of the fact that some of our participants were not unfamiliar with drama work, i.e. they already had the experience of participating in drama workshops at a drama studio – we can certainly say that none of them had the opportunity to participate in workshops formatted like these.

This project shows us by example that participatory practices, although still insufficiently present in our region, are very much necessary: that they are effective in the process of learning about a wide variety of topics, that they provide a 'safe space' for expression, that they contribute to a better understanding of theatre languages (facilitate reception and interpretation of the content of the plays) and familiarise audiences with different theatrical forms.

As drama pedagogues, our conclusions are that children need time to settle down their impressions; that they should be freed from the pressure to give correct/incorrect answers; and enabled to experience a theatre as a place of sensory and intuitive discoveries, not only of verbal and rational communication.

Looking closely at the process through which the participants went through in just a few days and seeing the “results” of this kind of work after only two longer workshops - we can’t help but wonder: what could be the effects if programmes like this one would become regular practice?

MILICA ŠEĆEROV, actress and drama pedagogue, senior associate at the Academy of Arts – Novi Sad, ‘Voices of Children’ mentor

SLAVICA VUČETIĆ, actress and drama pedagogue at the Youth Theater in Novi Sad, ‘Voices of Children’ mentor



Photo: Dejan Nad

For us who are engaged in creating TYA, it’s of great importance to listen very carefully to these voices who are meant to be our guide: are we doing it good enough, are we managing to address themes that are relevant to them, are we paying enough attention to their point of view, are we listening to the ‘language’ they use to express themselves and are we helping to create a safe space for that expression; are we shifting perspectives in order to create new meaning and understanding of the world we live in? Are we letting the young audience ‘navigate’ the future of TYA?

MILICA ŠEĆEROV



Within the ‘Voices of Teenagers’ project, the ‘Sustainability & Participation’ programme engaged a group of 16 teenagers from different parts of Serbia. It tried to question: How does theatre communicate with young people? How does theatre keep up with the times we’re living in? What makes a play a play? How is the use of digital tools functional and meaningful in a theatrical act? The group was diverse but also supported those underprivileged and without many opportunities to fulfil their interest in performing arts. Its first meeting was online, before the Turning Point.



‘Voices of Teenagers’ project in 2023, ‘Sustainability & Participation’ programme for the group of 16 teenagers from Serbia; the photo was taken on the first day of the AAG 2023 Turning Point, during the conference ‘The Right of Children and Young People to Culture: 10 Years After’ at the Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Belgrade on the 20th of November 2023, a World Children’s Day

Belgrade, on the first day of the AAG 2023 Turning Point, **the group merged with the ‘Fore-STEEN’ group (teenagers from Italy, Germany, and Denmark** gathered within the latest ASSITEJ’s international project) for an introductory workshop at the Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Belgrade, where the conference ‘The right of children and young people to culture: 10 years after’ was also happening.

In the evening, both groups watched ‘Screenagers vol. 2’ (Croatia-France), attended the after-talk, and departed to Novi Sad where they had separate but often overlapping programmes.



ALICE, Site specific performance, Interactive video projection,13+, Puls theatre Lazarevac & cultural Center Valjevo | **Photo:** Tatjana Drobnjak



YES YES YES, one actress text-in-forum performance, 14+, Aurora Nova/New Zealand | **Photo:** Tatjana Drobnjak

In Novi Sad, the ‘Voices of Teenagers’ had its workspace in Novi Sad (OPENS) where the group set down each day to share experiences of the performances and many other activities such as the Young Dance Network’s creative workshop that made each morning of the Turning Point very good for all. However, **the most thrilling group experience was an ad hoc workshop organised in the hostel’s living room** in the afternoon of the first day in Novi Sad. The three round table discussions brought talks about intergenerational cooperation, giving space to young people in content creation, conversations after performances and socialising with the audience, training and workshops, free tickets and availability of theatre to everyone, better cooperation with schools, volunteerism, peer education, audience education, strengthening theatre criticism and reception which could be achieved with a smartphone application created by young people.



The group watched more shows made for their age – ‘Yes Yes Yes’ (New Zealand), ‘Metamorphosis’, ‘Alice’, and ‘Do Birds Have the Capacity for Fun?’ (Serbia) – and was enthusiastic to see even those for the younger audience – ‘Why Don’t They Care About Earth?’ (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and ‘Tunnel’ (Slovenia). All shows raised long discussions about how their topics are communicated, how proper is their usage of technologies, and how engaging they are. ‘Yes Yes Yes’ was a peak of the AAG 2023 Turning Point for the youngsters (it even brought some of them on stage) and the ‘Tunnel’ based on the animation of light and darkness, although made for children 5+, also inspired a lot of comments and questions for the actors.



Other professional programmes in Novi Sad (the Artistic Encounters, workshops, the German speaking ASSITEJ centres’ talk about the multigenerational dialogue, and the conference on scene design) contributed to the maturity of the youngsters’ thinking of their own responsibility towards the TYA.



RE: GENERATION - Searching and finding of a multigenerational dialogue, initiative of the German speaking ASSITEJ centres (Austria, Germany, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Switzerland | **Photo:** Tanja Drobnjak

The evaluation showed that they liked the whole experience very much.

I heard about a festival in Germany called Theatre festival for young audiences where selectors and juries are young people. During our workshop, we talked about the potential to make a similar festival on our own in Serbia. We were imagining so deeply that we got to the idea that maybe we can also make our own theatre, not just a festival. That theatre would be run by us and we would decide what would be put on the stage.

*What did you like the most about the AAG and why?
The thing I liked the most is that somebody actually cared about what we thought, everyone was ready to listen to what we had to say.*

Is there anything you’ve learned at the AAG that you didn’t know before?

I learned that it is necessary to look at a performance from all possible angles in order to get an idea of its true image. Did the AAG Turning Point meet your expectations? Or did you imagine something different?

It honestly fulfilled all my expectations, even the ones I didn’t have in the beginning. I am glad that I had the opportunity to be a part of this event.

TIJANA GRUMIĆ, playwright and dramaturg, teaching assistant at the Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Belgrade, co-founder of the regional platform From the First Step, ‘Voices of Teenagers’ mentor

SANDRA MAKSIMOVIĆ, professor of Serbian language and literature, and the head of Drama Studio in elementary school Sveti Sava in Kruševac; leader of Kulturocyclin, ‘Voices of Teenagers’ mentor



Watch this great video about the ‘Voices of Teenagers’ that Sandra Maksimović made during the AAG 2023 Turning Point:



The ‘Voices of Teenagers’ group in Serbia is **now preparing a performance-lecture for the 6th Festival of ASSITEJ Serbia (November 2024, Belgrade) and will have an equal role in the festival’s main jury.**



SCENE DESIGN AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES IN TYA



DAY OF SCENE DESIGN AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES IN THEATRE FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES

One whole day of AAG 2023 Turning Point was dedicated to the creative usage of new technologies in scene design. As not only our audiences but many colleagues belong to the generations whose life is inseparable from multimedia devices, virtual worlds, and AI assistants, the main questions were – **how can new technologies expand the ways of telling stories in TYA and make communication between spectators and performers more engaging?**

The programme was realised in cooperation with SCEN Centre For Scene Design (Faculty of Technical Sciences in Novi Sad, OISTAT centre) where AAG participants were invited to meet **carefully selected artists whose works exceed the limits of the conventional theatre language.** Coming from different parts of the world and different theatre backgrounds, they tried to explain their practices and discuss the topic from various angles: How to really integrate technology, not use it as a sensation? What does technology allow us to talk about? Can technology get us closer? The presentations were followed by Q&A sessions and informal discussions during the breaks.

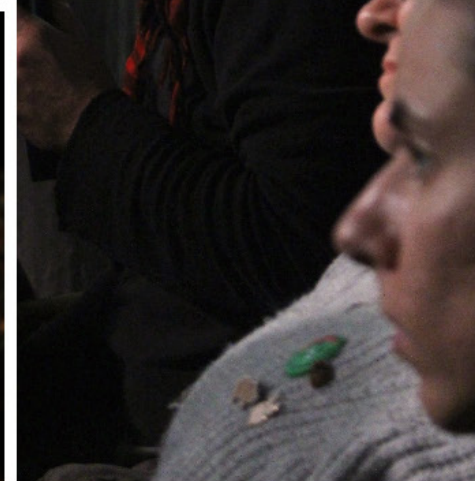
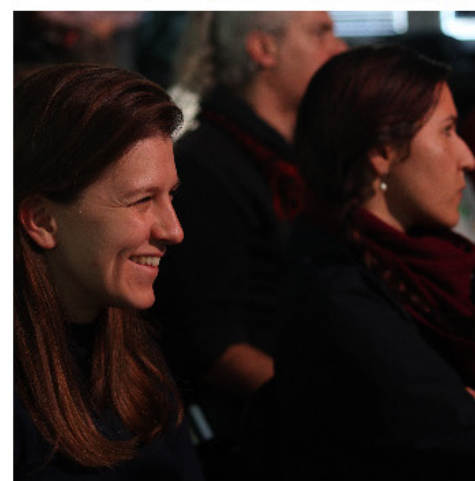
Guerilla way of thinking always moved things further. The biggest steps in theatre were never made in institutes. That is why bold theatre makers, the ones doing things from the heart, knowledge, and love will be speakers today.

NIKOLA ZAVIŠIĆ, director, writer, founder of 'Radio.Nica' group, co-editor of the conference



Photo

On behalf of SCEN Centre as the host, **Andrija Dinulović and Aleksandra Pešterac** gave the keynote speech 'On Tenderness, Responsibility and Dreams'. It was about the two projects of their colleagues and students that **won Serbia important awards at the Prague Quadrennial 2023**. After them, **Linea Happonen** (Finland) showed the work of her group **KREPSKO** which uses elements of circus and puppet theatre to tell stories without words. Never inspired by the technologies, she approaches them as a trickster looking for ways to



elevate the show. **Thaddeus Philips** (Colorado) was bored with theatre streamed during the pandemic before he invented an immersive online interactive theatre mystery called **Zoom Motel** which he performed for nine months non-stop. He gained rich technical experience and later used it to make a new production – Zoom Movie for Teateri (Jönköping, Sweden), together with Christian Arin (Sweden) who also talked about this unusual work.

Dalija Aćin Thelander (Serbia/Sweden) builds on the research findings of Alison Gopnik, a world-renowned expert in child development, to make theatre scenes which often positively affect the relationship between child and parent. Her performances last for 3-4 hours in carefully designed spaces that babies and children with autism and physical disabilities can **explore on their own**. **Mina Trapp and Matteo Frau** (Switzerland/Spain), as FRAUTRAPP company, presented 'micro cinema' as a theatrical expression that combines live video recording of animation of object and miniature (puppet theatre), live projection (film), and drama theatre. Inspired by the works of Astralages (Belgium), Agrupación Señor Serrano (Spain), and Hotel Modern (Netherlands), they are exploring how live projection of object animation changes puppetry (shows details, creates various effects...). **Davide Venturini** (Italy) applied video to theatre already in the 1980s (TPO) and soon started using live computer animation, and sensors that made interactive digital scenographies. Today, he is using and developing an authentic **Children's Cheering Carpet** that enables children to freely interact with the performers and co-create different productions.

The last session presented the work of artists teaching at the Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Belgrade who conceived the Laboratory of Interactive Arts a few years ago. **Mirko Stojković** showed **immersive theatre and nano spectacle**, **Branko Sujić** showed **how virtual space can exist in theatre**, and **Pavle Dinulović** presented **alternative stage practices as spaces for dialogue between art and science**. Together with the audience that still had questions, they made the ending of this day quite impressive, offering a solid perspective for rethinking performing arts in the digital environment.

Curated by theatre practitioners, this gathering was about curiosity, artistic practice, and creativity. With a lot of spontaneity and humour, the hosts and presenters inspired and sustained a day-long lively discussion **about the new, digitally mediated theatre works**.



ASSITEJ ARTISTIC ENCOUNTERS AND OTHER PROFESSIONAL PROGRAMMES

In addition to the conferences on the children's right to art, and the new technologies in scene design, AAG 2023 Turning Point offered **ten more professional programmes**. The consortiums of multiyear projects, done in cooperation of several national centres, also met to evaluate previous work, discuss their expectations, and plan future activities.

The central programmes were two sessions of **Artistic Encounters** facilitated by ASSITEJ International's Executive Committee. They were of special importance to the new members, helping them to present themselves and meet the community. The participants explored the theme and topics of the **Turning Point**, especially **diversity within the TYA** as the main strategy for its sustainability and advancement.



ASSITEJ Artistic Encounters | **Photo:** Jovana Semiz

In the Artistic Encounters we exchanged responses on the meaning of Turning Points when it comes to our (performing) art. Each group was asked to create an image/drawing together that included and combined the different perspectives. The results reflected the richness of focus points, hopes, ideas and fields of action that artists working for and with children and young people are considering in their practice.

JULIA DINA HESSE, EC member of ASSITEJ International

Everybody listened to the researchers (Kelly Freebody, Michael Anderson, Richard Johnson Sallis, Selina Busby, etc.) leading six ongoing advocacy-focused projects of ASSITEJ International, and discussed their focus on the cross-cutting priorities of sustainability, diversity, access, inclusion, and representation. It was very good to hear that soon we will have clearer insight (quantitative and qualitative findings) into the possible future directions of ASSITEJ itself and that all members will know their work better (why and how it works) and be able to speak to the stakeholders with more accurate evidence.



I think that there's often a disconnect between the stories we tell ourselves about the importance of our work as practitioners, and what funding bodies, governments, schools, and the world knows about our work, and what our work's impact really is.

PROF. KELLY FREEBODY, University of Sydney

Source: Assitej Srbija

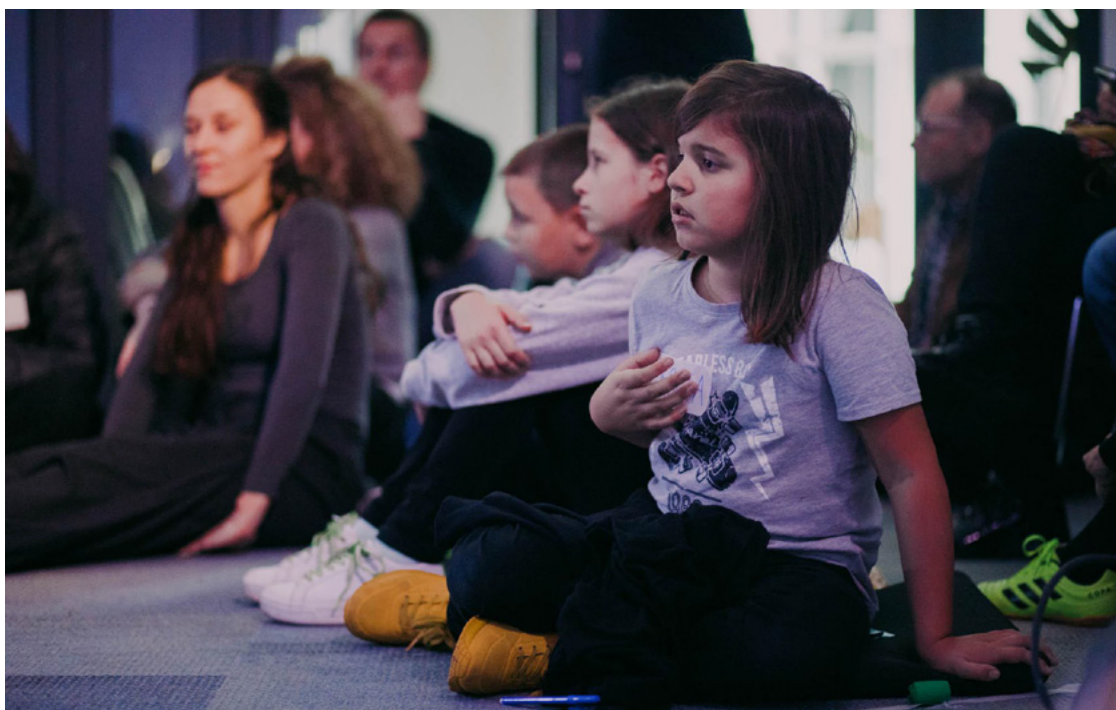
In the realm of the International **Inclusive Arts Network (IIAN)**, several programmes were offered and supported with the **IIAN's** discussion room for one-on-one or small-group conversations on inclusivity. Dalija Aćin Thelander, choreographer, stage designer and researcher, conducted **a 3-day workshop for the creation of performances for babies and children with disabilities**. The participants got the most progressive theoretical knowledge and were enabled to experience and explore Dalija's sensorial-perceptual creative approach which she started to develop in 2012. She read developmental studies and all sorts of research to understand what kinds of minds, bodies, and perceptions she was working with.



It was immensely empowering. And definitely, it made me understand more and more about how much of the work that is produced for babies is produced from an out-dated perspective. (...) Understanding that perception and seeing that there is much missing in the context from the perspective of progressive artistic thinking, I wanted to explore aesthetics, explore materials, explore the practices that are most meaningful for me, and from the perspective of seeing performance events as an ecology, rather than a static environment full of control and very unequal (between performer and audience).

DALIJA AČIN Thelander interviewed by Melissa Hekkers

Another programme was **engaging different groups of children aged 6-10 in an interactive multimedia installation Twisted Tales exploring fears of disagreeing with the dominant narratives**. It was about well-known fairy tales but with protagonists coming from vulnerable groups - Cinderella is about a girl with disabilities, The Snow Queen about a heroine with Down syndrome, Aladdin is a boy fighting against the patriarchy, Little Red Riding Hood is a survivor of sexual harassment... To make children think more deeply about their peers from vulnerable social groups, the installation used audiobooks, an interactive mobile application, dance, light design, and video. It was easily accessible, translated into Serbian sign language, and audio narrated for blind and partially sighted people. This programme came out from the project TwistedEdu (carried out in partnership between organisations from Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia).



Twisted Tales Audience and Twisted Edu project, **Photo:** Jovana Semiz

Together with **Write Local. Play Global. (WLPG)** network, IIAN and ASSITEJ Serbia held a hybrid session on the **importance of playwriting for the realisation of the right to arts and culture of neurodivergent or physically disabled children and young people**.

Two plays and their authors were in focus – Milena Depolo’s ‘Who is Laurette?’ (based on a picture book by Florence Cadier) and Simone Spiteri’s ‘The Fig Tree’. Ten years ago, ‘Who is Laurette?’ was the first play in an institutional theatre in Serbia that dealt with the topic of a child with a disability, a girl with Down syndrome, and it is coming back on stage again in December 2023. In Malta, ‘The Fig Tree’ came out from the workshop with people with and without disabilities, making everyone feel included.

Do not be afraid! The fear is not coming from them but from us. So you mustn't fear.

SIMONE SPITERI

Write a character, not a disability. And do not forget that they have abilities too.

MILENA DEPOLO



WLPG readings, playwrights Milena Depolo and Simone Spiteri | **Photo:** Tanja Drobnjak

Starting its own explorations of this year's AAG theme, WLPG also organised a slam event where **young playwrights read their original three-minute monologues** dealing with different turning points in their personal and professional lives. After the festival, 11 monologues of the playwrights who responded to the invitation (Ivona Marciuš, Viktoriia Chekmak, Erfan Khatibzadeh, Hana Holloway, etc.) were published on the [WLPG website](#).

More valuable contributions to the **consideration of playwriting as an empowering process** came with a round table discussion about the rewriting of a national anthem with ten Tasmanian kids, an endeavour carried out in Australia in 2022 by Terrapin Puppet Theatre and experts on inclusivity, Alex Walker and Davina Wright.



39 AnthemAnthem, a round table discussion of rewriting a national Anthem with 10 tasmanian kids
Photo: **Jovana Semiz**

The discussion about their project (meaningfully unifying children, a Tasmanian pakana artist DENNI, a table tennis robot, and an international multi-sport event) questioned: How can we provide hopeful spaces for our young people to dream of new worlds? What are our responsibilities as artists and organisations to support young people in engaging positively in broader conversations? How can we adapt local conversations to global communities?

On behalf of the **Small Size Network**, **Karel van Ransbeeck**, artistic director of De Spiegel theatre (Antwerp, Belgium), **led a 2-day masterclass in thinking about the artistic creation for early years**. He shared his well-elaborated view on theatre for early childhood and instructed theatre practitioners and students to watch three performances at the Setting Sail festival (Forest of Songs, Sound-Bird, The Wind). After the last show, he discussed the special quality of each production. As this programme was hosted by the network's Virtual House as well, van Ransbeeck's introductory lecture is still available online.

The **regional networks** also had their meetings. The **German speaking ASSITEJ centres** (Austria, Germany, Lichtenstein, Luxembourg, Switzerland) gathered to talk about the **necessity of a multigenerational dialogue in TYA**. Moved by the new paradigms of work and big transitions in leadership (members of the founding generation are handing over TYA to their younger successors), they recognised an immense chance for fundamental changes. They offered the findings of the research 'Diversification processes in the independent children's and youth theatre festival scene' (presented by Özlem Canyürek) and, together with an international group of teenagers ('Voices of Teenagers', 'ForesTEEN'), organised round tables to look for **ways to make the transition beneficial for all generations**.



40 RE:Generation, Photo: Tanja Drobnjak

Small Countries Network gave an opportunity to ASSITEJ members worldwide to become familiar with this network created in 2021 and active in countries with a population under 1,000,000. This was the second face-to-face meeting of the members of this network which lately became recognised as relevant by many ASSITEJ centres in the countries with a small performing arts sector, limited number of audiences, and modest public resources for TYA. After the current members made their presentations (Cyprus, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, San Marino, Malta), there was a discussion about the best ways to **serve children and young people in the smallest countries and/or those with scarce resources**.

My involvement with ASSITEJ was certainly a turning point in my career. I would have never thought that my involvement with this organisation would change my life in the way it has.

STAVROS STAVROU, founder of ASSITEJ Cyprus



41 **Small Talk**, Small Countries Network; Stavros Stavru, Simone Spiteri, Georg Bidermann, Jean Bermes
| **Photo:** Tanja Drobnjak

Members of the **Nordic-Baltic Network (NBAN)** talked about the overall **importance of a regional network**. This meeting was quite interesting for the members of all ASSITEJ’s regional networks, whether or not they had an official programme during the AAG 2023 Turning Point, because NBAN presented how it works – its focus areas (e.g., artistic exchange within the region), collaboration between the festivals to make them sustainable, promotion of ASSITEJ’s vision and mission, etc. After the presentation, all participants, including the representatives of Ibero American, Asian, and African ASSITEJ networks, exchanged their thoughts about the role, the potential and barriers in their mutual links and collaborations, and left this meeting with **much greater knowledge about each other**.

The Nordic-Baltic Assitej Network would like to express our heartfelt thanks to Diana Krzanic Tepavac Assitej Srbija and ASSITEJ International with the EC for giving us such an inspiring and profound week of artistic experiences, reflections, conversations and workshops. We would like to express our gratitude for having the opportunity to present our The Nordic-Baltic Assitej Network and to have the time and space to engage in a panel discussion with the other regional and transnational networks in ASSITEJ International - the Small Country Red Iberoamericana de Artes Escénicas para la Infancia y la Juventud, Asian TYA Network, African Children and Youth Theatre Arena (ACYTA) and the Small Countries Network. It was truly inspiring to hear from the other networks and to talk about opportunities and unleashing of the network’s potential within the network! Looking forward to more meetings of this kind. Thank you - and congratulations again on yet another great ASSITEJ Artistic Gathering!



Source of the photo and the quote: [Facebook profile of The Nordic-Baltic Assitej Network](#)

Aside from being partially implemented throughout the AAG 2023 Turning Point and presented during the Artistic Encounters, three ASSITEJ's multi year projects done in international cooperation including ASSITEJ Serbia had their own workspace. **The 'Building Collective Resilience (BCR)' (2022-2024)**, was designed after COVID-19 to build collective resilience across the network of organisations working in the TYA sector to provide children and young people with quality artistic experiences and make a positive impact on their development. Creating new necessary resources and relationships, the project addresses the TYA sector's responsibility towards sustainability, diversity, access, inclusion, and representation. For AAG 2023 Turning Point, this project enabled the Artistic Encounters, Karel van Ransbeeck's masterclass (Small Size Network), 'Voices of Children', 'Voices of Teenagers', and some elements of the conference 'The Rights of Children and Youth to Culture: 10 years later'.



42 The Art of Listening in Theatre for Young Audience - BABEL,
project consortium meeting | **Photo:** Jovana Semiz

'The Art of Listening in Theatre for Young Audiences - BABEL' (2022-2026), implemented in cooperation of ASSITEJ centres in 11 countries (Denmark, Netherlands, Ireland, Slovenia, Lithuania, Belgium, Spain, Italy, Sweden, Serbia, France) and led by the Theatre Centre of Denmark, had its presentation during the Open Market day, and held its consortium meetings for two days in Novi Sad after the Turning Point ended. This project aims to increase and improve the artistic, linguistic, and cultural diversity in TYA through exploring communication across different verbal and non-verbal languages in order to proactively involve the voices, needs, and feedback of children and young people in the creation of artistic works while supporting international networking through ASSITEJ International. By fostering intercultural and intergenerational dialogue, and overcoming language barriers, the project intends to highlight the complexity and richness of the theatrical relationship between artists and children/young people of all ages and, in doing so, it seeks to enable the better representation of a wider spectrum of identities on TYA scenes.



43 "ForesTeen: Building a Resilient European Teen Cultural Ecosystem"
kick off meeting, Fabrika, Novi Sad | **Photo:**

The latest project, **'ForesTeen: Building a Resilient European Teen Cultural Ecosystem' (2023-2027)**, had its first consortium meeting at the Turning Point. Carried out in partnership between ASSITEJ organisations in 9 countries, this project connects adolescents with policy-makers and cultural curators to enable a transgenerational dialogue that can result in new ways of producing culture and renewal of cultural forms and languages. Its priorities are audience engagement and sustainability. 'ForesTeen' was presented in two sessions of the conference 'The Right of Children and Youth to Culture: 10 years later' that opened the Turning Point, and its implementation in Serbia significantly contributed to the realisation of the conference's programme.



44 **Young Dance Network** annual meeting, | **Photo:** Tanja Drobnyak

Thanks to the **Young Dance Network (YDN)**, which held its annual meeting during the AAG 2023 Turning Point, each day of the Gathering started with 45-minute exercises in different dance practices, connecting the participants through movement and preparing them for a long working day of (mostly) sitting in meetings, panels, lectures, and performances.

THE NEXT GENERATION PROGRAMME



NEXT GENERATION RESIDENCY 'SUSTAINABILITY AS THE FUTURE OF TYA'

In November 2023, Next Generation Residency existed for ten days in Serbia and was focused on 'Sustainability as the Future of TYA'. Coordinated by Sonja Petrović, theatre and multimedia director, it built on the legacies of the Next Generation Programme and the Festival of Ecological Theatre for Children and Youth (FEP) in Bačka Palanka which was established in 1995 by the two local teachers and which Sonja is now leading.

The Residency was not only **about the materials, topics, and advocacy but also about the relationships between people in the process and mental health**. Its programme consisted of six days of workshops on the topic of sustainability; watching the performances from Serbia; discussions and reflections; networking during AAG 2023 Turning Point; and a meeting with the alumni.

The programme was prepared by the Next Generation steering group, ASSITEJ Serbia, and the regional platform From the First Step, an offspring of the Next Generation residency in Serbia in 2018. The first week, realised in Sremski Karlovci (nearby Novi Sad but far away from city distractions), was more intensive than the second one which overlapped with AAG 2023 Turning Point in Novi Sad.



45 Next Generation Residency, Eco Center Radulovački in Sremski Karlovci, | Photo: Jovana Semiz

The organisers considered **more than 100 applicants and invited 13 artists from 12 countries**. Six are from Southeast Europe and seven came from Brazil, Mexico, India, Egypt, Iran, Germany, and Switzerland. Mentors were **Nikola Zavišić**, theatre director, dramaturg, writer and lighting designer (Serbia); **Willem Miličević**, audio engineer, composer, sound and projection designer (Croatia); **David Ragot**, circus artist, performer and educator (France); and **Dalija Aćin Thelander**, choreographer, theatre maker and cultural worker (Serbia/Sweden) offered her 3-day workshop 'Creating performances for babies and children with disabilities' during the Turning Point as a residency spot. The main venue was Eco Center Radulovački in Sremski Karlovci, a youth centre labelled by the Council of Europe, and the programme was aligned with the SHIFT Eco-Guidelines for Networks as much as possible.



Through various types of workshops, the mentors wanted to: encourage the residents to create work for children and youth; motivate them to adopt **eco-friendly practices in their creative process** to ensure that their work does not harm the environment and has a minimal carbon footprint; inspire them to create a **healthy and productive workspace** focusing on self-sustainability; help them build **self-confidence and be more expressive** in their creativity; increase their awareness of the importance of TYA; empower them to explore **new forms and working models**; and recognise and affirm the **young artists' talents and potential**.

The residents expressed satisfaction with the topic (4.2), the mentors (4.6), the workshops led by guest artists (4.9), the 5th Festival of ASSITEJ Serbia (4.3), the professional programmes of the Turning Point (4.2), and the session 'What to take forward from this experience' (4.7). Half of them said that the residency should be longer, and four were suggested as alumni who should address the Next Generation residing in Havana during the ASSITEJ World Congress in 2024 – **Daniilo Brakočević** (Serbia), **Shweta Singh** (India), **Laura Leupi** (Switzerland), and **Mauricio Arizona Garcia** (Mexico).

46 Photo: Jovana Semiz

This Next Generation Residency was a bit differently organised from the previous ones. **A great deal of its programme was realised right before the AAG***. That enabled the participants to use AAG as a resource without being under the pressure of completing a demanding programme at the same time. Another effort resulted in an illustrative step-by-step elaboration of the preparation, realisation, and evaluation of the residency that inspired the ASSITEJ International to produce **a guide for the future hosts**.

*You can find a detailed report of the Next Generation program below.

OPEN MARKET

Held on the last day of the Turning Point, an ‘open market’ proved to be a favourable format allowing all ASSITEJ’s members and networks to present themselves as they like. In an atmosphere between relaxed and formal, people could gather, wander around, stop at something that sparks their interest, and get a lot of information.

The day started with a **presentation of the work done throughout the Next Generation Residency in 2023** ‘Sustainability as the future of TYA’ (14-24 November). It continued with a pitch session organised by the regional platform From The First Step for artists aged 36 years or below, including the 13 Next Generation residents. They could present their work and ideas to a broader international audience of theatre professionals.



47 Next Generation at Open Market | Photo: Dejan Nad



What was the feedback from your presentation in the Open Market?

Comments are so far positive, but I wasn’t really there for the Open Market, I needed to help the crew prepare for the performance. And I think that that was the best place to be, instead of the market. I am not a gifted seller, especially if I am the product. The pitch went as good as it could have been in those circumstances, and hopefully I’ll get a few emails from interested parties.

DANILO BRAKOČEVIĆ, artist and writer, Next Generation resident in 2023

Under the topic ‘How To Manage Terrible Conditions’, programme editors of the Day of Scene Design and New Technologies in TYA invited young artists and drama pedagogues to talk about the **current position of theatre in society and its effects on their professional work in TYA**. The youth sitting in the audience (current and future students of performing arts) also took an active part in the discussion about the lack of space for work, and auditions for plays for young audience; opposite opinions on whether it is smart to study for a professional artist (an actor) as the career is very insecure; the importance of learning managerial skills, becoming self-organised, etc.





Photo: Dejan Nad

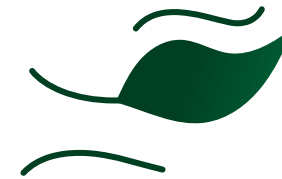
ASSITEJ International presented its **newest members** – ASSITEJ Cyprus and ASSITEJ North Macedonia national centres from the region who joined the international network during the last year. ASSITEJ's specialised networks, the International Inclusive Arts Network and Small Countries Network, also presented their news.....

A larger block of the programme was given to the Association of Critics and Theatre Experts of Serbia. Wanting to overcome the situation in which repertoires of children's theatres in Serbia are rarely followed by adequate reviews, the members of this association proposed **launching an initiative 'Reception of a TYA in Serbia'**. A lot of topics were brought up: how to get funding, who reads reviews of TYA, how the impressions of children and young people can be included in the reviews so that their voices are heard, and what could art schools do better.



Photo: Dejan Nad

The **Young Dance Network (YDN)** dedicated to dance for young audiences here tried to find out from the artists and experts about the situation in this field in Southeast Europe. Does it, in addition to the usual questions (How to express yourself in dance as a language? Is dance too abstract? How to meet expectations of the audience? Are there taboo topics related to the body? Is participation always necessary?), open up some new issues?



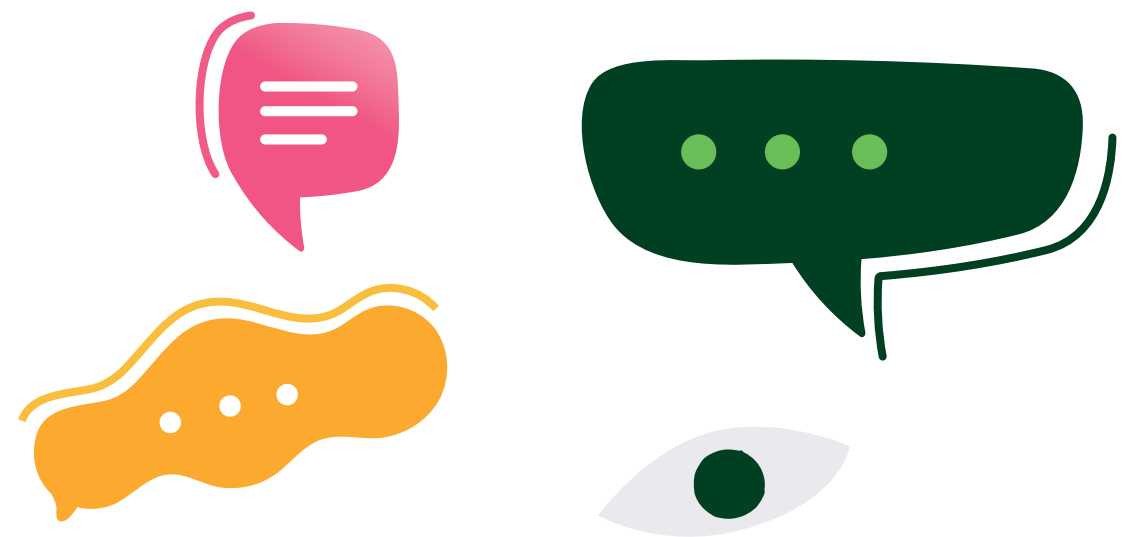
Given that this year at the AAG in Novi Sad and Belgrade we are dedicating ourselves to listening to the voices of young creators as much as young audiences, we have an opportunity to devote some time to this young art, which is still looking for its place in theatre institutions throughout the Balkan region.

JOVANA RAKIĆ, choreographer and dance teacher, YDN, ASSITEJ Serbia

Open Market ended with a presentation of the results of the project **'The Art of Listening in Theatre for Young Audiences – BABEL' (2022-2026)** implemented in cooperation between ASSITEJ centres in 11 countries and led by the Theater Center of Denmark.

In the evening of this last working day, BITEF Theatre's (Belgrade) production 'Do Birds Have the Capacity for Fun?' was performed on the Big Stage of the Youth Theater in Novi Sad, and followed by a Q&A session.

ASSITEJ Artistic Gathering (AAG) 2023 Turning Point was officially closed on the 24th of November at 8 PM, with a ceremony at FABRIKA (The Factory), the main program space of the Student's Cultural Center Novi Sad. In the following days, the consortium of the project BABEL (2022-2026) had its meetings in Novi Sad, having also the opportunity to see one of the best productions from Serbia – 'Prehistoric Girl' puppet show of the National Theatre 'Toša Jovanović' Zrenjanin.



WHO WAS WHO

ASSITEJ Artistic Gathering 2023 Turning Point in Serbia was jointly organised by ASSITEJ Serbia and ASSITEJ International. The event was encouraged by the National Commission for Co-operation with UNESCO and the Congress Bureau of the Tourism Organization of Serbia, and financed by the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Tourism and Youth of the Republic of Serbia, the European Union’s Creative Europe Programme, Swedish Institute (Creative Partnership, ASSITEJ Sweden), departments for culture of the City of Belgrade and the City of Novi Sad, Institut Français (Teatroskop, ASSITEJ France), and the Croatian Foundation ‘Kulturanova’. The sponsor of the Turning Point was “Matijević” and the media sponsor “Ringier”.

Our partners were Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Belgrade (FDA), Faculty of Technical Sciences Novi Sad, SCEN Centre, Laboratory of Interactive Arts FDA, Festival of Ecological Theatre for Children and Youth Bačka Palanka (FEP), Little Theatre “Duško Radović” in Belgrade, Children Cultural Centre of Belgrade, Puppet Theatre “Pinokio” Belgrade, Serbian National Theatre Novi Sad, Youth Theater Novi Sad, Student Cultural Centre Novi Sad, OPENS and Children’s Cultural Centre of Novi Sad.

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This report was largely based on information provided by Melissa Hekkers and Divna Stojanov who followed many programmes and diligently reported on them during the event; prof. Wolfgang Schneider (Hildesheim University) who helped in summarising the conclusions of the conference ‘The Right of Children and Young People to Culture: 10 Years After’; moderators of the programmes (‘Voices of Children’, ‘Voices of Teenagers’, ‘Next Generation Residency’); Richard Johnson Sallis and Jennifer Andersen (University of Melbourne) who surveyed the participants’ experiences of the Turning Point (within the ‘Building Collective Resilience’ project); and Chris Blois-Brooke, managing director of ASSITEJ International / Knowledge & Network, who provided many useful materials, including statistics on the pass and tickets sales.

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