

Formal Report: Residency 2 - "Contemporary Mask"

1.0 Introduction and Project Mandate

This document serves as the formal report for the "Contemporary Mask" residency, the second joint residency conducted within the "Art of the Mask a Tool from Our Past" project. Held in Chambéry, France, this intensive program brought together partners from the Theatre Transformations Company (France) and the Lisov Museum (Slovakia) to advance their collaborative work in mask-making, performance, and education. The residency focused on exploring contemporary mask practices as a dynamic tool for artistic expression, cultural exchange, and community engagement.

The core administrative details of the residency are summarized below:

Attribute	Detail
Project Title	Art of the Mask a Tool from Our Past
Residency Title	Contemporary mask
Project Code	KA210-YOU-1146F3AA
Residency Dates	10th to 21st of February 2025
Location	Chambéry, France
Lead Organisation	Theatre Transformations Company
Participating Organisation	Obcianske Zdruzenie Lisov Muzeum
Allocated Grant Amount	€16 566,00

The following sections detail the strategic objectives that guided the residency, the activities designed to achieve them, and the significant outcomes that resulted.

2.0 Strategic Objectives and Target Groups

The success of any international cultural exchange is predicated on a clear set of strategic objectives. For the "Contemporary Mask" residency, these goals provided a foundational framework that shaped every aspect of the program, from the intensive artistic creation sessions to the multifaceted community outreach initiatives. The objectives ensured a balanced focus on tangible production, professional development, pedagogical innovation, and partnership building.

The residency was guided by four primary objectives:

- **Mask-Making:** The core production goal was to facilitate a mutual exchange of mask-making techniques between the French and Slovakian partners. This hands-on collaboration was aimed directly at producing tangible assets for the project's educational mask kits, which are designed to serve as lasting pedagogical tools.
- **Mask Performance:** A key objective was to immerse all participants in the world of contemporary mask work by meeting artists and viewing live performances. This objective was crucial for moving beyond theoretical knowledge, providing participants with a tangible sense of the art form's contemporary relevance and expressive power.
- **Mask Education:** The residency sought to identify, learn, and disseminate new pedagogical techniques for teaching both mask performance and mask creation. This focus on education aimed to equip participants with innovative methods to ensure the project's long-term impact through future workshops and community programs.

- **Artistic and Cultural Collaboration:** The overarching goal was to utilize the medium of masks as a powerful tool for cross-cultural storytelling. By focusing on a non-verbal, universal medium, the residency aimed to bypass potential language barriers and foster a deeper, more intuitive mode of creative partnership between the French and Slovak teams. To achieve these objectives, the residency's activities were tailored to engage several specific target groups:

1. **Local Community Members:** A primary focus was placed on engaging local residents, particularly youth from the working-class district of Les Hauts-de-Chambéry and, crucially, those from surrounding areas who often have limited opportunities for artistic participation.

2. **Artists & Cultural Professionals:** The residency served as a vital platform for artists, actors, curators, and researchers to collaborate, develop new skills, and share their professional practices in the field of mask theatre.

3. **Youth Workers & Educators:** A key aim was to provide teachers and youth workers with new educational resources and creative methods for integrating mask-making and performance into their own educational settings and community programs.

The following section details the specific activities and events that were designed and implemented to meet these goals and engage these target audiences.

3.0 Analysis of Residency Activities and Implementation

To translate the strategic objectives into tangible results, the residency's program was structured around four core pillars of activity: intensive mask creation for the educational toolkits; dynamic public engagement to share knowledge; targeted professional development to deepen artistic practice; and immersive cultural exchange to solidify the Franco-Slovak partnership.

3.1 Mask Creation for Educational Toolkits

The central production activity of the residency involved intensive mask-making sessions dedicated to creating the project's educational toolkits.

- These sessions were substantial, spanning **13 half-days** of focused, collaborative work between the Theatre Transformations and Lisov Museum teams.
- The tangible output was significant: **7 masks were fully finished**, including 3 half masks, 3 full papier-mâché masks, and 1 fabric-and-wire carnival mask. An additional 12 masks are well underway, consisting of 8 papier-mâché masks (3 half and 5 full) and 4 fabric masks.
- The selection of masks was driven by a clear artistic and pedagogical rationale. The "Juliette and her Roméo" half-masks were chosen because they can be linked directly to existing photographs and video footage of a touring show, allowing future users of the kit to see the masks in a professional performance context. Similarly, the "baby" masks were included due to their proven effectiveness as a tool for introducing participants to the power and potential of mask work during initial training.

3.2 Public Engagement and Knowledge Sharing

A series of public-facing events was organized to share the project with the local community, promote European collaboration, and exchange knowledge with local professionals.

- **Fixed Mask Exhibition:** A four-day exhibition was hosted at the Maison des Jeunes et de la Culture (14-17 February), showcasing traditional and contemporary masks.
- **Workshop/Conference/Moving Exhibitions:** Two half-day sessions were held at the Centre Sociaux Culturel des Combes (13 & 20 February), combining presentations on mask heritage with live demonstrations.

- **Conferences on Masks:** Two dedicated conferences took place at the Maison des Jeunes de la Culture (13 February) and Espace Malraux (15 February), discussing mask heritage and contemporary performance.

- **Family Mask-Making Workshop:** A hands-on workshop for families was held in collaboration with Ciné Malraux at the Espace Malraux, introducing basic mask-making techniques.

These events successfully served as "a platform for insightful discussions and knowledge-sharing among educators, youth workers, and young people, fostering a sense of community and collaboration. »

3.3 Professional Development and Artistic Exchange

To deepen the participants' understanding of the contemporary mask landscape, the program included several key professional development opportunities.

- A dedicated half-day professional meeting was held on **February 14th**, bringing together project partners with local cultural workers, educators, and artists for an exchange on contemporary mask practices.

- Guest artists made significant contributions to this exchange. **David Sillet** delivered a presentation and workshop on animal masks, while **Charlotte Bauduin** provided a demonstration of her method combining mask work and "bouffon body foam."

- Participants attended two contemporary mask performances: "**The Mitten**" by the Theatre Transformations Company and "**Frimousse Contre Vente et Galères**" by the Pilouchat Company.

- A significant highlight was a visit to the workshop of Swiss-origin mask maker **Werner Strub**. This provided a unique opportunity to discover the vision of the mask as a theatrical prop but also a work of art and a powerful tool for storytelling in both classical and contemporary theatre.

3.2.4 Cultural Immersion and Partnership Building

Beyond the formal workshops and meetings, the residency included activities designed to foster cultural understanding and strengthen the interpersonal bonds between the project partners. Trips to discover the surrounding regions (l'Ain, Savoie, Haute Savoie) and engagement with local culture through restaurants, producers, and events like the "Nuit de Musée des Beaux arts" were crucial for reinforcing the collaborative spirit and building a durable foundation for the Franco-Slovak partnership.

The successful implementation of these diverse activities led directly to the achievement of the project's key results and strategic outcomes.

4.0 Achieved Outcomes and Strategic Impact

This residency was a clear success, effectively meeting its stated goals and delivering significant impact. As concluded in the project's internal assessment, "Cette résidence a rempli ces objectifs" (This residency has met its objectives). The success can be measured through the achievement of several key results that align directly with the project's strategic aims.

1. **Enhanced Appreciation of Cultural Heritage:** Participants from both partner organizations and the local community gained practical skills and deeper knowledge in both traditional and contemporary mask-making and performance practices. This outcome directly addressed the educational objective by fostering a richer understanding of this unique art form.

2. **Creation of Mask Education Toolkits:** A primary tangible outcome was the substantial progress made on the two educational mask kits. The creation of 19 masks (7 finished, 12

in progress) provides a robust foundation for these toolkits, which fulfill the core production objective and will extend the project's educational impact long after the residency's conclusion.

3. Empowerment & Community Engagement: Through collaborative performances, workshops, and exhibitions, local communities developed a tangible sense of ownership and pride in their shared cultural heritage. This directly achieved the project's goal of using masks as a tool for community-building, demonstrating that cultural activities can serve as a powerful catalyst for social cohesion in targeted districts like Les Hauts de Chambéry.

4. Strengthened International Partnerships: The intensive, shared experience of the residency was instrumental in building a sustainable and collaborative connection between the Slovakian and French organizations. This fulfilled the central collaboration objective, solidifying professional relationships and laying the groundwork for future joint cultural initiatives.

Professional Day Feedback

Actionable intelligence gathered from the Professional Day held on February 14th confirms the positive impact of the residency's collaborative approach. Overall satisfaction levels were exceptionally high. The primary qualitative takeaways included praise for the opportunity to explore the specific techniques of different guest artists. Constructive suggestions also emerged, most notably the proposal for creating a "digital platform for masks" and the desire to dedicate more time specifically to "performance mask techniques" in future sessions. Overall, the professional feedback affirmed the residency's success while offering valuable, concrete directions for deepening its impact in future programming. This feedback provides a clear roadmap for future iterations, highlighting a demand for blended digital and physical resources and a deeper focus on practical performance skills.

5.0 Conclusion and Future Outlook

The "Contemporary Mask" residency successfully achieved its ambitious mandate, effectively blending intensive artistic creation, targeted professional development, and meaningful community engagement. The program not only advanced the tangible goal of producing educational mask toolkits but also served as a powerful catalyst for cultural exchange and partnership building between the French and Slovakian teams.

Looking forward, the immediate priority is the continuation of the mask-making activity to complete the two mask kits, ensuring a lasting legacy for the project's educational ambitions. Furthermore, the strong collaborative foundation established during this residency has created significant momentum for future European projects between the Theatre Transformations Company and the Lisov Museum.

Ultimately, this residency has reinforced the project's core belief in the significance of masks as powerful and versatile tools for educational action, cross-cultural dialogue, and profound artistic expression.

(the masks for the tool kits were finished in March, 2025 ready for the exploration phase)