

# Independent Children's Theatre in Europe since 1990

Developments – Potentials – Perspectives

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Objectives

The prime objective of this study is to provide an overview of those developments, discourses and paradigms which have influenced independent children's theatre in Europe since 1990 and which are still influencing it today. Drama, comedy, dance and music theatre will be taken into account. In the course of the comparative analysis of exemplary structures, formats, and themes, the countries of Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Belgium, The Netherlands, Italy, France, England, Sweden, Poland, and Russia will be given particular consideration, because they provide notable, innovative impulses on the structural and/or aesthetic level or that their children's theatre scene is distinguished by specific characteristics which are also of interest in the pan-European context.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, the European perspective on the preconditions for contemporary independent children's theatre with regard to cultural and educational policy, financial, structural, personnel, and intangible factors should help to optimise independent children's theatre wherever it is deemed necessary in order to better exploit its potential in the future.

The main part of the study is divided into two parts: the first part provides an overall view of significant commonalities and differences between independent children's theatre scenes throughout Europe and provides a panorama of current manifestations, tendencies and examples of good practices; the second

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**1** | See also the countries considered in this study in Chapt. I/5: "Limitations of the Study".

part is devoted to a critical reflection of the given circumstances and attempts to point out deficits and problem areas and to question practices which are in place simply as a matter of course.

In the final part of this paper, consequences and demands will be derived from these considerations, and, finally, perspectives and visions for the future will be formulated.

## **1.2 Methodological Procedure**

The overview to be presented is based on a data collection process which was standardised for all the countries in question. Depending on their availability, the existing specialist literature, accessible archive material, and internet sources were exemplarily viewed and evaluated with regard to the specific aspects of the study. Furthermore, the research centred on the continuous exchange with national and international experts and those persons responsible in the children's theatre scene. This was achieved using questionnaires specifically designed for this study, which were sent by email, and also with qualitative, guided interviews. Some of these were done on the telephone, but most took place on-site during festivals and symposia. The insights into the landscapes of European children's theatre acquired in this way could be illustratively deepened through numerous informational and documenting materials which were kindly made available by individual artists and ensembles. Last but not least, the participatory observation of the author provided the basis for the analyses and reflections presented in this paper. All thoughts and theses which are not those of the author are clearly cited as such in the source references.

## **1.3 Source Material**

Europe is severely deficient in its statistical coverage of children's theatre. General data and facts can only be obtained with great difficulty, if at all, and current and complete surveys of children's theatre in individual European countries are not available. According to all national experts questioned, no specific yearbooks, chronicles or professional journals on the subject of children's and young people's theatre are published for the countries relevant to this study, with the exception of Germany and France; statistics are not recorded. "Generally we experience a lack in documentation. This is a political question that our ministry and National Arts Council haven't been able to solve, strangely enough." Thus Niclas Malmcrona (ASSITEJ Sweden) describes the situation of Swedish children's theatre. He goes on to say, "and then the official statistics within this field [sic!] are sadly neglected

by the governmental authorities".<sup>2</sup> Paul Harman (ASSITEJ Great Britain) confirmed:

'I repeat that theatre for young audiences in the UK is a free-market, unregulated activity. There is no authority which approves or monitors standards. There is therefore no official body which needs to collect any statistics. As far as Government is concerned, TYP [Theatre for Young People] does not exist.'

It can also be observed that the statistical data coverage in many countries cannot be evaluated for children's theatre, because no distinction is made between children's theatre and "adult theatre", and the available data thus refers to the theatre system in general without distinguishing between target groups. Moreover, artists and ensembles often do not seek a clear affiliation with one or the other group, since it is part of their common practice to regularly work for children and young people as well as for adults.

Even the data on children's theatre made available by the ASSITEJ groups in different countries is not comparable across borders – for one thing, because the members do not distinguish between independent and non-independent children's theatres, and for another, because the number of members in each country is not equal to the total number of artists and groups working for children and young people, especially because the importance of ASSITEJ, and with it the interest of the artists in a membership, varies greatly from country to country.

Finally, the comment made by Willemijn Kressenhof, staff member in the media library of the Theater Instituut Nederland, when asked about the books available on the subject of children's theatre, holds true. He described the situation exemplarily as follows:

'Although we have lots of information about theatre in general, theatre for young audiences is an underexposed area in our library. Most books on this subject [sic!] were written in the 1980's and 1990's.'

There are also significant deficiencies in the coverage and acknowledgement of theatre for children and young people by official sources and researchers. The only positive exceptions here are France and Germany:

The French ATEJ has published *Théâtre en France pour Jeunes Spectateurs* annually since 1963 (!), a comprehensive repertory directory, supplemented by

**2** | All of the quotations of experts consulted for this study have, in general, been reproduced verbatim in the language chosen by the interviewee (English, French or German). In many cases it is not the native language of the expert.

the *Lettres d'information*<sup>3</sup> which appears regularly and frequently during the course of each year. The German yearbook of the ASSITEJ, *Grimm & Grips*, was known as a standard work of the professional theatre for children and young people even beyond the country's national borders. Besides general information on the ASSITEJ contributions from theory and practice, it contained a chronicle of the season as well as an annual overview bibliography on current publications, thus providing the basis for a comprehensive database on the offerings in the area of children's and young people's theatre in Germany. In 2013, after more than 25 years, *Grimm & Grips* was replaced by its successor, *IXYPSILONZETT*, which appears three times a year as a supplement to the journal *Theater der Zeit* and which, in turn, is supplemented by a yearbook published every January.

Furthermore, the Children's and Young People's Theatre Centre in Germany (Kinder- und Jugendtheaterzentrum in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland), which was founded in Frankfurt am Main in 1989, played an important role as an information and documentation centre. The centre has an extensive library which not only contains plays for children's and young people's theatre but also programmes, posters, photographs, secondary literature, magazines, videos, DVDs and other media documents on the subject which are available to the public. Since 1991, the centre has been home to the International ASSITEJ Archive, in which documentary materials from all the local ASSITEJ groups are collected so that different historical and contemporary theatre archives are compiled in one location.<sup>4</sup>

However, at the same time, Dr. Jürgen Kirschner, researcher in the Frankfurt archive, had to admit that the children's and young people's theatre centre, in the light of the deficits described earlier, did not have a "statistical telescope" for the European region and therefore could not provide complete data for a comprehensive comparative overview.

## 1.4 Working Definition of the Term "Independent Theatre Scene"

An analysis of all the structural models of children's theatre in Europe and their respective (legal) status within the individual national theatre systems, not to mention a comparison of these models Europe-wide, would be suitable

**3** | In addition, two comprehensive empirical surveys were carried out in the 2006 and 2008 seasons which presented and compared – if only selectively – the production conditions of the artists in the area of children's and young people's theatre with the help of numerous statistical data (See also *Scène(s) d'enfance et d'ailleurs* (Association nationale de professionnels des arts de la scène en direction des jeunes publics)/Ministère de la culture et de la communication/DMDTS 2009 – For a complete bibliographical reference see also here and in the bibliography appended to this paper).

**4** | See also Schneider 2001, p. 247.

as the subject of a research paper devoted solely to this topic and cannot be accomplished in this study. Therefore, for the relevant context of observation within the framework of this study, a purely pragmatic definition of the term “independent” children’s theatre will be applied.

If, in the following text, reference is made to “independent” children’s theatre in Europe, a professional organisational form is meant which is at home in the performing arts and which a) is not part of the public sector and b) cannot be described as a private theatre with a commercial intent. The author does not contest or ignore the fact that the group of theatre ensembles and artists included in this definition is just as big as it is heterogeneous.

### **1.5 Limitations of the Study: “Independent Children’s Theatre in Europe”?**

This study, as the title suggests, is dedicated to the ‘independent children’s theatre in Europe’. It must first be stressed that the selection of countries included in this study does *not* cover the entire European region and that this was not the author’s intention. The fact that primarily the countries of Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Belgium, The Netherlands, Italy, France, England, Sweden, Poland and Russia are taken into account is a necessary prioritisation which came about in the course of the research and which is related to the respective exemplary structures and developments and/or model-like initiatives and impulses which characterise the particular children’s theatre scenes. When reference is made in this paper to children’s theatre in “Europe”, those countries are always meant which are the focus of this study.

Furthermore, the study, as stated in the title, concentrates primarily on theatre for *children*. It concerns those forms of the performing arts which target an audience aged between 0 and 12 years and can be classified as “intended” children’s theatre.<sup>5</sup> The two equally common terms, “theatre for children” and “children’s theatre” are used synonymously unless otherwise specified. Theatre for youth aged 12 to 18, here referred to as “theatre for young people”, is only included at times when a separation of the two sub-systems is not given or does not seem useful.<sup>6</sup> This prioritisation is mainly due to the fact that the boundary between theatre intended for young people and “adult theatre” has become

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**5** | A pragmatic definition of “intended” children’s theatre, according to Hans-Heino Ewers, includes “all theatrical productions which – whether by the producers, whether by other instances in the society – are deemed to be a suitable theatrical offering for children” (Ewers 2012, p. 21).

**6** | In this case the author refers generally to “theatre for children and young people” or “theatre for young audiences” which, in this context, is understood as an overall system which clearly distinguishes itself from the system of “adult theatre”.

increasingly pervious in recent years, and the number of plays and productions which (in the meantime) can be included in the category of “theatre for young persons” has increased exponentially in this regard. Extensive research in this area would thus go beyond the scope of this investigation.

The same is true for the sector of puppet and/or figure and object theatre to which only marginal attention can be devoted in this study.

It was also decided that this study would concentrate on professional theatre. Theatre formats found in schools have been excluded, as well as productions by lay drama groups and children’s recreational groups, as long as no professional artists are involved in such programmes. Moreover, this paper will systematically focus on independent theatre work and disregard all collaborations with state, municipal and regional theatres which lead to a temporary, more or less advanced “institutionalisation” of independent theatre professionals. Also these focal points are of a purely pragmatic nature and do not imply any valuation or forming of hierarchies.

Finally, despite the stated aim of pointing out developments and possible future perspectives, this study can be, in the end, no more than a snapshot. As was stressed at “European Audiences: 2020 and beyond”, a conference organised by the European Commission which took place in October 2012 in Brussels and was attended by more than 800 experts from the cultural sector, the arts sector is undergoing a particularly rapid change in the united Europe at this time:

‘[E]verything and everyone is in flux. No organisation can afford to sit still. Change is likely to be a permanent reality that the sector needs to contend with and embrace, to see and benefit from the opportunities that the world today offers.’<sup>7</sup>

This study is thus subject to the reality of this constant change and the resulting short “shelf life” of the facts which it presents.

## **1.6 Excursus: Poland and Russia – “No Practice”**

The two Eastern European countries, Poland and Russia, which are also included in this study, constitute special cases. Indeed, both countries have a children’s and young people’s theatre landscape which is rich in tradition and structurally diverse – but neither country has an *independent* children’s theatre scene.

Lucyna Kozien, artistic director of the Teatr Lalek Białaluka and publisher of the *Teatr Lalek* magazine, describes the situation in Poland as follows:

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**7** | European Commission 2012, p. 12.

'The theatre for children and young people in Poland is represented mainly by 24 institutional, fully professional puppet theatre companies. [...] Occasionally, their activities are complemented by 62 dramatic theatres, which sometimes include in their repertoire plays for children and young people. They generally do it once a year and their immediate motivation is improving attendance and revenue from [sic!] ticket sales. In what they offer the young audience, although often attractive and produced with a staging flourish, one cannot find titles other than the school obligatory reading list or classics of children's literature.'<sup>8</sup>

In other words, "children's theatre" within the Polish theatre system is still virtually synonymous with "institutional municipal puppet theatre":

'After 1989 the nature of children's theatre in Poland changed as did the social, political and economic situation. The result of the transformation meant the end of supporting national puppet theatres from the state budget. The theatres became the responsibility of local governments. [...] Theatre directors, for the first time in the history of the Polish theatre for children and young people had to start thinking about the market, economic profitability. Theatres had to account not only for the artistic results of their activity, but also for economic indicators, which were often more important. In most cities local governments provide funding for theatres only to cover the costs of the so-called 'base', that is the buildings and companies. [...] Such a change in the way theatres operate, since earlier they had funds for complete maintenance, company and new productions, was revolutionary in Polish conditions.'<sup>9</sup>

A professional independent scene could virtually not develop under these circumstances, even after 1989:<sup>10</sup>

'Hundreds of new theatre companies hoping to thrive in the new reality and subjected to the laws of the market and the dictates of the economy and commerce were forced to discover unfavourable conditions for development. Supported at the onset with subsidies provided by the state and self-government budgets, or by sponsors, and then left to their own devices they ultimately fell silent.'<sup>11</sup>

The greatest structural problem results from the fact that public funding is almost always used to support the institutional municipal theatres, and

**8** | Excerpt from "The Report on the State of Children and Young People's Theatre in Poland" (2004) – Original manuscript kindly provided by Lucyna Kozien.

**9** | See note 9.

**10** | The so-called "Theatre for Early Years" is an exception and will be explained in detail later.

**11** | Kozien 2011, p. 13.

since they no longer receive long-term overall funding, they also find it necessary to continuously acquisition subsidies in (unequal) competition with any independent theatres, so that there are scarcely any funds left for the independent scene.<sup>12</sup>

In this respect, only the following sobering conclusion can be drawn by theatre professionals with regard to Poland:

'In more than twenty years that have passed since the systemic transformation, Poland [sic!] has been unable to construct solid foundations for the functioning of independent theatres and lacks structural, legal and economic solutions. [...] Poland still has no place for truly independent and non-institutional theatre companies. Apparently, history has made a full circle: we are returning to a pre-1989 state when institutional companies delineated the rhythm of theatrical life.'<sup>13</sup>

In Russia, the situation is hardly different. According to Pavel Rudnev (Moscow Art Theatre), there are many different theatres which very successfully target young audiences – approximately 50 drama theatres and between 80 and 100 puppet theatres; however, all of them are state-controlled and completely institutionalised:

'In Russia till now the Stalin system of state repertoire companies is active. Private companies (especially when they are non-profit and of good quality) are a very rare phenomenon. And also from Stalin time we have got a tradition: If a town has more than 300,000 citizens, the town must have a theatre for young spectators, and if more than 500,000 citizens – a puppet theatre. They are responsible for young audiences. And they are permanent with long-term artists. [...] Each state company must have its own (but state) venue. This is standard. Sure, theatres for young spectators and puppet companies have got less venue than central drama theatre. As usual 400-500 seats venue plus chamber venue with 50-120 seats.'

An independent children's and young people's theatre scene does, therefore, not exist – and, according to Pavel Rudnev, is not desired: 'As you understood, we have got a lot of special theatre for youth (practically in every town). So if some independent theatre for children appears, it will usually be a potboiler.' Much more desirable would be a 'new directing generation that [sic!] is free of Soviet dogmata and came to theatre for children without compulsion'.

The Polish theatre makers, on the other hand, explicitly expressed the desire to draw on the Western European standard of independent children's

**12** | See Bartnikowski 2011, p. 58.

**13** | Kozien 2011, p. 13.

theatre with regard to the structures, aesthetics and dramaturgies – and named the following as the most significant positive trends in their national scene:

- ‘openness of programmers/artists/researchers that travel abroad, take part in seminars/festivals/conferences/workshops and promote good quality of children's theatre in Poland’ (Alicja Morawska-Rubczak, ASSITEJ Poland);
- ‘much wider cooperation with foreign theatre centres – mainly from Germany’;
- ‘free exchange of ideas and experiences (mainly from Europe, but also by international activity of ASSITEJ) after 1989 when the isolation of our country was over’ (Zbigniew Rudzinski, Children's Arts Centre, Poznan).’

In light of the particular situation of the theatre in Poland and Russia, both of these Eastern European countries have been largely excluded from the following observations and reflections. Unless specifically indicated, all of the statements made here regarding commonalities and differences in the European children's theatre landscape, involving developments, problem fields and perspectives, do not refer to the Polish and Russian situations, since these differ too greatly to be included in a study whose focus is the *independent* theatre scene.

## 2. MANIFESTATIONS, DISCOURSES, DEVELOPMENTS

### 2.1 Structural Emancipation of (Independent) Children's Theatre

Following the enactment of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child on 20 November 1989, a framework of reference was created on a European level which defined by contract the rights of children to art and culture and proclaimed their participation in cultural and artistic life as an aim worthy of public support. This was indeed a milestone in the history of children's theatre in Europe.

Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states the following:

‘(1) The contracting states recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to play and active recreation appropriate to its age as well as to free participation in cultural and artistic life.

(2) The contracting states respect and support the right of the child to full participation in cultural and artistic life, and promote the provision of suitable and equal opportunities for cultural and artistic activities as well as for active recuperation and recreation.’<sup>14</sup>

**14** | See also [http://www.unicef.de/fileadmin/content\\_media/mediathek/D\\_0006\\_Kinderkonvention.pdf](http://www.unicef.de/fileadmin/content_media/mediathek/D_0006_Kinderkonvention.pdf)

The fact that 193 contracting states have acceded to this convention to date – more than to any other UN convention – underlines how great the prevailing consensus is in this respect, and clearly demonstrates that the interests of children, at least conceptually, should be and have been an integral part of the cultural sector for over 20 years.

A specific look at performing arts for a young audience shows that since the 1990s the scene has not only been continuously developing in artistic terms but has also grown and become increasingly differentiated, and thus has been able to emancipate itself structurally from antiquated traditions! What Ilona Sauer says exemplarily about the current status quo of theatre for children and young people in Germany can be applied to all European theatre landscapes:

‘The theatre for children and young people is accepted as an important player in the German theatre landscape. It is no longer seated at a “side table” but is situated right in the middle of things; it has bid farewell to its niche existence and perhaps even to its existence in the “comfort zone” as well [...]’.<sup>15</sup>

### **2.1.1 High Degree of Permeability between the Systems**

In general, it can be observed that the boundaries between the system of “adult” theatre and theatre for children and young people, which were clearly delineated at first, are today becoming more blurred and permeable.<sup>16</sup> In particular, there is a lively exchange between both systems in the independent scene; a large number of the independent artists work flexibly for the theatre for children and young people and the theatre for adults, especially in project-specific “production ensembles”.<sup>17</sup> In many European countries, independent groups often produce for a young audience, at least in part. Thus, Eline Kleingeld (Vereniging van Schouwburg- en Concertgebouwdirecties) confirmed that in The Netherlands a percentage of 10-15% of the entire programme of independent groups is aimed at children and young people; in Sweden, it is even 70-80% of the productions of publicly funded groups, says Lotta Brilioth Biörnstad (Arts Council Sweden). For Flanders, it could be paradigmatically established that the number of independent artists who move between the two areas rose to at least 41% between 1993 and 2005:<sup>18</sup>

**15** | Sauer 2013, p. 36.

**16** | Exceptions in this context are Great Britain and Austria, where a specialisation of artists, and thus to a large extent a separation of the two systems, is the norm.

**17** | See also the comments in Chapt. 3.1.5.

**18** | See Anthonissen 2011, p. 2.

'Artistically speaking, adult and youth theatre have more or less kept pace with one another, partly due to the intense movement back and forth between them. For example, developments taking place in one place also occur elsewhere and vice versa.'<sup>19</sup>

The spanning of this gap, which on the whole means an upgrade of (as well as an equal status for) children's and young people's theatre, is facilitated by increasing interest on the part of leading directors and actors from adult theatre in productions for young audiences. This is indicated by Zbigniew Rudzinski's (Children's Arts Centre, Poznan) comment on the Polish scene:

'More and more theatre directors with a very high position in theatres for adults prepare performances for children. [This entails] the presence of performances for children, playwrights, readings of plays during festivals known till now as festivals for adults like Warsaw Theatre Meetings, Festival of First Nights in Bydgoszcz, Festival of Polish Contemporary Plays RAPORT in Gdynia.'

The increasing amount of public and media attention paid to children's and young people's theatre in this way has a positive effect on its position in the overall architecture of the theatre culture and contributes to its structural emancipation.

### **2.1.2 Increasing the Recipient Group: Adults as Part of the Primary Target Audience**

'In contrast to earlier decades in which a clear delimitation between childhood, youth, and adulthood was possible, the boundaries are now blurred'; 'the spaces reserved for each generation [...] are no longer strictly separated but interwoven, the boundaries fluid'.<sup>20</sup> What Carsten Gansel states with regard to the current relationship between generations in (Western) European societies in general is true for children's theatre – perhaps even more so: At least since the 1980s, there has been a tendency within European children's theatre landscapes to appeal to an adult audience on a hitherto unprecedented scale and to see this group as an essential part of the primary target audience. This attempt by the "special theatre" to dissolve its specificity is still continuing today.<sup>21</sup>

This is evident in a purely formal sense in the various renaming processes which have taken place:<sup>22</sup> The "children's theatre"/*Kindertheater/théâtre jeune public* has become the "theatre for all ages"/*Theater für alle/théâtre tout public*,

**19** | Ibid., p. 7f.

**20** | Gansel 2005, p. 364 and p. 365.

**21** | See also concerning "blurred boundaries" and the resulting dominance of theatre for young people Hentschel 1996, pp. 31-47 and Hartung 2001, p.120ff.

**22** | See also Hentschel 1996, p. 34.

the *Familientheater* or the “theatre for young audiences”/*Theater für ein junges Publikum*. On the other hand, especially with regard to the independent scene – and here, in particular, with regard to performance and installation formats – it can be increasingly observed that productions (and their artists) deliberately refuse to commit themselves to a specific target audience.

Thus, it has almost become a matter of course that at the prestigious independent theatre festivals in Germany, “Impulse” and “Favoriten”, besides “adult” theatre, children’s theatre productions are regularly included; moreover, the Helios Theater in Hamm has, indeed, already been a prizewinner several times. In addition, children’s theatre productions are now increasingly being included in the evening programmes, and, as the initiative *Schönen Abend!* of the Junges Ensemble Stuttgart (JES) proves, even full evening programmes with productions for children and young people are being introduced. This principle, which already has a tradition in countries such as France and which extends back to the 1960s, is of course not an attempt to exclude children from children’s theatre, but rather to specifically *include* parents and other adults and thus to appeal across generations, as Maurice Yendt (ASSITEJ France) stresses: ‘Les spectacles présentés en soirée ne sont pas exclusivement pour adultes, ils réunissent un public inter-générationnel d’enfants et d’adultes.’

All of this blurring of distinctions may, if nothing else, have a commercial background – for many independent theatre professionals who work for children and young people, however, it is also a matter of upgrading their own art form, says Myrtó Dimitriadou (Toihaus Theater, Salzburg): ‘The idea behind it probably has to do with changing the image of theatre for children – not ‘childish’ and with an exaggerated focus on what is considered appropriate for children, but little works of art for everyone.’

### 2.1.3 Extending the Producer Group: Children also on the Stage

‘Every artist who receives public funds should be obliged to work with young people’ – with this statement Hortensia Völckers, artistic director of the German Cultural Foundation (Kulturstiftung des Bundes),<sup>23</sup> took an unequivocal stand on another fundamental development which has taken place in the European children’s theatre landscape in recent years: namely the tendency to see children not only as members of the audience but as partners in the artistic production, to involve them in the production process, and to allow them to perform on stage as “experts on everyday life”. More and more often, “children’s theatre” in this sense also means “theatre *with* children”.

The principle of what is so frequently designated “participation” is not a phenomenon of the nineties per se, but goes back to the impulses provided by the independent scene in the seventies. The “conquest of the theatre landscape

23 | Odenthal 2005, p. 108.

by the target group",<sup>24</sup> as described by Wolfgang Schneider, Chairman of ASSITEJ Germany and Honorary President of ASSITEJ International, is, however, really something new,<sup>25</sup> and manifests itself paradigmatically in the fact that at the renowned *Augenblickmal! Festival* in Berlin in 2013, *9 Leben* by the Junges Ensemble Stuttgart (JES) under the choreographic direction of Iwes Thuwis-De-Leeuw, a production *with* young people was selected by the jury to be included in the regular festival programme and was presented on equal terms with professional productions *for* a young audience.

The motivation and objectives for such theatre projects with children vary from project to project; the spectrum of methodological, content-related and aesthetic forms is broad. The reasons given by the European network for young music theatre, RESEO, (European Network for Opera and Dance Education), for the trend towards participative projects for music theatre with children can also be applied to the field of performing arts in general. According to RESEO, apart from the increasing call for programmes for cultural education from those responsible for cultural and education policies, the following arguments can be put forward from an artistic point of view:

'The presence of children on stage allows young audiences to identify with the young performers;

Young performers provide energy to the project, which has a dynamic effect on the attitude of the spectator;

In this way, children on stage are revalorised, especially when they are involved in professional productions working with professional adults;

Children on stage allow for a more "interactive" exchange between the spectators and the actors (this reinforces the link between the work and the audience);

Young audiences may feel the desire to start learning an artistic discipline themselves.

These types of performances show that artistic practice is accessible to everyone;

[...] Audiences are more attentive and more interested;

It appeals to a wider audience (families also attend, widening the audience that attends Opera).<sup>26</sup>

Aside from these arguments, there is no denying that there is a purely pragmatic – namely commercial – self-interest on the part of the independent theatre in offering more participation projects. In times in which, according

**24** | Quoted from an editorial on *IXYPSILONZETT, Jahrbuch 2013*, p. 1.

**25** | The trend to make the artistic work *with* children more and more a conceptual component of theatre programmes, projects and proclaimed profiles of many independent groups can no doubt be seen in the light of the general debates on cultural education. See also detailed explanation in Chapt. II/A.1.

**26** | RESEO 2009, p. 35f.

to the “EU culture barometer”, attending the theatre ranks seventh on a list of possible cultural activities – thus *after* visits to cinemas, libraries, historical monuments, sports events, museums, galleries and concerts – and, of those persons surveyed, the artistic participation in theatre-acting ranks last (!) in the list of arts queried in the survey,<sup>27</sup> it seems more than appropriate to work towards specifically training the “audience of tomorrow”. In order to face increasing competition with other art forms and media and acknowledge the frequently noted “ageing of the audience”,<sup>28</sup> it is necessary to involve members of the upcoming generation in the artistic work and to allow them to experience the performing arts in a manner which is personally significant to them.<sup>29</sup>

A danger of such participative formats which are closely linked to “audience development” may be detected in the fact that this has a tendency to fulfil, as Carmen Mörsch formulates it, a purely *affirmative* or *reproductive* function: The participation by children in the production processes of artistic work primarily serves to impart what the institutions of high culture produce to an accordingly initiated and already interested audience “as smoothly as possible”, or to win over the next – paying – audience generation.<sup>30</sup>

This situation applies to the independent children’s theatre scene, albeit under different circumstances: Since independent theatre professionals are seldom interested in the preservation of an institution, of an establishment, a structure per se, affirmative and reproductive functions of participation projects are almost automatically less important. Instead, other functions which Mörsch refers to as *critical-deconstructive* and *transformative* tend to gain in importance: Mörsch recognises a critical-deconstructive function of cultural representation and promotion when the “existing implicitness of high culture and its institutions is questioned, disclosed and adapted” and learners are equipped with knowledge “which makes it possible for them to form their own opinion and to become aware of their own status and circumstances”. If one’s own preoccupation with art and culture goes beyond such critical scrutiny in that the cultural representation and promotion tries to “influence that which it represents and promotes and, for example, to change it in terms of more

**27** | According to the survey, only 3.8% of those questioned in the EU population are active in theatre in their free time (See *THE EUROPEAN OPINION RESEARCH GROUP 2002*, no page). However, only persons aged 15 and older were included in the survey.

**28** | Schneider 2007, p. 83.

**29** | Especially opera houses see themselves, in this context, in acute financial peril: As RESEO ascertained for the music and dance theatre sector by means of an empirical study, at least 81% of the pedagogy departments of opera houses in Europe currently mount stage productions in which children and young people are (also) active (See RESEO 2009, p. 35).

**30** | Mörsch 2011, p. 11.

justice, more critical thinking and less social distinction", Mörsch then refers to a transformative process which can bring about social and institutional change.<sup>31</sup>

Against this backdrop, Mörsch develops a set of objectives and functions for the artistic practice *with* children, which may sound like a song of praise but which, at its core, when aptly summarised could and should have the effect that an encounter with the arts would have in the ideal case:

'Understood in this way, it serves the promotion of social emancipation and co-determination and thus the permanent (self-)analysis and transformation of art, of culture and its institutions. It encourages rebelliousness. It stresses the potential of diverse experiences and sets the importance of failure, of searching, of open processes and aggressive uselessness as a disturbing factor against an efficiency-oriented thinking. Instead of offering individuals the will to permanent self-optimisation as the best survival option, it provides space in which – in addition to fun, pleasure, the desire to create and produce, training of perception, communication of knowledge – problems can be identified, named and dealt with. Space in which disputes can take place. Space in which such naturally positive things like love of art or the will to work can be questioned, and a discussion can arise about what the good life is for whom. Space in which it is less about life-long than about life-changing learning. Space in which no one is discriminated because of age, origin, appearance, physical disposition or sexual orientation and in which instead one acts on behalf of others.'<sup>32</sup>

The fact that this potential is not or cannot often be exploited to the maximum and that this is frequently because the initiators of these projects and programmes pursue other, more production-oriented interests, is a different matter.

#### **2.1.4 Increasing International Networking**

As is the case with the independent scene in general, independent children's theatre is becoming more and more internationally networked. The factors which have contributed to and promoted this networking are manifold, but overall they are comparable to those which characterize independent theatre in Europe.

Besides the increasing number of international festivals, and the lively import and export of theatre texts which had already led to the creation of a European repertoire of modern plays for children's theatre at the beginning of the nineties, three lines of development are particularly relevant.

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**31** | Ibid., p. 11.

**32** | Ibid., p. 19.

First, not only an increase in the number of networks can be observed, but also their growing expansion and use. ASSITEJ, the global umbrella organisation for independent children's and young people's theatre, should be mentioned here to begin with. ASSITEJ held its 17<sup>th</sup> World Congress in 2011, on which occasion over 1500 delegates, artists and organisers from more than 50 countries met. ASSITEJ currently has members in 85 national centres on all continents and will celebrate its fiftieth anniversary in 2015. The charter of this UNESCO organisation (which was founded in 1965) was signed by the 42 countries then present and reads as follows:

'Considering the role theatre can play in the education of younger generations, an autonomous international organisation has been formed which bears the name of the International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People (ASSITEJ International). [...] Theatre for young people respects its young audiences by presenting their hopes, dreams and fears; it develops and deepens experience, intelligence, emotion and imagination; it inspires ethical choices; it helps awareness of social relations; it encourages self-esteem, tolerance confidence and opinions. Above all, it helps young people to find their place and voice in society. [...] [ASSITEJ International] holds with the belief of the Report of the World Commission on Culture and Development, "Our Creative Diversity", that young people must be given a cultural identity and made visible everywhere in society.'<sup>33</sup>

It speaks for the quality of this charter that its premises and goals have not lost any of their timeliness and urgency to this day.

Secondly, the international and, above all, the European-wide networking of independent children's theatre is promoted by the growing number of guest performances from abroad, which has been noticeable for some years. In the case of France, there are specific figures which confirm this trend exemplarily:

'La création étrangère est de mieux en mieux accueillie en France. Au début des années 2000, elle représentait 2% des programmations jeune public. Au cours des trois dernières saisons (de 2007-2008 à 2009-2010), près de 25% des programmations adressées au jeune public en France présentent des spectacles étrangers.'<sup>34</sup>

France can be said to hold a forerunner position when it comes to children's and young people's theatre in relation to the theatre system in general:

'Le rapprochement avec les chiffres d'ensemble met en lumière une manifeste spécificité de ce secteur en matière d'accueil de spectacle étranger. Entre 2007 et 2010, 25%

**33** | See <http://www.assitej.at/ueber/assitej-international/>

**34** | ONDA 2011, p. 36.

des programmations adressées au jeune public en France présentent des spectacles étrangers, alors que sur la même période, environ 12% des programmations du réseau labellisé présentent des spectacles étrangers.<sup>35</sup>

Although respective data from other European countries is not available, it can be noted that independent children's theatre is definitely on a par with "adult theatre" with regard to networking through international guest performances.

Finally, in parallel to this development, the interest of professionals from the independent theatre scene in participating in transnational co-productions and collaborations as well as in residence and exchange programmes is apparently increasing steadily. This form of networking is naturally practiced more frequently between those countries in which similar structures of children's theatre exist.

### **2.1.5 Increasing Professionalism: Targeted Promotion of Young Talent**

In the past decades, independent children's theatre in Europe has emancipated and established itself. All the country experts surveyed have confirmed this, since most artists who are active in this field today have completed artistic training and learned their craft under professional guidance. The number of autodidacts, lateral entrants and amateurs has decreased considerably.

In addition, due to the lack of specific education and training opportunities at state universities and other educational institutions, a certain 'immanent system' to promote young talent has developed within the scene which is particularly aimed at preparing participants for the requirements of producing for children and at creating spheres for experimenting and experiencing in which young artists can undertake their own first projects for this audience.

A prime example in this context is the training laboratory Het Lab in the Dutch city of Utrecht, which is highly regarded in Europe and which for years has operated as a talent factory where young professionals are promoted for independent children's and young people's theatre. "There is no shortage of talented young theatre makers in The Netherlands who can and will work for young audiences. If there is any problem, it is with the continuation of these artists into the world of the professional theatre",<sup>36</sup> says one of the fundamental premises of the Het Lab. An essential characteristic of the 'training' was the long-term and individual support given to the young artists by experienced mentors; 'long-term custom-made partnerships whose ultimate goal was for the artists to obtain a place in professional theatre, either with an existing company or independently':

**35** | Ibid., p. 37.

**36** | Meyer 2012, p. 8.

'During these long-term collaborations over several years we not only supported the artists artistically, but we also focused on cultural entrepreneurship. Developing a long-term view, acquiring an understanding of the business side and the production aspects of the theatre, and audience development were among the subjects we tackled.'<sup>37</sup>

Another aspect of this specific formula for success was the implementation of a target group orientation for children's theatre during the rehearsal and play development process:

'One very important thing Het Lab would focus on, therefore, was simply getting to know the young audience. By just talking to them, working with them, including them in the artistic process at regular intervals. Each artist would have his or her own trajectory with the young target audience: from talks in a classroom to giving workshops centred on the subject of the performance and to discussing rehearsals and tryouts. The children proved inspiring dramaturges. Their concrete experiences and responses would often lead the making of certain decisions. In order to be able to offer this type of research, Het Lab established strong connections with schools and teachers who were interested in working with us.'<sup>38</sup>

Moreover, the continuous expansion of its own scope of training and experimenting in the direction of dance theatre is exemplary and exceptional:

'Although Het Lab Utrecht mainly supported stage directors and playwrights during its earlier years, we have always focused on dance as well [...]. From 2009 onwards the scope for dance increased permanently. The ambition is to give dance for young audiences a similar set of impulses as we have done for theatre.'<sup>39</sup>

From 2009 to 2012, [Het Lab] supported over ten productions that have found their way to stages both nationally and internationally. In addition, the house took the lead in initiating the Fresh Tracks Europe network.'<sup>40</sup>

The establishment of its own dance department resulted in an increasing internationalisation of the artistic staff almost automatically;<sup>41</sup> the intercultural aspect of producing together for a young audience became the centre of attention and provided new impulses.

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**37** | Meyer 2012, p. 7.

**38** | van den Broek 2013, p. 30.

**39** | Meyer 2012, p. 7.

**40** | van den Broek 2013, p. 31.

**41** | See Meyer 2012, p. 8. See also the following supplementary observation: "We have seen an explosive increase in international, mainly European, attention for our work from the very moment we included dance permanently" (ibid., p. 8).

The central importance of such a multidisciplinary and multicultural training centre as a source of invigoration for the scene was undisputed for years:

'For more than ten years, the production houses have played a crucial role within the Dutch theatre landscape. Within theatre for young audiences, Het Lab Utrecht and Bonte Hond in Almere have carefully devoted their energy to bridging the gap between art schools and professional art practice. Het Lab has focused on text-based theatre and performance/dance; Bonte Hond on site-specific theatre and physically/visually based theatre. A relatively large number of recent graduates have been given an opportunity to work on small-scale projects and experiments with one of the two production houses.'<sup>42</sup>

In 2013, Het Lab was facing closure due to across-the-board, drastic cuts in the cultural sector in The Netherlands.<sup>43</sup> The dramatic consequences this will have for independent children's and young people's theatre can only be supposed at this point in time.

Apart from such exceptional examples, the independent scene is in many places specialised in recruiting and providing continuous training for young artists from its own ranks. A common model in the German independent scene is, in this context, the attempt to support members from participative theatre projects *with* young people or from the theatres' own youth clubs on their way towards becoming professionals by providing rehearsal rooms and technical resources like costumes, stage sets and lighting as well as dramaturgical support.

An example of good practice is the Theater Marabu in Bonn under the artistic direction of Claus Overcamp and Tina Jücker, because the Marabus have launched exemplary initiatives to promote young artistic talent on several levels at the same time. For one, besides the actual Theater Marabu, there is the Junges Ensemble Marabu (Young Ensemble Marabu), which regularly puts on theatre performances *with* young people, whereby the productions of the Young Ensemble have the same importance and thus are given the same amount of rehearsal room time as the professional productions, which do not have a participative orientation. In addition, the so-called experimental field of directing was created especially for members of the Young Ensemble and offers interested young people the chance to work on their own projects under the guidance of mentors from the Marabu team over a period of four to six weeks, a time period in which rooms and equipment are provided and at the end of which the final product can be presented to an audience. Furthermore, the Theater Marabu systematically supports young artists in another format: "Young Directors" is aimed at young graduates of theatre schools who are given

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**42** | Blik 2012, p. 3.

**43** | van den Broek 2013, p. 29.

the opportunity to put together their own artistic team with whom they can work out a production under professional conditions. The production is then included in the programme of the Theater Marabu for at least one season.

Apart from such in-house talent promotion programmes of individual independent groups, there is occasional support funding, especially in the form of grants to young artists which are intended as a kind of 'start-up help'. Thus, it is possible for independent young artists in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia to receive a lump sum scholarship of five thousand euros for a period of four months in order to work and do research in connection with an established children's and young people's theatre. Such support programmes do not by any means indicate the presence of any type of structure in this respect, and are not the rule but rather a positive and regionally limited exception.



*Figure 1: 'Leonce und Lena', Theater Marabu – Junges Ensemble, Bonn, 2012.  
Photograph: Ursula Kaufmann*

### 2.1.6 Quintessence

All in all, it can be said that, in the course of the decades since 1990, independent children's theatre in Europe has structurally outgrown its 'baby shoes' and has more and more established itself as an art form with a status equivalent to that of "adult" theatre.

If one takes a closer look at the developments, paradigm changes and newly generated discourses which have influenced the landscapes of children's theatre most conspicuously and most sustainably in the past 20 years, essentially three phenomena or tendencies become evident:

- the newly formulated definition of the function of children's theatre as mirrored in the worldwide debates on cultural education

- the involvement of the target group of the youngest theatregoers (0-3 years) and the establishment of a "theatre for early years"
- the increasing trend to productions which transcend genres and disciplines and with it the dissolution of boundaries between sectors and systems

The following is a more detailed analysis of these three main lines of development within independent children's theatre in Europe since 1990.

## 2.2 Independent Children's Theatre in Europe is Today ... Cultural Education!

"To be a performing artist in Britain in the next century, you have to be an educator, too". Thus was the prophesy made by Sir Simon Rattle in 1999 during a debate on cultural and educational policy in London,<sup>44</sup> and his prediction turned out to be quite right. Not only in Great Britain but in all of Europe (and beyond), a trend was to emerge which would make "art" and "education" inseparable in people's minds, and which would force a decisive paradigm shift in the arts as well. The key phrase, without which any debate on cultural and educational policy would be unthinkable, is "arts education".<sup>45</sup>

In 1999, the thirtieth General Assembly of UNESCO passed a resolution to promote arts education and creativity in schools. In the same year, the European Commission initiated a new programme named *Connect* to mediate between culture and education and to establish networking between the different spheres,<sup>46</sup> and consolidated the directorates for education and culture. However, only two years later, the question regarding the necessity of arts education became the focus of public attention. "It is even possible to name the exact date when the development acquired a new dynamic", says Max Fuchs about the situation in Germany. "It was 4 December 2001".<sup>47</sup> The keyword here: PISA.

On 4 December 2001, Edelgard Bulmahn, then the German Minister of Education, presented the results of the first PISA study. Since that reform programme of educational policies, which was the most successful of all time internationally, the promotion of arts education has been considered in political

<sup>44</sup> | Quoted from *All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education*. London 1999, p. 182.

<sup>45</sup> | On an international level, in this context, the term "arts education" is used almost everywhere; sporadically one can find the English translation of the German term, "kulturelle Bildung" as "cultural education". (Fuchs 2008, p. 111f.).

<sup>46</sup> | See *Pre-Conference Reader on the European conference, "Promoting Cultural Education in Europe: A Contribution to Participation, Innovation and Quality"*, p. 42.

<sup>47</sup> | Fuchs 2010, p. 93.

discourse to be one of the most important cross-sectional tasks,<sup>48</sup> as the following statement by the group of experts on the Council of Ministers of Culture of the European Union indicates:

‘The reinforcement of synergies between education and culture is therefore considered as a key goal both at national and international [sic!] levels, opening the way for the mainstreaming of artistic and cultural education throughout Europe.’<sup>49</sup>

Not least, the extremely high importance attached to arts education is reflected in the fact that the new millennium has already brought forth two world conferences on arts education initiated by UNESCO (World Conference on Arts Education) in 2006 and 2010, at which about 1000 experts from 100 countries met for several days to discuss questions regarding arts education.<sup>50</sup>

Given this central paradigm shift in the form of an “educational turn” on the macro level of global cultural and educational policies, it is not surprising that, especially in the course of this development, the performing arts for young audiences are now regarded in the context of cultural educational opportunities and examined for their potential in connection with the overriding common goal of promoting arts education: The expectations which the public has set in the potential impact of children’s theatre – and this includes theatre *with* children as well as theatre *for* children – could hardly be higher.<sup>51</sup>

**48** | See also the text by Michael Wimmer at [www.bpb.de/gesellschaft/kultur/kulturelle-bildung/60202/europa](http://www.bpb.de/gesellschaft/kultur/kulturelle-bildung/60202/europa), which provides an overview of this process and of the fundamentals of educational and cultural policies for the promotional activities of the EU in the area of education. See also regarding the legal framework conditions of arts education on national and international levels (incl. arts education in early childhood) Deutscher Kulturrat 2005 and 2009.

**49** | Lauret/Marie 2010, p. 4.

**50** | <http://www.bpb.de/gesellschaft/kultur/kulturelle-bildung/60187/unesco>

**51** | See for example the findings on the positive effects of arts education, especially of “educational drama and theatre”, which the EU-sponsored project of the DICE Consortium (“Drama Improves Lisbon Key Competences in Education”) presented, as presumably the most comprehensive empirical study of this kind to date, according to research in 12 countries on projects in which ca. 4,500 young people participated: “[Young people] are assessed more highly by their teachers in all aspects; feel more confident in reading and understanding tasks; feel more confident to communicate; [...] are better at problem solving; are better at coping with stress; are more tolerant towards both minorities and foreigners; are more active citizens; show more interest in voting at any level; show more interest in participating in public issues; are more empathetic: they have concerns for others; are more able to change perspectives; are more innovative and entrepreneurial; show more dedication towards their future and have more plans;

'With the advent of the "knowledge society", a paradigm change has taken place with regard to theatre and education which has rehabilitated the concept of education and comprehends the theatre in its elemental function in arts education and thus in its function for a socially intact community, thus as an indispensable socialisation factor.'<sup>52</sup>

Accordingly, independent children's theatre in Europe has repositioned itself in the overall social structure; some redefinition was necessary, particularly regarding its function. The consequences are diverse: Whether the expectations resulting from cultural and educational policies were the cause or not, the number of cultural and educational offerings and "educational programmes", declared as such, is increasing rapidly and exponentially;<sup>53</sup> the forms of collaboration between independent artists and schools and other educational institutions are becoming more and more varied; and, above all, theatre *with* children has established itself as an independent area of work for independent artists as never before.

### **2.2.1 An Attempt at a Definition: Arts Education – Common Denominators in the Relevant Discourses**

Despite (or perhaps because of) the worldwide debates about and growing attention paid to arts education by scientific research, no common definition exists on a national level, and even less so on a European one.<sup>54</sup> However, in the relevant discourses, some aspects can be identified as common denominators on which there is broad agreement.<sup>55</sup>

It is widely agreed that educational processes in the arts (and in general) can take place in both formal as well as informal contexts, and are thus not bound to the school as a place of learning.<sup>56</sup>

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are much more willing to participate in any genre of arts and culture [...]; are more likely to be a central character in class; have a better sense of humour; feel better at home". (DICE 2010, p. 6f.). In conclusion, the consortium stated: "DICE claims that educational drama and theatre supports the targets of the most relevant EU level documents", among them "Europe 2020" and the "Lisbon Key Competences" (See <http://publish.ucc.ie/scenario/2011/01/kueppers/12/en>).

**52** | Editorial on dramaturgy: *Zeitschrift der Dramaturgischen Gesellschaft* 1/2007, p. 1. Thus, it was significant that the motto of the annual conference of the dg 2007 in Heidelberg was "What is the new role of theatre in the knowledge society?".

**53** | In Germany, for example, the respective percentage has increased fourfold in the past five years (See Keuchel 2010b, p. 238).

**54** | See EDUCULT 2011, p. 37.

**55** | See Bamford 2009, p. 48f.

**56** | Lauret/Marie 2010, p. 24.

Furthermore, it is clear that arts education, understood as a process and the result of encounters and experiences with art, not only includes its reception but also the initiation of one's own artistic practice:

'Arts Education is not only aiming at ways of an enjoyable or reflected reception, it also fosters a productive and practical approach – guided as well as independent – in all artistic fields of perception, expression, composition, presentation and communication.'<sup>57</sup>

The main goal of arts education is to enable young people to "participate in the cultural life of a society", which, in turn, should encourage "a differentiated contact with art and culture and stimulate creative aesthetic action".<sup>58</sup> Moreover, with respect to the many possible goals of arts education, it is important to distinguish between "extrinsic" (non-artistic) and "intrinsic" (artistic and art-specific) aims.<sup>59</sup>

If the arts serve only (or mainly) as a medium or method with which non-artistic contents can be transported and general educational goals can be pursued (for instance, the acquisition of superordinate key competences such as promoting communication and team skills),<sup>60</sup> Anne Bamford refers to "education through the arts".<sup>61</sup> If, on the other hand, the arts themselves represent the contents of the arts education processes, and if the goals are intrinsically related to the arts themselves, Bamford classifies this as "education in the arts".<sup>62</sup> In this case, it is about learning, experiencing and understanding artistic symbols and techniques, which means

**57** | Deutsche UNESCO-Kommission e. V. 2009, p. 1.

**58** | This formulation can be found under the budget title "Kulturelle Bildung" in the "Kinder- und Jugendplan" of the German Federal Government with reference to § 11 of the "Kinder- und Jugendhilfegesetz. See in this regard Art. 26 of the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights", the "UN Convention on the Rights of the Child" and the following premise of the Swedish Cultural Council: "The Arts Council's basic guiding principle is that all children and young people [...] are entitled to equal opportunity to enjoy a range of cultural and artistic offerings and to engage in creative pursuits of their own". (See [www.kulturradet.se/Documents/English/strategy\\_culture\\_children\\_young\\_people.pdf](http://www.kulturradet.se/Documents/English/strategy_culture_children_young_people.pdf)).

**59** | See Lauret/Marie 2010, p. 12.

**60** | See also the "Lisbon Key Competences" at <http://www.oapee.es/documentum/MEC PRO/Web/weboapee/servicios/documentos/documentacion-convocatoria-2008/139420061230en00100018.pdf?documentId=0901e72b80004481>

**61** | Bamford 2009, pp. 21 and 71 et passim.

**62** | See note 86.

- a) communicating art-specific abilities and skills as 'tools' for one's own artistic activity,
- b) imparting knowledge about art, artistic processes and products (and the profession of the artist) so that the different arts can be experienced with their characteristic qualities, and
- c) promoting the ability to "read" art and experience the process of an "aesthetic alphabetisation"<sup>63</sup> which includes developing individual tastes and needs with respect to aesthetic events.

The decisive aspect of this dichotomy between "education through the arts" and "education in the arts" is that arts education processes should ideally cover both dimensions; instead, in practice, one can observe that they are often played off against each other, mostly with the intention of promoting extrinsic educational aims:

*'Education in the arts and education through the arts, while distinct, are interdependent and it should not be assumed that it is possible to adopt one or the other to achieve the totality of positive impacts on the child's educational realization.'*<sup>64</sup>

When defining arts education, there can be no question that the educational mandate for the arts is fulfilled at the expense of artistic-aesthetic quality. However, there is a broader consensus regarding the fact that pedagogical and aesthetic aims should not be excluded and the educational function is reconcilable with the topos "autonomy of art".<sup>65</sup>

This means that it is not about the theatre as a "service theatre"<sup>66</sup> used for pedagogical purposes or degraded to the status of a supplier of topics for school lessons – and this is especially true of children's theatre. A play imparting useful knowledge about environmental protection, the circulation of money, or piracy, does not do a 'better job' of educating the public than one that gives

**63** | Mollenhauer 1990, p. 9f.

**64** | Bamford 2009, p. 71. See also Bamford 2010, p. 82.

**65** | As Reinold Schmücker remarks, the autonomy of art, according to a widespread opinion, manifests itself in its "functionlessness and purposelessness" (Schmücker 2011, p. 109) – a misleading understanding of the autonomy of art which has been deeply rooted in the modern understanding of art since the era of Romanticism (See *ibid.*, p.113). Actually, art is in "many ways functional" and could "serve many different purposes – even those which the artist does not approve of" (*ibid.*, p. 114). Nevertheless, the existing autonomy of art can be found "in the privilege of the artists to define standards which their works should meet" and in "their ability to create laws which can be applied to each one of their works as well as to their oeuvre in total" (*ibid.*, p. 113).

**66** | Schneider 2005, p. 117.

the audience intensive aesthetic experiences and impressions – it only educates in another respect. Thus, it should always be the concern of arts education to accept the arts for their own sake and to value them as unique learning material. The superordinate goal should be to equally exploit the extrinsic and intrinsic educational potential immanent to the theatre, and to allow each aspect to unfold in its own way.

### **2.2.2 On the Quality of Arts Education Programmes: “Parameters of Quality”**

Although it can be argued that a dimension of arts education is inherent to a preoccupation with the arts per se, the question regarding the artistic aesthetic and pedagogical quality of such learning opportunities has thereby not been answered. Cultural and educational policies in Europe have frequently taken this circumstance into account in recent years. The focus of the international discourse surrounding arts education has increasingly shifted from the necessity of arts education programmes as such to securing and guaranteeing their quality;<sup>67</sup> the position paper formulated at the second world conference, the *Seoul Agenda*, states the following as one of the three main development objectives in this context: “Assure that arts education activities and programmes are of a high quality in conception and delivery”.<sup>68</sup>

The report contracted by UNESCO and presented by Anne Bamford in 2006 provided an important impulse with respect to the quality development and quality assurance of arts education programmes. It was entitled “The Wow Factor. Global research compendium on the impact of the arts in education”. The report had already been an important basis for the first world conference and has since gained greatly in importance.<sup>69</sup> From a systematic, empirically based perspective, and for the first time in an international comparison, Bamford identifies the framework conditions necessary to create high-quality arts education programmes in the field of artistic work *with* children. In the course of evaluating the empirical findings and case studies from the 37 participating countries, Bamford worked out a catalogue of so-called “parameters of quality” for participation projects which can be applied universally as success factors, regardless of the different educational contents and intended impacts, which may vary from project to project within the scope of arts.<sup>70</sup>

**67** | See Keuchel 2010a, p. 39ff.

**68** | See [http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CLT/CLT/pdf/Seoul\\_Agenda\\_EN.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CLT/CLT/pdf/Seoul_Agenda_EN.pdf)

**69** | See Liebau 2010, p. 11.

**70** | See also Bamford: “It was a somewhat unexpected result of the research that from all the diversity of case studies presented the parameters of quality were so uniform”

A key finding of Bamford's research was that the quality of arts education programmes did not strongly depend on any particular *content* but rather on the interaction between suitable *structures* and appropriate *teaching methods*. "The case studies [...] show that content is of less relevance to quality than method and structure",<sup>71</sup> according to Bamford. Bamford further differentiates the two types of quality parameters as follows:<sup>72</sup>

- a) Structural quality parameters:
  - Public performance/presentation of results
  - Detailed documentation and evaluation of the process and the results
  - Permeability of boundaries between artists, school(s) and community
  - Continuous further training and development of artists
- b) Methodological quality parameters:
  - Teamwork and cooperation/flexible organisational structures
  - Use of local resources, local environment and local context on the material as well as on the content-related levels / involvement of local community and its particular features
  - Process-oriented project work on the basis of artistic-creative research

In particular, the last aspect in the list of methodological quality parameters, namely open-ended artistic experimentation and research, was pointed out repeatedly by Bamford to be of the greatest significance with respect to the quality assurance of arts education activities:

'The most significant aspect of methodology that appeared in the qualitative case studies [...] was the arousal of children's curiosity about the world through problem or pro-

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(Bamford 2009, p. 88). It is, however, clear that these parameters are not adequate for all situations, but only represent the necessary prerequisites, and, for that reason, additional project-specific quality parameters must be added in an actual individual case. The *Potenzialstudie zu Kinder- und Jugendkulturprojekten*, which was contracted by the PwC Foundation and presented by Susanne Keuchel and Petra Aeschel in 2007, pursues a comparable objective. Based on the quantitative and qualitative evaluation of 60 good practice examples in Germany, the authors created a catalogue of 104 quality criteria which can be key factors to the "success" of a cultural project for children and young people. These criteria include those parameters developed by Bamford, but far surpass them in the degree of differentiation described (See Keuchel/Aeschel 2007).

**71** | Bamford 2009, p. 89.

**72** | Ibid., p. 88ff. The criteria listed here represent a selection of the most important parameters developed by Bamford and which are of particular relevance for the independent children's theatre scene.

ject orientated activities. [...] Effective project-based arts-rich education involved the child in investigations of their direct environment and responding to issues around them through their art making process.’<sup>73</sup>

It is important that the joint artistic work effort be actively influenced and shaped by the learners<sup>74</sup> – and that wrong decisions or even a possible failure of the project can also be understood as a constructive experience:

‘Quality arts-rich education encouraged the children to take risks and allowed them to make mistakes. “Letting go” of control and being confident to enable children to make mistakes [sic!] was an important part of giving children ownership of their creative processes. Uncertainty surrounds quality arts practice and this is to be encouraged.’<sup>75</sup>

The global significance of these UNESCO quality parameters for processes in arts education is illustrated by the fact that almost all of the criteria listed by Bamford have not only been included in the recommendation section of the “Road Map for Arts Education”, which was presented as a follow-up to the first UNESCO World Conference,<sup>76</sup> but also in the “European Agenda for Culture” from the year 2010.<sup>77</sup>

Thus, it is all the more surprising that a blatant disparity exists between such widely accepted quality parameters and the actual working conditions of the artists involved.

### **2.2.3 On the Unique Educational Potential of the Independent Children’s Theatre Scene**

According to UNESCO quality parameters formulated by Anne Bamford, high-quality arts education programmes are not primarily characterised by content but, above all, by structural and methodological criteria. If one takes a closer look at these parameters, one cannot ignore the fact that the required

**73** | Ibid., p. 94. See also *ibid.*, p. 95 et *passim*.

**74** | “The children not only engaged in the activities presented, but actively designed the scope and nature of the underpinning projects” (Bamford 2009, p. 95). See also Keuchel/Aescht: “Follow-up projects at the project location occur when young people are involved in decisions during the actual course of the project. The participation of young people in the project organisation promotes the interest in further arts education activities” (Keuchel/Aescht 2007, p. 30).

**75** | Bamford 2009, p. 101.

**76** | See [www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CLT/CLT/pdf/Arts\\_Edu\\_Road\\_Map\\_en.pdf](https://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CLT/CLT/pdf/Arts_Edu_Road_Map_en.pdf)

**77** | See Lauret/Marie 2010, p. 32.

methodological success factors are largely consistent with the typical production and presentation methods of the independent children's theatre scene in Europe.

Teamwork and cooperation are not only common practice in the collective work processes of the groups and ensembles which are mainly non-hierarchically organised and which operate across systems and sectors, but rather a necessary condition for the process of joint production development.

The use of local resources and the inclusion of the local context have always been of great importance – especially in connection with participation projects – for the independent children's theatre scene. The “reality principle”<sup>78</sup> of the theatre, going out into ‘the real world’ and initiating direct actions in public places (and thus in the real everyday life of those involved and those addressed) in the form of “site-specific” projects is not only a trend which can be observed in “adult” theatre; it is just as much a focus of many theatre formats with children.

Above all, the principle of strongly process-oriented, open-ended project work on the basis of artistic research, which Bamford identified as the most significant methodological quality criterion, was confirmed by virtually all artists in the independent children's theatre scene who were surveyed as a typical working method and was, furthermore, explicitly desired and generally acknowledged as being constitutive.

Therefore, it can be noted that the independent children's theatre scene in Europe has a unique potential, in view of the ‘freedom’ it claims for itself regarding the choice of methodological access and the organisation of the artistic work process – namely, the potential to offer particularly high-quality forms of arts education activities in the field of participation formats, and thus to make an important contribution to the aim which is so very important to cultural and educational policies. This potential will lie idle, however, as long as it is not acknowledged and sufficiently financed by the public sector.

### **2.3 Independent Children's Theatre in Europe Today is also... “A Theatre for Early Years!”**

The discovery of the target group of the youngest theatre-goers, the age group from 0 to 6 years, can be seen as one of the most important innovations of the independent theatre for children since the 1990s. After the emancipatory boom experienced by children's theatre at the beginning of the 1970s, the process of upward revaluation and (aspired) equality of the target group took another decisive step forward with the establishment of the theatre for the very young. Thanks to the growing knowledge of neurobiology, psychology and educational science, a new image of childhood emerged which required that infants and small children be seen as full-fledged individuals, able and entitled to gain

artistic-aesthetic experience. This assumption is reflected paradigmatically in the title of the biggest network worldwide devoted to theatre for the very young: “Small Size, Big Citizens”.

The network, founded in Bologna in 2005 as an initiative of children’s theatre, La Baracca – Testoni Ragazzi, in which at first only four European countries participated, today connects twelve theatres from twelve different countries as well as partners from three national micro-networks which promote the structural and aesthetic (further) development of the performing arts in Europe for the target group aged 0-6 years, and which develop joint projects, programmes and initiatives for this purpose. In three consecutive funding periods, each sponsored perennially by the cultural sponsorship programme of the European Commission, the project activities of the “Small Size” network are divided into three different areas. The activities focus on the so-called “production” activities. The aim of those theatre professionals in the network is to develop and financially support new productions and co-productions, especially for the very young. In addition, there is a broad spectrum of training activities: workshops, summer academies, and residences which target artists, teachers, educators, cultural mediators, parents and children and, as the name says, are intended as education and training activities. Finally, the sector of promotional activities is very important for the maintenance and expansion of the network, since this allows new contacts to be made and a platform provided on which knowledge can be exchanged, and it also allows a common database to be maintained which is available to all users. These promotional activities not only include the funding of several publications in the field of theatre for the very young, but also multimedia activities for advertising purposes, the acquisition of new network partners and grants, and the organisation of the “Small Size” festivals and showcases, which feature not only productions by the network partners but also performances for very young audiences by external groups.

The fact that “Small Size, Big Citizens” is the only multiyear project for children that was chosen by the European Commission in 2009 for the funding period 2009-2014 reflects the great importance which even the public sector attaches to this trend in children’s theatre – a finding which, without a doubt, can be considered in the light of the debate on arts education for the very young, as was discussed earlier. Therefore, against the background of the EU concept of “life-long learning”, arts education logically means starting as early as possible.<sup>79</sup> This apparently seems to be sufficient justification for the existence of a specific art form for the very young. Thus, it was by no means a coincidence that the cooperation project “Parentalité, éducation, culture, art”,

**79** | See Final Report of the Enquête Commission: “Kultur in Deutschland”, p. 382 and Deutscher Kulturrat 2009.

realised under the auspices of the French independent group ACTA, which concentrated particularly on the very young, was sponsored by the EU education programme for life-long learning, "Grundtvig".

If, during its beginnings in the nineties, the theatre for the very young was a specialty of Italy and France, it has since more or less established itself in almost all European countries.<sup>80</sup> However, in principle, it is clearly a matter of the independent theatre scene. The institutions, it seems, are still not really interested in producing for the very young – whether it is because the expected revenues would be relatively small or because the necessary production conditions are not really compatible with the working structures of a state and municipal theatre. A positive exception is the Theater der Jungen Generation (Theatre of the Young Generation) in Dresden, whose programme offers productions for the very young all year round.

It is particularly noteworthy in this connection that it is precisely the theatre for the very young which is the area of Polish children's theatre, in which the most striking developments are currently taking place, and in which the otherwise hardly existent independent scene seems to have claimed some scope of action for itself. The beginnings of this movement go back to the initiative network of the global key pioneer in this field: the children's theatre La Baracca – Testoni Ragazzi in Bologna with the Children's Arts Centre in Poznan. In 2006, the Polish Children's Arts Centre included a guest performance from Italy in its programme; this was followed shortly thereafter by guest performances by the Toihaus Theater from Salzburg, Austria, and by the Helios theatre from Germany.

The attempt to use these good practice examples for very young theatregoers as a source of inspiration and initial impetus has apparently succeeded. A number of independent artists were inspired to experiment in this direction and to develop plays for a very young audience; independent groups such as Teatr Atofri or the Studio Teatralne Blum were founded, which are completely dedicated to the youngest theatregoers; "and even a very [sic!] well-known director for adults, Pawl Lysak, directed one piece for babies", said Alicja Morawska-Rubczak (ASSITEJ Poland). In short, a separate little movement came into being, and, thanks to that, the theatre for the very young is present throughout the entire country and has increasingly established itself especially as a working field for the independent scene.<sup>81</sup> This is confirmed by the fact that since 2010 an internationally oriented arts festival has taken place in

**80** | Switzerland is an exception in this case: This art form has not been able to assert itself so far, according to Sandra Fölnbacher (University Bern).

**81** | It should, however, be noted that in Poland there is now a national theatre exclusively devoted to the target group of very young theatregoers, Teatr małego widza (The Theatre of the Little Spectator).

Poland which is dedicated solely to the very young: *Sztuka szuka malucha* (Art seeks the Toddler), which is sponsored by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage and which has grown steadily since its inception.

Professionals active in this area see the inadequate networking within this scene as one of the major development projects still to be realised in the future. Not only are there too few possibilities to cooperate and too few opportunities to exchange information on the national level, since the independent groups working for the very young are scattered all around the country, but there is a lack of contact with other European countries where the theatre for the very young has long been a tradition, a fact particularly bemoaned by artists. In this respect, the next festival for the very young in Poland will, if possible, be organised together with an international symposium with a wide spectrum of participants, so that an end will be put to the niche existence of independent artists working in this field, and the Polish independent scene in general will gain momentum and “visibility” (including on an international level).<sup>82</sup>

In general, it can be said that there is at least one festival for the very young in most European countries, and that it is quite naturally a part of a children’s theatre scene which considers itself emancipated: *Visioni di futuro, visioni di teatro* in Bologna, *Premières rencontres* in Villiers-le-Bel in France, *Bim Bam* in Salzburg, *Twee Turven Hoog* in Almere in The Netherlands, *TakeOff* in England, *Starcatchers* in Scotland, *Fratz* in Berlin – the list is long, and it is getting longer day by day because the theatre for the very young is booming!

Demand, too, seems to be immense. As Stephan von Löwis, organiser of the renowned international arts festival *kinderkinder* in Hamburg confirms, the saying holds true: “The younger the target group, the ‘more sold out’ the performance!” Stephan Rabl (DSCHUNGEL, Vienna) says that if he programmed productions for the very young to correspond with the demand, his programme would consist only of performances for this audience. However, it cannot be ignored that despite the great demand and the general upswing which the theatre for the very young has experienced in Europe in recent years, readiness is still lacking when it comes to sponsoring this art form with public funds or to acknowledging it as an art form at all. “There are [sic!] quite a few that make theatre for [the very young, author’s note T. K.], but they have no structural money, so there is not a real infrastructure for this age-group (which is very frustrating)”, says the Dutch theatre expert Brechtje Zwaneveld about the situation of artists in The Netherlands; even such prestigious groups with a high standing throughout Europe as La Baracca in Bologna, can, in their own words, only finance their productions for the very young with the help of funds

**82** | This information and these comments are based on the extensive elucidations of the Polish experts Alicja Morawska-Rubczak (ASSITEJ Poland), Zbigniew Rudzinski, and Barbara Malecka (both from Children’s Arts Centre in Poznan).

from the “Small Size” network or through collaborations with institutions. A specific funding from public sources does not exist.

The reason for this may lie in the basic problem of legitimising the theatre for the very young. On the one hand, even its most avid proponents cannot deny that the theatre for the very young must constantly assert itself in competition with other ‘common’ everyday experiences. To the extent that practices are frequently demonstrated and repeated on stage which children are familiar with in their family environment and in nursery school – playing with materials like paper, wood, wool, metal, experimenting with colours, sounds, smells, etc., the theatre always runs the risk of being replaced as a sphere for experience. This is all the more the case when the performance on stage, in the sense of a post-dramatic performance, no longer has a symbolic reference function and does not take place in the mimetic simulation modus of ‘pretend’, and actors do not play roles but present and demonstrate their own – childlike? – play with objects. The producers of the aesthetic experience a child has when watching such a performance have to accept the fact that such an experience is inevitably compared with those which a small child makes when, for instance, it sees a rainbow or, even more so, when a child can make its own experiences playing in the sand, with wood, or on the piano.

On the other hand, one must keep in mind that the actual receptive experiences of small children during a theatre performance conceived especially for them have not been researched to date and, presumably, not all will be able to be researched. The thesis that the “theatre for children under three years has special qualities which distinguish it from other activities which can delight a small child” has not been proven up to now.<sup>83</sup> This is also true for the premise “that theatre for under-three-year-olds represents an indispensable component in the aesthetic development of an individual”.<sup>84</sup> The danger that a “small child is used as a projection surface”<sup>85</sup> on which to express adult, neo-romantic fantasies of a childlike world of experience is great, whereby a certain concept of “childhood” in the early 21st century is implied but seldom questioned.<sup>86</sup> An inevitable fact with which theatre makers have to live is that a measurable contribution to the aesthetic development of a child by the theatre for the very young has not been empirically proven to date.

**83** | Viehöver/Wunsch 2011, p. 4.

**84** | Ibid., p. 4.

**85** | Wunsch 2011, p. 15.

**86** | Ibid., p. 14. See also Viehöver Wunsch 2011, p. 6.



Figure 2: *'I Colori Dell'Acqua', La Baracca – Testoni Ragazzi, Bologna, Italy, 2003. Photograph: Matteo Chiura*

## 2.4 Independent Children's Theatre in Europe Today is... Interdisciplinary!

In the course of the past decades, independent children's theatre in Europe did not only emancipate itself structurally. Aesthetically, it demonstrates a growing variety of forms and a constantly increasing spectrum of contents. It has laid claim to all formats, genres and sectors, as well as all manner of appearance of the contemporary independent theatre and has enhanced, so it seems, its image in the areas where it interacts with bordering art forms and disciplines. The German term *vierte Sparte* (fourth discipline), which is used to describe the children's and young people's theatre in state, municipal and regional theatres, is more misleading than ever, since it implies that children's and young people's theatre can be located in a category which is separate from the traditional fields of drama, opera and ballet, and in doing so fails to acknowledge the fact that

music and dance theatre have long become part of the spectrum of performing arts for young audiences.

As far as the time period relevant to this study is concerned, it should be noted that the year 1990 does not represent a significant turning point with regard to subject matter and themes for children's theatre in Western Europe.<sup>87</sup> A far-reaching paradigm shift had already taken place at the beginning of the seventies when children's and young people's theatre radically extended its scope of subject matter as part of the general reform of the system of thought and action in the field of children's and youth literature. Since then there have been very few absolute taboo topics, and they are becoming fewer and fewer, or as Maurice Yendt has appropriately summarised it: "Il y a bien sur des tabous sociaux ou moraux mais pas plus que dans le théâtre s'adressant aux adultes". A review of the past two decades indicates that the most significant developments on the aesthetic level have been primarily in the area of forms and formats; the interest of theatre makers has mainly focused on experimenting with new post-dramatic narrative styles.

Probably the most important development in this context is the general trend towards cross-genre and interdisciplinary projects. Therefore, it is not surprising that "children's theatre" in many contexts is called the "performing arts for children", and that "theatre" has become the "performing arts" and "théâtre" the "spectacles vivants". Maurice Yendt regards this trend as a quite natural development:

'Cela va de soi. Depuis Sophocle et Aristophane, le théâtre est un art ontologiquement syncrétique qui a toujours fait appel, pour affirmer son identité artistique, à beaucoup d'autres formes d'art (littérature, musique, danse, arts visuels, etc.).'

However, the increasing frequency with which professionals in the independent children's theatre scene pursue this interdisciplinary approach and its growing importance for their artistic work is remarkable. Three areas in particular must be mentioned regarding the general orientation towards "crossover formats" which have strongly influenced the landscape of children's theatre.

First and most notable is music, and above all the dance theatre scene for young audiences which has been developing rapidly for years, and for which interdisciplinary work and the equal interaction of different arts and forms of expression are obviously necessary.

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**87** | At this point it should again be noted that the countries mainly included in this study are all located in Western Europe; Poland and Russia, as stated earlier, have a special status, not least because of historical and political reasons. The children's theatre of the former GDR is also largely neglected in this context in the general comments regarding developments prior to 1990 and the early 1990s.

Second, the meeting of performing and visual arts is still a popular and recurring phenomenon in the area of children's theatre. The spectrum in this sector is very broad and extends from the staging of art objects and video arrangements, as in the case of the successful production of *Hinter den Spiegeln* (2011) by the Helios theatre in Hamm, to interactive installations which members of the audience can walk through and experience alone (!), without the presence of actors, as has been repeatedly and successfully implemented by the Italian-Swiss collective Trickster.

Third, a crossover format with an atypically artistic discipline is becoming more and more common, namely an opening of children's theatre in the direction of science: "Through the differentiation of sciences, the rapidly increasing amount of knowledge, and the new media, formats have gained in importance which present scientific contents with unconventional means and in which the person of the scientist is visible",<sup>88</sup> and, indeed, this can be increasingly observed in the area of independent theatre for young audiences. In "lecture performances" and other documentary formats which explicitly place themselves in the service of science through presentations which illustrate scientific contents by appealing to the audience's senses, socially relevant topics are narrated rather than acted out in a multimedia approach and with artistic means. More recently, in Germany alone, new plays have appeared on the subject of money (see the production of the same name by the Theater an der Parkaue, 2013 and the *Kinderbank* by the Fundus Theater, 2012), on the scarcity of drinking water (*Durst*, Grips Theater, 2013), on environmental pollution (*Trashedy*, Leandro Kees, 2012) and on the influence and manipulation by media and news (*Der Rest der Welt*, Pulk Fiktion, 2011). That the appearance of these formats is undoubtedly closely related to the general cultural and political interest in the promotion of arts education is one of the central internal dynamics in the system of children's and young people's theatre.

To illustrate the increasing interdisciplinary differentiation of independent children's theatre in Europe, the area of dance theatre will be dealt with in more detail in the following chapter – on the one hand because, as will be demonstrated, a particular importance is attached to it regarding arts education opportunities for children, and on the other because the structural and aesthetic change in the system of children's theatre has perhaps most conspicuously manifested itself and taken hold in the area of dance.



Figure 3: 'Die Harmonie der Gefiederten'/'L'Harmonie de la Gent à Plumes', AGORA Theater, St. Vith, Belgium, 2014. Photograph: Willi Filz

## 2.5 Dance Theatre for Children: The Ideal Way to Arts Education?

"Modern boys want to be dancers rather than firemen"<sup>89</sup> – such was the title of an article which appeared in the British newspaper *The Daily Telegraph* on 17 August 2013 and described a "cultural shift". As was discovered in two empirical studies, the profession of "dancer" ranks third for boys as a career option after "doctor" and "footballer" – and before "fireman". The outcome of this study may be surprising – perhaps positively so – and with a view to the current developments which are taking place in the field of dance theatre in Europe, it seems only logical, since the most fundamental and significant structural changes in the independent children's theatre scene are taking place in this area. The art form of dance, "which until not too long ago was, in many places, without public attention, funds and a political lobby",<sup>90</sup> has managed to establish itself, especially in the area of participative dance formats *with* children and young people, as an essential component of arts education (and thus of social life) and has been able to secure a prominent position for itself within the independent performing arts for young audiences.

<sup>89</sup> | See <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/10242601/Modern-boys-want-to-be-dancers-rather-than-firemen.html>

<sup>90</sup> | Foik 2012, p. 606.

Networks are being founded all over Europe. First and foremost is the impressively successful, EU-subsidised “Fresh Tracks Europe”;<sup>91</sup> the number of dance productions and initiatives is growing steadily, as is the offer of specific dance festivals for children (including the very young). So far, the oldest and largest annual international dance festival for young people worldwide is the *Szene Bunte Wähne* in Vienna, which has existed since 1998.

Although dance theatre for young people has enjoyed a comparably long tradition in a few European countries (e.g., The Netherlands, where its tradition generally runs parallel to that of children’s and young people’s theatre), the incorporation of the art form of dance into the spectrum of the performing arts for children and young people is really a phenomenon of the late nineties and, above all, the beginning of the 21st century in many other countries, where it has only lately begun to enjoy concentrated public attention and funding policy activities. The Swedish Arts Council initiated special support measures for dance theatre for young people in 2009 and increased the subsidies for new projects as well as for existing initiatives.<sup>92</sup>

Germany can be considered a best practice model for arts education measures when it comes to sponsoring dance for children and young people, since it conceived and successfully implemented a regional and supra-regional

**91** | At this time there are eleven institutions from eight countries who are members and partners of “Fresh Tracks Europe”. One of the core members is the dance and theatre laboratory “Het Lab Utrecht” (NL), whose initiative sparked the founding of the network. Others are the Centre for Performing Arts “Kopergietery” (B), the theatre and dance house “DSCHUNGEL Vienna” (A) and the independent Centre for International Dance Art “tanzhaus nrw” (D). Other partners are the venue for contemporary dance “Dansstationen” (SWE), the agencies for contemporary dance “Soltumatu Tantsu Ühendus” (EST) and “Aabendans” (DK) and the festivals “Imagine” (UK), “Krokus Festival” (B), “Szene Bunte Wähne” (A) and “Tweetakt” (NL). See also [www.freshtracks-europe.com](http://www.freshtracks-europe.com) and the comprehensive documentation in English “Fresh Tracks Europe (ed.): Innovation in Dance for Young Audiences 2013”.

**92** | See also the following extract from the publications of the German Cultural Council: “The interest in both classical and modern contemporary dance has increased markedly in recent years – not least among children and young people. The Government is making a concentrated effort to enable dance to reach a greater proportion of the general public and get more people to discover dance as an art form. House of Dance (Dansens hus) is being given special funds to put high-quality dance in focus, in cooperation with other dance institutes. Children and young people are central target groups for this initiative. The national programme Dance in School, which has been coordinated by the Swedish Arts Council since 2005, has been expanded. The National Dance in School Institute was established at Luleå University of Technology in March 2009 to increase research in the area” (<http://www.government.se/content/1/c6/15/21/08/bc7ed630.pdf>).

structural development plan, which is unique in Europe to date.<sup>93</sup> The so-called “Tanzplan” of the German Federal Cultural Foundation, which was implemented in June 2004, probably represents the most comprehensive cultural and political impulse for the contemporary dance scene in years.<sup>94</sup>

With the programme “Tanzplan”, the German Cultural Foundation, for the first time in the history of the German Federal Republic, specifically earmarked funds to promote dance in order to support artists and next-generation artists, professional dance training, arts education and dance as a cultural heritage, to enhance the public perception of dance as an art form, and to develop a model for longer-term structural funding measures. For this purpose, a total of 12.5 million euros was set aside between 2005 and 2010 to be used in financing a great number of local dance initiatives, training projects, research projects and publications.<sup>95</sup> Thanks to the “match funding principle”, which required that the regions and communities provide 50% of the subsidies themselves and the declaration of intent requested of the financiers regarding the absorption of costs after the end of the project running time, it was not only possible for those parties involved to guarantee long-term planning, but to invest a total sum of approximately 21 million euros in the dance sector.<sup>96</sup> More than 80% of the initiatives are still running; eight of the nine regional dance plans are still being financed by the regions and communities.<sup>97</sup> Four hundred twenty-six project partners and three hundred eighty-nine choreographers from fifty countries were involved in this gigantic programme. Six hundred eighty-one of the one thousand two hundred seventy-seven dance performances were for and with children and young people;<sup>98</sup> especially in the area of arts education through participation formats, “Tanzplan” has an extremely good record, with approximately 13,000 dance lessons involving over 30,000 children and young people after five years’ running time.<sup>99</sup>

However, two things were important: on the one hand, the necessary artistic, personnel and financial prerequisites should be created in order to put on professional dance productions for a young target group and to develop sustainable production structures;<sup>100</sup> on the other hand, many different educational offers, ranging from practical dance instruction to group reception

**93** | See Foik 2012, p. 605.

**94** | Müller/Schneeweis 2006, p. 136f.

**95** | [http://www.tanzplan-deutschland.de/plan.php?id\\_language=1](http://www.tanzplan-deutschland.de/plan.php?id_language=1)

**96** | Foik 2012, p. 606.

**97** | See Odenthal 2005, p. 108.

**98** | See *ibid.*

**99** | See Foik 2012, p. 606.

**100** | See Kessel/Müller/Kosubek/Barz 2011, p. 22.

and reflection of dance performances, should be made available which would provide different ways to access dance as an art form. For this purpose,

‘in collaboration with elementary schools, secondary schools, pre-schools and youth centres, a basis was developed to communicate and teach the art of dance. In particular, in urban neighbourhoods in which the access to dance was difficult, the collaboration with children’s and youth centres was intended as a continuous cooperation. Together with the institutions involved, ways were found to achieve a long-term implementation in order to make dance an integral part of these facilities.’<sup>101</sup>

A case study with exemplary character for such local “Tanzplan” initiatives is the success story of the programme, *Take-off: Junger Tanz – Tanzplan Düsseldorf*, which was implemented from 2006 to 2010 with the “tanzhaus nrw” as project organiser and which is described here in brief. The facts speak for themselves:

#### *Formats*

- 32 different productions
- 12 prizes and acknowledgements for 6 productions
- 43 guest performances from 12 different countries
- 1 annual festival
- 20 dance productions with children and young people
- 237 courses and workshops at partner schools, youth centres and pre-schools
- Advanced training offers for dancers, choreographers, and teachers

#### *Players*

- 4 theatres
- 1 concert house
- 160 independent choreographers, dancers, and dance instructors from 15 different countries
- 4 institutions of higher learning, 1 university, 10 schools, 4 youth centres, 2 pre-schools

#### *Partners*

- 26 local
- 8 supra-regional
- 11 international

#### *Participants*

- 6712 participants in dance projects for children and young people at schools, youth centres, and pre-schools

- 567 children and young people as dancers in productions
- 9017 hours of instruction at schools, youth centres, pre-schools
- 100,088 spectators<sup>102</sup>

It speaks for the success of this programme that after the end of “Tanzplan” the state of North Rhine-Westphalia and the city of Düsseldorf assumed all costs for subsidising *Take-Off* and for the associated festival which still takes place annually.<sup>103</sup>

The German Federal Cultural Foundation has also continued its commitment after the successful conclusion of its pilot project and has subsidised two new funds, “Tanzfonds Partner” and the “Tanzfonds Erbe” with a sum of 2.5 million euros,<sup>104</sup> whereby the “Tanzfonds Partner” is explicitly aimed at the target group of children and young people and at the development of multiyear alliances between schools and dance institutions (theatres, dance companies, and choreographic centres).<sup>105</sup>

Furthermore, more or less in the wake of this comprehensive structural development programme, many other initiatives and target-group-specific arts education and educational formats have emerged as initiatives of institutions and individuals in the German-speaking region, which, in the tradition of the “community dance” concept, are especially devoted to promoting dance *with* children and young persons:

‘In many cities and federal states, different projects were founded with the aim of establishing dance in mainstream schools. The networks between the different initiatives and institutions in this field have grown and have become more structured, not least through the joint foundation of an umbrella organisation: the Federal Association of Dance in Schools (Bundesverband Tanz in Schulen e.V.).’<sup>106</sup>

This association, founded in 2007, which has set itself the aims of establishing contemporary dance as an integral part of arts education in German schools and securing and further developing the quality of respective offers,<sup>107</sup> has in

**102** | See *ibid.* p. 24.

**103** | See Kessel/Müller/Kosubek/Barz 2011, p. 178.

**104** | Foik 2012, p. 606.

**105** | See also the informative letter from the German Federal Cultural Foundation at [www.tanzfonds.de](http://www.tanzfonds.de) and [www.kulturstiftung-bund.de](http://www.kulturstiftung-bund.de)

**106** | Foik 2008, p. 54.

**107** | See [www.bundesverband-tanzinschulen.org](http://www.bundesverband-tanzinschulen.org), and also Klinge 2012, p. 4. There exist very good empirical studies in the form of evaluation research which were contracted by the Federal Association for Dance at Schools, see Federal Association for Dance at Schools 2009 as well as the work group Evaluation and Research of the Federal Associa-

its own way strongly invigorated and structurally enhanced the independent scene of dance theatre for young audiences.

The success of this initiative clearly indicates that more and more dance projects with children and young people extend the framework or even go beyond the scope defined by schools – whether because participants rehearse in a professional dance studio off school premises or because performances no longer take place ‘only’ in a school setting but also in professional theatres or dance institutes or in site-specific contexts.<sup>108</sup> The current efforts of the federal association are in line with the slogan “Tanz in Schulen geht raus!” (“Dance in Schools reaches out!”) and are aimed at creating new or enhanced structures which can lead to establishing collaborations between independent dance artists and schools and even informal educational facilities like children’s welfare centres, education offices, day care centres, houses of dance and theatres.<sup>109</sup>

Furthermore, the newly initiated programme “Chance Tanz”,<sup>110</sup> which is part of the initiative “Culture is Strength – Alliances for Education”, is another dance promotion concept especially implemented for educationally disadvantaged children and young people.

One example of a successfully implemented dance programme which has not only helped to create structures, but which can be traced back to the initiative of a single individual, is the good practice model “TanzZeit – Zeit für

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tion for Dance at Schools 2009. In order to be able to monitor the existence and development of the projects, the federal association established a project data base at <http://www.bv-tanzinschulen.info/30+M5713274d807.html> for all of Germany, which is maintained and used by the heads of projects and provides a set of tools with which the different projects can be documented, evaluated and reflected. Recently, the organisation has published quality parameters with recommendations on the implementation, quality development and quality assurance for dance projects at schools by dancers, choreographers and dance instructors. (See [www.bv-tanzinschulen.de/qualitaetsrahmen.html](http://www.bv-tanzinschulen.de/qualitaetsrahmen.html)).

**108** | See Bundesverband Tanz in Schulen 2013, p. 5.

**109** | See *ibid.*, p. 4.

**110** | See also an extract from the programme description: “‘Chance Tanz’ promotes local project activities in which children and young people participate in and actively organise a dance-creative process under professional guidance by dance instructors/educators. The results of the projects are then presented in a small- or large-scale context. Besides the active participation in the dance programme, other activities involving the reception of dance in the form of attendance of performances and rehearsals as well as discussions and meetings with dancers are included. Three different formats are planned, Tanz\_Start, Tanz\_Intensiv and Tanz\_Sonderprojekt, which mainly differ from each other in their defined timeframes (30 and 65-80/100 hours of dance). The projects are led by professional dance artists” (<http://www.bv-tanzinschulen.info/30+M557164d6160.html>).

Tanz in Schulen" in Berlin, which was conceived by the Italian independent dance artist Livia Patrizi in 2005 and at its outset encompassed 37 school classes, 40 independent dancers and choreographers and a start-up grant of 48,000 euros from the Kultursenat of Berlin.<sup>111</sup> Since then, the project has not only been implemented in Berlin, but is also linked nationwide to numerous cooperation partners and institutions, and can thus offer young dancers professional production conditions in prestigious theatres like the HAU or the Radialsystem V in Berlin. The project also aims at establishing dance as a regular weekly part of morning classes for school children.<sup>112</sup> Also in this case, the project was financed by means of a mixed financing strategy: The personnel and material costs of the coordinating office were borne by the Berlin Project Fund for Arts Education; the fees for the independent dance artists for instruction were paid through subsidies to the participating schools, voluntary contributions made by parents, through grants from municipal district authorities and resources from the community management in Berlin, as well as through foundations, patrons and sponsors.<sup>113</sup> Since 2010, the financing of "TanzZeit", backed up by investments from Rotary and booster clubs, has been a fixed item in the budget of the Senate Administration for Education, Youth and Science (Senatsverwaltung für Bildung, Jugend und Wissenschaft), which not only represents an important and reliable financial base, but gives a clear signal that the importance of the facilitation of arts education through dance is gradually gaining in standing.<sup>114</sup> Through support from the public sector, "TanzZeit" has been able to expand steadily since its founding; in the seven years of its existence, over 100 schools and over 11,000 pupils from all districts of Berlin have taken part in the project.<sup>115</sup> Yet, the number of schools interested in becoming project partners far exceeds the available budget.<sup>116</sup>

If time has been taken here to describe in detail all of these exemplary structural measures from and in Germany, this is because they demonstrate what is possible when extensive measures concerning culture and arts education are implemented which involve all the relevant players in a development process and, in contrast to one-off investments in flagship projects, create nationwide structures which offer incentives for local politics to (financially) commit itself long-term in the future.

It is therefore particularly welcome, because the area of dance within the performing arts for children may be assigned a special function which justifies

**111** | See von Zedlitz 2009, p. 8ff. and p. 88f.

**112** | See *ibid.*, p. 68.

**113** | *Ibid.*, p. 91.

**114** | See Beyeler/Patrizi 2012, p. 603.

**115** | See *ibid.*, p. 600.

**116** | See *ibid.*, p. 603.

the further systematic funding of independent children's theatre on the whole. In contrast to drama theatre and the theatre of the spoken word, dance – non-verbal, sensually specific, physical, archaic – reaches out to all classes, cultures and age groups (including pre-readers<sup>117</sup>):

'Since the human body as the direct and immediate medium of expression is in the centre of the communication, dance can reach everyone, regardless of age, sex or origin, and can communicate human feelings less on an intellectual as on a sensual-emotional level.'<sup>118</sup>

The relevance of dance is not to be overestimated with regard to the intercultural learning aspect in the area of arts education programmes. Great importance is attached to dance as a non-verbal medium because it transcends language barriers and can thus function as an important means to develop communicative and social competences in children. In fact, empirical studies prove that the "positive resonance of existing" that dance offers is particularly high among pupils from migrant backgrounds.<sup>119</sup>

In addition, particularly in connection with participative dance formats *with* children, an important advantage of dance, as opposed to other performing arts and in accordance with the Community Dance concept, is that everyone can move and dance in her own way without any kind of previous knowledge:

'In this sense "everyone is equal" in dance, - whereby everyone can find his or her individual role and importance within the group. A personal feeling of achievement and feedback from the group enable participants to make positive experiences with regard to differentiation and a sense of belonging. As part of the everyday school routine, dance can promote integration and help to counteract the tendencies toward social exclusion.'<sup>120</sup>

Above all, a particular potential is inherent to dance because it is a physical phenomenon. Children can make their (first) aesthetic experiences which are not conceivable in a comparable intensity with any other art form. Since the human body is a "medium permeable to emotions" through which "experiences in and with the world can be processed and symbolized" as well as a "centre of action which implements experiences, ideas, plans and insights", and which provides the sensual basis from which "resistance, differentiation and learning experiences originate",<sup>121</sup> experience and insight potentials come into play in a remarkable way in dance. "In an exploratory, playful approach to the possibilities given by

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**117** | Suchy 2012, p. 14.

**118** | Foik 2008, p. 51.

**119** | See Kosubek/Barz 2011, p. 140.

**120** | Foik 2008, p. 52 – emphasis in original

**121** | Klinge 2010, p. 90.

the movement and expression of one's own body, dance offers the potential of immediate attention and sensitivity",<sup>122</sup> whereby, in relation to other physical activities like sports, a comparably large freedom for individual expression is always given. "Physical activity is enhanced in creative dance by the possibility to express personal emotions, situations, experiences in a reflected and structured manner," Livia Patrizi said at the awards ceremony for the German Prize for Violence Prevention in October 2007. "This movement which is transformed into dance can help children to overcome feelings and thus to experience a kind of liberation".<sup>123</sup> In this respect, dance would appear to have a general potential within arts education as an optimal initiation experience for children.

In summary, the following can be said: If, admittedly, contemporary dance had long led a "Cinderella-like existence among the arts",<sup>124</sup> this Cinderella is now getting the "royal treatment", not only because of its relevance to arts education, but largely because of it. "Dance is the ideal way in arts education to create inclusive communities in schools as well as in social and cultural facilities",<sup>125</sup> as formulated in a thesis of the Federal Association of Dance in Schools (Bundesverband Tanz in Schulen). Now it is up to the European makers of policy on arts education to determine whether things will continue on this course, e.g. maintaining and promoting the structures which have been created and developing them further with independent dance professionals.



Figure 4: 'TRASHedy', Leandro Kees, Performing Group Cologne, 2012.  
Photograph: Anika Freytag

**122** | Klinge 2012, p. 5.

**123** | Cited according to von Zedlitz 2009, p. 14.

**124** | von Zedlitz 2009, p. 7.

**125** | <http://www.bv-tanzinschulen.info/30+M551a96f62a1.html>



Figure 5: 'Alice', De Stilte, Breda, Netherlands, 2009. Photograph: Hans Gerritsen

## 2.6 Interim Conclusion I: Risks Involved in the Developments Outlined

Although the developments presented here can generally be considered success stories and describe positive, emancipatory opening and expansion processes in the field of independent children's theatre in Europe, it cannot be denied that, despite all the enthusiasm and respect, some tendencies should be viewed with a critical eye. This is true for the theatre productions *for* children as well as for the participation formats *with* children.

### 2.6.1 Theatre for Children: Stop under-challenging children! Strive for a complex simplicity!

One of the main dangers of children's theatre, including in the 21st century, is what Holger Noltze termed the "lie of easiness", the danger of "confusing communication with simplification"<sup>126</sup> and of subjecting art to a simplification and disambiguation process in the course of supposed 'communication' – a

conclusion which can certainly be seen in direct connection with the general trend towards the commercialisation of art:

'Mass media fear complexity. Complexity is feared as an obstacle to mass and broad accessibility of the public. [...] What is true for media on the public marketplace and what seems understandable, has become, in the meantime, also [...] a principle of the systems, "education" and "the cultural sector". Indeed, a "quota" also prevails here, and similar mechanisms of convergence have also come into play here.'<sup>127</sup>

The great taboos of the art (communication) market are thus complexity and effort; conversely, "a strategy of harmonisation" and "dedifferentiation" in terms of "more of the same easily digestible soup"<sup>128</sup> is the order of the day.

This fatal "reductionism" can, according to Holger Noltze, "especially be observed [...] when the child and art meet".<sup>129</sup> This statement is repeatedly confirmed for children's theatre – either because the practical constraints of the market do not (or no longer) allow working methods which do not have a commercial orientation, or because the artists themselves have (too) little faith and confidence in their young audience. Time and again, theatre productions can be seen at prestigious international festivals which tend to confirm clichés about childhood rather than actually deal with children's current living conditions and, possibly, suffering. Children are 'picked up' in their receptive behaviour where adults assume them to be, without basing these assumptions on sound scientific research. Thus, children are regularly under-challenged, and a mistrust in their intellectual and emotional abilities is virtually guaranteed: "It's not only in Poland that the children in contemporary world are changing faster than adults' knowledge (imagination) about that", Zbigniew Rudzinski comments paradigmatically.

It would be more desirable if theatre makers working in the field of children's theatre did not look *down* on their (intended) target group but *engaged them at eye level*, so that by empathising and assuming the target group's perspective, they can enter into a direct communication and direct dialogue with the audience in order to understand its views, interests and needs.

This does not mean that children's theatre should give up its target group orientation and specificity. It has much more to do with the impartial fact that, as a rule, there is a (more or less pronounced) generation gap between producers and recipients, that it is primarily adults who make theatre for children and are thus essentially different from their target group. Analogous to the demand made by Hans-Heino Ewers with regard to literature for children

**127** | Ibid., p. 233f.

**128** | Ibid., p. 104.

**129** | Ibid., p. 230.

and young people in comparison to “adult” literature, the aim of children’s and young people’s literature should not be an identity with adult theatre but solely a separate and equally valid identity. The “differentiation [...] of the subject’s perspective” should definitely be maintained:

‘In children’s literature, the world in which the child lives is the starting point for the development of a common world for children and adults which they, if not exclusively, then primarily, describe in its significance for children.’<sup>130</sup>

In this context, if one speaks of “easiness” or, in general, ‘simplicity’ of the theatre for children, then one should speak (if at all) of a “complex simplicity”<sup>131</sup> in the sense of an “elementarisation of complex knowledge with the help of a simple, elementary-literary [or genuine theatrical, author’s note T.K.] process”, says Maria Lypp<sup>132</sup> – and not of a hierarchisation or valuation of whatever kind with regard to the audience orientation. Marcel Cremer, the founder and long-term artistic director of the Belgian children’s and young people’s theatre group AGORA, from Saint-Vith, exposed the problems behind this demand with regard to the standard practices particularly common to children’s theatre:

‘In some restaurants there is a page of the menu with children’s dishes. Usually you can find noodles with red sauce, chips with ketchup or mayonnaise, fish sticks with mashed potatoes, sausages with potato salad, often served with a cola or other soft drink free of charge. Careful! Whoever goes to the restaurant to eat what he always eats can save himself the trip. Whoever goes to the theatre in the hope of seeing the old familiar, what is well-known, hackneyed or reprocessed, that person is lacking the most important prerequisite: hunger for something new, unknown, strange. In order to avoid this conflict, some theatre people prefer to sell children and young people fish sticks. I am of the opinion that you should offer them fish and show them how to remove the bones. Fresh fish is much healthier than fish sticks. It contains many vital substances because the creature can still be recognised, and therefore it tells us more about life than fish sticks whose origin and identity have been mutilated beyond recognition. The pre-requisite is always hunger, hunger for something new.’<sup>133</sup>

To presume that children experience this hunger – and, moreover, to think them capable of being able to deal with something new and unfamiliar

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**130** | Ewers 1995, p. 23.

**131** | Jahnke 2001, p. 129.

**132** | Lypp 2005, p. 831.

**133** | Cremer, Marcel: “Das Sehen lernen.” Report as part of the school theatre festival “Spring auf!” in May 2004 in Luxemburg. Unpublished original manuscript, kindly made available by the AGORA Theater in St. Vith, Belgium.

(especially because this is expected of children on a daily basis anyway, not only in the theatre) – could without a doubt help theatre for children to further emancipate itself aesthetically and to ensure increased quality.

### 2.6.2 Theatre with Children: For whom? How? And why?

In connection with participative theatre formats *with* children, the process orientation of projects is often stressed, to which the players clearly avow themselves and which is even invoked as a necessary condition for joint artistic research. Conversely, however, the concluding public presentation of the result is hardly at issue, but is understood as a constitutive element of the artistic work.

Yet this often gives rise to a problem. If, when working with children, the 'journey is its own reward', and thus the result shown to the public is only relevant with regard to the process from which it arose, then such a project must be open to the question: To what extent is it suited at all to be shown to an audience which itself was not part of the process? The 'process' does not become a 'product' solely by virtue of the performance.

During a discussion with the audience at the end of a performance of a participative music theatre project in Berlin, a member of the audience expressed her feeling of unease in dialogue with the actors: "I like it when an evening of theatre raises questions that I can think about. In your case I had the feeling that you gave me a lot of *answers* which you had found for yourselves during the rehearsals – but I don't know your questions! Somehow I felt left out." The danger is that this feeling of 'being left out' on the part of the audience can result when the process of 'trying things out' and the children involved in this process are paramount. There is nothing wrong with this *per se*, but in this case one must carefully consider which role the audience should have during the performance and how it can be explicitly involved.

What Manfred Jahnke says about the impossibility of subjecting a purely process-oriented participation format to normal theatre critique can be applied to the question regarding the role of the audience as a whole:

'The tried and tested instruments of a theatre critique can hardly be used in connection with groups which are focused on self-awareness and in which sensibilisation and emancipation of the individual are the most important concerns. On the contrary, such work must be protected from the public which can only be present in the role of a voyeur.'<sup>134</sup>

Thus, it seems necessary to rethink these circumstances with regard to theatre projects with children in order to ensure that the eminently desirable public

presentation of participation formats for the players and for the audience is an enriching and pleasant experience in many instances.

Another key question which must be asked and answered anew for every theatre project with children is the question of which role the children themselves play in the course of these formats and in what way they should and can specifically ‘participate’. Is it about *doing* or is it about *participating*? Should the professional artists bring their expertise into play and ‘stage’ and guide the children, or should they help the children to find their own way and just initiate and, if necessary, catalyse the children’s own artistic activity?

In the meantime, there are countless examples of both variations – and there are just as many questions that seem poorly thought-out. The result is frequently fraudulent labelling! Whereas such projects are very often promoted to the public with phrases like “self-determination”, “artistic self-expression” and “grass-roots democratic participation” of children (and these buzzwords have top priority when it comes to acquisitioning funds), one look behind the scenes usually reveals that the possibilities young players actually have to influence the creation of the project are very limited. There are some quite pragmatic reasons for this. If a project with children is then performed onstage, possibly as part of the evening programme, this implies that the respective product must be ‘worth’ the normal ticket price – which raises the question regarding the extent to which a project which is performed by lay persons is permitted to be ‘amateurish’ and ‘unprofessional’. There is nothing to be said against the fact that professional artists contribute their professionalism and their experience, but, in contrast, it is desirable that the asymmetry between artists and lay people is used productively and is made fruitful for the children as a learning opportunity. Yet it must be borne in mind that the danger of instrumentalisation is ever present, and the younger the lay persons are with whom the artists are working, the greater this danger. Where children are only ‘incorporated’ into the plays of adults, without their understanding the overall sense of the play and without their ideas and approaches being taken into account, the term ‘participation’ borders on the absurd, and the idea of self-determination is turned into the contrary.

One last ‘danger zone’ can be identified with a view to the current aesthetic developments and trends in the area of children’s theatre: the demand for arts education, which is growing increasingly louder. The problem is not the demand itself, but rather the accompanying implied concentration on the area of education *through* the arts as described by Anne Bamford. If one speaks of arts education, what is almost always meant is the communication of knowledge on the level of content; genuinely artistic learning content in the sense of education *in* the arts, which is certainly just as necessary, is neglected or totally ignored. Therefore, the danger of instrumentalisation is lurking here as well, albeit on a different level:

'Precisely theatre for children and young people runs the risk of being instrumentalised and of being used as an extension of educational institutions. Many makers of children's theatre see themselves as imparters of knowledge and educators rather than as artists and researchers. We, makers of children's theatre are often required to focus on specific subjects and problems which fit into the current lesson plan or the general public discourse. Not infrequently, it was about communicating preconceived opinions and approaches, an accepted pedagogical version [...]. The young audience should be able to comprehend, learn and later implement (if not to say, parrot) something in particular.'<sup>135</sup>

Children's theatre seems to be facing this danger all over Europe. Karin Helander (Stockholm University) confirmed this with regard to Swedish children's theatre, which is generally considered highly developed and aesthetically progressive: "Children's culture (and theatre for children) is still very much connected with school culture and concepts like learning and understanding and intelligibility in a rather rigid way".

Against the background of the worldwide debate on arts education, one can also discover a reason for the current trend towards the documentary theatre formats described earlier, which serve to impart knowledge and present scientific findings in a manner 'suitable for children'. However, in this context, other sources of danger and problems result.

For one, children's theatre, if it is primarily devoted to imparting knowledge, puts itself in the rather unfavourable position of being in competition with other media and formats which have the same intention (but which perhaps have the advantage of being able to do it better!). Can theatre for children "explain" complex scientific subjects better than, for instance, the well-reputed German *Programme with the Mouse* (*Die Sendung mit der Maus*)? Is a participation project better suited to encourage children to experiment with materials like metal, wool, wood or trash than a project week at school, or simply a school lesson using action- and production-oriented methods?

In addition, the rediscovered legitimization of art as a source of new, alternative knowledge, as Nikolaus Müller-Schöll explains, almost automatically obliges it to subordinate itself to those other disciplines and to allow itself to be measured by the same criteria as a science – which, in the final analysis, would prove to be unfavorable and unsatisfactory:

'If one looks [...] beyond the much noted showcase examples which are publicised under the mantle of 'artistic research', the suspicion arises that the democratisation of art and

**135** | Pahl, Silvia: "Da sein – ein Manifest" (January 2013). Unpublished original manuscript kindly made available by the author of "theater 3 hasen oben" from Immichenhain/Deutschland.

science might sometimes be of pedagogical value and its integrative intention perhaps good, but the actual result is frequently edutainment or arts and crafts, lightweight science and watered-down art. Perhaps it is time to point out that artistic research can only take place where artists are working on their very own questions and issues.<sup>136</sup>

Even greater than the danger presented in the area of “artistic research” is the risk of children’s theatre being usurped by a unilaterally interpreted educational mandate in the area of the so-called “theatre for the very young” – and even more so when especially “keen parents in a state of early education panic”<sup>137</sup> are involved, who take their toddlers to the theatre so they can ‘learn’ something. In such cases, it is often forgotten that the theatre for the very young is, or should primarily be, the beginning of a theatrical socialisation process.

Since theatre for the very young involves initiation experiences which facilitate the access to theatre for such a very young audience, a performance which communicates the basic characteristics of the art form – theatre – and thus contributes to an education *in* the arts, can hardly be regarded as successful. It cannot suffice simply to fob children off with ‘pre-forms’ of theatre which (still) do not make use of the theatrical system of signs and symbols and do not genuinely work with theatrical devices. This would be like giving pre-schoolers their first reading lessons using a ‘children’s alphabet’ before teaching them to use the ‘real’ adult alphabet. So it is also insufficient that the acting of the players on the stage does not differ from the childlike games in nursery school or in the forest playground, and the specific potential of the theatre is not (or is hardly) realised.

Perhaps a change of thinking in this respect, namely in the context of political debates on the legitimization of theatre for the very young, would prove to be helpful.

### 3. CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE CIRCUMSTANCES

Now that an overview of the particular creative and educational potential of the independent children’s theatre scene in Europe has been presented based on central themes of development and exemplary manifestations, the following chapters will be devoted to a critical review of the given circumstances and an examination of deficits and problems. The focus will be placed on the possibilities and limitations of the independent scene and the inherent potential to be developed.

**136** | Müller-Schöll 2013, p. 39.

**137** | Suchy 2012, p. 17.

### 3.1 Precarious Production and Presentation Conditions

#### 3.1.1 Inadequate Funding of Independent Children's Theatre

In principle, one can say that employment is precarious in the independent scene. The so-called “independent” or “free” scene is, above all, “free” of funds. The discrepancy is particularly striking between what the independent scene offers – and, with respect to the expectations to be fulfilled, *should* offer – and what the public sector accords it in return.

On the one hand, this concerns the comparison of the artist's profession with other professions. In many countries, the wages paid by theatres are considerably lower than what is paid in other occupational sectors;<sup>138</sup> the percentage of those who have a fairly secure job (for which social security contributions are paid) is declining.<sup>139</sup> Almost all the country experts surveyed confirmed that professional artists in the independent scene are generally dependent on a (not necessarily artistic) second job; only in Sweden and France is the situation generally better. In Austria, there are some federal states in which there is hardly a difference in the amount of funding given to amateur theatre groups, according to Barbara Stüwe-Eßl (Interest Group Independent Theatre Work): “A tango club may receive more support than a professional independent group”.

In dually organised theatre systems, it is undeniable that there are considerable financial disadvantages for the independent scene compared to institutional state, municipal and regional theatres, as Niclas Malmcrona puts it when describing the situation in Sweden:

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**138** | Thus reports Irène Howald on the circumstances in Switzerland, based on comparisons drawn by ACT, the association of independent theatre professionals: “An actor working an average number of hours earns less, for example, than a social worker. The diploma earned by a graduate in theatre direction from the Zurich University of Arts (ZHdK) or from another prestigious state university is the equivalent of a bachelor's degree in elementary school education. At the beginning of his or her career, an elementary school teacher in the canton Zürich has a gross monthly salary of about CHF 6000.-. An employee with a degree from a technical college and several years of work experience who has a management position at a university in the canton Zürich has a gross monthly salary of approximately CHF 12,000.-. In small theatres and in the independent theatre, wages of circa CHF 4000.- are quite common.” In Germany, too, the average annual income for professionals in the independent theatre and dance scene is about 40% of the average income of an employee according to *Report Darstellende Künste* (See Fonds Darstellende Künste 2010, p. 14).

**139** | See as an example a current study of the German Cultural Council as presented by Schulz/Zimmermann/Hufnagel 2013, p. 329.

'The main difference is the size and financial situation with the institutional theatres as the "big and rich". Artistically there is no big difference between institutional and independent theatres – the difference is mainly in resources (which sometimes have an artistic outcome...).'

The same can be said of the situation of children's and young people's theatre in Germany. Indeed, the high subsidies for theatres in Germany are internationally unique; however, a very high percentage of these funds go exclusively to institutional theatres. This applies all the more to the area of music theatre, as can be seen in the "Fonds Experimentelles Musiktheater".

As a common initiative of the "NRW Kultursekretariats" and the "Kunststiftung NRW", the fund which was established in 2005 and which, since recently, explicitly includes music theatre for children and young people, supports experimental music theatre projects in repertory theatres. The aim is to confront the institution of the opera house with other 'independent' work structures in order to relax the standardised production procedures and open the theatres to new impulses from the independent scene. In other words, instead of directly providing the independent scene with more money to enable new experimental music theatre projects, the already highly subsidised theatres and opera houses are given an extra budget, provided they structurally adapt to the production methods of the independent scene and work 'alternatively'.<sup>140</sup>

Finally, the precarious working conditions of independent artists in some European countries such as Germany, Austria, Switzerland and The Netherlands, in particular with a view to children's theatre, are becoming worse and worse. Although children's theatre must fulfill the same criteria in order to be eligible for subsidies and is subject to the same conditions as "adult" theatre, it often receives less funding than theatre in general<sup>141</sup> and, as is the case with dance theatre in The Netherlands, is often hit hardest by cuts

**140** | See the press release "Förderinstrumente der Stadt Wien entwickeln sich konträr zu erklärten Zielen der Kulturpolitik" ("Subsidies granted by the City of Vienna contradict the professed aims of cultural and educational policies") in the Austrian "IG Freie Theaterarbeit" of 7 June 2013, where one can read: "Thus the circumstances involving subsidies shift in the direction of more money for structures, more for the big and even more for the very big; money is saved on subsidies to small theatres, while in the same reference period, the large institutions – outside the body of reform – can chalk up a significant PLUS" (See [http://www.freietheater.at/?page=index&alle=true&detail=19&id\\_language=2](http://www.freietheater.at/?page=index&alle=true&detail=19&id_language=2)).

**141** | See also findings from the year 2006 for funding structures in Austria: "The reality regarding subsidies clearly indicates that performing arts for young (small) people correlates without exception with smaller subsidies" – not even one tenth of the total funding was set aside for the independent groups which produce for children and young people (share: 6.1%); and children's and young people's theatre achieved less than half

in public budgets.<sup>142</sup> “En fait, [...] la mentalité majoritairement adultocentrique de la plupart des décideurs les empêche assez souvent de véritablement s'intéresser aux droits des enfants au théâtre et à la culture en général”, thus the explanation given by Maurice Yendt. The fact that artists receive less money for participative theatre projects *with* children than projects *for* children (in Austria, for example) seems all the more incomprehensible in view of the ever-louder calls for arts education programmes.

A special budget reserved exclusively for children's and young people's theatre is nowhere to be found, with the notable exceptions of Sweden, where the “Arts Council” has formulated the aim of investing at least 30% of the total financial resources for culture in programmes and projects for and with children and young people,<sup>143</sup> and parts of Belgium, where the ministry of culture has established a separate “Conseil du théâtre pour l'enfance et la jeunesse”. The subsidies, as Paul Harman from Great Britain explains, are included in the general budgets for the theatres:

‘The fact is that the Arts Councils never “officially” funded theatre companies which specialised in TYP – the position adopted by the Arts Councils is that they only fund ART. The audience for which the theatre is made has had no influence on the decision to fund a theatre company – at least in the majority of periods over the last 50 years.’

Only occasionally can one find cultural and political framework guidelines or recommendations aimed at expanding or perpetuating the cultural programme for children and young people so that the theatre for children and young people is indirectly affected (or at least may be affected). In the case of Great Britain, this is a result of an initiative of the British Arts Council and is described by Deborah Stephenson (British Arts Council) as follows:

‘[E]ncouraging the participation of children and young people in the arts is a key theme running through all our programmes and we fund many theatres and productions that produce work for young audiences. Achieving Great Art, our strategic framework for the arts, sets out our 5 main goals over the next ten years and goal 5 is “every child and young person has the opportunity to experience the richness of the arts”. [...] We have 696 organisations in our National portfolio funding programme (NPO) and of these 64%

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of the average funding in comparison with the average payment made to those eligible for support (See Stüwe-Eßl 2008).

**142** | Akveld 2011, p. 58. In 2009, 5 dance companies were included in the state basic funding (BIS): “Introdans”, “Aya”, “Meekers”, “De Stilte” and “De Dansers”. In 2013, these subsidies were eliminated.

**143** | See [http://www.kulturradet.se/Documents/English/strategy\\_culture\\_children\\_young\\_people.pdf](http://www.kulturradet.se/Documents/English/strategy_culture_children_young_people.pdf)

are supporting us to deliver goal 5 over the next three years. We do not monitor exactly what proportion of their funding is related to the delivery of this goal, but each organisation will have an activity plan with specific work identified with children and young people and will be expected to report on that work on a yearly basis.'

In all of Europe, there are no targeted initiatives taken by public authorities to support the sector of children's and young people's theatre.

In contrast to this, in the past ten years there has been a rapidly growing number of educational and cultural policy initiatives committed to promoting arts education. These initiatives are, however, focused almost entirely on the public, institutional sector and neglect the independent theatre scene as well as areas not related to formal education in schools:

'The substantial role played by individuals and organisations beyond the public sector is inadequately considered in policy planning and implementation up to now. In practice even a large number of non-education related government and non-government organisations directly contribute to cultural education; a fact which is widely neglected by politicians responsible for cultural education.'<sup>144</sup>

What has been formulated by the "Institute for Art Education" with regard to Switzerland also describes the reality of independent children's theatre professionals in many other European countries:

'Most resources are invested in the cooperation between cultural institutions and schools [...]. While there is money for school projects in many cantons, there is no comparable support for extra-curricular activities by independent cultural educators – and in many places for extra-curricular activities by institutions. Often such projects are passed back and forth between the sectors, culture and education, and in the meantime even social affairs.'<sup>145</sup>

Outside these specific support programmes, independent children's theatre has virtually been unable to profit from the increased attention currently paid to arts education worldwide. For the entire panorama of landscapes of European independent theatre, Maurice Yendt summarises what is indeed only true for the French children's theatre scene but what can easily be applied to the situation of the independent children's theatre in Europe in general:

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**144** | *Pre-Conference-Reader on the European conference "Promoting Cultural Education in Europe: A Contribution to Participation, Innovation and Quality"*, p. 31.

**145** | Institute for Art Education, p. 176.

‘Depuis plus de 10 ans, l'ensemble du secteur théâtral jeunes publics est dans l'attente d'une redéfinition et de la mise en œuvre d'une nouvelle politique de service public en faveur des artistes et de la création théâtrale pour jeunes spectateurs.’

### 3.1.2 Inadequate Public and Media Attention given to Independent Children's Theatre

The inadequate financial support is still accompanied by a blatant deficit of public recognition. Despite its continuous professionalisation and increased quality, independent children's theatre is seldom taken seriously, if at all, by theatre critics and the media. “A large part of theatre criticism ignores or even disdains children's theatre”,<sup>146</sup> says Wolfgang Schneider. With the exceptions of Poland and Russia, whose country experts, Zbigniew Rudzinski and Pavel Rudnev, have confirmed a steady increase in media attention and the existence of a qualified theatre critique (at least in the area of public, institutional children's theatre), independent children's theatre is at a disadvantage in this respect in practically all European countries. This neglect brings about a kind of vicious circle. An area of public life which is not “visible” because it is not given any media attention generally receives less (financial) support. The less the area is supported, the more difficult it is to make itself noticed, and the less attention it receives. The example of private sponsoring has been used to prove this connection. Analyses show

‘a clear correlation of quality characteristics in “regional and communal media coverage” to the criterion, “acquisition of private sponsors”. The reason is obvious. Above all, small companies operating in the vicinity of projects commit themselves as sponsors of such projects, if this is then rewarded with sufficient public attention. And this publicity is more important to medium-sized companies in the area than a superregional presence which is less probable, anyway.’<sup>147</sup>

Therefore, the importance of a qualified theatre criticism and media attention for children's theatre cannot be underestimated, as Cyrille Planson, critic for the French trade journal *La Scène*, specialising in children's theatre, stresses:

‘Donc, les retours des médias ont pour nous deux intérêts principaux: témoigner, grâce à ces retours, de la pertinence de notre démarche auprès des décideurs (directeurs de la culture, politiques...) qui comptent beaucoup sur ces retours de la presse...

porter une parole militante et plus générale portant sur la nature de l'offre culturelle faite aux enfants et à son boom.’

**146** | Schneider 2005, p. 102.

**147** | Keuchel/Aescht 2007, p. 32.

Where there is no qualified public dialogue with the performing arts, severe losses can be expected. Otherwise, as in Switzerland, “unconventional solutions must be found to realise new forms of public confrontation”.<sup>148</sup> Such an unconventional solution can be found at the internet website *www.theaterkritik.ch*, which was launched by independent theatre makers and sponsored by the ACT (Association des Créateurs du Théâtre indépendant) and the ASTEJ, and supported by the Swiss Federal Office of Culture (Bundesamt für Kultur) and the Oertli Foundation. Since November 2011, *theaterkritik.ch* has been online as a national platform for theatre reviews through which independent artists and groups can hire up to two critics for their productions against payment, who are then obliged to write a review. Indeed, the fact that theatre professionals contribute to the costs of the project continually leads to questions concerning the impartiality of the reviews;<sup>149</sup> however, there seems to be a broad consensus in the Swiss independent theatre scene that in view of the current predicament, in which the very diverse theatre landscape does otherwise not receive enough media attention, this is the lesser evil. Remarkably, almost half of the almost 20 reviews which appeared before January 2012 were reviews of children’s theatre productions. In the opinion of theatre makers, this is a clear sign that there is a particularly great need for critical assessment which the existing media formats do not fulfil at all.

### 3.1.3 Shortage of Opportunities for Training and Specialisation for Independent Children’s Theatre

Despite its increasing structural emancipation – apart from the wider and wider range of offers for courses of studies in the areas of cultural education<sup>150</sup> and theatre pedagogy<sup>151</sup> – as a rule there are no specific training opportunities at state universities<sup>152</sup> in Europe. This also holds true for music theatre: If composing for music theatre only plays a marginal role at most music academies, composing for children plays no role whatsoever. The target group orientation in the area of puppet or figure and object theatre is also neglected. Indeed, most productions in this area are aimed at a young audience, but no particular importance is attached to children’s theatre during professional training, as Tim Sandweg reports with regard to the prestigious Hochschule für Schauspielkunst Ernst Busch in Berlin (which has its own course of studies in puppetry). Although experience shows that most graduates work primarily for children and that the market also clearly tends to offer puppet theatre for

**148** | See *Jahresbericht 12* of astej/Switzerland, February 2013, p. 15.

**149** | See *Jahresbericht 11* of astej/Switzerland, February 2012, p. 16.

**150** | See Blumenreich 2012.

**151** | See Hentschel 2012.

**152** | See also Doderer 1993, p. 32ff. and Schneider 2005, pp. 323-330.

pre-school audiences, neither visits to children's theatres nor a respective theoretical analysis is offered during the course of studies<sup>153</sup>. Sandweg explains this desideratum as follows:

'Today, a certain arrogance prevails which leads to the fact that children's theatre is not considered a form which can really be taken seriously. The aim of the course of studies to establish puppetry as its own serious art could only be achieved by way of the theatre for adults and the respective study plans.'<sup>154</sup>

The question of whether this attitude can be seen as the reason why children's and young people's theatre has still not found its place in the training structures for the performing arts must remain open at this point.

At the same time, there is a great lack of (and need for) professional training for participants in this area in the field of cultural education – the process of professionalisation has only just begun. This is especially true for dance theatre.<sup>155</sup> Although qualification programmes in dance pedagogy are being developed at state universities and in the field of advanced training for professionals, they lack professional training aimed at the dance-specific concerns of work in arts education.<sup>156</sup>

Thus, there is a central and general shortcoming in the area of arts education. This deficiency was described for France in the following way:

'Il faut professionnaliser les acteurs de l'éducation artistique et culturelle. La qualité des formations est un enjeu central' (Jean-Pierre Saëz, directeur de l'Observatoire des politiques culturelles). – L'accord sur ce sujet est large. Plaident en ce sens la plupart des organismes auditionnés [...]. La demande de formations conjointes (acteurs des secteurs culturels, éducatifs et sociaux ensemble) a été fréquemment formulée. Elle est certainement l'une des principales voies de progrès.'<sup>157</sup>

And: "Il est nécessaire de passer du stade de l'expérimentation (parfois de l'incantation) à un véritable développement".<sup>158</sup> In this sense, the training structures would have to be modelled and (to an extent) created from the ground up.

**153** | See Sandweg 2012, p. 22f.

**154** | Ibid., p. 23.

**155** | See for example Bundesverband Tanz in Schulen 2012, p. 55.

**156** | See Klinge 2012b, p. 882f. and Odenthal 2005, p. 109.

**157** | Bouët 2013, p. 24.

**158** | Ibid., p. 25.

### 3.1.4 Lack of Stages

It is one of the particularities of the independent children's theatre scenes in Europe that children's theatre companies do not usually have a permanent venue, much less their own stage. Independent theatre for children is almost synonymous with mobile theatre for children. Almost all country experts confirmed that, besides festival performances and guest appearances in theatre houses and local cultural centres, schools (auditoriums), pre-schools and nursery schools are the main venues for independent children's theatre.<sup>159</sup> A positive exception to be mentioned here is Sweden, where, according to Niclas Malmcrona, approximately 50 independent groups (out of about 100) are equipped with a permanent venue and separate rehearsal rooms. In comparison, in England, of about 170 children's theatre ensembles, only five have a permanent venue, and in The Netherlands it is two out of about 40.

In many cases, this lack of performance opportunities sparks not only the artistically motivated desire, but the necessity to collaborate internationally and organise guest performance tours. As was discussed at the festival *Visioni di futuro, visioni di teatro* in Bologna in 2013, for example, it is extremely difficult for producers of independent children's theatre in Italy to sell their productions in their own country; even the 'festival market' is in such a crisis that it is often difficult for groups – and for new, still not established groups, virtually impossible – to perform a piece in Italy even once. In this respect, networking with other countries is becoming more and more important in order to find a market and venues.

### 3.1.5 Existing Conditions Complicate the Formation of Ensembles and Hamper Artistic Continuity

Hardly any independent children's theatre group can afford to employ a large, permanent ensemble of actors, much less administrative staff or a special team to document and evaluate their artistic activities. For example, what Paul Harman writes about the children's theatre scene in England can be applied to the personnel situation of many independent groups in most other European countries: "Many of the smaller TYA companies, for example the puppet companies, are just husband and wife teams or extended family groups."

The number of permanent ensembles which produce for children has decreased significantly in the European independent scene in the last few years. Furthermore, it seems that the organisation model, described by Myrtó Dimitriadou as the "production ensemble", is beginning to prevail: a small, permanent core ensemble, frequently consisting only of a director and dramatic

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**159** | An exception in this context is German-speaking Switzerland: According to Sandra Förbacher (University Bern), independent children's theatre does not usually perform in alternative venues, but always gives guest performances in regular theatre houses.

advisor which hires artists as required by the respective production and for the duration of a project. Long-term cooperation in permanent structures has become a rarity, mainly because the financial modalities make it seem risky, if not impossible, to establish a continuous employment relationship. Long-term planning is far too seldom an issue.

Apart from the fact that the support for independent children's theatre groups in Europe is generally distributed on an application basis and depends on compliance with certain subsidy criteria, very few groups receive public funding which is part of a structural concept (as a rule for three to four years). The great majority, if they get public support at all, depend on one-off project grants which are usually considerably smaller than the structural subsidies.<sup>160</sup> Thus, in 2009 in England, only 42 out of 227 children's and young people's theatres were among those in the RFO or Regularly Funded Organisations which received support over a period of three years; in 2012 in The Netherlands, only eight out of 40 were included in the four-year BIS or Basis Infrastructuur. A positive exception in this respect is Sweden. According to Lotta Brilioth Björnstad, most independent groups regularly receive national subsidies. In 2011, the Swedish Arts Council awarded SEK 51 million to the independent scene, approximately 50% of which was given to groups that produce for children. As Niclas Malmcrona reports, it is common for permanent ensembles to be created and work together longer-term.

Otherwise, however, the principle of one-off project funding dominates. Work contexts which are severely limited by time and organisational constraints, and within which the growing together – and maturing – of an ensemble is impossible, are the necessary consequence. Despite all the lip service paid to the great importance of arts education, this is also, and especially, true with respect to the reduced number of educational programmes: “In practice it is the sad reality that especially in the area of arts education [...] project promotion with all its drawbacks is more the rule than the exception to it”.<sup>161</sup>

The situation in Great Britain is perhaps the most dramatic. There are practically no permanent ensembles in England anymore, says Paul Harman; the artistic team is put together anew for every production and given short-term contracts; every production is – after a rehearsal period of three to four weeks

**160** | The respective sums vary considerably even on a national level. In Austria, project subsidies are awarded for one project which may vary from €2,000 to €45,000 according to Barbara Stüwe-Eßl from the federal ministry in charge. Even in the different federal states, e.g. the state of Salzburg, the sums for independent groups can vary between €500 and €5,000.

**161** | Deutscher Kulturrat 2005, p. 98. Furthermore, initiatives for arts education are often classified as projects – even those which take place in institutions which have a relatively secure funding from the public sector.

– performed *en bloc* in a limited period of time. There is no possibility to go on a longer tour with a production, much less build up a repertory, since within that “small pool of local actors shared with a number of other local companies”, every artist is contractually committed to several projects. A collective manner of working or the joint development of a new piece is inconceivable under these circumstances; the actors have accustomed themselves to something else – “to be employees rather than members of co-operative companies; wait for the offer of a job, rather than join with others to follow an artistic and social vision”.<sup>162</sup> Rhona Matheson (*Starcatchers*, Edinburgh) confirms a similar situation with regard to Scotland:

‘Whilst the reputation is strong, there is a fragile infrastructure for theatre for children in Scotland. We have only two fully funded children’s theatre companies and these are touring companies. There is no centre/building dedicated to children’s theatre/arts. The other companies (including *Starcatchers*) are project-funded which gives little security and scope for long-term planning.’

The resulting “lone wolf mentality” which, of course, contradicts any ideas of teamwork and cooperation, is also just as much a part of the precarious and self-defeating conditions of the support system.

### 3.1.6 Continuous Cuts in the Cultural Sector

At the sixth *Kinder zum Olymp Congress*, held on 13 June 2013 in Hannover, Feridum Zaimoglu, an author of Turkish descent, gave a refreshingly direct and pointed answer to the question concerning success factors for artistic projects with children and young people by saying: ‘It is not about the question: ‘Does it have quality or not?’ but solely about the question: ‘Do we have enough money or not?’ That, in principle, is the only question.’

The answer to this question for most artists in the independent children’s theatre scene in Europe is clear, and an improvement is not in sight.

Since in times of economic and financial crises the cultural sector has to struggle with or is threatened by drastic cost cuts on the national and EU levels,<sup>163</sup> independent theatre for children is also increasingly hard-pressed

**162** | Harman 2009/2011, p. 13f.

**163** | See regarding the planned cuts in the EU budget 2014-2020 the position of the network “Culture Action Europe (CAE)”, which, with more than 80,000 member organisations throughout Europe, is the leading European stakeholder group in the field of art and culture: [http://www.wearemore.eu/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/CAE\\_Statement-Council-Agreement\\_20130211.pdf](http://www.wearemore.eu/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/CAE_Statement-Council-Agreement_20130211.pdf). The impact of the cost cuts is also being felt on the local level (such as in the production conditions of the independent theatre in Vienna). For years, a prime example of sound cultural funding policies, which continu-

financially, now more than ever. All country experts have said that they have been confronted with continuous budget cuts for at least ten years. Foundations are being used as temporary stopgaps and rescue anchors for basic support everywhere, because the system of government funding has broken down.<sup>164</sup> Maurice Yendt states for the French children's theatre scene: "L'autofinancement devient la règle pour un nombre croissant de compagnies."

In Switzerland, the national ASTEJ might be facing disbandment. The Federal Office of Culture (Bundesamt für Kultur or BAK) has decided to cut the subsidies to the ASTEJ every year by fifty percent in the next funding period between 2013 and 2015. As of 2016, the association will not be subsidised at all. "This degression can only be interpreted in one way," the members themselves say. "The ASTEJ cannot survive without these means".<sup>165</sup> The BAK justifies these measures with the supposed "lack of representativeness of the members",<sup>166</sup> which, in view of the fact that the ASTEJ is the only national theatre association in Switzerland with offices in all four language regions, must seem nothing short of cynical.

Perhaps the hardest hit at this time are the independent theatre professionals in The Netherlands. As part of the dramatically high cuts in the overall theatre system, the budget for national subsidies for children's and young people's theatre, which has been part of the publicly subsidised "Basis Infrastructuur" since 1990, has been virtually cut in half. For individual companies such as the prestigious Toneelmakerij, this will mean cuts of up to 70%. Others, such as the Rotterdam Meekers, the Theatergroep Max, the Theatergroep Siberia or Het nationaal Toneel and Stella in The Hague, might only survive by forming a forced alliance and pooling their resources. Four out of five dance companies are disappearing altogether, and all three production houses for children's and young people's theatre which are known beyond national borders for being talent factories for upcoming young professionals are closing down as well.<sup>167</sup>

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ously increased the budget for independent theatre for the past ten years until it reached a record high of €25 million, have now also taken a turn for the worse. And contrary to the stated aims of cultural policies, as the IG Independent Theatre Work publicised in a press release of 7 June 2013, the culture department of the city decided to reduce the volume of concept funding by almost half, from €12 million to €6.5 million. Further cuts are planned. (See <https://www.wien.gv.at/rk/msg/2013/02/15013.html>).

**164** | On increasing importance of foundations in the area of arts education, see for example Fleisch 2012.

**165** | <http://www.astej.ch/?id=2199&L=0>

**166** | See the respective media release from November 2012 at [http://www.astej.ch/fileadmin/images/2012.10/Medienmitteilung\\_astej\\_121107.pdf](http://www.astej.ch/fileadmin/images/2012.10/Medienmitteilung_astej_121107.pdf)

**167** | See Zwaneveld 2011, pp. 43 and 28.

In summary, the independent children's theatre scenes in Europe are so underfunded from the structural prerequisites that they can hardly develop their high creative and educational potential. There are not enough rehearsal rooms and stages, personnel and continuity – and, above all, there is not enough money.

### **3.2 Economisation**

Let us recall: As key methodological and aesthetic quality parameters for high-quality arts education activities, the following three factors were stressed by UNESCO: teamwork, the use of local resources and the involvement of the local context, and particularly the process-oriented work on the basis of artistic-creative research. Yet those success factors are hardly compatible with the prevailing constraints on the theatre market and the eligibility criteria for subsidies. How should professionals work collectively, in a site-specific manner and in an artistic, open-ended, non-result-oriented research process if money, time and long-term planning are not available? How should the experimental freedom be created in which theatre can be oppositional and extraordinary under the increasing pressure from the market?

#### **3.2.1 On the Question of Teamwork and Cooperation**

As concerns the question of teamwork and collective, not hierarchically organised collaborative working, it can be observed that not only the trend toward “production ensembles”, already described, and the general short-term nature of work structures within the independent children's theatre scene considerably restrict the possibilities of genuine teamwork and ensemble formation. As, for example, Irène Howald (ASTEJ Switzerland) states: Because there are more and more independent companies and at the same time less and less money available, there is an increasing competitive pressure. The struggle for “visibility” and subsidies as well as the constant necessity for self-marketing require rigorously calculated competitive strategies – among the independent companies as well as within a single production team.

#### **3.2.2 On the Question of Location Sensitivity and “Locatedness”**

Location sensitivity and the use of local resources, success factors defined by UNESCO, have proven to be particularly important, and not only in connection with arts education programmes for children. In fact, in times of increased pressure on the publicly financed theatre to justify its existence as an economic cost factor, they are generally key factors in creating an individual profile and “theatre development planning”, as Wolfgang Schneider explains:

'The theatre which has to do with the respective region or city must be a focus, must search and do research on site, must track down issues and use what seems relevant to the region. That should not only take place in order to attract the regional audience but because one can, in doing so, gain a deeper insight into the society.'<sup>168</sup>

The aim, however, of creating location-specific (cultural) identification offers which are especially directed at local interests and affairs is diametrically opposed to the dictates of the theatre market to produce 'export goods' which are mobile and internationally competitive and which promise a measurable increase in profit through mass distribution.

Lieven Baeyens, artistic director of the Compagnie IOTA in French-speaking Belgium – an independent group which manages without any structural funding – says about the precarious situation which results from having to perform a production as often as possible in as many different venues as possible:

'Pour savoir survivre nous avons besoin d'au moins une centaine de représentations par saison. Pour l'instant nous avons quarante-trois options, c'est très peu sans subventions. Le budget pour le théâtre jeune public n'a pas changé depuis plus de huit ans. Notre indépendance a un prix. C'est une réalité que nous sommes en train d'assumer pour l'instant.'

The consequence of this development on the international market is a 'loss of locality':

'In the European scene – if we not only consider Western Europe – we can observe a process of convergence or approximation of aesthetics and theatre languages in which cultural individuality is at risk of falling by the wayside. Productions are produced with an eye to the European festivals and subsidy programmes and performed in English rather than in the native languages. Less is produced (especially in Eastern Europe) for the local audience than for a market dominated by Western Europe (in the hope of being able to succeed in a Western-dominated global market).'<sup>169</sup>

Analogous to the economic models, European cultural promotion (and therefore also independent children's theatre) brings forth "efficient, innovative productions with mobile resources. What is lost is the [...] distinctiveness, the uniqueness".<sup>170</sup>

If one agrees with Holger Noltze, this trend will be even further promoted by the steadily growing cooperation network within the independent theatre

**168** | Schneider 2013, p. 27.

**169** | Hentschel 2012, no page.

**170** | See note 192.

landscapes – too great is the temptation to simply participate “intellectually-conceptionally, almost effortlessly, somehow, somewhere”: “The presentation of some cultural contents create playing surfaces of a common sense whose main striving is to remain as close as possible to the lowest common denominator. That will always work.”<sup>171</sup>

### **3.2.3 On the Question of Process-Oriented Work Based on Artistic Research**

“Education takes place in the active and reflective confrontation with the unexpected, a moment of surprise or difference. Educational processes are not (primarily) aligned to fixed contents or prescribed events”.<sup>172</sup> What Martin Stern formulates regarding the necessary openness of educational processes in general can be confirmed even more emphatically with respect to *arts* education processes, since unpredictability, non-standardisation and a certain ‘creative chaos’ are specific characteristics of what is considered artistic.

Indeed, there is broad agreement with regard to a necessary open-endedness: “Arts education which strives to impart aesthetic insights must at first be experimental, hypothetical, contradictory, vague and fleeting”,<sup>173</sup> says Helle Becker. “Aesthetic research only has one purpose – to begin the journey without wanting to achieve a preconceived result. It is a journey with obstacles and an uncertain ending”,<sup>174</sup> confirms Helga Kämpf-Jansen. “Arts are characterised by their open, playful and experimental handling of issues and contents and by their way of dealing with discontinuities and ambiguities”,<sup>175</sup> says the report “Arts Education – Culture Counts”. The European Agenda for Culture from the year 2010 makes the point in the following way:

‘Pupils asked to do school exercises are used to looking for a single right answer, which the teacher already knows, and rejecting all other answers, regarded as wrong. On the contrary, involvement in an art project has more in common with research and exploration than with an algorithmic procedure whose stages are marked out in advance. It teaches that there are many right answers possible to the questions we face in seeing the project through. It also teaches us that the result is never known in advance and must always be constructed.’<sup>176</sup>

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**171** | Noltze 2010, p. 190.

**172** | Stern 2010, p. 224.

**173** | Becker 2011, p. 219.

**174** | Kämpf-Jansen 2002, p. 276.

**175** | German UNESCO Commission e. V. 2009, p. 1.

**176** | Lauret/Marie 2010, p. 12.

The educational opportunities this produces involve discovering new abilities, gaining insights, and opening up a range of behavioural possibilities, so that it is generally easier to tolerate what is unknown, uncertain and ambiguous, since such projects require “a constant discarding, deciding and re-deciding, and accepting of situations” – namely “situations in which, under different circumstances, one would never have found oneself”.<sup>177</sup> Understood in this way, the artistic-aesthetic experience becomes a kind of “training programme for an open, creative approach to complexity which is tolerant of resistance and ambiguity”.<sup>178</sup>

Furthermore, experiencing a (temporary) failure can be made fruitful by integrating it into the creative process. “To be an artist is to fail, as no other dare fail”.<sup>179</sup> This is one of the most frequently quoted sentences from the writings of Samuel Beckett on art theory – and there is a general consensus with respect to education theory that “productive failure” is a key moment in educational processes,<sup>180</sup> since “a diversity of experiences”, involving confusion, not being able to, or not knowing how, harbor the potential of expanding, qualifying or changing<sup>181</sup> existing conditions. Apart from this, errors and detours can lead to new insights and discoveries which could otherwise neither be planned nor foreseen: “With respect to acquiring experience, the shortest way from A to B is not necessarily the best”,<sup>182</sup> says Holger Noltze.

In the light of all these insights and findings, the conception and implementation of theatre projects with children should logically always be about allowing an open-ended, research-based artistic work process with a ‘license to fail’. Yet the reality of artistic practice in the independent children’s theatre scenes in Europe looks different.

On the one hand, it is no secret that independent theatre makers usually work under tremendous time pressure. Faced with short funding periods (and small grants) typical for project promotion, many independent groups are forced to respect the motto “time is money” by producing quickly in order to achieve presentable results within the subsidised time frame, and by realising as many projects one after another in “assembly line” fashion so that a continuous funding is ensured, at least cumulatively. “In many cities the under-financing of independent theatre has paradoxically led to over-production. [...] The primal instinct for survival compels theatres to mass produce”.<sup>183</sup> Cecilia Billing

**177** | Kämpf-Jansen 2002, p. 277.

**178** | Noltze 2010, p. 263f.

**179** | Beckett 1983, p. 145.

**180** | Stern 2010, p. 222f.

**181** | Ibid., p. 224.

**182** | Noltze 2010, p. 228.

**183** | *Evaluation der Freien Theaterszene in Frankfurt am Main*, p. 14.

from Dockteaterverkstan, an independent puppet theatre ensemble from the Swedish city of Osby, describes the production conditions as follows:

‘The first problem is to be given the time for development, innovation, building puppets etc. You are under pressure to all the time produce new performances and you must produce in a certain time. (As a touring company we always meet a new audience so we do not have to make new performances all the time. But to get grants you are forced to produce.)’

In addition, there are normally such strict funding criteria and such specific target agreements to which independent groups commit themselves contractually when they receive grants, that a truly open-ended, process-oriented, and experimental working method is hardly possible – to say nothing of failing as a learning experience.

“It would be a wonderful miracle if the independent scene were sponsored so well that the singular theatre experiment can afford to seek and fail without jeopardising its entire existence”,<sup>184</sup> says Silvia Pahl from the independent German theatre ensemble “3 hasen oben”. However, the real situation is far removed from this ‘wonderful miracle’. The cultural and political task of “comprehending theatre promotion as a risk premium”, that means “not rewarding what works and is successful in any case but also rewarding the process and the failure”, is a funding criterion, as Wolfgang Schneider confirms, which “has been completely neglected”<sup>185</sup> to date. Even the Deutsche Kulturrat in 2005 came to a similar conclusion with regard to European cultural policies in general:

‘In principle, especially as part of a pilot project in which, for example, new methods of communicating culture are tried out, failing should be an option because such a project is about experimenting. In reality, it has been the case for years that failure is avoided at all costs because a project owner who has failed hardly has the chance to acquisition for new projects.’<sup>186</sup>

In other words, the problem has long been recognised as such – and no solution or concrete countermeasures are in sight.

Another issue is that a possible failure is normally measured according to whether or not it is a *commercial* failure. For in the end, what stands above everything else in the neoliberal matrix of the economic market, which also controls the ‘market’ of the independent theatre in Europe, is the principle of

**184** | Pahl, Silvia: “Theaterblitzlicht”. Notes on *Spurensuche* 2012 in Hannover. Unpublished manuscript kindly made available by the author of theater 3 hasen oben in Immichenhain/Germany.

**185** | Schneider 2013, p. 28.

**186** | Deutscher Kulturrat 2005, p. 98.

usefulness and efficiency – the exploitation and rationality of a cost-benefit calculation. This necessitates “the industrialisation of creative processes which are based on the optimisation of the relationship of effort and yield”.<sup>187</sup>

This concerns not ‘only’ the artistic sector, but that of (arts) education, since the “educational turn” is closely linked with the performing arts for young audiences. And in the area of independent children's theatre, these interactions and dynamics have proven to be especially problematic. In the course of the general commercialisation and economisation of the collective thinking process, educational contents are evaluated more and more according to their profitability: “The educational system is seen today almost exclusively as a supplier for economic processes”<sup>188</sup> and, as a consequence, “education is reduced to a commodity”.<sup>189</sup> The aim of most educational processes is employability, and thus the immediate usability of learning contents and competences for the successful creation of work biographies.

‘It is only about *qualification* – making people usable in terms of a profitable exploitation. The frequent reference to the importance of the “factor education” for the economy, including the pretty slogan about life-long learning, only reveals what this is really about: not about “educating individuals” but only about “creating capital” by means of tailoring the qualification of subjects to the needs of the potential buyers of the commodity, human labour.’<sup>190</sup>

General postulata about education apply even more to *arts* education. Parallel to the emergence of today's “knowledge societies”, a decisive paradigm shift has taken place regarding the weighting of “arts education skills” and the requirements profile for “human capital” on the job market of the future:

‘21<sup>st</sup> century societies are increasingly demanding workforces that are creative, flexible, adaptable and innovative and education systems need to evolve with these shifting conditions. Arts education equips learners with these skills.’<sup>191</sup>

With regard to this, Paul Harman described the changed production conditions of independent artists in Great Britain as follows:

‘From the 1950s, UK schools welcomed artists of all kinds to give children direct experience of the arts, as part of a full “education of the whole child”. Since the 1980s, pub-

**187** | Noltze 2010, p. 85.

**188** | Ribolits 2004, p. 41.

**189** | Ibid., p. 50.

**190** | Ibid., p. 48 – emphasis in original

**191** | *Road Map for Arts Education*, p. 3.

lic education has been largely reduced to preparing children to serve the economy. They have been graded and tested to show employers how they might be used by business. There is a focus on learning skills of practical use to employers.’

The potential economic usability of arts education initiatives is primarily reflected in the willingness to provide financing and more public funding. For cultural and educational policymakers, the question “Does Mozart Make You Smart?” – the title of a research project sponsored by the German Federal Ministry for Education and Research – is apparently still a crucial, if not the only, criterion for government subsidies.<sup>192</sup> The genuine artistic-aesthetic aspect does not appear as an intrinsically basic right and value, and thus not important enough to merit public support. Grants are always linked to possible non-artistic transfer or “follow-up competences”, utility and book values and indirect profitability resulting from knock-on effects.

On the part of the artists and mediators working in the field, this circumstance has been frequently noted and more or less cynically pointed out. Elmar Lampson, President of the Academy of Music and Theatre Hamburg, on the occasion of an awards ceremony for the “junge ohren” Prize 2012, commented: “I am no good at maths. I never was and am still not today. Working with all those numbers – I can’t do it! But I can play a triple counterpoint. Why is that not worth as much?” And Stéphan Vincent-Lancrin, project manager at the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) of the OECD, stated in unequivocal terms at a congress on “Perspectives of Research on Arts Education” in June 2013:

‘A mathematician would never think about asking whether mathematical skills have positive transfer effects when learning how to play a musical instrument - the other way around, it happens all the time!’

In other words, approaches to arts education are always under pressure to prove their legitimacy. What counts is not arts education itself but its ‘barter value’. Social relevance is mainly (or only) attributed to arts education when it is suitable for the acquisition of “key competences” and qualifications which are of interest to the job market.

This can be observed in many places. In 2001, the German Federation for Cultural Youth Education (Bundesvereinigung Kulturelle Jugendbildung e.V.) published an important report on acquiring “key competences through arts education”. This report makes clear that for the publishers the acquisition of these key competences refers to the “evaluation and certification of the

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**192** | See also “Macht Mozart schlau – Die Förderung kognitiver Kompetenzen durch Musik” (See [http://www.bmbf.de/pub/macht\\_mozart\\_schlau\\_kurzfassung.pdf](http://www.bmbf.de/pub/macht_mozart_schlau_kurzfassung.pdf)).

educational benefits of arts education for working life” as well as “securing the positive effects of arts education for the individual and making them visible and comprehensible for future employers”. The aim is to have young persons “channel these positive effects profitably into their professional careers” and thus be able to document them as a “sustainable resource”.<sup>193</sup>

The position of the German Federation for Cultural Youth is also remarkably similar with regard to the “procedure to identify and certify key competences through arts education”, implemented between 2001 and 2004, to that of the pilot project sponsored by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung) called Cultural Competence Certificate (Kompetenznachweis Kultur). Young persons achieving this certificate have proven themselves in possession of soft skills which have been organised into 34 sub-competences and which they have acquired through voluntary participation in extracurricular arts education programmes. These are offered in various facilities and projects organised by music and art schools, theatre and dance workshops, literature offices or media centres, in the children’s museum and in the children and youth circus. The certification is in the form of a competence passport which when “presented should improve the holder’s chances on the job market – and, at the same time, justify the existence of cultural work by presenting ‘hard’ evidence of its educational impact”.<sup>194</sup>

‘In a study contracted by the project development department of the German Federation of Cultural Children’s and Youth Education, it was determined that young persons who were in possession of a competence certificate could benefit more from their cultural hobby than those youths who did not participate in the certification programme. Employers praise the additional information which is usually not included in CVs and school reports and which is useful in candidate selection processes for apprenticeships or other positions.’<sup>195</sup>

A similar concept with a so-called “Kulturpass” exists in Switzerland.

What manifests itself here is the prevailing collective utilitarian thinking that sees artistic competences primarily in the service of equipping the Me PLC which, in turn, pays off in cash returns in the long run. That education in and with the arts has an immanent worth in itself and for itself, and that education *in* the arts could be desirable as a primary educational goal, is completely forgotten. In other words, even the concept of education is increasingly subjugated to the dictates of the neoliberal market and reduced to

**193** | Bundesvereinigung Kulturelle Jugendbildung e. V. 2002, p. 5f.

**194** | Mörsch, Carmen: Eine kurze Geschichte von KünstlerInnen in Schulen; See: <http://kontextschule.org/inhalte/dateien/MoerschKuelnSchGeschichte.pdf>

**195** | Final Report of the Enquête Commission: “Kultur in Deutschland”, p. 388.

“parading readily accessible competences” where its contents are concerned;<sup>196</sup> education’s worth and market value, professional (and capital) potential are often inseparable:

‘The value of something is a gift given by industry, not a quality of the product itself. Many cultural-political documents refer to a cultural value. In such documents, “value” is a devalued term which is only perceptible from a quantitative perspective, as, for example, in attendance figures with statistical breakdowns which enable the monitoring of social inclusion and provide data on advertising customers and sponsors. In this way the actual worth is subjected to the economic value. The worth which is more valuable than all the others is an economic one [...] The marketability of culture must be guaranteed; Culture is only then valuable when it contributes to the “economy”.’<sup>197</sup>

The independent performing arts for children and mainstream education in Europe are finding themselves on the same side of the fence in the struggle against the increasingly strict dictates of the market. Both are under comparable performance, efficiency and marketing pressure resulting from the economisation and commercialisation, in the wake of which they must both justify themselves as an economic factor.

Therefore, the following can be concluded: The methodological-aesthetic quality parameters developed by UNESCO for artistic work processes with children are often neglected in today’s labour market, sales market and in prevalent self-marketing processes. It may be that the independent scene, with its own mode of production, is theoretically better able to fulfil the acknowledged conditions for success on this level, but once again the necessary financial resources will be lacking.

### 3.3 Paradoxical Funding Criteria

The makers of independent children’s theatre presently find themselves in a paradoxical situation. The methodological-aesthetic quality parameters defined by UNESCO confirm the necessity of a working method and production aesthetics which are incompatible with the prevailing factual constraints of an increasingly economised art market. Yet a (typically) ‘independent’ mode of working is expected despite a concurrent, omnipresent absence of freedom and dependence on the part of the independent artists with respect to financial and structural security.

**196** | See also the essay by Christoph Türcke “Wie das Lernen sein Gewicht verliert” from the *Süddeutschen Zeitung* of 1 Aug 2012, p. 12.

**197** | Leslie 2007, p. 57.

Many exemplary cases can be added to this basic perception of what is considered paradoxical. They demonstrate the incompatibility of the criteria used to determine eligibility for funding in the area of cultural promotion with the actual circumstances and possibilities, especially of the independent scene.

Lotta Brilioth Björnstad of the Swedish Arts Council compiled an incomplete list of general funding conditions for independent groups which included the following criteria:

- High artistic quality
- Development and renewal
- Geographical distribution
- International exchange
- Diversity
- Accessibility
- Gender equality
- Local and/or regional support

Complying with these criteria, however, would require the financial and structural security for which the independent artists first have to apply.

In addition, there are also further funding criteria which are incompatible with the artistic practice of most independent theatre groups; these are described in the following overview.

### **3.3.1 Permanent Full-Time Employment**

As Irène Howald reported on the requirements for granting financial resources in the German-speaking part of Switzerland, one of the criteria for theatre funding is “professionalism”, defined as “more than 50% of the activities being performed actively in the theatre”. But this is in fact hardly possible, since most of those employed by the independent theatre rely on sideline jobs which need not, but may, be proportionally subordinate to their work in the theatre.

### **3.3.2 Proof of Venue**

Typical of the overall situation is Irène Howald's description of another funding criterion as applied in Switzerland (it also applies to many other countries): proof of venue:

‘The (first) performances usually have to be guaranteed, i.e. collaborations have to exist with theatre houses/organisers. [...] More often than in the past, the theatres play an important role in the funding since, more and more, only those productions are subsidised which can show that they have several fixed venues and dates.’

In view of the general lack of theatre venues and performance possibilities for independent groups, this, too, is a requirement which often prevents or severely limits the development of new projects.

### 3.3.3 Non-Profit Criteria

A country's legal situation, which may favour artists' biographies and the establishment of ensembles and projects more or less, is another important factor in granting subsidies. In this regard, Paul Harmon describes the structural production conditions of independent groups in Great Britain which cannot be separated from the *manner* of production and the production *results* they bring about:

'The great constitutional problem in the UK is the use of Charity law as the basis for registering a non-profit theatre company. Until recently there was no easy way to create a co-operative company which would meet the non-profit criteria demanded by the funders. So the kind of collectives formed after 1969 in Denmark, Germany or Belgium (asbl) were very hard to create in the UK. We had to use a more complex structure which the artists could not run themselves as directors. It works this way:

A registered Charity pays no tax on income or profits and has some other tax advantages. A Charity has to be run by Directors who have no financial interest – so they cannot be paid employees. But to have limited liability if you lose money, you have to be a Company Limited by Guarantee, also having unpaid directors. The Arts Council will normally only fund non-profit bodies set up in this way. So the artists are employed by a group of well-intentioned outside people who have to satisfy the Arts Council funders – and maybe also the Local Authority if they give any money towards the Company's work – that the money is spent only on things the Arts Council approves.

So, after a while, the Arts Council changes its priorities or the Board of the Company decides to do something different and the artistic team changes.

That is a thumbnail sketch but reasonably accurate. [...]

So there is I believe a more direct link between constitutional arrangements and artistic choices. If you can spend six months rehearsing a play, [...] the result will be very different from what you can do in England on three or four weeks rehearsal with actors you recruit for the show on a short contract.'

### 3.3.4 Employment under an Employee Contract

One problem similar to those of funding criteria and legal situations is that of employment status (in Germany and Austria, for example). The law regulating work in the area of "acting" requires that the employment of actors is based on an employment status subject to social security contributions. While "artists" can generally be classified as self-employed staff and insured with the artists' social insurance (Künstlersozialkasse - KSK), this does not apply to actors who are officially and essentially bound by instructions from an "employer". However, in the artistic practice of independent groups, it is

usually impossible to comply with this regulation, which obviously orients itself towards the financial volume of a structurally subsidised state theatre. The social security contribution for employees with permanent contracts would far exceed any (project) budget. Thus, those working in the field of independent theatre have only two options: starting a new 'company' for each project, with its own managing director and in which all participants are personally liable (!) partners – a huge organisational and administrative effort few groups can afford – or giving up their artistic work.

### 3.3.5 National Interests

One can also observe incongruities in the funding possibilities for promoting national interests and structures, as seen in the criteria for cultural promotion in German-speaking Switzerland:

'In addition to funding from cantons and cities for cultural promotion, the federal government provides subsidies and support exclusively for plans which are of significance for the whole of Switzerland. [...] Since such projects, in general, take place in one location and in interaction with the population in a specific local context, the significance for the whole of Switzerland is difficult to prove.'<sup>198</sup>

Moreover, Irène Howald emphasised the following for the area of children's and young people's theatre: 'In principle, there are big differences between the funding in more rural communities and cantons and in the urban parts of Switzerland. An independent group, working in a small canton, cannot secure its livelihood.'

### 3.3.6 Innovation

As has been clearly demonstrated based on the criteria from Sweden, development and renewal are still important assessment criteria for the independent theatre scene when it comes to granting financial resources. Apart from that, the frequently cited UNESCO Convention on the Promotion and Protection of the Diversity of Cultural Expression from 2005 refers to the promotion of artistic diversity and specificity as one of the main goals of European cultural policy. A (production-) aesthetic standardisation and producing for the mainstream market are diametrically opposed to these prerequisites.

In reality, however, faced with an increasingly economised art market, the independent groups in particular find themselves under pressure to succeed and to supply productions with passe-partout aesthetics and themes with mass appeal which are internationally competitive, which can be delivered in standardised serial production, and which do not run the risk of being

unmarketable. The more important the funding criterion of capacity utilisation becomes, the less the independent theatre makers can afford to experiment, to try out the unconventional, to address taboo and sensitive topics, and the more necessary it is to produce easily ‘consumable’, purely entertaining ‘goods’ which guarantee their own marketability.

This trend towards commercialisation and market orientation in the independent children’s theatre scenes in Europe was named by all those country experts surveyed, and independent of each other, as one of the most pressing negative developments. Maurice Yendt sums up the situation for France: “Développement quantitatif important en raison de la banalisation des spectacles jeunes publics en tous genres – retour de formes dramaturgiques formatées par les exigences du marché des produits culturels”. Karin Helander describes the situation for Sweden as follows:

‘Still too many theatres (and adults) are afraid of emotionally strong themes and new innovations. Still a lot of performances for children are based on classical children’s literature, fairy tales and well-known figures in very traditional ways. And lack of money too often results in a coward repertoire and poor stagings.’

And Myrtó Dimitriadou added the following comments with regard to independent children’s theatre in Austria:

‘One problem is surely the financing. Many groups are forced to follow conventional taste, the requirements of the audience, because otherwise they will not have any revenues. This makes it impossible for some to remain consistent and to develop in new directions because they cannot sell the productions. Of course, this is counterproductive for the others.’

Paul Harman describes the following production strategy common in Great Britain:

‘Original and contemporary theatre forms are only used by the specialist, independent companies. The larger building-based producing companies largely present conventional adaptations of children’s books. This is because there is too great a financial risk in offering an ‘experimental’ work in a large theatre which has to sell many hundreds of seats to the public.’

For the German-speaking region of Switzerland, Peter Keller from the Theater Arlecchino in Basel reports:

‘Since our theatre is not subsidised and we are always on the brink of financial collapse, we are very much dependent on the revenues from ticket sales. We always have

to have a programme which will bring in a lot of spectators. Therefore, we specialise in the modern classics of children's literature. This also distinguishes us from other theatres.'<sup>199</sup>

In other words, the independent groups, especially those which receive only project-related funding (if any), do not usually have the means and possibilities for the (aesthetic) experiments which funding criteria require. Given the dictates of the market, they are more or less forced to play a conventional text and repertory theatre which significantly increases the probability of high ticket sales and full houses because of its mass appeal.

### 3.3.7 Measurable Interim and Final Results

A basic recommendation made by the European Agenda for Culture in 2010, which can also be found in the structural quality parameters of UNESCO, is the success factor of evaluation and quality assurance:

'[E]valuation is the key to developing and sustaining good work and should be undertaken regularly to contribute to informed decision making and improved action in arts education.

With this in mind, it is proposed: That all projects and programmes should allocate funds from their budgets for evaluation (preferably both internal and external).'<sup>200</sup>

In contrast, the measurable and verifiable, the communicable in general, is *not* really a characteristic feature of artistic processes:

'What is the value of theatre in the lives of children and young people?

Much has been written about the value of the arts, and important work is being done across the globe in researching the powerful effects of the arts on children through studies in neuroscience, neuro-education, developmental psychology and related fields. But as much as we can try to measure the impact of what we do, there is also a level at which the impact of art on its audience remains mysterious and unquantifiable. It is the

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**199** | In the repertory of the Theater Arlecchino, there are adaptations of novels by Astrid Lindgren (Pippi Langstrumpf, Pippi in Taka-Tuka-Land, Ronja The Robber's Daughter, Michel from Lönneberga), Michael Ende (Jim Knopf and Lukas the Engine Driver, Jim Knopf and the Wild 13), Ellis Kaut (Pumuckl), James Matthew Barrie (Peter Pan), P. L. Travers (Mary Poppins), Rudyard Kipling (The Jungle Book) and Lyman Frank Baum (The Wizard of Oz).

**200** | Lauret/Marie 2010, p. 31.

profound and unique meeting of the theatre piece with the audience in a particular time and space that makes theatre so unpredictable and exciting.<sup>201</sup>

Against this backdrop, the evaluation of artistic processes, which in many cases is required of theatre groups to prove their eligibility for subsidies and which can be seen as proof of effectiveness or fulfilment of an educational standard, generates a pressure on said groups to prove their legitimacy which is detrimental and which, in the end, *hinders* or even *prevents* the desired open-ended results and process orientation.

### 3.3.8 Mission: Arts Education

Finally, certain constraints on independent theatre are specific to children's theatre with regard to the much called-for mission to contribute to arts education. Despite the potential of the independent scene described in this study, funding possibilities focus on the sector of publicly subsidised institutions, leaving only a niche (if anything) for makers of independent theatre:

'The promotion of arts education, which after a long struggle is not financed with resources from the areas of education and culture, often concentrates on schools or collaborations of cultural institutions with educational institutions. Projects which [...] operate outside these funding guidelines in the independent scene, have difficulty acquisitioning funds as long as they do not adapt to the funding criteria. When assessed for cultural funding (which, by far, does not subsidise all the good projects), the artists are lay persons, for social funding the costs are too high for a professional video installation. In both cases it is difficult to think beyond the duration of a project: Innovative projects are desired but seldom follow-up collaborations or even institutional support. Funding stipulations prevent sustainability.'<sup>202</sup>

In summary, Paul Harman states what this means for current developments on the methodological-aesthetic level for the independent children's and young people's theatre scene in Great Britain:

'In the last five years or so, we have seen a greater and greater divide between companies. They fall into roughly three groups. A small group who seek to make art for young audiences. A large group who make entertainment theatre which can attract paying audiences, usually based on known folk tales or adaptations of contemporary picture books for younger children and established titles for older children. The largest group

**201** | Hardie, Yvette, "President's Message" on the occasion of the World Day of Children's and Young People's Theatre, 20 March 2013; see [http://www.assitej-international.org/media/55530/message\\_2013\\_yvette.pdf](http://www.assitej-international.org/media/55530/message_2013_yvette.pdf)

**202** | Berendts 2010, p. 166.

now make overtly 'educational' theatre, which covers a wide range of participatory or didactic products aimed to support aspects of the official curriculum, or to address topics like sex education which teachers assume will be better delivered through dramatised stories or dramatic play.'

The fact that the groups which actually want *and can* produce "art" for children are a minority is one of the crucial absurdities of the art market and the system of cultural funding.

### **3.4 Interim Conclusion II: Possibilities and Limitations of the Independent Scene**

Since the nineties, independent children's theatre in Europe has structurally emancipated itself and aesthetically differentiated and refined itself. It has also successfully repositioned itself in the knowledge society of the 21st century in terms of an explicit educational mandate, giving the independent theatre scene a particular and inherent potential for several reasons.

On the one hand, a particular creative potential can be observed, since certain impulses for the structural change and aesthetic innovation could only emerge under the production and distribution conditions characteristic of the independent scene. The typically 'independent' manner of working alone (i.e., outside predefined structures) has enabled and favoured the development of new formats which have currently influenced and stimulated the children's theatre landscapes in Europe.

The most important factor in this context is the cross-sector and interdisciplinary play development which the majority of independent groups still espouse despite all adversities. In this connection, it is important to bear in mind that the creation of new plays which are perfectly tailored to the talents of the respective artists involved create favourable prerequisites for aesthetic experiments and innovations. In some areas, as in the theatre for the very young and in music and dance theatre for children, the ability to develop separate artistic productions in the group is virtually a necessary condition, because there is to date practically no repertoire which artists can fall back on which can be re-enacted one-to-one.

As can be well demonstrated for the sector of music theatre for young people, the flexible structures and production conditions necessary for the development process of new pieces are typical of the independent scene, but not of an institutional opera house: "The team-oriented structures of the independent theatre are much better suited to the character of projects than the hierarchically organised work structures and division of labour which

can be found in a [...] municipal theatre”,<sup>203</sup> says the so-called “Mannheimer Manifest” on music theatre for young audiences. And what is proclaimed here for music theatre can be generally applied to the principle of separate piece development within the independent performing arts on the whole: ‘Independent’ work structures are more suitable for piece development.

In addition, it could be shown that the independent children’s theatre scene in particular has the potential to fulfil the educational mandate given to the arts. It seems predestined to offer participative activities in arts education of a very high standard, since the compatibility of typically ‘independent’ production conditions with the quality parameters defined by UNESCO is especially high.

From that point of view, one can say that working artistically *and* ‘independently’ greatly increases the chances (or is necessary) for both aesthetic innovations and high-quality arts education activities in the area of children’s theatre. However, the development of this immanent potential of independent theatre can only take place under certain conditions – conditions which are seldom guaranteed by cultural and educational policies. In fact, independent children’s theatre in Europe is still largely neglected in cultural and educational policies, and its potential is disregarded (or underestimated at best).

As has been shown, the lack of financial resources, the constraints and mechanisms of an increasingly economised art market, and the prevailing (and often paradoxical) funding criteria prevent independent groups from being able to work typically ‘independently’. Precarious working conditions make it impossible for artists to develop their creative potential in the form of innovations like those prescribed in the UNESCO quality parameters for arts education.

One thing is clear: the makers of independent children’s theatre can only use their ‘independence’ productively and thus be able to develop their potential if they are ‘independent’ of the constraints of the market – if the independent scene can become an “independent scene with sufficient money and time”. This, however, is in the reality of most European countries still a paradox. Independent children’s theatre groups normally have neither (sufficient) public funding nor the option of taking enough time to develop a project, and the advancing commercialisation of the market on which art for children is increasingly offered purely as a commodity is making the situation worse.

One of the consequences of these precarious working conditions is the increasing self-exploitation of artists: “If the independent scene [...] claims to be the avantgarde of the theatre, then it has been, in the form of a project-based regime of exploitation, the capitalistic avantgarde for a long time now”,<sup>204</sup>

**203** | From “Mannheimer Manifest zum Musiktheater” (vgl. [http://www.assitej.de/file-admin/assitej/pdf/2009-12-07\\_Mannheimer\\_Manifest.pdf](http://www.assitej.de/file-admin/assitej/pdf/2009-12-07_Mannheimer_Manifest.pdf)), p. 1.

**204** | Stegemann 2013, p. 234.

according to Bernd Stegemann. And also the general reflections of Byung-Chul Hans on the implicit “structures of subordination and coercion of the neoliberal dictates of freedom”<sup>205</sup> can be transferred almost one-to-one to the working structures of the so-called “independent” theatre scene:

‘The call for motivation, initiative and project is more effective for exploitation than whip and commands. As one’s own entrepreneur, the subject of performance is free in that it is not subordinate to the orders and exploitation of others because it exploits itself and of its own volition. The exploiter is the exploited. One is perpetrator and victim in one. The self-exploitation is much more efficient than the exploitation by another because it is associated with the feeling of freedom.’<sup>206</sup>

This mechanism of self-exploitation is also perpetuated by the circumstance that the prevailing hardship in economic circles has been relabelled as a virtue by using the artists as “perfect role models for the economy of the service society”; each is expected to continuously reinvent him- or herself as a “Me Incorporated”.<sup>207</sup> In this sense, being ‘creative’ becomes one of the most urgent “key competences” in a neoliberal exploitation system.

“One could argue that the quality of theatre for children and youth is an indicator of the maturity and sophistication of a theatre culture in any given country, its sense of vision and responsibility, its deliberate investment in the future theatre audience”,<sup>208</sup> Dragan Klaic wrote about the importance of theatre for children and young people. In light of this, it must seem completely desirable for independent children’s theatre to receive more support in the future to develop its full potential. In order to achieve this, two things must happen as soon as possible:

1.) “*Being an artist means putting up a fight!*”

“The art of being courageous is not losing heart. Keep struggling. Always offering resistance. Against the wind. Counter-current. Always maintaining the balance. Always alert”.<sup>209</sup> These are the words which Marcel Cremer (AGORA Theater, Saint Vith) used to describe his general artistic self-perception. On another occasion, he described it as follows:

**205** | Han 2013, p. 16.

**206** | Ibid., p. 15.

**207** | Mörsch, Carmen: “Eine kurze Geschichte von KünstlerInnen in Schulen”; see: <http://kontextschule.org/inhalte/dateien/MoerschKueInSchGeschichte.pdf>

**208** | Klaic 2012, p. 75.

**209** | Cremer 2012, no page.

‘Being an artist means putting up a fight. The fool and I are one and the same. And the fool generally survives the kings who employ him [...]. An artist is not there to stand up for the powerful or to serve them [...]. We, artists, are on the side of the minorities, especially if we see ourselves as artists of the people [...]. It is part of the biography of an artist that he never puts down his weapons, never refuses to fight for a just cause.’<sup>210</sup>

If one specifically addresses the necessary resistance of the independent artists in the struggle against the usurpation of their art by the mechanisms of the market economy, this can express itself in a deliberate refusal of certain subsidies if the respective prerequisites for funding negatively influence artistic work. Bill Buffery (multi story theatre company) from Great Britain reported on the situation as follows:

‘Firstly, we deliberately do not seek revenue funding. This is because, having worked for 23 years within subsidised theatre, we grew weary of the opaque bureaucracy that came with subsidy. We resented the colonisation of our minds and the eroding of our creative time. We found the constraints in terms of what kind of work we could produce and where we could produce it counter-productive.’

The following answer was given by Silvia Pahl from theater 3 hasen oben when asked why she wanted to continue working in children’s theatre despite all the difficulties:

‘It is very clear to us that our capabilities of exerting any kind of influence on society are (put mildly) limited. With regard to the single individual who comes to the theatre, our influence is, for a short time, a bit greater. We want to use this moment. Even the smallest impulse is worth sending out into the audience – and, thus, into the world. We are idealists, otherwise we would be out of place in children’s theatre.’<sup>211</sup>

There is nothing more to add.

## 2.) *“A redefinition of public interest in culture!”*

“One should be aware of the fact that saving on culture can only make a small contribution toward balancing a budget. However, the damage done by such

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**210** | Cremer, Marcel: “Jenseits der grünen Wiese”. In: *AGORA – Das Theater der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens* (ed.): Pieces 8-16. In-house publication 2009 – quoted from: *AGORA 2012*, no page.

**211** | Pahl, Silvia, “Da sein – ein Manifest” (January 2013). Unpublished original manuscript kindly made available by the author of “theater 3 hasen oben” from Immichenhain/Germany.

cost-cutting measures is immense".<sup>212</sup> This statement made by the German Minister of State, Bernd Neumann, indicates a clear direction for European cultural promotion policies: Limit the damage, and, in the best case, *repair* it!

An independent Austrian research institute, EDUCULT, developed and published a cross-section study in 2011 describing the near future of children's theatre in Europe and including the following two horror scenarios:

'Scenario I:

Further budget constraints for public cultural policy and cultural institutions are leading to an even higher concentration on traditional forms of presentation and existing audience. Culture is the final retreat of the diminishing white urban upper class.

Scenario II:

Further budget cuts of public funding are compensated by cultural institutions through a strong market orientation. Besides concentration on traditional forms, cultural offers are identical with entertainment, serving the taste of the audience. Education will be limited to edutainment activities. As a result cultural institutions will no longer have a consistent image, values of culture and the arts will be indicated by quantities of audiences and return on investment.'<sup>213</sup>

One should also bear in mind that saving should not be an issue when it comes to the quality of such activities, especially in terms of arts education:

'Quality arts education programs have impact on the child; the teaching and learning environment, and on the community, but these benefits were only observed where quality programs were in place. [...] It is of significance to note that a number of case studies indicated that bad and poor quality programs, in fact may be detrimental to children's creative development [...].'<sup>214</sup>

Accordingly, the worst case scenario may be the one pointedly predicted by Paul Harman: "The current austerity measures probably mean that we shall lose most of the improvements in status and public awareness won over the last 30 years."

In order to prevent this catastrophe, politicians must become more active: "Le secteur théâtral jeunes publics français est dans l'attente de la définition et de la mise en œuvre d'une nouvelle politique théâtrale de service public pour jeunes spectateurs au niveau de l'Etat comme des collectivités régionales".

**212** | Bernd Neumann in an interview with the ver.di-Zeitschrift *Kunst + Kultur*, 14 Dec 2009 (online at: [http://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/Interview/2009/12/2009-12-14-bernd-neumann-verdi-kunst-und-kultur.html?\\_\\_site=Nachhaltigkeit](http://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/Interview/2009/12/2009-12-14-bernd-neumann-verdi-kunst-und-kultur.html?__site=Nachhaltigkeit)).

**213** | EDUCULT 2011, p. 65.

**214** | Bamford 2009, p. 101.

Maurice Yendt describes the expectations of children's theatre professionals in France in such a way that most players in the independent children's theatre scenes in practically all European countries would subscribe to it. Or in the words of Dragan Klaic:

'What is needed in Europe instead of new theatre laws is a redefinition of public interest in culture and the articulation of instruments, criteria, procedures and resources that will implement these interests through the existing and emerging cultural infrastructure, drawing clear demarcation lines between commercial and non-commercial cultural production and distribution. This redefinition cannot be just a matter of national policy but needs strong regional and local anchoring.'<sup>215</sup>

What this can mean for independent children's theatre in Europe in particular, and what steps European cultural and educational policy makers should take in view of the currently prevailing (negative) conditions, will be summarised in the last part of this study.

## **4. CONCLUSION: FIVE DEMANDS ON CULTURAL POLICY MAKERS**

What are currently the most important desiderata essential to the well-being of independent children's theatre in Europe which must be addressed to those persons who are and should be responsible for cultural and educational policies? Which measures are urgently needed to ensure a better future for the independent performing artists for young audiences?

### **4.1 End the Inadequate Financing of Independent Children's Theatre!**

As this study showed, the independent groups in Europe, especially in the area of children's theatre, still suffer from a severe shortage of financial support. If public protestations demanding innovation and creativity, the preservation of cultural diversity, and more high-quality arts education programmes are to be more than lip service, then there *must* be more money, and swift and purposeful action *must* be taken on both national and community levels. "Public funding in this area is in the 'public interest'", concludes the German Bundestag's Enquête Commission on Culture<sup>216</sup> – now it is time to turn words into action, not only in Germany but throughout Europe.

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**215** | Klaic 2012, p. 171.

**216** | Final Report of the Enquête Commission: "Kultur in Deutschland", p. 381.

This is also true, and should be explicitly emphasised at this point, for the area of arts education:

'There is hardly a greater gulf between what is promised in political speeches and what is actually implemented through day-to-day efforts than in the area of arts education. Leading players from all sectors of society do not hesitate to acknowledge the importance of arts education for the individual and the society; hard and fast consequences for the practice of arts education, however, are often not forthcoming.'<sup>217</sup>

Therefore, in its Road Map for Arts Education, UNESCO designated the following as one of the most urgent developmental tasks in Europe: 'Acknowledging that budgets for Arts Education are either non-existent or insufficient to cover its routine and development needs'.<sup>218</sup>

There is a need for immediate action in order to prevent the gap between expected performance and available funds from widening any further.

## 4.2 Revamp and Revise Impedimentary Funding Criteria!

The revamping and revision of impedimentary funding criteria is a very broad field about which it is difficult to make general statements, since the cultural funding systems and instances in Europe vary from country to country. There does seem to be a consensus with regard to the following two demands:

First, it is necessary that makers of independent children's theatre are given more possibilities to receive long-term, structural and conceptual support instead of (at best) serial project funding. Only this kind of financial security can enable the long-term planning and continuity which are essential to successful organisational, personnel and quality development.

Second, visionary new funding concepts are needed – in the interest of a continuous stimulation and revival of the scene – which focus on an open-process funding and thus create more room for innovation and experimentation on unfamiliar ground: "Creativity needs a protected space which is free from the dimensions of results-orientation and economic calculability".<sup>219</sup> In this sense, it is to rethink goal agreements and criteria for public promotion for independent children's theatre groups. The scene certainly does *not* need more "efficiency measurements (politely referred to as evaluations)" – what it *does* need is "trust in the experiment [...] and the acceptance of failure".<sup>220</sup>

**217** | Ibid., p. 377.

**218** | [http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CLT/CLT/pdf/Arts\\_Edu\\_RoadMap\\_en.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CLT/CLT/pdf/Arts_Edu_RoadMap_en.pdf)

**219** | *Evaluation der Hamburger Privattheater*, p. 11.

**220** | Hentschel 2012, no page.

### 4.3 More Venues and Production Houses for Independent Children's Theatre!

The lack of permanent venues for the independent scene has a particularly adverse effect on the system of children's theatre:<sup>221</sup> When independent children's theatre takes place in so-called "alternative" venues, i.e. schools, youth centres or public places, it is seldom aesthetically motivated but occurs for pragmatic, financial reasons – because no other venue is affordable. On the other hand, it must be said that all the independent groups which have their own permanent venue can be designated as "established" and are "visible" in their artistic profile in some way, beyond regional and even national borders, particularly because they are more highly regarded by both the public and the media.

Hence, the order of the day must be to create more venues for independent children's theatre throughout Europe – and, in the best case, to establish more separate theatres for children's theatre. "The future belongs to the theatres!" Wolfgang Schneider proclaimed several years ago and proceeded to describe what a "theatre house" could be:

- 'the place for production and presentation, identification and interaction,
- the model for co-production and cooperation,
- the network of artistic exchange, also with other arts and other cultures,
- the agency for cultural management, for guest performances, festivals, art instruction, for the concerted acquisition of financial resources, sponsoring, fund-raising, public relations and other marketing measures,
- the theatre as a seal of approval for artistic quality. Whoever can participate, is good, guarantees the agency for consumer testing, theatre!'<sup>222</sup>

As a national and/or regional centre, a theatre for a young audience can function as a meeting place, forum and stage for different theatre producers, as an "interdisciplinary, interactive and integrative theatre centre", as a "placement agency, experimental stage, research institute, laboratory" as well as an "idea pool" and "centre for entrepreneurs in the field of independent theatre".<sup>223</sup>

In addition, a theatre house for children, even though it is initiated and run by adults, is a "house and artistic institution for a community of children which

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**221** | The problem is exacerbated in dance theatre; here there are virtually no permanent venues, and thus, despite some exemplary structural and artistic support, hardly any rehearsal and performance possibilities exist for independent dance groups (See Figl 2013, p. 27).

**222** | Schneider 2007, p. 90.

**223** | Ibid., p. 86.

is created there. It is one of the few possibilities in which children can claim and develop a sphere of their own public space".<sup>224</sup> Therefore, a separate theatre for children not only has an aesthetic importance, but a social significance as well.

The "Frankfurter Perspektivkommission" also stressed the advantages of an unlimited residence at a permanent venue:

'This supports the formation of identity and the anchoring of many ensembles in one location, gives the chance of developing a repertory by providing storage capacity [...] ensures the "owners" rehearsal rooms, allows a diverse artistic programme with even small formats.'<sup>225</sup>

The possible disadvantages of a permanent, or even a separate venue – for example, the stagnation of artistic development, the calcification of entrenched structures or 'stewing in one's own juice' by closing oneself off from the outside world – have so far not been observed in the area of independent children's theatre. Whoever is lucky enough to have their own permanent venue or to operate their own house usually does not stop performing site-specific projects in public space or touring, or networking or opening their doors to other independent groups for guest performances and co-productions. The "innovative potential through theatricality in different locations"<sup>226</sup> is maintained; the essentially desirable and creatively beneficial mobility of the independent theatre is not rejected. Or as Marcel Crème (AGORA Theatre, Saint Vith) once metaphorically described it when his group moved into their new theatre:

'The artist must always seek the unknown. His home is the journey. As soon as the unknown becomes familiar to him, he must move on. What is the Triangel, the new theatre? It is our home port. That's where we are anchored. And we hoist anchor to set out for new horizons. The new destination tells us that we are not nowhere but somewhere.'<sup>227</sup>

The necessary of having a "home port" and "not being nowhere" seems to apply to the independent children's theatre in Europe as well.

**224** | Richard 1986, p. 63.

**225** | *Evaluation der Freien Theaterszene in Frankfurt am Main*, p. 19.

**226** | Schneider 2007, p. 86.

**227** | Cremer, Marcel: Foreword. In: AGORA – Das Theater der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens (ed.): 30 Jahre AGORA. In-house publication 2010 – quoted from: AGORA 2012, no page.

#### 4.4 No Disproportionate Preferential Treatment for Participative Formats!

In light of the global debates on this topic, much (public) funding is now being made available to promote arts education for children. However, an imbalance is becoming more and more evident inasmuch as a disproportionately large share of these subsidies is used to finance educational and participative formats and thus only a small select area of arts education programmes is profiting. The promotion of professional theatre for children tends to be neglected.<sup>228</sup> This can be demonstrated by taking a closer look at the current cultural funding guidelines for the city of Hamburg for the year 2012, in which one can read the following statement:

“While, in recent years, there has been an expansion and an increase in quality of the education and training programmes in the area of cultural education Germany-wide, the programmes in the artistic sector seem to be stagnating on a rather low level”.<sup>229</sup> Yet no countermeasures are planned; in fact, the actions planned by the senate are aimed almost exclusively at the promotion of formats which derive from the area of theatre pedagogy or “theatre and school”.<sup>230</sup> A prime example of this is the stated intention, “on the part of the Hamburg Staatsoper, to intensify the targeting of children and young people by means of specific educational offers and projects” which should be organised analogous to the successful TuSch Programme which has been in place in Hamburg for years.<sup>231</sup> As positive as the implementation of this plan may seem, it is all the more absurd that there is no music theatre for young audiences in Hamburg at this time and that this fact does not seem to merit any kind of attention in this context.

Similarly, Paul Harman describes the recent cultural and political measures in England, stating that they unfairly discriminate and show undue preference towards cultural *education*:

“The Labour Government 1997-2010 spent a large amount of money on Creative Partnerships, by which artists were invited to help teachers develop and use more creative

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**228** | Particularly in the area of dance theatre, there is a great deficit. Although the number of independent groups which produce for children and young people has significantly increased in recent years, it still cannot be said that there is a continuous offer of activities for young people as a matter of course.

**229** | *Rahmenkonzept Kinder- und Jugendkultur in Hamburg 2012* (Framework Concept for Children and Youth Culture in Hamburg 2012), p. 15.

**230** | See *ibid.*, p. 32.

**231** | *Ibid.*, p. 17.

methods to deliver the same utilitarian objectives. Theatre performances by professionals could play no part in this.'

The narrow interpretation of the concept of arts education and the preferential treatment given to participative formats disregards the fact that arts education processes are not only initiated through "learning by doing" but just as much through "learning by *viewing*"; it is often forgotten that watching is also a form of participation – namely on the level of our imagination – and is in no way to be classified as a passive process. Thus, theatre projects *with* children as a means to the end of arts education cannot suffice. Arts education includes practicing art as well as art reception and a "programme of aesthetic alphabetisation".<sup>232</sup>

'In an era in which we are bombarded with signs every day, it makes sense to train the art of seeing. And the best method still seems to be in arousing interest in what can be seen. The theatre offers [...] the possibility of integrating seeing into a communication process which codes and decodes the signs of the time between actors and so-called "spect-actors".'<sup>233</sup>

The "Announcement on the Financing of Culture 2012-2015" (Botschaft zur Finanzierung der Kultur 2012-2015) stresses the importance of the *reception* of the arts:

'Arts sharpen the perception and develop awareness. There is no better school of contemplation, of attention, of differentiation than art. Precise and critical listening, looking, thinking makes people attentive, expressive and discerning.'<sup>234</sup>

The necessity of training and practicing the ability to observe is possibly more important today than ever before, as Ulrich Khuon explains:

'Precisely because the subject and his perceptions are bound to a merciless personal inner-worldly obligation to be present and to participate, and because it hardly seems possible to distance oneself from this obligation or even to dispense with it, the retreat from the strenuous constant presence in the world which we perceive could be a chance for the arts. The observer can watch something without being directly involved; he is meant without having to react immediately. Art could help us to observe more exactly because we wish to continue the perception in this unencumbered state.'<sup>235</sup>

**232** | Mollenhauer 1990, p. 9.

**233** | Schneider 2013, p. 30.

**234** | Institute for Art Education, p. 124.

**235** | Khuon 2010, p. 47.

Therefore, since an elective course on creative writing in school cannot be a full-fledged substitute for reading literary texts, and most certainly not for reading the classics, theatre work *with* children can be usefully integrated into a professional programme *for* a young audience – and can receive at least the same amount of public funding!

#### **4.5 Fight the Usurpation of Art and Culture by the Mechanisms of the Market Economy!**

Another difficulty concerning public funding policies results from a one-sided interpretation of the concept of arts education – this time in the direction of an “education *through* the arts”, meaning an education through and in the medium of the arts which has as its aim the imparting of knowledge and promoting the acquisition of non-artistic transfer competences. All too often, and, as it seems, with an increasing trend, the dimension of “education *in* the arts” is neglected, although UNESCO deemed this aspect equally important. Encountering the arts is itself the content and aim of arts education, according to the principle of “education *in* the arts”. As has been shown, the strong pressure of legitimisation which is often cited in the public discourse in connection with the high social relevance of arts education programmes can usually be assigned to the categories of “secondary effects”, “subsequent benefits” or “positive knock-on effects”. “One thing should not be forgotten,” according to the warning voiced by the Deutscher Kulturrat in 2013. “The job market, culture, is a unique job market. [...] If art is regarded only from an economical point of view, it loses its magic and dies”.<sup>236</sup>

Therefore, perhaps the most important demand on European cultural and educational policies with regard to public funding for arts education for children is the acknowledgement of the specific *intrinsic value* of art and culture. That this intrinsic value is increasingly neglected and, in the course of the progressing economisation of arts, is constantly in danger of being reduced to a level which corresponds with other factors in discussion, is something which has been repeatedly confirmed by independent children’s theatre professionals.

Bill Buffery (multi story theatre company) from Great Britain, when asked about the most important demands in the area of professional theatre for children, pointed out the pressure to justify itself in the face of other media, which leads to a situation in which the theatre no longer has faith in its own abilities and instead tries to imitate its “competitors”:

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**236** | Schulz/Zimmermann/Hufnagel 2013, p. 333.

'The serious problems are related to [this]: basically a lack of faith in what theatre has to offer and a scrabbling around to grab what is cool from other entertainment models – TV, video, PC, smartphones or whatever. Theatre starts to apologise for not being the new kid on the block and does its very best to appear light and fluffy and eager to please. And so loses its essential seriousness and sense of purpose. And runs the risk of becoming irrelevant.'

This trend leads to a loss of identity within the theatre which denies the children that special potential, that intrinsic value, which only the theatre has to offer: '[Children] don't need theatre to do what their PC does – their PC does that better. They need theatre to do what theatre does – which is to celebrate the transformative power of the human imagination.'

Silvia Pahl of the German independent group theater 3 hasen oben describes her artistic conception of herself as a purposeful attempt to create an "antipole to the prevailing climate" by means of her work in the theatre:

'We live in a society which, it seems, is almost entirely permeated by a materialistic view. Everything that we think and do, everything that we teach and learn, everything we strive for, has one sense: usability. Nearly everything that we do has goals or at least intentions. Even on toys for the youngest children (e.g. HABA toys), there is a recommended age group printed on the package and the skills which the child can acquire with the toy. It seems to me that not one of our actions may be without intention because we think that it would then be useless [...] Every day we miss out on simply being. Our children and we forget how to play just for the sake of playing, telling stories for the sake of inventing, dancing, singing, crying. We unlearn and forget all that, and we do not have any time left, alongside our appointments, for our personal optimisation.'<sup>237</sup>

If the concept of arts education should not be subjugated to the dictates of the market, then when decisions are made with regard to providing public funding, the criterion should not be whether a theatre project for children imparts usable 'knowledge', but the genuinely artistic, aesthetic quality of the project must be the most relevant factor: the extent to which the children watching and/or participating are given the opportunity of making a specific aesthetic experience.

Such an aesthetic experience is, in contrast to the perceptive experiences made in everyday life, by definition "free of every primary connection to external tasks, functions and goals":

**237** | Pahl, Silvia: "Da sein – ein Manifest" (January 2013). Unpublished manuscript kindly made available by the author of theater 3 hasen oben in Immichenhain/Germany.

'The relationship which we establish to objects when making aesthetic experiences is not subject to any one-sided goal or purpose orientation, but the sense and purpose lie solely in the experience itself.'<sup>238</sup>

This, however, does not mean that aesthetic experiences *do not* fulfil a function. In fact, for many reasons, it is possible to attest because

'[aesthetic experiences] are anchored in the sensuality of perception, but need reflexive processing without, at the same time, losing the touch with physicality. In aesthetic experiences we experience ourselves and the world at the same time and are animated to different kinds of interplay: between sensuality and reflection, between emotionality and reason, between the conscious and the subconscious, between materiality and sign characters, between the speakable and the unspeakable, between the certain and the uncertain. Perhaps the basic openness which makes this interplay possible is, in general, exemplary for human experience and recognition.'<sup>239</sup>

The cultural and educational policies which neglect the funding of education *in* the arts are thus in every respect unacceptable, especially in times in which any remaining oasis which gives us the chance to withdraw from the pressures of everyday life should be preserved and used. The theatre can still be such a refuge – perhaps more than ever before. A different time prevails here: a timeout. And a playing space is opened in which efficiency and exploitation are suspended and the utilisation principle can be thwarted. "The more oppressive we perceive our commitment to the norms of our everyday lives – maximisation, mainstream, deprivation – the more we need to experience something else", says Holger Noltze. "Having once made the experience that this place exists, changes our perspective".<sup>240</sup>

'The very word education comes from the Latin word "educo", to lead out (not to cram in), and this is where the arts come in, with their unique ability to develop communication skills and moral and social awareness, to inspire creativity and self-expression, to instil a sense of self-esteem, self-confidence, achievement and hence identity. To produce rounded, responsible future citizens of the world. To question our assumptions and prejudices and reaffirm our basic values and our shared humanity. To crucially give the lie to the idea that nothing really matters any more except money.'<sup>241</sup>

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**238** | Brandstätter 2012, p. 175.

**239** | Ibid., p. 180.

**240** | Noltze 2010, p. 265.

**241** | See the remarks by Michael Attenborough on 2 May 2013 at <http://www.thestage.co.uk/features/analysis-opinion/2013/05/letters-week-may-2-2013>

In this sense, the arts can be turned into “launching pads from which we can be sent off into other orbits. And they will work because they defy the control of the prevailing principles”.<sup>242</sup>

Providing support for this unique quality of the arts, and thus for independent children's theatre, would not only mean an increase in the quality of arts education activities, but in the final analysis would increase the quality of *life* in all those children who are given the chance to make such aesthetic experiences in and with the arts. And wouldn't that be the best conceivable aim of arts education?

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- Rofina, Tanya (ASSITEJ, Poland)
- Rosenfeld, Arthur (Maas, the Netherlands)
- Rosiny, Claudia (Bundesamt für Kultur, Switzerland)
- Rudnev, Pavel (Moscow Art Theatre, Russia)
- Rudzinski, Zbigniew (Children's Arts Centre, Poland)
- Schade, Jörg (Pyrmonter Theatercompagnie e.V., Germany)
- Schappach, Beate (Institut für Theaterwissenschaften Universität Bern, Switzerland)
- Schneeberger, Christian (Schweizerische Theatersammlung, Switzerland)
- Schneider, Wolfgang (ASSITEJ, Germany)
- Smits, Jan (Koninklijke Bibliotheek, the Netherlands)
- Sobczyk, Justyna (IT, Poland)
- Socha, Ela (ASSITEJ, Poland)
- Stasiołek, Katarzyna (POLUNIMA, Poland)
- Staudt, Rivka (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the Netherlands)
- Stephenson, Deborah (Arts Council, United Kingdom)
- Stüwe-Eßl, Barbara (Interessensgemeinschaft Freie Theaterarbeit Österreich, Austria)
- Tacchini, Barbara (Junge Oper Stuttgart, Germany)
- Takei, Yutaka (Compagnie Forest Beats, France)
- Terribile, Roberto (Fondazione AIDA, Italy)
- Timmermans, Jack (De Stille, the Netherlands)
- Turner, Jeremy (Cwmni Theatr Arad Goch, United Kingdom)
- Ullrich, Christoph (Laterna Musica, Germany)
- Unsel, Melanie (University of Oldenburg, Germany)

- van de Water, Manon (ITYARN, USA)
- van den Eynde, Bart (a.pass: advanced performance and scenography studies, Belgium)
- van der Meulen, Jamilja (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, the Netherlands)
- van der Mieden, Otto (Poppenspelmuseum, the Netherlands)
- Vanthienen, Annemie (FARO – Vlaams Steunpunt voor Cultureel Erfgoed, Belgium)
- Venturini, Davide (Compagnia TPO, Italy)
- Verbrugge, Flora (Theater Sonnevanck, the Netherlands)
- von Löwis, Stephan (kinderkinder, Germany)
- Wallebroek, Veerle (Het Firmament, Belgium)
- Wartemann, Geesche (University of Hildesheim, Germany)
- Weber, Brigitta (Theater Eiger, Mönch und Jungfrau, Switzerland)
- Wellens, Nikol (VTI, Belgium)
- Werdenberg, Ursula (ITI, Switzerland)
- Wettmark, Ellen (Kulturrådet, Sweden)
- Wischnitzky, Eva (Theater Fallalpha, Switzerland)
- Yendt, Maurice (ATEJ, France)
- Zagorski, Andrea (ITI, Germany)
- Zeeman, Pieter (Fonds Podiumkunsten, the Netherlands)
- Zini, Carlotta (La Baracca, Italy)
- Zwaneveld, Brechtje (Theatermaker, the Netherlands)