# Towards a Theatrical Landscape

## Funding the performing arts: cultural policy considerations

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'What if we gave cultural policy a shake up?' asks the Deutsche Bühne, in a booklet produced as part of its 2011–12 evaluation.[1] Theatre commentators are more than disillusioned with the powers that be: politicians see theatre only in terms of its price tag; absurd savings targets set by local authorities in response to the financial crisis will result only in closures and mergers; the devaluing of the arts and the erosion of the cultural sphere will have lasting repercussions. The journalists are prepared to shoulder some of the blame, lamenting 'the absence of debate about the future of the arts in our feature pages.'[2] Coverage of theatre in print media, radio and television remains healthy: productions continue to be reviewed, critics continue to dispense their opinions on theatre-makers. What's missing is an engagement with the politics or a challenge to the status quo. That status quo is Berlin, Salzburg, Bayreuth; the Kammerspeile, the Thalia and the Schaubühne theatres. A closed shop of the same institutions exchanging the same personnel, a theatrical Champions League. We should not wait for calls for reform to come from the feature pages: better to look online. 'Impulse.de' publishes analytical viewpoints on the theatre scene, www.theaterpolitik.de unites, as its title indicates, the theatrical and the political, and www.nachtkritik.de leads the field in cultural news and policy analysis.

Our theatrical landscape remains unmapped. The dominance of the big players means not enough collaborative projects are nurtured and ideas are rarely pooled. This was recognised by the German government's 2007 inquiry into 'German Culture.' Its report urged regional and local authorities 'to institute regional theatre development plans, invest in the middle-term, and also to provide long-term support to enable theatre, music and opera companies

**1** | Detlef Brandenburg, in 'Complete Theatrical Works,' Deutscher Bühnenverein (Ed.): The German Stage, No. 8 (2012), Pg. 26–35, here p. 35.

**2** | Ibid.

to pursue education projects, and to reach as wide an audience as possible.'[3] The report drew attention to the huge number of existing alliances, networks and models, and recommended that they be strengthened. But the will is lacking.

Local authorities complain about empty coffers and tiny culture budgets, and fixate on outputs and square metres of useable space. Structural change is not on their radar. Every year, regional authorities fund what they've always funded. A refreshing of their approach is long overdue. Despite its lack of expertise, national government engages with arts policy indirectly through its national cultural foundation, its Performing Arts Fund and its City Cultural Fund. Without these bodies, Germany would have no arts policy at all. Politicians and cultural commentators would do well to recognise and reflect on this. In the last federal reforms, the regions cemented their cultural supremacy, but theatre reform was left to central government, which left it to the foundations.[4]

The national cultural foundation plays a major part in shaping the theatrical landscape. The 'Heimspiel' ['Home Match'], 'Doppelpass' ['One-two Pass'] and 'Wanderlust' funding programmes go to the city theatres and attest to the issues seen to be most pressing: the decrease in theatre's traditional middle class audience, the exclusion of the wider population, the self-centredness and inward-looking 'German-ness' of the performing arts. The foundation's vision is for city theatres that genuinely serve their whole city, as well as for an internationalisation of ensembles and repertoires, international co-productions and collaborations with the independent theatre sector.

'The 'Doppelpass' Fund is specifically for collaborations between independent groups and permanent building-based theatre and dance companies, to provide the additional time and space needed for the exploration of new models of joint working and artistic production methods. This framework is intended to facilitate new experiences and perspectives for both partners: theatres can offer independent groups performance opportunities, an established infrastructure and organisational and artistic expertise. Independent groups can offer alternative thematic and organisational approaches to help the institutions enrich their practice and reflect on their own working forms, methods and content.'[5]

**3** | German Parliament (Ed.), Report of the Enquiry into Culture in Germany, ConBrio Publications, Regensburg 2008, Pg. 117.

**4** | Wolfgang Schneider: 'Wuppertal is Everywhere! The cultural policy crisis in the performing arts reveals the need for reform to the German theatrical landscape'. In The Independent Performing Arts in Germany: Discussions – Developments – Perspectives, Erkhard Mittelstädt, Alexander Pinto (ed.), Bielefeld, 2013, pp. 21–32.

**5** | Government Cultural Funds (Ed.), http://www.kulturstiftung-des-bundes.de

Why is this fund necessary? The scandal is not that central government funds are also going to local and regional theatre organisations, but that government has to provide them before the above can happen.[6]

Germany's theatrical and musical heritage has been recognised by the country's UNESCO Commission, which awarded it World Cultural Heritage status in its first list for the Federal Republic. This was influenced to some degree by the directors of town and regional theatres, together with their funders, who lobbied mayors and culture ministers following a resolution on the subject at their 2013 conference in Kiel.

The dpa [the German Press Agency] often quotes the then-president's plea that the theatre landscape be protected, 'so that in ten or 15 years it is not completely unrecognisable.'[7] But is that not exactly what we want it to be? In order to make the performing arts sustainable, we need a re-design, with new networks and new structures. We need practical ideas with a conceptual basis: ideas drawn from theory, an understanding of history, current experience and our vision for the future. We need a cultural development strategy, a SWAT analysis, discussions that include all stakeholders, clear aims and implementation strategies. Most of all, we need the will to undertake reform.

## Planning and Developing Theatre

The University Institute for Cultural Policy organised a lecture series in the winter term of 2012–13, in which culture and theatre academics undertook took to test, analyse and evaluate theoretical positions on the aesthetics and dramaturgy of the performing arts from the perspective of the politics of theatrical administration.

Annemarie Matzke, professor and performance artist, offered the provocative opinion that there is no such thing as independent theatre. She highlighted problems with the concept, as well as opportunities offered by it, and linked it historically with the appearance of new theatre forms. Rather than being an aesthetic or political definition, she finds the term to be descriptive of new methods of production and working practices distinct from those found in state-funded theatres. The multiplicity of these new forms, however, means a blanket definition of 'independent theatre' is impossible. Matzke emphasised that she was interrogating the concept, rather than questioning its aesthetic or social relevance. She described current tendencies as reflective of social plu-

**6** | Wolfgang Schneider: Provocations for the System: the performing arts need cultural policy. In Theatre Platform: the performing arts in flux, contributions to cultural education, Genshagen Foundation (ed.), 2013, pp. 38–45.

**7** | Stuttgarter Nachrichten [Stuttgart News], May 24 2013.

rality, informed by increased flexibility on the one hand and new forms of collective production on the other. An investigation into the changing nature of theatre is for Matzke also a collective theatre form in itself.

For Heiner Goebbels, Professor and President of the Theatre Academy in Hessen, the contemporary performing arts have always engaged in a critique of institutions. The performing arts, however, unlike the fine arts, have trouble escaping aesthetic convention: theatre, opera and concert houses are constrained by their architectural structures and organisational hierarchies. The training organisations follow rigid ideological traditions: far from being the exploratory laboratories Goebbels would like them to be, they serve the market. He calls for independent performance spaces unencumbered by demands to deliver effectiveness, optimum space-utilisation, or an uninterrupted repertory. These should not have in-house orchestras, choirs, acting or dance companies, but should be financially supported just like opera houses, city theatres and regional theatres.

Thomas Oberender, Director of the Berliner Festspiele theatre, understands theatrical developments in the context of the deregulation occurring at every level of society. Public funding of the performing arts follows market-based criteria: activity is supported only if it is evaluable and measureable. Oberender charts on the one hand an increase in political power over the arts, through funding and endowment programmes, and on the other, a situation in which artists have become project managers. This new cultural mood has led to the emergence of a 'new type of institution.' He asks pointedly: what do we want to support in the future: the picnic or the Proms, the project or the institution?

Thomas Schmidt, Professor of Theatre Management at the University for Music and the Performing Arts in Frankfurt am Main, describes the current theatrical landscape as rugged, productive, innovative and discursive. However the publicly-funded theatre system is undergoing its most radical upheaval since the Second World War. Schmidt outlines some of the difficult questions theatres are currently asking. Their answers, he suggests, will form the basis for crisis management tactics and models for reform. The idea of what constitutes success in theatre will need to be re-imagined. Schmidt sees collaborative working between institutionalised and independent theatre as one solution, a re-organisation of the funding structure to allow for a fairer distribution of resources another.

Alexander Pinto, independent theatre practitioner and research assistant at the HafenCity University in Hamburg, sees independent theatre as a breeding ground for new ideas, a niche it has carved in response to the near-monopoly of the state-funded theatres. In independent theatre, standard working conditions do not exist. The economic disparity between the two systems has, however, allowed some independent theatre to choose to invest in artistic development, while town theatres groan under financial pressures. Independent theatre

remains critical of any institutionalising tendencies of its own, and keeps abreast of directions taken by other theatres around it. As a consequence, the creation of spaces for development and exchange that will be so important to revitalising theatre in towns and cities is likely to be spearheaded by the independent sector.[8]

## Theatrical Collaboration: a European Tendency

There are European theatre festivals, networks, grants, prizes, exchange programmes and productions. Europe and theatre have a long history, our theatres perhaps the secular cathedrals of our cultural identity. Few other art forms operate so successfully across borders. There are historical reasons for this. Theatre did not emerge fully-formed, but wrested itself free of its archaic origins through cultural processes to become drama: the drama of human existence itself, whether expressed through stories of gods in the ancient Greek, religious belief in the Spanish, internal conflicts in the Elizabethan, guilt in the classical enlightenment, or society, the individual, nothingness and absurdity in the modern age. The ancient form of the play evolved in Homeric Greece, with roots in both the dance and sacrificial ceremonies and the worship or competition-focussed public games. Tragedy was first recognised as an art form in 534BC, when the famous actor Thespis, from Ikara, was invited to manage the cult of Dionysus celebrations. This cultural event signalled the emergence of European theatre. It proceeded to be moulded by Greek and Roman dramatists, Spanish and French directors, English and German producers. The theatre texts and their stagings travelled throughout Europe, sparking the first dialogues that allowed European artistic relationships to develop.

Europe didn't invent theatre, but it was united by it. Today's classical repertoire attests to this: Euripides and Aristophanes, Shakespeare and Molière, Goethe and Schiller, Chekov and Ibsen, Büchner and Brecht wrote the texts still seen on stages all over Europe. But no European theatrical landscape is like another. While the same plays can be seen in different stagings from Oslo to Madrid, London to Bucharest, theatrical systems differ widely. That, too, is the nature of Europe. Theatrical landscapes might be dominated by powerful leaders with a mandate to represent a broad public, by citizen involvement, the cult of individual artists, and/or by commercial markets. They feature a variety of playing spaces: regional and city theatres, rural stages, theatre agencies, independent and privately-owned theatre, musical theatre venues, venues with

**8** | Wolfgang Schneider (Ed.): Developing and Planning Theatre: cultural policy concepts for the reform of the performing arts, Bielefeld, 2013.

or without in-house companies, institution-based or project-oriented, with programmes played in repertory or in sequence.

Whatever its form, European theatre has a tendency to be mobile. It travels to different regions, rural areas, other European countries. The hosting of the visiting company is an established principle. This exchange can influence artists, and, occasionally, cultural policy. Theatre practitioners have a need to communicate: with the public, but also amongst themselves. They disseminate not only their stories, but elements of our cultural discourse: they are the voices in an ongoing pan-European dialogue. European theatre is elemental, alive and enlivening; it allows us, through its cross-border co-productions, festivals and networks, to continually re-discover our continent through dialogue and exchange. An analysis of the European theatrical landscape reveals platforms for debate and the sharing of work at every level: we are woven together by theatre. Despite language differences, there is a high level of geographical mobility amongst artists, and despite the different structures in different countries, communal creation is widespread. Festivals are important points of contact, embracing the full diversity of performing arts activity. This mobility and flexibility is made possible by a huge number of organising groups, alliances and networks, which are recognised and supported by cultural policy makers.[9]

Very recently in theatrical history, innovative performing arts projects that united artists from all over Europe and toured all over Europe began to receive financial support. Hugo Greef's Kaaiteater in Brussels, Tom Stromberg's Theater am Turm in Frankfurt am Main, Nelle Hertling's Hebbel-Theatre in Berlin, the Vienna Festwochen [Festival Week], the Avignon Festival, the Theater in der Gessnerallee in Zürich and the Kampnagel in Hamburg all benefitted. European 'centres of production' for the contemporary arts emerged. A European funding information and networking initiative at the Künstlerhaus Mousonturm in Frankfurt am Main even bore that name. Lecture and discussion programmes supplement performances. Usually the more avant-garde the staging, the more alternative its methods of production. These artist-led buildings are worlds away from the traditional theatre houses. They work flexibly, adapting production methods to artistic requirements. They have become the model for the contemporary municipal theatre. They point to a future theatrical landscape composed of interdisciplinary, interactive, integrative performance centres; places that combine production, distribution and reception, and see themselves as experimental stage spaces, research institutions and laboratories for new performance styles.

**9** | Wolfgang Schneider: Theatre (En)live(n)s Europe: cultural policy in the performing arts: co-productions, festivals and networks. In Cultural Policy Yearbook 2007: European Culture, Institute for Cultural Policy of the Cultural Policy Society (ed.), pp. 303–312.

## Theatre and Interculturality

Academic studies have researched, analysed and reflected on the role of independent theatre. Many focus on theatrical aesthetics, but cultural policy developments have also been mapped, along with production conditions and processes. Consultations have highlighted areas of funding need. Two examples serve to make the cultural policy argument.

One of the greatest social and political challenges in a globalised world is integration, the need to ensure that people of all ethnic backgrounds, religious orientations and cultural traditions are able to participate equally in society. Instrumental to this is the nurturing of respect for cultural diversity in a multi-ethnic and multicultural context. Cultural policy can play a part in this, contributing to the recognition and understanding of cultural difference. Interculturality is a key concept in the identification of appropriate policy and practice to facilitate integration.

In societies characterised by cultural diversity and fast-paced change, efforts towards equal participation will only bear fruit if ideas around cultural identity and artistic activity are understood as process-driven, and if serious, critical questioning of our conceptions of borders and thresholds is recognised as a motor for social change. In the context of cultural multiplicity, discourses around societal forms and the understanding and treatment of difference transcend multiculturalism to become 'transculturalism'. An equalities-based framework is important, and of self-evident practical value, in the implementation of intercultural actions in conceptual and policy arenas, in agenda-setting, especially for collaborative decision-making, in the fair redistribution of cultural funds and in the internal restructure of arts organisations. Infrastructure, network-building and access criteria are key to successful intercultural practice. Possibilities must be created for broad participation, to allow for the forging of relationships based on empathy for the new rather than fear of the strange.

Three major aspects need attention if the theatrical landscape is to be reorganised along intercultural lines. The first and most fundamental area for action is that of cultural education. Unless society can provide a broader cultural training within the compulsory education system – a 'school for life' – large parts of the population will continue to remain excluded from cultural offerings and, in the best case scenario, new forms of cultural expression will eke out a meagre existence beyond the pale of mainstream cultural policy. We must demand a commitment from policy-makers to make good the rhetoric of annual government education reports and regional plans and recognise cultural training as a social responsibility. As mentioned as a dissenting opinion in the Culture Inquiry report, this could be achieved through the inclusion of cultural training in the educational curriculum, as a subject taught from kindergarten to

adult education level. Training policy would emphasise culture as a core aspect of lifelong learning.

The second working area is that of audience development, understood as an integrated component of cultural management. This is a cross-cutting issue for all institutions that aspire to a holistic practice: it can inform their creative and organisational methodology and allow them to grow alongside their changing public, as well as to nurture that public. Only a self-imposed commitment to cultural diversity by the entire arts industry will lead to a culturally diverse public. Traditional marketing methods, focussed on the maximisation of profits and the selling of an existing product to an existing customer, are not equal to this task. In order to plan, position, communicate, disseminate and sell cultural offerings to diverse target groups, audience development needs to work in tandem with arts marketing, PR, research, education and training.

The concept of audience development emerged in the Anglo-Saxon world in the 1990s. It is embedded in an understanding of cultural management that takes the central reference point for the cultural organisation to be its public. This is a departure from the supply-based model traditional in Germany. It is important to understand that a demand-based model does not necessarily lead, as Bourdieu has claimed, to a reduction in artistic quality.

Equality of participation, the democratisation of culture, and the dismantling of elitist structures are amongst the most important aims of audience development. Alongside these socio-cultural perspectives are other considerations. Cultural policy-makers have the right to demand to see a wide social cross section of the public in state-funded institutions, based on the belief that art can have a sustained and enriching effect on people's lives, and can strengthen communication, identity and sense of community. The benefits to just one participant can justify the public money invested.

The belief that the arts are intimidating, boring or difficult to understand can only be combated through increased accessibility and education. The public should be engaged in a lively debate with culture. For this to happen, it must be provided with the knowledge and tools to crack cultural codes. In the short term, this can be achieved through direct education provision within cultural institutions themselves, through media-based interpretation aids, such as audio guides, dialogue-based tours or creative discussions in workshops. The quality of the intermediary is of paramount importance in this regard.

A structured, long term cultural training strategy orientated towards the whole population is essential. Increased collaboration between cultural organisations and associations, facilities used for out of school activities and the schools themselves will help. Only such an approach can guarantee that early engagement with art and culture is available to all, and, in particular, is not dependent on a child's social background. Short and long term engagement activity should understand cultural training as intercultural training.

The content of training should be developed with a view to strengthening intercultural perspectives.

The third working area is the nurturing of the community-focussed and mandated cultural hubs that have sprung up throughout Europe, but remain fragile in terms of their financial sustainability and capacity for long-term planning. They contribute to an overall move towards participation in the arts by a wider spectrum of society: people of different ages, ethnic backgrounds or social classes living in the vicinity of the institutions are beginning to include them in their day-to-day lives without needing to be explicitly targeted. Socio-cultural institutions are tried and tested places for intercultural communication and participation, and are increasingly also sites for the performing arts, including visiting independent productions and participative theatre work.

## Children and Young People's Theatre

The government's 'German Culture' Inquiry presented its report at the end of 2007. Its recommendations have been widely discussed and variously interpreted since then. The report presents the government's policy position and its agenda for the reform of the German cultural landscape. It says:

'theatre for children and young people plays an important role in the German theatre system. As projects within town and regional theatres, autonomous stages or independent theatres of their own, children and young people's theatres are committed to their target group, reflect the realities of young people's experience through texts and staging, and take their educational role seriously. Cultural education contributes towards empowerment and life skills. Theatre for young audiences must focus on the perspectives of young people and help them to negotiate society and develop abstract thought and creative ability.'[10]

Contemporary societies make complex demands on their citizens. Young people must begin at an early age to engage critically with their own development and perspectives on the future. They need both the confidence and the organisational skills to negotiate constant decision-making and change. They can acquire these in the family, at school, or through a range of other activities that promote personal empowerment, cultural training being one. Involvement with the arts develops the key competencies of literacy and the understanding of abstract language, alongside discipline, flexibility and team working skills. The ability to judge and evaluate both newly-acquired knowledge and the behaviour of oneself and others is honed. Cultural training

**10** | German Parliament (Ed.), Final Report, p. 109.

is however more concerned with self-development than with the transmission of knowledge. As well as producing the above outcomes for young people, it also impacts positively on the cultural sphere itself, bringing young blood in the form of new creators and consumers of art. It contributes to the on-going critique and preservation of the German cultural legacy. Cultural idiosyncrasy and participation are decisive elements in the socialising of young people and must be safeguarded at both national and international level. Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states, on participation in cultural and artistic life:

'1. States Parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts. 2. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.'[11]

All European states have ratified this convention. Germany, as a 'cultural nation,' has promised special protection and long-term state and local authority funding to cultural education. The basic conditions have thus been created, but implementation remains problematic: there is still much to be done to make cultural participation, whether productive or receptive, equally accessible to all young people.

Alternative play areas beyond schools, youth theatres or outdoor spaces should be critically considered. Theatre for pre-school children would benefit from well-equipped performance spaces too. Why not a children's theatre building, a third space for young people alongside family and school? Another part of the inquiry report warns against allocating disproportionate resources to education and participation activity. Theatre offers not only the personal experience of rehearsing for life by treading the boards, but also another kind of personal experience through its consumption. 'Learning by doing' is one side of the coin, 'learning by viewing' the other. In some cultural education formats, the weighting is skewed towards theatrical activity by children and young people themselves. The school subject of drama tends to privilege theatre as a creative workshop, unlike art, in which the teaching of drawing is only one part of the curriculum, or music, in which children learn more than just how to sing. A final demand in this context should be for a union of art and culture, particularly where society's youngest citizens are concerned.

**11** | German Ministry for Families, Older People, Women and Children: Convention on the Rights of the Child, verbatim report with materials, article 31, p. 23.

The intrinsic value of theatre must be enhanced, not just its products. Theatres should become 'go to places' for 'time out' in a 'playing space'.[12]

Theatre is a special event, a happening that allows the everyday to be turned on its head, the usual rules to be re-written. It provides an experience unlike that usually associated with learning, which can forge strong connections, create profound experiences and transmit varied knowledge. It can provide orientation and overview, and allow for individual evaluation of learned material and its application to real-life contexts. At its best, theatre for children and young people provides an aesthetic experience that has multiple possible meanings, a celebration of the pleasures of life, and a space for new experiences that frees the mind for play.

There is a real opportunity for theatre for children and young people outside formal educational spaces to enhance school-based provision. It could partner with schools to become an integral part of the curriculum. School has a manifest need for what theatre can provide. Both sides could benefit from closer collaboration. This already exists in the form of theatre outings for pupils, special offers for school groups and drama workers in schools and theatres planning activities with both contexts in mind. Artistic training is crucial for social sustainability; children's and young people's theatre can provide it.

According to neuroscientists, a large proportion of essential human social interaction is non-verbal. Non-spoken communication competencies need to be developed and refined. Children and young people's theatre companies have known this for decades. Exposure to their multi-dimensional visual storytelling can contribute to the development of artistic taste and sophisticated skills of perception and judgement.

## Independent Theatre Needs Cultural Policy

There are many reasons to adopt a new definition of the performing arts. Reform of the theatre landscape to reflect the population being served are long overdue – a view that seems to be gaining only gradual acceptance. In a democracy, the performing arts should cater for everyone, and should play a social role. In order to realise this potential, cultural policy measures must prioritise participation. They must recognise that at present, not everyone is willing and/or in a position to seek non-material benefits from cultural experience, not everyone feels at home in the world of the arts, or necessarily values or aspires to what they can provide in terms of questioning the meaning of life, seeking intellectual fulfilment or even just having fun.

**12** | Wolfgang Schneider (Ed.): Theatre and Schools: a handbook for cultural education, Bielefeld, 2009.

The first chapter of the 'Culture in Germany' report is titled 'the meaning of art and culture for individual and society.' It states:

'the arts also have indirect meaning for [these people], however, through media and publicity, and as a sub-sector of wider culture. Art is uniquely placed to explore and champion the freedom and dignity of the individual, to portray this in all its contradictoriness, to symbolise it in ways that can be translated into thought and action. Art interrogates individual identity and social bonds. In this sense it has a broad effect over social communication as a whole and impacts on people's day to day decision-making and analysis. Cultural policy must therefore also be understood as social policy. It should enable, defend and help shape art and culture', 2008.[13]

Exposure to ideas that were previously hidden, or that we were afraid to entertain, can help us engage with the changing world and find answers to the questions that concern us. The concept of contingency awareness, identified in cultural research, describes the human quest for ways to shape experience in order to better understand the future. Art questions and refreshes contemporary reality. Some academic studies consider it the most sensitive seismograph of an approaching crisis for humanity. Art introduces us to new subjects, perhaps allowing us to see the world in different ways, perhaps allowing us to deal with it differently.

The performing arts can intervene in the public realm and influence social and political decision-making. Theatre can stimulate thought and debate. It can alter our day to day behaviour and our perception of the world around us. In ideal conditions, theatre can re-animate spaces and present the everyday in a new light, offering surprising, stimulating associations, irritations, even provocations. Embracing new ideas makes the future seem less daunting. The huge variety of artistic modes of expression means there are different opportunities to suit individual issues and needs. Independent theatre, in particular, uses its experimental starting points to critique basic assumptions, equipping us to confront the future with more confidence. At their best, the performance arts can help us to identify connections and can sharpen our ability to judge what is most important in life.

A policy for nurturing the performing arts could serve as a blueprint for concept-based cultural policy as a whole. What would that mean for our theatrical landscape? First, we need to take stock. The Köln 'Werkstatistik' [statistics about theatre activity] are a useful starting point, but knowledge about amateur and independent theatre must be expanded. It would be useful to have a performing arts yearbook that justified its name, alongside a theatre development plan that thinks holistically and across sectors, uniting the

**13** | German Parliament (Ed.), Final Report, 2008, p. 50.

'Champions League' and the amateur dramatics society, the national opera house and the woodland amphitheatre, the theatre education centre and the independent theatre space. The time is right for concept-based cultural policy.[14]

Even the local lobbies are now aware of the current situation, in which 'because of the reduced share of the national budget, in terms of total expenditure, allocated to culture, only restricted budgetary impact is achievable, and even minor cuts can often lead to irreparable damage to the cultural infrastructure'[15]. The Director of Culture for the German Congress of Municipal Authorities now speaks in terms of collaborations, mergers and even – albeit 'cautiously' – reforms to local culture policies and the need for new structures. The new chair of the government's Culture Committee, Siegmund Ehrmann, has said the public funding of culture should be critically examined: 'there must be a public debate about what types of support are meaningful and in what contexts, and about what we want them to achieve. Perhaps an improvement in quality will result.'[16] Funding models are yet to be evaluated in terms of their real impact, so this is a legitimate demand.

Germany has a long way to go to achieve 'Culture for All.' Only a 'happy few' regularly take part in traditional arts activity. State support is principally for infrastructure, increasing institutionalisation at the expense of project and process-oriented activity. Funding goes to a core group of cultural organisations mainly found in urban centres. The management and upkeep of buildings and equipment consume public cultural funds, using the taxes of all citizens to benefit a few. Production is better resourced than reception, with cultural education getting the leftover crumbs.

This situation represents an opportunity for independent theatre practitioners. Who is making work on the ground, in the diaspora, in the non-funded no man's lands? Who is creating access-routes into communities, working towards culture for all through cultural education? Where are the true 'people's stages'? Participation is currently being re-discovered as a theatrical output in itself, and the patent for the practice belongs to independent theatre.

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**14** | Wolfgang Schneider: The Future of our Theatrical Landscape: a topical cultural policy polemic. In Performing Arts Report: economic, social and employment conditions for theatre and dance practitioners in Germany, Funding the Performing Arts (ed.), Essen, 2010, pp. 21–25.

**15** | Klaus Hebborn:'Culture in Germany from a Local Perspective,' in Cultural Policy Reports, Journal for Cultural Policy of the Cultural Policy Society: European Capital of Culture, vol. 127 (2009), pp. 8–10, here p. 8.

**16** | TAZ [news website], http://www.taz.de/1/archiv/print-archiv/printressorts/digi-artikel/?ressort=ku&dig=2009%2F12%2F15%2Fa0028&cHash=ba9c0cf4e9ddc01db2d4ed7a6dba88ba.

The goal must be more theatre for more people, as part of a theatrical landscape that features multiple structures able to support diverse forms of practice.

Independent theatre will have to evolve too, if only because of global developments and changes in demographics. Dismissal of the amateurs by the professionals, and vice versa, will have no place in a world in which collaboration will be key. No theatre is an island: however strong our pride in our own artistic traditions, a glimpse beyond our own noses can only do us good.

## Theatre Funding: European Comparisons

Those discussing good practice in theatre funding inevitably look to the north. Cultural policy-makers in the Scandinavian countries know that through highs and lows, during economic prosperity or recession, whether social democrats or conservatives hold the balance of power in government, the performing arts must remain high on the agenda. The best sustainable funding practice can be found in children and young people's theatre.

In March 1998, in Stockholm, UNESCO held a conference and launched a report to mark the end of its international decade of world culture. 'The Power of Culture' conference was an 'intergovernmental' gathering on the subject of 'cultural policy and development.' Around 5,000 people of varying degrees of seniority took turns on a political dancefloor. 150 countries were represented, 70 culture ministers spoke, experts presented papers, diplomatic officials, and official diplomats, gathered the material into a 'draft action plan' for cultural policy. The conference produced about ten kilogrammes of paper, which eventually became the 'Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions' (2005). A fair result, particularly as the document includes an appendix on 'culture for children and young people.' [17] Written by Britt Isaksson of the Swedish Department for Cultural Affairs, it argues over 14 pages for the right of children and young people to have access to art and to be integrated into cultural life. For communication skills to be developed to their fullest, Isaksson argues, creativity must be nurtured early on. The challenge to global media dominance cannot be left to the market, but should centre on local, regional, national and international influencing initiatives. Definitions of cultural education are explored using the example of children's libraries. Isaksson concludes that without imagination, society regresses. She urges that art, in all its variety, be harnessed as part of lifelong learning. In Sweden, support for theatre for children and young people is

**17** | Britt Isaksson: Culture for Children and Young People, 1998, UNESCO (Ed.): http://unesdoc.unesco.org/Ulis/cgi-bin/ulis.pl?catno=111819&set=005630BB37_3_378&gp=0&lin=1&ll=1.

enshrined in an education act: each year all pupils have the chance to attend the theatre twice. Two million children and young people means a need for four million seats at performances. That means public investment in theatrical productions, funding for touring theatre groups in every region, and flexible playing forms.

The picture is similar in Denmark. Children and young people's theatre groups travel the country in fleets of vans, trailers and minibuses. They drive to the next location, unload, put up then take down the set, move on. It's a strenuous business, but the only way to make their business work. In late April, they converge at a national festival, in a different location every year. The festival has been running since 1971, and is of increasing importance. Audiences include librarians in charge of booking productions, teachers planning for the following year and civil servants from cultural departments putting together their programmes. The bearded old chairman of the Roskilde Theatre Company can be seen chatting with the young, blonde youth theatre manager from a Copenhagen suburb. Audience members can come just for the weekend and choose from an incredible 200 performances in two days. Plays happen in every possible and impossible space. Entire schools are occupied: classrooms become mini auditoria, a story-telling session takes place in the biology lab. In the assembly hall, the theatre groups tout their wares. In the sports hall, up to eight stage sets are played on, one after the other. The whole thing is an organisational tour-de-force with an important cultural policy aim: to provide state support to theatre distribution as well as to its production.

Decentralisation is an important element of Finnish cultural policy too. Comprehensive schools, serving one area in a larger town or the whole of a smaller town, are also cultural centres for the whole community. Finland consistently tops the PISA rankings, a comparative study of educational standards in OECD countries, and anyone who's ever visited a school there can see the reasons in their architecture, conception and practice. At the centre of every school is a media studio with a black box theatre, regularly played in by independent theatre companies.

In Norway, a 'cultural school satchel' combines general education with theatre arts and ensures that from the first to the tenth class, all pupils can see and practice theatre. Independent theatre is financed through measures including a voucher system.

The public funding of theatre in Europe is managed through local and regional political structures using funds from national programmes; local and national policy-makers and occasionally also cultural affairs departments share responsibility. In France, Spain, Italy and many other countries in central and Eastern Europe, theatre funding is the domain of cultural ministries. In the UK, Ireland and the Nordic countries, the funds are administered by Arts Councils, independent from government, following an 'arm's length' principle.

In every national context, however, an increasing gulf is visible between regularly or permanently state-funded organisations and the independent sector. Differences between artistic and business models are also evident, as is an on-going debate about the cultural marketplace and the economics of private funding. In Greece, Spain, Portugal and Italy, independent theatre has fallen victim to national austerity programmes. Only some regions and richer local authorities are able to provide project funding to ensure performing arts provision beyond the big opera houses.

In Belgium, three organisations are active in funding theatre. The country is divided according to regional territories and its three languages. In Flanders, culture is the responsibility of the Flemish government, through a Ministry for Culture, Youth, Sport and Media. Its policy is based on a parliamentary resolution, the so-called arts decree (adopted in 2004, coming into force in 2006, following the 1993 performing arts decree and the legislative decision to enact a theatre decree in 1975). The arts decree aims to support integrated practice for all professional fields in the arts through a long-term support framework. Funding is also available through four and two year grants, project grants, grants for individual artists and for international cultural organisations with a base in Flanders. The change of government in 2012 resulted in uncertainty about the future of these budgets. Most of the money increasingly goes on long-term funding, while smaller project funds have been cut. On its website, The Flemish Theatre Institute calls the arts decree 'a good starting point.' [18] Development, production, presentation, participation and reflection have all been funded. The challenge for cultural policy is how to harness the enormous productivity of the performing arts, to bring new theatre groups and artists into the system and to nurture them so they can achieve the highest standards of practice.

The Netherlands Theatre Institute was seen for many years a model of cultural policy, independent from state, regional and local authorities. Figures like Dragon Klaic, long-term director of the Amsterdamer Zentrale, were able to create artistic momentum and lead innovation. The new conservative government has, however, implemented drastic cuts to the culture budget, ending this era of cultural engagement and artistic autonomy. The Theatre Institute closed in 2013. Only the Theatre Collection remains, a library and archive now housed at the University of Amsterdam. A performing arts fund is still in place, available five times a year, for theatre productions taking part in major international festivals or tours. These funds generally cover travel and transport costs, more rarely also workshops, masterclasses or seminars. The budget for 2014 was only €940,000. There is also a new fund for cultural participation, to support people to play a more active role in artistic activity.

**18** | Flanders Arts Institute, http://www.vti.be

It prioritises close working relationships with local partners, the support of cultural training institutions, discussion forums and research as well as the exchange of experience and knowledge in amateur arts and popular culture. Since 2009, €14 million has been made available annually by the state for the accreditation of cultural training, €3.5 million for innovative amateur arts, and €3 million for talent and event development. Independent theatre is supported if it meets the criteria of the trustees.

Detailed information about theatre funding in Europe is available on 'Fund-Finder', an online publication by the IETM, the International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts (formerly the Informal European Theatre Meeting). It lists international and interdisciplinary funding programmes.[19] As well as the well-known European Union cultural funds, such as 'Creative Europe,' projects like "Horizon 2020,' the 'European Regional Fund' and 'Interreg' are also featured, all possible avenues of support for independent theatre given its frequent focus on social concerns, urban development and/or intercultural dialogue. Project funds are of course time-limited, as is also the case with sources like Crowdfunding, social enterprise start-up funds and festival funding. The focus is always on the mobility of practitioners across Europe and on opportunities for artistic exchange.

## Models of Theatre Development Planning

Theatre policy is all too often just funding policy, as an overview of the funding of independent theatre in Germany indicates. Theatre is supported in every region, whether the focus be on the 'innovative and experimental' (Nordrhein-Westfalen)[20], 'the preservation of diversity' (Saarland)[21] or 'artistic quality, originality and capacity to serve as models' (Baden-Württemberg)[22]. Medium term funding may come through 'concept funds', or a 'top-level fund', seen as a 'stamp of quality' (Baden- Württemberg)[23], and may be limited to two, three or four years (Hamburg, Niedersachsen). 'The state, together with local

**19** | Cf. IETM, http://www.ietm.org

**20** | Nordrhein-Westfalen Regional Authority for the Performing Arts, http://www.nrw-landesbuero-kultur.de/index.php?article_id=10

**21** | Saarland. Artists and Artist Development, http://www.saarland.de/10104.htm

**22** | Baden-Württemberg Association for Independent Dance and Theatre Artists Ltd, 'Cultural Training' Project, http://www.laftbw.de/foerderinstrumente/projektfoerderung_kulturelle_bildung

**23** | Baden-Württemberg Association for Independent Dance and Theatre Artists Ltd, 'Cultural Training' Project, http://www.laftbw.de/foerderinstrumente/projektfoerderung_kulturelle_bildung

authorities, also takes responsibility for the resourcing of non-state theatre in Bayern' (Bayern)[24]. Independent theatres such as 'Mummpitz' and 'Pfütze' in Nürnberg are given institutional support, so that an adequate theatre offering is guaranteed in all parts of the region' (Styria)[25].

All the regions also contribute to funding for the independent theatre festivals 'Impulse' (Nordrhein-Westfalen), 'Made in Hessen' (Hessen) and '100 Grad' (Berlin). Funding of theatre means valuing of theatre, so theatre awards are also supported as cultural policy initiatives. These may include prize money and also 'the premiere production of a new play' (Nordrhein-Westfalen)[26], funds towards the next production (Niedersachsen) or for artists or companies in recognition of unusual talent and impressive management (Bayern, Baden-Württemberg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern). There is also support for productions which have already been produced using public funds to have a longer life. Touring theatre funding goers to organisers, artists and groups (Nordrhein-Westfalen, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Hamburg). Additional production and re-staging funds are available 'to stage productions of a play in the home region'[27] and 'to re-stage high expenditure productions' (Baden-Württemberg)[28].

Stipends are another aspect of funding for independent theatre. These may be for work, travel or accommodation (Brandenburg), 'for the artist to devote themselves intensively to their work for a specific period' (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern)[29], or for international exchanges and co-productions (Hamburg). The government and the Goethe Institute are the most active institutions in terms of the dissemination of national cultural policy. Both provide artistic development opportunities for independent theatre in a European and international context. This translates into a commitment to the development of the self-organising skills of independent theatre, to strengthen artists as part of civil society. Networks, regional associations and the Federal Association

**24** | Bayern State Department for Training, Education, Science and Arts, Funding for non-state theatre, http://www.km.bayern.de/kunst-und-kultur/foerderung/foerderung-nicht staatlicher-theater.html

**25** | Ibid.

**26** | Nordrhein-Westfalen Frauen Kultur Büro [Women's Culture Department], http://www.frauenkulturbuero-nrw.de/index.php/foerderrecherche/theater/

**27** | Baden-Württemberg Association for Independent Dance and Theatre Artists Ltd, Performance Funding, http://www.laftbw.de/foerderinstrumente/auffuehrungs foerderung

**28** | Baden-Württemberg Association for Independent Dance and Theatre Artists Ltd, Re-staging Funding, http://www.laftbw.de/foerderinstrumente/wiederaufnahme foerderung

**29** | Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Ministry for Education, Science and Culture, Artists Stipends, http://www.regierung-mv.de/Landesregierung/bm/Kultur/Künstlerstipendien

of Independent Theatres offer advice, information-sharing and advocacy on behalf of the sector. In that sense the regions and central government support both lobbying and service provision.

## The Top Ten of Independent Theatre Funding

- Project funding
- Concept funding
- Funding of institutions
- Funding of festivals
- Funding through theatre prizes
- Funding for young people's projects
- Funding for touring, productions and re-staging
- Funding through stipends
- Funding of international exchanges
- Funding of advocacy

All of these aspects should be included in an over-arching, concept-based cultural policy, which could take the form of a theatre development plan. The focus could be local relevance. Theatre projects with connections to a town or region should be actively engaged in on-the ground research, discovering the themes that resonate with residents, with the aim not only of attracting local audiences, but of achieving a deeper understanding of society. Diversity should be preserved through the nurturing of a variety of theatrical forms and structures.[30]

An appropriate cultural policy approach would be to understand theatre funding as a risk premium, awarding process and failure rather than only that which is known to work. This element of funding has been completely neglected to date. If a theatre director's show flops, they lose their job faster than a football coach in the German league. The fact that independent theatre must evaluate and evidence all its activity can be seen in a positive light. Why is this not the case for all theatre? Why are the town and regional theatres not regularly asked what they've done to develop new audiences or to take theatre into schools?

An important element of a theatre development plan would be interdisciplinary working. The current system is completely out-dated in this regard.

**30** | Wolfgang Schneider: From Project to Project - on the side-lines of cultural policy? The role of independent theatre in a future theatrical landscape. In Independent Theatre in Germany: funding structures and perspectives, Funding the Performing Arts (ed.), Essen, 2007, pp. 82–70.

Why do we still speak of 'spoken word theatre'? Why is musical theatre still a hermetic entity, along with ballet, dance, puppetry and theatre for children and young people? The avant-garde has always worked across disciplines. The town and regional theatres do too. Our society is intercultural: so should our performing arts be. Dance theatre at present is particularly international in its focus. People have communicated across state borders through theatre for thousands of years. Internationality must be part of theatre development planning.

Cultural policy positions relate to production, distribution and reception, but currently 90% of funding goes to production. There is an expectation that a book, a musical composition, a play or an exhibition must result. Performances, however, are often only staged eight or ten times. Why can these pieces not reach new markets through touring or other funding?

We must ask ourselves again who all this is for: the 'happy few,' or everybody? What would a universal theatre service look like, and how could it be achieved? Which structures must be created to ensure the arts reach as many people as possible? An existing example is the TUSCH programme, an alliance between theatres and schools that operates in many German towns. The school curriculum, however, remains unchanged, as if PISA had never happened. Once again, we lag far behind other countries in reading skills. When will education policy-makers react, and when will politicians wake up to the fact that cultural and educational institutions belong together? Both are publicly funded, both have a social role. It's not just the schools, with their 'Wandertag' [hiking day] and their reduction in lesson-lengths of 45 minutes, which stand in the way of collaborative working. Theatre companies, too, busy negotiating their packed performance schedules, seem content with the status quo.

The development and support of the performing arts must happen within the context of an investigation into national, European and international independent theatre infrastructure and networks. This could be facilitated through an archive of independent theatre, an initiative proposed by the Impulse Theatre Biennale festival in 2013 (www.theatrearchiv.org).[31] It is described as including

'material covering the whole genre, information on production methods and documented practice, text-based drama and physical and visual theatre, international examples, records, artefacts and discovered objects, the mass produced object as well as the theatre marketing video.'

The mission statement says:

**31** | Impulse Theatre Biennale (Ed.), 2013, Project Description, http://www.theaterarchiv.org

'a unique tradition has grown up. It is now a matter of improving its operational conditions so it can develop beyond the town theatre structure. In comparison with other artistic fields, the conditions experienced by independent theatre are problematic and often precarious: short-term funding, constant pressure to evidence the legitimacy of any artistic work that takes place outside established companies and repertory theatres, and an unwillingness to recognise emerging alternatives to the theatrical canon.'[32]

The Department for Culture and Media has now funded the Institute for Cultural Policy at the University of Hildesheim to conduct a 'feasibility study for the establishment of an independent theatre archive.'

Theatre is more than the curtain going up every evening. Theatre policy should not lose sight of the societal meaning of the art form. With philosophy, it may have begun thus: perhaps the first philosopher stubbed their toe on a stone. This accident led them to ponder on why the stone was there, why there was anything there rather than nothing, why the stone was so hard, what the essence of stone-ness was. Why did they trip on the stone, and what should they do about it? Was there something wrong with their eyes, and what is seeing anyway? No one knows how these questions were answered back then, but we do know that not everyone who looks also sees. Seeing is also 'overseeing', 'seeing to' and 'foreseeing.' 'Looking' is perhaps our attempt to make the obscure transparent, to see what usually goes unseen. How should we look, in order to be able to see? In an age in which we are assaulted by symbols, it makes sense to teach seeing. The best method seems to be to awaken interest in what is being seen. In my opinion, theatre offers the opportunity to integrate seeing with communication, to learn to code and decode our world through a dialogue between those playing on the stage and those playing in the audience. Of course the performance must be interesting enough, must stimulate curiosity, must have something meaningful to offer. It needs a sense of purpose in order to engage our attention beyond the superficial, move us, preoccupy us, urge us to action, initiate a relationship with us based on what psychologists call mutual dependency. It needs substance, brilliance and relevance in order to care about itself and to express itself. Once we put our minds to reforming the cultural politics of our theatrical landscape, theatre will be able to achieve all of this.

**32** | Ibid.

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