

# PUSH

## Project Evaluation 2016–2018

KSO Research Ltd

# Executive Summary

## The PUSH Project

PUSH was a 2-year Creative Europe funded project involving five partners from Scotland, Belgium, Ireland, Norway and Denmark to 'push' and develop thinking, ideas and the art-forms within theatre and dance for children and young people in Europe. It focussed on the three themes of gender and sexual identity, (over)protection and migration. It entailed:

- 3 artistic Labs, one each in Scotland, Belgium and Ireland attended by 41 artists from the 5 partner countries. Each Lab was connected to a local school or other group of children/young people as well as a team of artistic leaders and non-arts professionals
- 3 PUSH two-day events at each Lab for sector peers and the general public
- 5 festival visits for 58 artists from across the 5 partner countries (international delegations were sent to each)
- 5 PUSH two-day public presentations at the 5 partner festivals
- production of a series of professional films including a project trailer and documentary film

An independent evaluation of the PUSH project was commissioned which ran concurrently with the project, the findings from which are presented here. The evaluation methodology included baseline surveys and follow-up interviews for all Labs, surveys after each of the festival visits and ongoing telephone interviews/observational research as the project progressed. All who were involved in PUSH provided individual input to the evaluation.

## The PUSH Partners

PUSH centred on the collective thinking of:

### Imaginate (Scotland)

The national organisation in Scotland which promotes, develops and celebrates theatre and dance for children and young people and produces the Edinburgh International Children's Festival.

### Aaben Dans (Denmark)

Which tours extensively both nationally and internationally and hosts international residencies for up-and-coming dance artists, as well as curating SWOP, an international dance festival for the young audiences.

### Cultuurcentrum Hasselt (Belgium)

A centre that presents a high-quality program of theatre, dance, classical and contemporary music for all audiences and organises Krokusfestival, the annual international arts festival for young audiences.

### Scenekunstbruket (Norway)

The Norwegian Network for Performing arts and the largest distributor of performing arts for a young audience in Norway. It produces Showbox, an annual festival for performing arts for a young audience.

### The Ark (Ireland)

A dedicated cultural centre for children that works in partnership with others as artistic collaborators, including a partnership with the Dublin Theatre Festival.

The partners already had an established relationship built up through long term collaboration and this was strengthened by PUSH.



## Main Findings

### Planning and Motivations

Planning for the Labs and festivals ran smoothly, with excellent partnership working reported from all host partners, artists and Lead artists.

Each of the partners had clear expectations of what they wanted to achieve and this included increasing and strengthening their professional networks, raising their local and international profiles as organisations (especially the smaller partners), as well as the opportunity to be a part of a cross-border project.

The project attracted a wide range of artists from different personal and professional backgrounds and this provided opportunities for most to learn about new ways of working, different art-forms as well as to learn more about the cultural contexts in which participants were working in their home countries.

The main motivations for artists taking part included building on previous work with children and young people or developing work in one of the three PUSH theme areas. The opportunity to work with a diverse group of other artists was also cited as a key motivator for artists taking part.

**“It [PUSH] combines everything that interests me into one project. Art, theatre, children, the topic of migration, collaborating with other artists, exchanging knowledge and experience with people with similar interests.”**

### Diversity and Participation

Across the Labs and festivals, artists took part from a range of different genders, ages, ethnic origins and sexual identities.

For more than half of the artists who took part in PUSH, it was their first experience of taking part in an International Residency or Lab. For those who already had international experience, many commented that the experience was still unique in that it focussed on artist development and was not a ‘usual’ residency. The uniqueness of the opportunity and a chance to take part in a European project were seen as strengths of PUSH.

Partners reported that PUSH had provided an excellent platform locally and internationally for the artists working in their countries.

### The Lab Experiences

Those who participated in the Labs expressed that their thinking in relation to the three themes had been significantly enhanced, with exposure to a broad range of new ideas, biases and heightened awareness of the challenges still to be overcome in delivering work around gender and sexual identity, (over) protection and migration for young audiences.

The quality and depth of materials discussed and the evidence presented by speakers across the Labs were seen as a real strength of the project, allowing artists to explore them on a deep level and develop theoretical as well as a practical understanding of the issues at hand.

Artists spoke positively about the learning and self-development opportunities that had been presented by Labs and felt that the project had enabled powerful personal journeys to take place. Lead artists had played a key role in providing safe spaces to allow participants to work freely and confidently and the Lead artists were also praised more generally for the support and encouragement that they offered, as well as their willingness to openly share their own expertise.

**“I can honestly say that it has affected everything that I think about in my work. When I’m watching things, my sensitivity to gender stereotypes and lack of diversity is heightened massively. And, it’s probably given me permission to be a bit braver in what I do.”**

Many new relationships were established between participating artists, as well as between artists and the host partners and many of these had started to manifest in the development of new artistic collaborations or outputs within the lifetime of the project. Many other new pieces of work were in development or were being planned by participating artists, either alone or with others.

Artists and partners both expressed that they had been able to share their PUSH experiences with colleagues and their wider professional and personal networks, both during the planning and execution of the Labs and afterwards, meaning that learning from the project was shared much wider than the immediate group who took part.

All of the Labs were successful at engaging with local children or young people to allow artists to test new ideas and explore how work in these areas might be understood and received from the young audience perspective. Being able to work with children and young people directly during the Labs was seen as another real strength of the project.

There was a clear understanding that the artists were not under pressure to produce work on completion of the Labs, and this was welcomed, i.e. artistic development for its own purpose.

### The Festival Experiences

Everyone who attended one of the festivals said that they had made new contacts, broadened their networks or consolidated existing professional relationships as a result. The festivals also provided a valuable opportunity for artists from different PUSH strands to come together and share their learning.

Some of those who attended the festivals had not been to an international festival to see work for young audiences before. This was especially true for those attending the Edinburgh International Children’s Festival.

Across the five festivals, almost all said that they had learnt something new about PUSH that they did not know before attending. More generally, artists commented that the festivals had:

- allowed them to meet fellow PUSH participants and learn about the different experiences across the Labs and festivals, ‘connecting strands’
- reinforced the importance of including children and young people in making work

- provided opportunities to tell others about plans and projects they would like to be involved in
- presented opportunities to meet programmers and/ producers or representatives from arts organisations, providing opportunities to consider future collaborations
- made them think more about touring and presenting work internationally

All had reflected more on the PUSH themes after attending the festivals and all were keen to use their festival experiences to feed into their future work.

**“I met some people that I could potentially collaborate with and it is also good to meet producers from around the world as this is very helpful for a freelance artist.”**

### Challenges and Lessons Learned

The formative nature of the evaluation meant that feedback data were collected from artists and partners as the project progressed, which was used to respond to emerging challenges and improve the project as it went along. Most of the learning was around planning for the Labs, handling how artists and partners would find appropriate time and space to share their experiences, and enabling even wider participation.

There were also some disappointments along the way, which were less easily resolved, but these related mostly to the level of community engagement achieved, including media engagement with the project. Getting people in both the arts and non-arts community and beyond to engage with these themes and feel more confident programming and watching work around these themes that is designed for young audiences perhaps was the biggest barrier still to be addressed on conclusion of the project (although it was recognised that this is something that no single project could ever hope to achieve in isolation).

## Summary of Evidence for Meeting the Project Objectives

<p>To initiate new ideas for theatre and dance for young audiences - exploring topics that are currently underrepresented and require addressing; topics that can be taboo and/or experimental</p>	<p>All participating artists reported learning something new, learning from others and sharing their experiences, direct and vicarious, around the three themes</p> <p>Several new pieces focussed on these themes have been developed or are in development as a result</p>
<p>To create positive and open spaces to pilot new ideas/experiments with audiences</p>	<p>Artists praised the partners and lead artists for creating safe spaces in which everyone felt supported to pilot new ideas</p> <p>Children, parents/carers and teachers all engaged with the project, including viewing work/taking part in interventions and gave feedback that inspired new thinking among artists for how to engage multiple diverse audiences in the future</p>
<p>To offer high quality training and peer-to-peer learning for European artists and practitioners based in Scotland (UK), Belgium, Ireland, Denmark and Norway</p>	<p>Participation of artists from all of the partner countries was consistent across the project, with artists coming from a broad range disciplines and from nations within Europe and beyond</p> <p>Lead artists received praise for the way in which Labs were facilitated and for sharing their expertise, which inspired many</p> <p>Guest lectures from specialists in the field were attended, and artists were exposed to a broad range of evidence-based research and practice, as well as benefitting from the shared lived experiences of peers</p>
<p>To create a visible network of artists, peers, organisations and festivals across the EU</p>	<p>Partners promoted participating artists within the partner organisations and ensured their connection with the network was not a one-off experience - many artists took part in multiple PUSH strands</p> <p>Spontaneous networking events were facilitated to strengthen and consolidate relationships</p> <p>Online resources were developed to facilitate public accessibility to the project, the artists and the project outcomes</p>
<p>To enhance the international career potential for artists through opportunities to find new collaborators and new markets for their productions</p>	<p>Festival and Lab attendees all reported making new contacts, extending networks and strengthening ties internationally</p> <p>A number of new collaborations emerged, with several collaborate pieces already underway, including some sponsored/supported by the partner organisations</p>
<p>To build stronger and more diverse partnerships, using the PUSH opportunities to build connections in parts of the EU where our connections are not yet as strong</p>	<p>A total of 41 artists from 20 different nationalities took part based in five European countries. All festivals included international delegations</p> <p>Partners have already secured funding to continue to work together on PUSH+ and involve a new partner from Thailand</p>

## The PUSH Legacy

All partners said that the project had exceeded their expectations and had been an excellent learning opportunity. The content of the Labs and festivals had gone to plan, and the range of artists who had engaged was even more diverse than anticipated. Praise was given to the Lead Partner for the strength of leadership, management and enthusiasm dedicated to the project throughout.

Artists also expressed hopes that the industry would learn from PUSH and that it would provide a starting point for future conversations around these themes and programming work in these areas. Others expressed a desire for the project to be realised in the making of new work and several artists were already delivering or planning new PUSH inspired pieces as the time that the project reached its end.

Towards the end of the PUSH project, funding was secured for PUSH+, a three-year international project which seeks to stimulate European dialogue and initiate new artistic ideas and performances around the topics of Home, Failure and Different Bodies. This will build directly on PUSH.

## Conclusions

The project was successful at engaging artists, partners and, to a lesser extent, wider communities in the importance of tackling challenging themes in work for children and young audiences. The project benefited those who took part both professionally and personally, and all participants were invested in the project from start to finish. Valuable lessons were learned which can be used to 'PUSH' further creative thinking and exchange of knowledge, experience and skills, not only among the PUSH project participants, but to others in the artistic community and beyond.



# Introduction

## The PUSH Project

PUSH was a 2-year Creative Europe funded project involving five partners from Scotland, Belgium, Ireland, Norway and Denmark to ‘push’ and develop thinking, ideas and the art-forms within theatre and dance for children and young people in Europe. It was rooted in a desire in the children’s theatre and dance sector, to create work that is excellent and relevant, which tells a more diverse range of stories, and reflects the experiences and lives of us all.

## The PUSH Themes

PUSH sought to offer international, high quality opportunities for artists focussed on the three topics that are currently underexplored in work for young audiences:

**Gender and Sexual Identity** – looking at how performance can be used to explore gender and sexual identity with children and questioning whether we should. It also sought to explore how artists can use their current skills and push themselves and the sector to create bold and radical work for children

**(over)Protection** – investigating how we can protect children without restricting their childhood. Specifically, it explored how we can balance risk and protection, wildness and safety and take work outside of our theatres – to shopping malls, to school playgrounds – opening up equality of access for our young audiences and their adults

**Migration** – asking questions around how we can talk about migration and asylum with our audiences, including minority voices, in a sector that is not yet diverse and a context that is highly political.

PUSH also sought to stimulate European dialogue around these topics that get to the core of who we are, how we choose to live, what stories we tell each other and how we honestly, yet safely, represent the reality of life to children and young people.

In order to explore this material in a meaningful way and enhance learning beyond the current thinking in each of the respective countries, PUSH brought artists and organisations together to work alongside young people and non-arts professionals, to provide external inspiration and provocation for the participating artists, all of whom were specifically selected for their expertise and interest in each topic.

## PUSH Objectives

The PUSH project had six clear objectives, set by partners at the start of the project:

- to initiate new ideas for theatre and dance for young audiences, exploring topics that are currently underrepresented and require addressing – topics that can be taboo and/or experimental
- to create positive and open spaces to pilot new ideas/experiments with audiences
- to offer high quality training and peer-to-peer learning for European artists and practitioners based in Scotland (UK), Belgium, Ireland, Denmark and Norway
- to create a visible network of artists, peers, organisations and festivals across the EU
- to enhance the international career potential for artists through opportunities to find new collaborators and new markets for their productions
- to build stronger and more diverse partnerships, using the PUSH opportunities to build connections in parts of the EU where connections are not yet as strong

## PUSH Planned Activities

PUSH had a clear structure over a two-year period and comprised:

- 3 artistic Labs, one each in Scotland, Belgium and Ireland attended by 41 artists from the 5 partner countries. Each Lab was connected to a local school or other group of children/young people as well as a team of artistic leaders and non-arts professionals
- 3 PUSH two-day events at each Lab for sector peers and the general public
- 5 festival visits for 56 artists from across the 5 partner countries (international delegations were sent to each)
- 5 PUSH two-day public presentations at the 5 partner festivals
- production of a professional project trailer and documentary film

## The Independent Evaluation

To measure performance against each of these objectives, an independent evaluation of the PUSH project was commissioned which ran concurrently with the project (i.e. September 2016 to September 2018). A mixed methods approach was used which included:

- online surveys of all participating artists and lead artists for each of the three artistic Labs, issued before the Labs took place to gauge expectations of those involved (three surveys in total)
- online surveys for all artists who took part in the Festival Visits, to explore perceptions of the festivals, opportunities introduced by the experience, etc.
- individual one-to-one interviews with all artists and lead artists who participated in the Labs in the weeks following their completion, to explore perceptions of the experience, perceived impacts and likely influence of the Labs going forward. For the first Lab, a focus group attended by all participating artists was also facilitated ahead of the one-to-one interviews but this model was changed for the latter two Labs
- one-to-one interviews with the designated lead from each of the partner organisations both at the start and end of the project, to gauge expectations and aspirations and, at the end of the project, to explore if the project had run as planned and to explore intentions for the future
- ad hoc interviews and non-participant observations by the researcher across different strands of the PUSH project, including gaining feedback from the filmmaker, reviewing the documentary and attending some of the performances and networking events (in Edinburgh only)
- a final survey, issued to all artists who had been involved in the project to ask about overall perceptions, impacts of taking part, plans for the future, and what artists hoped the legacy of the PUSH project would be

The evaluation was formative in its approach, with findings from the early stages of the research helping to direct and shape the later stages of the PUSH programme. This approach was effective in ensuring that lessons were learned at each stage of the project, which allowed partners to adapt plans to maximise the effectiveness of future events and activities and maximise impacts for participants and audiences. Response rates to the surveys was high throughout ranging from 65% to 100% and there were no gaps in the interviews, i.e. every participating artist and partner provided personal input to the evaluation.

## Report Presentation and Research Caveats

This report presents the findings from the independent evaluation, and uses verbatim quotes from artists and partners to highlight some of the main learning achieved. It should also be read alongside the project documentary and with reference to the PUSH project website to ensure that a full account of the project's many outcomes and successes is achieved:

[www.pushproject.eu](http://www.pushproject.eu)

# Expectations and Aspirations

## What Attracted Partners to the Project

Partners had been attracted to the project by the prospect of increasing and strengthening their professional networks, raising their local and international profiles as organisations (especially the smaller partners), as well as the opportunity to be a part of a cross-border project. For one of the partners, Norsk Scenekunstbruket, this was their first involvement in an EU project as a partner .

The topics were also valued greatly by all of the partners and were seen as themes which would unite artists well from across Europe and the world, and which would benefit from being scrutinised by artists from multiple different art forms. The intentions to recruit artists from multi-disciplinary backgrounds, including some which partners themselves were less familiar with was also seen as an exciting prospect:

Some of the partner organisations were also small in size and so this opportunity provided them with an invaluable experience of learning from others and bringing outside skills and experience to their own organisations. The clear structure of the PUSH project was also an attractive feature for the partners and was key to getting them on board:

**“As a small partner, we do not feel like a small partner! We feel that we have been included in all of the planning decisions and we feel like we are as important as the bigger partners.”**

Partners felt a responsibility to artists in their own communities to explore the three themes, build up an evidence base around these themes and share learning in the community, as well as to provide opportunities for artists to engage in artistic development for its own value. Partners also perceived their role as ‘being brave’ and leading the way for artists to introduce these topics into mainstream theatre as well as playing a role in political discussions around these themes.

Partners had found it easy to communicate with participating artists in the build up to the project and clear systems were in place for sharing practical information for the Labs and festival visits throughout. Indeed, across all of the later surveys, artists reported that they felt well prepared for the Labs and festivals and needed little or further information or guidance from the partners. Organisation and management of the project overall was praised and there was a clear sense of ownership from beginning to end.

## What Attracted Artists to the Project

Motivations for taking part included previous work with children, young people or teenagers or work in one of the three PUSH theme areas. When PUSH opportunities arose, they were already aligned with the work that artists were doing, and seemed a natural progression/career development opportunity for many.

The opportunity to work with a diverse group of other artists was also cited as a key motivator for artists taking part:

“The dialogue, exchange and encounter of different artists to discuss the topic gender for a young audience interests me and encourages me as an artist to develop my practice and work. I would like to keep on broadening artistic horizons and continue learning, experiencing and liberating my own creativity as a choreographer and performer and share my practices with others.”

Artists were motivated to learn directly from young people and to explore with others how to ‘push’ the boundaries of others’ thinking. An opportunity for self-reflection, for challenging their own ideas and re-assessing how the themes were currently incorporated into their own practice was something that also emerged as a driver for artists to take part.

Other reasons for wanting to take part in the PUSH project included:

- the format of the Labs (i.e. something different from a workshop)
- a chance to start new collaborations which would last beyond the Lab
- wanting to explore ways of encouraging parents/carers to see performance through the eyes of their children/child
- a chance to be part of a European project

All artists commented that they felt the project would help to challenge or change their thinking around the themes to at least some degree:

- for the gender Lab, artists saw it as an opportunity to “enrich thinking on the topic”, to “learn how young people are feeling about gender and sexual identity and what needs to be changed” as well as “how that could be achieved via theatre/performance arts”
- comments were made that the (over) protection Lab would provide an opportunity to explore the theme from different perspectives (both the person/observer who is (over)protected and the one who does the (over)protecting), as well as allowing artists an opportunity to tease out and discuss areas of confusion or conflict in their existing thinking in this area
- for the migration Lab, artists were keen to explore the topic from the perspective of different artistic styles/performance modes as well as from different cultural perspectives. Several mentioned that they were keen to learn about migration and the immigrant situation in other countries. There was specific mention of wanting to use the Lab as an opportunity to address the less ‘comfortable’ sides of this theme and to challenge some of the more difficult parts of the topic which participants maybe had not felt comfortable exploring before (or alone)

Others mentioned that they had no specific expectations for the project, but were hopeful that participation would broaden their perspectives and provide “new answers to old questions”:

**“I hope and expect the project to challenge my ideas and I am up for them being challenged! Hopefully my thinking will broaden and open. I have no specific expectations but I do hope to be challenged.”**

All artists also anticipated that participation in the project would impact on their practice in some way. Some mentioned that they hoped to generate specific proposals for workshops or performance pieces, others mentioned that they hoped to build up their networks to support future work and thinking:

**“Next to the unique networking opportunity offered by this international project, I think that this reflection process might give me ideas for a concept for a future performance.”**

Again, others said that they hoped it would impact on practice insofar as allowing them to feel more confident in their future work especially what could/should be explored with young people.

The main things that artists were most looking forward to from the project included:

- meeting and working with children and young people and feeling more enlightened about how to work with children and young people in performing arts
- being given the dedicated time and space to think in depth about/explore the themes and engage with artistic processes
- feeling better able to articulate their thinking in relation to the themes
- achieving more visibility as an artist
- feeling generally more inspired, refreshed, refuelled and ready to work again
- a chance to see and work in new places and to have some fun!

Many wanted to remain open-minded about if or how the Lab would impact on practice and did not want expectations to constrain or confound the experience:

**“The PUSH Project is fascinating, and is interrogating subjects that are still uncomfortable and challenging and completely necessary in the contemporary world.”**

In terms of impacting on others, artists expressed that they hoped that the project would make partners more open to their “radical work”, encourage trust from gatekeepers to children and young people and generally help to challenge stereotypes in communities, and those presented in the media:

**“I hope it will confront guardians with the relevance of the subject for themselves and for children. I hope it will shake them up a little, and not necessarily on an intellectual level, but on an emotional level.”**

Other hopes of impacting the wider community included:

- encouraging others to see the themes as important issues to be addressed in work with young people
- challenging existing views among funders, programmers, teachers and artists making work
- providing inspiration for teachers by exposing them to performances that integrate and include all children, allowing them to understand better the use of the word integration
- letting others view difference as a strength
- bringing the themes forward in national conversations creating a shift in perception of the subjects that are much in need of attention and funds
- de-stigmatising and making the themes accessible for artistic exploration

Overall, when surveyed before they took part in the project, artists felt excited and privileged to be involved, were looking forward to the Labs and festivals and were hopeful that the PUSH project would be positively impactful on both themselves and others.

## Relationships

All artists were hopeful that they might establish new working relationships or opportunities by taking part in PUSH. This included short-term relationships during the Lab itself, to foster new thinking and creative thinking, as well as longer term relationships, for collaborations. There was a keenness to meet and learn from artists practicing different art forms and from different countries. Artists spoke of hoping to meet the others again during festivals organised by different partners and generally widening their networks.

Three kinds of relationships were mentioned by artists:

- relationships between artists attending the same Labs/Festivals: it was hoped that new working relationships could be established, potentially leading to future collaborations, but also allowing transfer of artistic practice and wider knowledge/intelligence around future opportunities;
- relationships with artists who had taken part in other Labs/Festivals: to gain an even broader perspective on the three PUSH themes; and
- relationships with children: artists hoped to get a better understanding of the ways they could engage children and young people with the PUSH themes.

Importantly, several artists mentioned that they hoped that relationships would be developed which would have longevity, but also that the relationships would not be ‘forced’ or constrained by expectations that specific projects would result from the Lab.

## Apprehensions

Partners expressed concern that it may be challenging to keep the project energy alive – ensuring that the enthusiasm which accompanied the launch of the project was maintained for the duration. This was a concern that did not materialise.

Early negative attention from some of the Scottish media about the theme of gender and sexual identity also caused some concerns about how the project would be received in the community, however, it also provided extra impetus to many of the artists involved to ensure that negative stereotypes were challenged. It galvanised the partners and made them even more determined that the project would succeed.

Getting the balance right in terms of splitting responsibilities for different project tasks was also something that the lead partners were keen to manage closely from the start, on the understanding that an in-balance could emerge if not closely monitored. Again, despite a bias in workloads held by the lead partner, most felt that inputs had been otherwise well balanced.

For artists, there were no real apprehensions. Most simply expressed excitement at being invited to take part in the festivals and Labs and were keen to get started!

# The Artistic Labs

A total of 41 artists of 20 different nationalities took part in the artistic Labs with a range of gender, age, ethnic origins and sexual identity. An independent filmmaker also attended each Lab and four lead artists facilitated the programme (one each for the Gender and Migration Labs and two for the (over) protection Lab).

Demographics	Percentage of Artists
Gender	64% Female 24% Male 2% Other 10% Unknown
Age	28% aged 18–30 62% aged 31–50 10% Unknown
Ethnic Origins	68% White 8% Asian 11% Mixed or multiple ethnic groups 13% Other
Sexual Identity	61% Heterosexual/straight 14% Gay 5% Bisexual 10% Other 10% Prefer not to say
Disability	997% No disability 3% Prefer not to say

For more than half of the artists who took part in PUSH, it was their first experience of taking part in an International Residency or Lab. For those who already had international experience, many commented that the experience was still unique in that it focussed on artist development and was not a ‘usual’ residency. The uniqueness of the opportunity and a chance to take part in a European project were both key motivators for taking part:

“...the chance to be part of an EU project on my own doorstep is amazing!!”  
“I have also never worked in a group that was so diverse.”



## The Gender and Sexual Identity Lab

The first Lab, organised by the Scottish partner, brought together 14 artists to explore the representation of gender and sexual identity in theatre and dance for children. Led by Ivor MacAskill, the group worked together over 8 days from 30 January – 6 February 2017. The group were based at Lyra in the deprived community of Craigmillar, Edinburgh with a packed programme that included:

- spending time talking and sharing ideas together
- a workshop with Yvon Bonenfant on how to use children's voicings to explore gender and queerness
- creating and delivering workshops to two groups of young people (Lyra Young Company and Niddrie Mill Primary School P7s)
- creating and performing at a the PUSH Scratch event
- watching a work in progress of At a Stretch with local schools

One of the main successes of the Gender Lab was the exposure that it created for a number of artists to others working in different countries, different artistic fields and with different levels of experience of working with young audiences:

**"I got to know artists and organisations from my own country that I had not encountered before, so it was definitely an enriching of my network, which was inspiring. I also got new ideas from people who had more experience than me at working with children. It opened up for me ways of thinking about other audiences and has given me ideas, concrete ideas, that I can use when working with children."**

Relationships between group members in all of the Labs were described as very strong, trusting, open and generous but this was perhaps most evident in the gender Lab:

**"I feel like everyone was really open and honest and we created a really safe space, and we have created a great energy."**

When interviewed several weeks after the Lab, many indicated that learning from the Lab had impacted on all aspects of their lives:

**"I can honestly say that it has affected everything that I think about in my work. When I'm watching things, my sensitivity to gender stereotypes and lack of diversity is heightened massively. And, it's probably given me permission to be a bit braver in what I do."**

Artists spoke positively about the learning and self-development opportunities that had been presented by the week, and felt that they had been on powerful personal journeys during the week, in terms of exploring the Lab themes:

**"I can honestly say that it has affected everything that I think about in my work. When I'm watching things, my sensitivity to gender stereotypes and lack of diversity is heightened massively. And, it's probably given me permission to be a bit braver in what I do."**

Another main benefit to artists had been working with children and hearing directly from them:

**"It was brilliant working with the schools and it helped the artists to get out of their heads a bit, because it was such a personal topic, and it can be so heavy for people, that the lightness and energy that the young people brought was really nice."**

The school who worked collaboratively on the gender Lab also provided strong, positive feedback, and saw the experience as an opportunity for:

- challenging gender and sexuality stereotypes that children may have been exposed to on a regular basis in their home/community lives
- creating an opportunity to see a live performance, which many of the children might not otherwise have a chance to do
- allowing children to speak openly and safely about relationships more generally (i.e. parent and child relationships, relationships between parents and partners, etc.)

**"When we first started talking about it [the project] with the pupils, one of the boys said to me "Are we going to have real gay people in our class?" This is one of the main reasons that we wanted to get involved – challenging this type of attitude."**

There was a sense that the workshops and performance were pitched at exactly the right level – some children who felt uncomfortable chatting about gender and sexual identity were allowed to listen and contribute only when they were comfortable, and the facilitators created a very supportive environment in which children were able to be honest:

**"I certainly found it interesting to hear the children talking really honestly and really openly and sharing things. That level of trust and that level of intimacy is really hard to create."**

## The (over)Protection Lab

The second PUSH Lab was an 8-day residential laboratory organised by the Belgian partner focusing on the topic of (over)protection. The Lab took place from 8 – 17 September 2017, was jointly led by Sara Vertongen and Jasper Dzuki Jelen and involved 14 artists. It included:

- a networking dinner in the art centre of Dommelhof
- an intense weekend of reflection, discussions, a lecture by pedagogue Martin Van Rooijen about responsible children's play and risky walks in cities and an intense workshop by actor Jef Van Gestel
- five days of physical workshops, discussions and talks and another inspiring lecture by Flemish pedagogue Bruno de Bruyckere
- attending The 100Hands performance, 25Feet and music shows by Chantal Acda and Echo Collective
- all artists exploring the city on risky situations and preparing artistic interventions, which were also attended by all PUSH partners

On conclusion of the Lab, everyone commented that the experience had or would impact on their work or, more generally, their daily living. Many had already put their learning into practice and some were planning to expand the interventions into new pieces:

**"I definitely will use the learning in quite a concrete way – I would like to expand the intervention that we developed and make something which we could do in public that would be quite risky. The idea of creating real relationships with children who we have not met before in a public setting is really quite exciting. The relationship between power and risk with young people and making sure that children are given power – that's something I am really keen to take forward. Giving children ownership of space too – that is something I will explore further."**

Again, the strength of relationships that developed over the Lab was seen by many as a particular success:

**“The intense connection between people and the fact that, as a group, we explored all of our different views on (over)protection and made a connection rather than just having fragmented views which we couldn’t bring together. Just a really good mix of artists and a new network which we can benefit from. It was just very inspirational.”**

Participants commented that they had gleaned significant experience from working together and this was especially valuable for those who had no previous international experience or no previous experience of working with children.

There was a clear understanding that the artists were not under pressure to produce work on completion of the Lab, and this was welcomed.

For the (over)protection Lab, the quality and depth of materials discussed and the evidence presented by speakers were seen as a real strength of the project, allowing artists to explore them on a deep level and develop theoretical as well as a practical understanding of the issues at hand:

**“The strengths were the variety of different prompts and stimuli to stimulate conversation that were provided by the lead artists. They gave us loads of material. I think that was really great.”**

Participants described reflecting back on the experience and feeling that it had been a more bonded group than they had experienced in any previous Labs, workshops or collaborations. People welcomed the chance to learn about one another, difference practices, different countries and cultures and different life experiences. Having a mix of parents and non-parents was also cited as a strength in shaping discussions:

**“...being part of PUSH has been really integral to my life since participating in the (over)protection Lab in Belgium. In ways that are hard to quantify and write down on a form. Meeting the diverse range of artists from different countries and disciplines has changed my outlook on my work and life in ways I couldn’t have foreseen at the outset. I feel connected to a new international community of practice and practitioners who share similar intentions and interests in their work as I do, whose commitment skill and openness has broadened my artistic and humanistic horizons.”**

Thinking had changed and artists had been challenged:

**“It definitely challenged me and I realised that the theme of (over)protection is in everything that I do. While some of my ideas were maybe challenged, others were maybe solidified and seeing things through others eyes is always helpful, I think.”**

Artists felt very positively about the Lab overall, both before and after taking part, and many of their hopes and expectations had been realised. As with the gender Lab, the group of selected artists, the Lab leaders and the richness of the experience were all high points. Many of the participants expressed a desire to stay involved with PUSH and with one-another.

## The Migration Lab

The third PUSH Lab was an 8-day residential organised by the Irish partner. It took place from 20 February – 1 March 2018 in Dublin and involved 14 participating artists. The Lab was led by Veronica Coburn and focussed on themes of immigration, emigration and asylum and their impact on Ireland and its European neighbours and partners.

Lab activities included:

- time spent networking in Dublin between artists and the partners
- interactive games and exercises, including yoga, to help with group bonding and familiarisation and daily challenges, through discussions and provocations
- exploring the theme theoretically through guest presentations to the group, including Liam Thornton, Lecturer in Law, University College Dublin and a psychotherapist
- a day spent working with children young people from the Children’s Council
- a free talk on art and migration in the global world by writer Karthika Nair in conversation with Liz Roche, followed by a networking event

A main strength from the migration Lab was the opportunities that it presented for artists to work with others’ who had lived experience on the theme:

**“A lot of things we talked about were things that I have thought about before, but the Lab really gave an opportunity to dig deeper into the theme and discuss things in more detail, so it was really amazing. And, to speak with other people who have personal experience to do with migration gave real life to the discussions.”**

This group also explored hidden voices and the privilege of working in Europe where there was a freedom to criticise and speak out on issues of political contention. The group discussed the ‘rights’ of the artist to speak about themes of migration, immigration and asylum and discovered that art provided a mode of communication well suited to raising public awareness of these plights:

**“We had an interesting discussion about privilege and our rights to discuss the theme, and work on the theme, which was quite challenging, but useful.”**

**“I gained confidence to work in this area, and also knowledge that I need to spend more time preparing and asking how migrants want their story to be told. When you tell a story that is not your story, you have to do it right, because you are taking responsibility for sharing their voice.”**

The migration Lab again provided an opportunity for artists to work directly with young people, including a full day spent working with the Children’s Council. This was seen as a real highlight for all involved, and a reminder of the importance of considering children’s voices and views when making work:

**“The high point was working with the Children’s Council. We spent so much of the week talking about children, and making work for them, but actually being able to make work with them made that all seem much more real and important. They were ‘real’ children instead of ‘hypothetical’ children. We gained so much from working with them and it also reminded me to always consult children in making work, rather than us deciding things for them.”**

As with the earlier Labs, there was a strong view from artists that the experience would impact on their future work or practice:

**“The Lab will help not only with how I approach this theme in the future, but generally will influence how I work with children, I think.”**

The artists all, again, stressed their appreciation at having been chosen to take part and the value of the experience for their wider learning and professional development:

**“It was an amazing privilege to go through an experience like this, and I am very grateful to have taken part. You can’t help but take lots of knowledge and experience from it and to be so focussed on one thing and have a chance to really focus in on that, was so valuable.”**

## The Lead Artists

The content and material for the Labs, including speakers, activities and workshops, was largely shaped by the Lab leaders working closely with the host partners. They worked well together to plan the schedules for the Labs, and lead artists said that they had been well supported throughout the project. All reported positively on the experience, feeling that they had been given sufficient agency to make and implement decisions, and adapt the Labs as they went along:

**“My job is to provide a space where things can happen...”**

Participating artists all commented favourably on the choice of leads and felt that they had been well selected given their experience, skills and knowledge in their respective fields. Working alongside these lead artists was a real strength of the project:

**“The group of people, sensitivity to the subject, the guidance of the Lab leader with great delicacy, care, attention and professionalism towards our eyes, our points of view. I felt a lot of respect and openness from the group as well as from the organisers of the Lab.”**

Across the Labs, the lead artists also felt that they had benefited from taking part, given the volume, quality and diversity of experience brought by the artists:

**“It was rigorous, collegiate and everyone was present – people brought all that they were in to the room emotionally, intellectually and physically. You can’t help but be inspired by that...One of the main messages that I will take away is that producing things in non–pressurised spaces is key and that’s a valuable reminder for me in my own practice. That, and the need to be open to everyone’s ideas.”**

Lead artists wished to see the project continue beyond its lifetime, or to be extended to allow the learning achieved to be put to maximum effect:

**“I hope it continues. I am delighted to hear the PUSH Plus has received the funding applied for. I hope that the community built around the initial three labs will continue to flourish and grow, I feel like a huge part of it’s success of PUSH was that sense of community created and grown by the partners, the continuous meetings and exchanges at festival visits, the welcoming to the final event at Imagine so that we could all meet each other and share together our experiences, that sense of togetherness... made it feel like this was the beginning of a new artistic community that was generous and strong enough to hold and support a continuous growing interaction with artists and partners. It needs to be cultivated and explored for a while to come, the individual relationships between the participating artists is one vital aspect which is beyond valuable across disciplines and countries, but the sense of a collective thriving artistic community focused on key questions and needs of our children and Young People today is vital.”**

# Festival Visits

The PUSH project allowed artists and partners to take part in 5 festival visits which included artists from each of the 5 partner countries. The festivals were:

- Showbox Festival (Norway)
- Dublin Theatre Festival (Ireland)
- Krokus Festival (Belgium)
- SWOP Festival (Denmark)
- Edinburgh International Children’s Festival (Scotland)

Participants came from a diverse range of demographic backgrounds, with a broad range of practices represented.

The diversity of festival delegates was even greater than those attending the Labs, with a broader age range and disability status represented.

Demographics	Percentage of Artists
Gender	70% Female 28% Male 2% Unknown
Age	19% aged 18–30 75% aged 31–50 4% aged 51–70 2% Unknown
Ethnic Origins	81% White 8% Asian 8% Mixed or multiple ethnic groups 3% Unknown
Sexual Identity	58% Heterosexual/straight 15% Gay 2% Bisexual 11% Other 14% Prefer not to say
Disability	92% No disability 4% Disabled 4% Prefer not to say

## Showbox Festival

From 29 November – 2 December 2016, the PUSH-partners met at Showbox, a performing arts festival for the young audience in Oslo, Norway. The festival was organized by the Norwegian partner; Scenekunstbruket. During this week in Oslo the partners, and a few of the artists selected for the first Lab saw performances, networked with theatre and dance delegates from Norway and other European Countries, and attended a seminar that presented the three PUSH topics. Survey findings included:

- 86% of delegates said that, while attending the Showbox festival, they had learnt something that they didn’t know about the PUSH project
- Two of the artists had never been to an international festival to see work for young audiences before
- 88% of delegates said that attending the Showbox festival had made them think more or differently about the PUSH themes. All had reflected more on these areas since attending, and the main thinking appears to have been around how sensitively these subjects are handled by communities (including negative responses by the media) and how this can be challenged going forward:

**“At Showbox we saw a number of shows that addressed migration directly, and they made me think differently about how to introduce and explore this subject with a young audience. I’m really passionate about the topic of [over] protection and I heard discussion from various programmers about ‘suitability’ of some of the work that we saw at the festival which helped me to understand how problematic this area indeed is.”**

All of the delegates said that they had either made new contacts, established new working relationships or learnt of new opportunities while attending the Showbox festival. Some commented that they had been exposed to new ways of working and this had been beneficial:

**“I met some people that I could potentially collaborate with and it is also good to meet producers from around the world as this is very helpful for a freelance artist.”**

All also said that they perceived their visit to the Showbox festival would impact on their work/practice in the future, with some commenting that they had learnt new skills and had been inspired by the work they had seen.

- 86% highlighted at least one positive experience/learning point that they had gained. This included seeing the shows and discussing them with fellow artists (both formally and informally), meeting other artists, theatre makers and producers, and learning about different attitudes to theatre and art in the different participating countries.
- 71% indicated that there was nothing about the experience that was not useful, the only suggestions being for more/different social events and more engagement with the Norwegian children’s theatre scene

Overall, those who attended appear to have been inspired by the festival and came away feeling more aware of what PUSH entailed, as well as feeling part of a wider group of participating artists:

**“I felt part of a bigger group than I thought I belonged to before. We are all artists, struggling, building, imagining, telling stories and expressing ourselves. I was happy to see that despite our interesting differences we speak the same language. And we are all so passionate.”**

## Dublin Theatre Festival

From 6–9 October 2017 The Ark hosted the PUSH partners as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival. Over the weekend the PUSH delegates (project partners and artists invited to attend) had the opportunity to network with Irish artists and arts organisations. All but one delegate at this festival had previously attended an international festival to see work for young audiences.

- 80% of delegates said that they had learnt something that they didn't know about the PUSH project whilst attending the Dublin Theatre Festival
- 70% said that attending the Dublin Theatre Festival had made them think more or differently about the three PUSH topics. This was especially true for migration, with attendees developing a wider perspective/appreciation of the theme
- 90% said that their visit to the Dublin Theatre Festival was likely to impact on their work/practice

Artists also commented that the festival had provided an opportunity to solidify thinking on the inter-related aspects of the three themes:

**“We spoke about all three topics with the partners and the artists and that made me reflect upon these topics again. It was also nice to hear that the artists who participated in the gender and (over)protection Lab were still thinking about it.”**

Again, everyone who took part in the survey said that they had established new working relationships or learned of new opportunities while attending the Dublin Theatre Festival. Being the second festival, and coming after the first of the Labs had taken place it also provided a valuable opportunity for earlier relationships to be consolidated

## Krokus Festival

From 11–14 February 2018 the PUSH delegation visited Krokusfestival, the international arts festival for young audiences in Hasselt, Belgium. 120 international delegates visited the festival this year, including the PUSH delegation. The PUSH partners and artists visited exhibitions, saw seven different shows during their stay and attended three professional seminars. As part of a PUSH seminar, partners and artists presented the project and looked back on the gender and (over)protection Labs. The seminar ended with table discussions about these two themes in the context of the wide range of different countries attending Krokusfestival.

Again, only one of the PUSH delegates had not previously been to an International Festival to see work for young audiences but, despite this, all saw the festival as a new and exciting opportunity. Most who attended were already well aware of PUSH but it nonetheless provided a valuable opportunity for getting to know more about the structure of the project and the opportunities it presented for new creation and making new networks. It also made some think more or differently about the three PUSH themes, through providing opportunities for social networking with artists from around the world:

- 93% of delegates said that they had made new contacts, established new working relationships or learned of new opportunities while attending the Krokus Festival and all said that their visit to the Krokus Festival would likely impact on their work/practice in the future.

Artists commented that the Festival had:

- reinforced the importance of including children and young people in making work
- provided opportunities to tell others about plans and projects they would like to be involved in
- presented opportunities to meet programmers and/ producers or representatives from arts organisations, providing opportunities to consider future collaborations
- made them think more about touring and presenting work internationally

**“It also reinforced the importance of involving children and young people in discussions around them, and in creative processes for work that is aimed at them.”**

The main strengths of the festival were seen to be the opportunities it provided to meet/reconnect with other artists (both from the same country and other countries), the diverse and varied programme and the inspiration that it provided. Overall, feedback from the Krokus Festival was positive, especially with regards to the networking opportunities that it provided, and the only criticism seemed to be around the appropriateness/audience suitability of some of the seminars and presentations.

## SWOP Festival

PUSH partners and artists visited the SWOP Festival produced by Aabendans from 4–7 May 2018. As part of the visit, there was a PUSH networking event with Danish and international SWOP delegates plus a Seminar for professionals exploring the three PUSH topics, and three performance forms (site-specific work, intergenerational work and participatory work). PUSH delegates were invited to watch seven performances.

While all those who attended as part of PUSH had previous similar international festival experiences, it again provided an invaluable experience for learning more about PUSH, including the reach of the project, and the different experiences of children and artists in the participating European countries:

**“It was also overwhelming to realise how many people the project has reached.”**

The performances delegates attended also acted as a valuable prompt for deeper reflection and thinking on the PUSH themes the importance of addressing them in artistic practice and the importance of intersectionality (i.e. how the three themes overlap:

**“...being there, with artists and experts always makes you look at things in a different way. It deepens the thoughts.”**

Again, the festival created opportunities for making new contacts, and all said that attending the festival would impact on their future work/practice in some way, including:

- thinking about participatory work in a different way
- being reminded to be inclusive, open and non-hierarchical in ambitions
- being inspired by how people behind events work together
- being encouraged to pursue artist development and artistic research
- being reminded of the importance of the three PUSH themes

- the importance of being connected and reconnecting with people longer term
- the importance of networking, making new contacts and expanding networks generally

**“I think that whenever you visit a place for the first time, you meet people, you see shows, and the way to present them you are learning and opening new possibilities in your creations.”**

The main strengths of the festival were cited as the opportunity to reconnect with PUSH artists/colleagues, networking with the PUSH artists and partners and seeing a range of different and exciting performances. The main weaknesses were the hectic schedule which resulted in long days, the distance from the accommodation to the performance venues and a lack of ‘downtime’ for artists. However, feedback given in the survey mostly reflected on how positive the festival visit had been:

**“SWOP festival is a beautiful example of an event brought together by a passionate and committed team. We were made to feel at home, encouraged to meet other practitioners and most excitingly the programme showcased a real range of work that we could all get our teeth into. It left me contemplating many things about my practice, the work I want to make and the work I want to see as an audience member.”**

Others again commented on how the festival had reminded them of the importance of pursuing European connections and linking with young audiences. In general, there was a shared view that Aabendans had put on a great festival with a good programme which had been beneficial for the PUSH delegation in many ways.

Delegates mentioned they would like to know how to stay involved and connected with the other PUSH participants and how to continue or develop the work that was started in earlier PUSH Labs.

## Edinburgh International Children’s Festival

From 31 May – 3 June 2018 a PUSH delegation visited Edinburgh International Children’s Festival for the final PUSH activity. The festival showcased 14 productions from Scotland and around the world alongside a programme of delegate events for industry colleagues (rehearsed readings, discussion events, works in progress, networking events). The PUSH group (including artists and partners) were part of the full festival delegation which this year consisted of 305 delegates from 24 different countries, offering valuable networking opportunities.

PUSH delegates were invited to attend a number of performances and workshops during the festival, as well as a panel discussion exploring making work for young audiences around the topic of migration. A party celebrating the end of the project included talks from project partners, artists and Creative Europe. 28 of the 41 artists invited attended along with the partners (despite funding being available for only 6).

- 20% of those who took part in the post-festival survey said that they had never been to an international festival to see work for young audiences before
- nearly two thirds (64%) said that they learned something new about the PUSH project while attending the Edinburgh International Children’s Festival
- 100% of delegates said that they had increased their networks as a result of attending and all said the festival experience would impact on the future work.

There was a desire to find ways to continue conversations that came out of the Labs beyond the project, to identify funding for collaborating across different countries/ languages and to stay connected – all reflecting an enthusiasm to build on PUSH.

**“Being able to link the conversation topics together (as they all intersect) with the artists has enabled me to think more clearly about some new work I am developing, as well as make contacts that will hopefully become working relationships/ collaborations.”**

The strengths of the festival included the opportunity to meet artists who had taken part in different PUSH strands, to see such a diverse range of performances, and the chance to report back to the group on progress made since the artists had first come together. The only perceived weaknesses were that the festival was not long enough to allow artists to properly reconnect and share as much as they would have liked – everyone wished the visit was longer:

**“It was incredibly valuable and exciting to meet all of the artists who attended, to reconnect with people I met on the Lab and also to meet people I’d heard about/seen interviews with. It was such an invigorating group of people to be in a room with and to have conversations with – I wanted it to be longer. It felt like it was hopefully the start of something rather than the end.”**

# Lessons Learned from the Project

In addition to having a significant positive impact on a number of artists, partners and others, PUSH also provided valuable learning opportunities for the partners involved. By actively engaging participants in an ongoing evaluation process, learning was achieved which helped to shape the project as it went along.

## Crossing Boundaries

One of the main limitations of the first Lab had been what was perceived to be the 'hurried' and 'unnatural' way in which artists and partners had come to meet for the first time. Overall, there was perceived to have been insufficient opportunity for artists to have 'properly' communicated with partners on an equal footing and to share the learning from the first Lab. Future sessions were able to learn from this, with partners being introduced earlier and in a more collegiate way. This was beneficial to both groups and created the sense of working together which was what the project sought to achieve and was sustained thereafter.

## Creating Personal Space

Feedback from the early Labs also revealed that artists had found the experiences more tiring than expected, and that they would have welcomed more personal space – both physical space and mental space – when attending Labs and festivals, to help them digest the experiences in situ. The partners learned from this early feedback and introduced more breaks for participants in the later events, including a free day for participants in both the (over)protection and migration Labs.

## Broadening Participation

Although the project achieved input from a broad and diverse range of artists from different personal and professional backgrounds, the project was more successful at securing engagement and applications

to take part in some countries, compared to others. Again, partners were able to take this on board to investigate new means of networking and advertising opportunities, which will now feature in their recruitment processes for future activities/events.

## Structure and Flexibility

For some, the experience of the Labs and Festivals had felt overly prescriptive and too structured, while for others, too much flexibility had been built in. The project learned from this feedback and a better balance of planned and unplanned activities were incorporated into gatherings to try and respond to multiple participants' preferences.

## Financial Planning

As a project that involved five partners, with one taking a leading role, a small challenge to emerge was ensuring the timely transfer of funds between partner organisations at the times when it was needed most. The significant workloads involved in managing both the operational and pastoral issues for all Labs and festivals meant that this administrative task was one of a number of competing demands on partners' time. This was recognised as something which could be made more efficient if undertaking similar projects in the future.

## Community Engagement

There were also some disappointments along the way, which were less easily resolved, but these related mostly to the level of community engagement, including media engagement with the project. Indeed, one partner experienced negative media coverage in their home country. Getting people in both the arts and non-arts community and beyond to engage with these themes and feel more confident programming and watching work around these themes that is designed for young audiences perhaps remains the biggest barrier to overcome.

# PUSH Legacy and Looking Ahead

## Legacy for Partners

All partners said that the project had exceeded their expectations and had been an excellent learning opportunity. The content of the Labs and festivals had gone to plan, and the range of artists who had engaged was even more diverse than anticipated. Despite some minor unanticipated and unavoidable changes to staffing among the host partners, there was consistency in approach and delivery of the project throughout. Praise was given to the Lead Partner for the strength of leadership, management and enthusiasm dedicated to the project throughout:

**“This is one of the best projects I have ever been involved with in terms of the connection between partners and artists, especially the focus on artists development.”**

Partners reported small but significant shifts in their own ways of working and that of their colleagues as a response to the project, and reported that one of the unanticipated outcomes of the project had been the number of people reached (including those working 'behind the scenes') and who felt challenged by/engaged with the topics. Partners reported personal as well as professional growth as a result of taking part in the project and reported a sense of 'international inspiration'.

The project helped to raise both the local and international profiles of the partner organisations, increasing their visibility and making them 'go to' organisations for those in the arts community who were interested in these themes. An expertise developed which was jointly shared by the partner organisations for the benefit of artists in their own countries and beyond. Local ambassadors for the themes had also emerged.

Partners commented that the project had

been hugely beneficial for their local artists and they had been surprised by the genuine desire of all artists to reconnect at various points throughout the project's duration. PUSH had provided an excellent platform locally and internationally. Some of the work that had emerged following the Labs and festivals was being supported by partners, financially and ideologically, with a view to helping artists share the PUSH messages in the years to come:

**“It has given us a lot of confidence in European projects, and it has given us a formal framework we can follow in the future.”**

**“We got international inspiration as an organisation, and our own festivals will improve as a result of that.”**

**“We were consistently blown away by the artists and their enthusiasm.”**

## Legacy for Artists

- 96% of artists rated their overall experience of the PUSH project as positive/very positive.

At the end of the project, all participants were asked to reflect on what they hoped the legacy of the project may be. This resulted in views similar to those which had been expressed throughout the project, the focus being on the long-term change required to bring challenging issues to mainstream performance for young people:

**“I hope that there are more opportunities to open up these conversations with more and more people. I hope that a greater range of diversity is represented in this sector, not as tokenism or to tick boxes but because makers and presenters recognise the responsibility and potential to change thinking through this specific sector. I hope that future generations of young people are met with more and more open-minded adults.”**

Artists also expressed hopes that the industry would learn from PUSH and that it would provide a starting point for future conversations around these themes and programming work in these areas.

Others focussed on the desire for the project to be realised in the making of new work:

**“I hope that the project ideas we made will actually become something real and this experience will lead to new projects. I hope these projects will bring children of different backgrounds closer to each other and will bring awareness to a wide audience. For the industry I wish that PUSH leads to more cross country, cross discipline, cross background collaborations within the arts. That it will unite art based on topic of interest instead of geographical location or shared social circle. I wish that it will inspire more artists to use art as a voice to address problems that are around us daily. I wish that it takes away worries from both artists as institutions to make or promote socially engaged art.”**

At the end of the project, a number of PUSH inspired projects had already been planned or were underway and were being delivered to audiences across Europe. This included some cross-country collaborations. Specific examples included:

- a new collaboration of three artists from Belgium and Denmark who are now working together to create a new interactive performance play around the topics of identity and protection
- an intervention created by a Scottish artist as part of the (over)protection Lab, that premiered at the Opening Weekend of the Edinburgh International Children’s Festival in May 2018 and is still continuing
- a new production based on themes of migration involving four Migration Lab artists

All but three (89%) of the artists who took part in the final evaluation survey said that they were already using their PUSH experience to create work or that their experience has resulted in some other form of tangible outcome.

A more detailed overview of projects and other results to emerge from PUSH can be found on the PUSH website:

[www.pushproject.eu/results/](http://www.pushproject.eu/results/)

## Looking Ahead: PUSH+

Towards the end of the PUSH project, funding was secured for PUSH+, a three-year international project which seeks to stimulate European dialogue and initiate new artistic ideas and performances around the topics of Home, Failure and Different Bodies. Building directly on the experience of PUSH, the same partners will be involved, and will also be joined by a new partner from Thailand.

A series of events have already been planned, including residential Labs, residencies, festival visits, international workshops, symposiums, a film and website, among other things. Three different engagement formats will be used, including Participatory, Site-specific and Intergenerational styles of performance to try and fill identified gaps in the sector and provide interactive opportunities with audiences.

PUSH+ grew directly from the learning and results of PUSH, and from the desire to take that learning to the next level. It is a progression of the concepts, ethos and partnerships within PUSH, facilitating more in-depth investigation and allowing partners to build on the successes already achieved.



# Discussion

## Summary

- The PUSH project management ran smoothly and without problems, and all partners worked well together with the participating artists to contribute to its success
- The PUSH project partners and other existing networks seem to be the main routes via which artists had learned of the project. Learning about the opportunity from people who had taken part in the earlier Labs was also key to encouraging participation
- The three main drivers to participation were learning more about the project themes, broadening social and professional networks and the opportunity to work with young people
- Vicarious learning and the opportunity to challenge one another were seen as particularly attractive features of the Lab opportunities
- Protected time to explore the PUSH themes in a safe space was welcomed, as well as a chance to inspire others and to be inspired (professional artistic development for its own sake)
- Several artists had no previous international experience of this kind and so were keen to create international bonds and explore cultural diversity in thinking around the topics
- Most were hopeful that the Labs and festivals would open up collaboration opportunities in the future and this was evidenced throughout
- Most were excited to be exposed to new/ different artistic practice and explore cross-over between practices
- Raising public awareness of the importance of the three themes as wider social issues and as something that should be integrated into mainstream artistic performance was cited as an important wider outcome, as well as challenging stigma/fear of discussing the themes
- Awareness of the project in the arts community continued to grow momentum as the project progressed to the benefit of all involved
- All artists and partners expressed a wish to remain associated with the PUSH project and to ensure that their experiences was reflected in future practice, ensuring longevity of the project beyond the two years

## Meeting the Project Objectives

To initiate new ideas for theatre and dance for young audiences - exploring topics that are currently underrepresented and require addressing; topics that can be taboo and/or experimental	All participating artists reported learning something new, learning from others and sharing their experiences, direct and vicarious, around the three themes  Several new pieces focussed on these themes have been developed or are in development as a result
To create positive and open spaces to pilot new ideas/experiments with audiences	Artists praised the partners and lead artists for creating safe spaces in which everyone felt supported to pilot new ideas  Children, parents/carers and teachers all engaged with the project, including viewing work/taking part in interventions and gave feedback that inspired new thinking among artists for how to engage multiple diverse audiences in the future
To offer high quality training and peer-to-peer learning for European artists and practitioners based in Scotland (UK), Belgium, Ireland, Denmark and Norway	Participation of artists from all of the partner countries was consistent across the project, with artists coming from a broad range disciplines and from nations within Europe and beyond  Lead artists received praise for the way in which Labs were facilitated and for sharing their expertise, which inspired many  Guest lectures from specialists in the field were attended, and artists were exposed to a broad range of evidence-based research and practice, as well as benefitting from the shared lived experiences of peers
To create a visible network of artists, peers, organisations and festivals across the EU	Partners promoted participating artists within the partner organisations and ensured their connection with the network was not a one-off experience - many artists took part in multiple PUSH strands  Spontaneous networking events were facilitated to strengthen and consolidate relationships  Online resources were developed to facilitate public accessibility to the project, the artists and the project outcomes
To enhance the international career potential for artists through opportunities to find new collaborators and new markets for their productions	Festival and Lab attendees all reported making new contacts, extending networks and strengthening ties internationally  A number of new collaborations emerged, with several collaborate pieces already underway, including some sponsored/supported by the partner organisations
To build stronger and more diverse partnerships, using the PUSH opportunities to build connections in parts of the EU where our connections are not yet as strong	A total of 41 artists from 20 different nationalities took part based in five European countries. All festivals included international delegations  Partners have already secured funding to continue to work together on PUSH+ and involve a new partner from Thailand

In addition to the specified objectives the PUSH project resulted in a number of other tangible outcomes, including:

- a number of pieces initiated or developed during Labs, with some already on tour
- a comprehensive film documentary for each of the PUSH Festivals and Labs, capturing feedback from participants and reflections on learning
- a resource repository, hosted online by the lead partner, containing a wealth of information and evidence on the three PUSH topics, and accessible to all. This is an organic resource, and will continue to grow over time

The many non-tangible outcomes are more difficult to evidence, but include an enrichment of the lives of all who took part, both professional and personal, it seems. Many other outcomes will also have been realised but will not yet be measurable. Indeed, one of the strengths of the project is that it sought to 'set seeds' that will come to fruition in years to come.

## Conclusions

The project was successful at engaging artists, partners and, to a lesser extent, wider communities in the importance of tackling challenging themes in work for children and young audiences. The project appears to have benefited those who took part both professionally and personally, and all participants were invested in the project from start to finish. The project's success was significantly impacted by the enthusiasm, commitment, honesty, openness and closeness of relationships that developed between all participants. The evaluation too was only possible as a result of the willingness to provide honest and critical feedback on experiences of those who took part, in the knowledge that it would help guide and shape the future of the project for everyone's benefit. Valuable lessons have been learned which can be used to 'PUSH' further creative thinking and exchange of knowledge, experience and skills, not only among the PUSH project participants, but to others in the artistic community and beyond.

**“PUSH has allowed me to spend time investigating big themes and ideas with a really exciting group of international artists. It has created a network of artists internationally that have a shared experience and a shared interest in moving the conversation around these themes forwards. It has felt like a real effort by the sector to not repeat the same conversations we have at ‘networking’ or ‘industry’ events, but to attempt to create the circumstances under which artists can forge new collaborations and create ground-breaking new work around these challenging ideas.”**



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

[www.pushproject.eu](http://www.pushproject.eu)

