

Baboró International Arts Festival for Children nurtures children's innate creativity and curiosity for the world around them through the creative arts. We do this by presenting an annual international festival in Galway city and county and through offering year-round opportunities, including creative engagement in the classroom, outreach projects, and professional development supports for artists creating work for young audiences.

We advocate for the equal rights of ALL children to participate in cultural activities and aim to provide access to, and participation in, the arts for children by breaking down barriers both real and perceived, whether financial, social, educational, geographical, intellectual or physical. We endeavour to ensure all children see themselves represented in the stories being told on our stages and in our galleries. We support artists creating work for young audiences and offer a suite of professional development supports year-round. We are currently partnering on our fourth Creative Europe project. During the festival, we host a significant number of Irish and international delegates and facilitate networking events to strengthen international relations.

The festival is a curated programme of high quality, beautiful, engaging, provoking work from the best makers around the world and around the country. It incorporates theatre, dance, puppetry, circus, visual art, literature, and digital work. It is brimful of compelling stories - stories that move us, challenge us, surprise us, inspire us, scare us, make us laugh out loud and give us a glimpse into many cultures.

In 2022, 16,873 individuals attended the Baboró festival in October; this included families, school groups as well as artists, industry professionals and programmers.



Baboró's LEAP is a community-building project and artist development programme for creative individuals from underrepresented, ethnically diverse communities and/or migrant backgrounds curious about creating work for young audiences. It is one branch of our overarching artist development programme, GROW. The pilot LEAP programme launched in 2022 and involved a four-day workshop series led by Moonfish Theatre, with additional facilitation from Maeve Stone and Mufutau Yusuf. The workshop series was followed by an optional bursary to be used for mentorship or a gap day, and a paid visit to the 2022 Baboró Festival. Participants were also invited to take part in a panel discussion on LEAP included in the festival's Delegate Programme.

The 2022 participants were Alexandra Craciun, Fernanda Ferrari, Justyna Cwojdzńska, and Justin Anene.

LEAP's pilot programme was funded by the Arts Council's Capacity Building Award with further support from the Irish Research Council's New Foundations Scheme. The entire process was evaluated by Dr. Charlotte McIvor (Department of Drama and Theatre Studies, University of Galway) and her research team.

## Why do we need LEAP?

A gap exists between the diversity of our young audiences and that of the artists presenting work for them—LEAP was born from a need to eliminate that gap. Children deserve quality art that represents them, created by artists with whom they can relate.

As a source of support for artists in Ireland creating work for children, we at Baboró realise our responsibility in ensuring our opportunities reach creatives of varying backgrounds, abilities, ethnicities, and identities, and acknowledge the need for us to break down barriers and actively seek and support artists who face disproportionate challenges. LEAP is Baboró's first artist development support programme that solely and explicitly supports artists from ethnically diverse/migrant backgrounds.

LEAP is a vital part of our mission to support artists creating work for young people, strengthening the sector with varied voices and beginning to rectify the discrepancy between representation in the communities we serve and representation on our stages.

## Learning #1: Think *deep*, not wide

- How do you make a project valuable but also sustainable and realistic?
  - Consider framing the project as part of a longer-term process to feel less pressure to do everything all at once, right now
  - Factor in time to press pause multiple times and potentially significantly redesign to make sure what you are doing is realistic and actually valuable
  - Don't be afraid to scale back and hone-in to be really specific and clear about the purpose of the project – focusing on one small aim can be more impactful than spreading yourself and team too thin across more/larger goals

## Learning #2: Value *artistry* first and foremost

- Wherever identity is part of eligibility criteria, tokenization is—to some degree—inherent
- It is then essential that the actual offer and design of the project is genuine, meaningful and useful to participants as artists
  - Consider a design that is bespoke, relational and durational
- Ex. Moonfish Theatre's facilitation of LEAP workshops involved:
  - designing the workshop activities after conversations with each of the selected artists
  - starting each day with social 'tea & chat' time, followed by time for each person in the room to check in with each other
  - activities, exercises and games around movement, music, multilingualism and puppetry
  - a day dedicated to how to self-produce your work as a freelancer in an Irish context
  - \*Key Detail: everyone in the room participated in the workshop activities, including evaluators\*

## Learning #3: Be *human*

- Research continues to show that self-awareness is the first step in Diversity and Inclusion work
  - So be honest, transparent and gracious with yourself and others
  - Expect blind spots
  - Make time and space for the learnings
  - Invite new perspectives in and listen—we had a diverse advisory group for LEAP that helped enormously
    - Ultimately though, not all voices and perspectives will be able to be completely incorporated
  - There's no one right way to do this work
  - Make time and space to be available to connect with everyone along the way on a human level

These learnings can be applied to general artist support programmes as well as incorporated into organisational operations.