

JACK IS LATE: ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH AT THE BUS STOP

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Introduction

Key facts (source WHO, 2016):

- *Air pollution is a major environmental risk to health. By reducing air pollution levels, countries can reduce the burden of disease from stroke, heart disease, lung cancer, and both chronic and acute respiratory diseases, including asthma.*
- *The lower the levels of air pollution, the better the cardiovascular and respiratory health of the population will be, both long- and short-term.*
- *88% of those premature deaths occurred in low- and middle-income countries, and the greatest number in the WHO Western Pacific and South-East Asia regions.*
- *Policies and investments supporting cleaner transport, energy-efficient housing, power generation, industry and better municipal waste management would reduce key sources of urban outdoor air pollution.*

GIOCONDA's answer: a theatre lab to talk about air pollution

Tackling the problem of the air pollution and its effects on the young public, the LIFE + GIOCONDA project (i GIOvani CONtano nelle Decisioni su salute e Ambiente – the young count in the decisions on environment and health, www.gioconda.ifc.cnr.it) provides young citizens and local administrations with a tool for dialogue on health and environmental issues. The structure of the project is built through an active involvement of these actors, in a process of participation and education.

Among the tools GIOCONDA created to foster the dialogue, the theatre lab *Jack at the bus stop* fulfils the need to have an agile, low-cost, impacting tool to talk about complex issues in a broad and engaging manner.

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Jack at the bus stop

Jack is young boy at a bus stop. He's worried: the bus doesn't arrive and he's afraid to be late at school. His teacher will be angry. She will call the parents, who will get worried. And his friend Jimmy will be very disappointed not to get back his videogame.

That's the first scene of an uncompleted theatre script, which develops through other four characters, entering the stage: Jack's teacher, a technician expert of environmental monitoring, a paediatrician, and the Mayor of the city. They all gather at the bus stop, reflecting on the air pollution and its effect on health, each from his/her own perspective.

The theatre script is the base for a 75 minutes laboratory to discuss about this topic in a simple, constructive and friendly way, with groups of people from different backgrounds and ages (max 25 participants), in a few steps: completion of the script by the participants themselves; performance; elaboration of final recommendations to improve the state of the local environment - and consequently of the health of its inhabitants; their dispatch via mail/local newspapers/social networks to the local decision makers.

The overall objective of the laboratory is to stimulate the discussion among people through a concrete action.

We imagine the theatre play to happen in a city, at a bus stop.

The theatre laboratory in 4 moments

The laboratory is organized in four moments:

1. Presentation of the activity and groups organization (20 min)
Having the draft of the script well in mind (see the script at the end of this explanation), the facilitator explains the laboratory; introduces the topic of environmental health, the characters who will perform and the way the next hour will be organized.
He/she divides up the group in 5 sub-groups, corresponding to the 5 characters playing in the performance and gives to each group a symbol:

- Jack, a 11 years old Canadian boy (symbol: backpack and hat)
- Jack's Teacher (symbol: class book)
- A technician expert of environmental monitoring (symbol: safety mask)
- A paediatrician (symbol: stethoscope/white coat)
- The Mayor of the city (symbol: stripe)

All the characters discuss at the bus stop about air pollution.

The facilitator distributes the script regarding each of the characters and explains that each group has 20 minutes to discuss what their character will say to the others, following the instruction on the paper. After completing their script, each group chooses the actor who will play the character. The ideas discussed and written down in the first sheet will be followed by the suggestions to the Major to improve the environment and health (second sheet: *For these reason, Major, we recommend that...*)

2. *Script writing (30 min)*

The participants, divided into 5 groups, fill the two-pages script.

Each group discusses and fill the first page, starting from a single scene: a character arrives at the bus stop, and starts talking about air pollution.

In the first page, the group has to share and address the ideas in the shape of recommendation for the Mayor, who will arrive as last character on the stage.

3. *Performance (10 min)*

The moderator introduces the scene (see first page of the script) and acts as director, inviting on the scene the other actors in two round: during the first the actors read/play the first pages; in the second they come back on the stage in turns reading/playing the second pages. In this last round, the major stays on the scenes, listen to the recommendation of his/her citizens and reply.

4. *End of the event (10 min)*

The moderator writes the main recommendations on a poster and, in a final plenary session, typically a class, the participants vote their preferences to the best solutions to address the environmental problems linked to air pollution.

The recommendations are therefore ranked.

The performance can finish here, but much more effective is if the proponent of the event shares with the schools or the interest groups which took part of it a summary of the recommendations in the shape of a poster, a letter, a message on social media, later sent to the local administration or to key-stakeholders to testimony the public engagement in environment and health.

Script model at: http://gioconda.ifc.cnr.it/?page_id=2960&lang=en.

Conclusions

The *Jack at the bus stop* theatre lab was played in science festivals and in public schools in the last three years, fulfilling our objectives to:

- Promote the discussion on environmental issue among people with different backgrounds
- Elaborate recommendations to improve the state of the local environment and the health of its inhabitants
- Propose concrete solutions to environmental problems
- Produce an impact on local decision-makers.

It demonstrated to be effective tool thanks to four main features:

- It is a tool with a flexible and agile structure, which allows to be adapted to the many different topics related to risk communication
- It is cheap

- The output of the laboratory is concrete and its follow-up make of it a even more effective if the dialogue is fostered by the proponents of the activity
- The recommendations produced during the laboratories can have a true impact on society, once disseminated through the social media, local newspapers, follow-up working tables.

Lab's numbers:

- "GIOCONDA in Genoa 2013", Italian Festival of Science 2013. Theatre-workshops with classes from 8 to 13 years old children. Total: 507 participants
- "GIOCONDA in Genoa 2014", Italian Festival of Science 2014. Conference-theatre show. The Genoa city councillor in charge of environment participated and responded to students. Total: one class (25 students) performed; 200 children attended
- "GIOCONDA in Milan 2014", *Fà la cosa giusta* event, 28-30 March 2014. Conference-theatre show. Total: 100 children attended
- "GIOCONDA in Ferrara 2015", *Dear Mayor, we wish you...* Letter to the Mayor and publishing on the local newspapers. Total: 50 children (parents, teachers)

To apply GIOCONDA's Lab in your city: http://gioconda.ifc.cnr.it/?page_id=2960&lang=en.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to all the children and teachers who took the GIOCONDA's challenge and actively participated to its theatre labs, in Genoa, Milan, Ferrara. Thanks to the local administrators who took part of the events, declaring their need of a dialogue with the young ones and demonstrating that a communication evidence-informed has to be continuously fed.