INSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

According to the preliminary results of the research carried out for the study "About Theater" by the Heartefact Fund and the Working Group for Performing Arts in cooperation with the Creative Industries Council, as well as publicly available information sources, the following basic data on the institutional part of the performing sector has emerged:

- In Serbia, in the institutional framework, at the level of local self-governments, cities and at the republic level, there is a total of 45 theaters.

- These institutions employ approximately 2350 people, most of whom are engaged in permanent employment. As a supplement to the regular ensemble and the structure of employees, the so-called flat-rate, part-time, occasional and temporary contracts are still an often practice.

- In the framework of institutional theaters in the entire Serbia, in 2017 there were 65 premiers recorded in independent production. In addition, institutional theaters produced another 16 performances in co-productions, mostly with an independent scene. The city of Belgrade has the most developed theater sector and records almost two thirds of these premiers, followed by the city of Novi Sad. In these 65 plays, about 380 actors and performers are engaged. It is important to note that these numbers are not completely precise - the statistics are made on the basis of publicly available data, reports and media contents that followed the theater activities during the year.

- The number of theaters in Serbia bearing the classification of institutions of national importance, according to the decision of the Government of the Republic of Serbia from the year 2013, is 7.

Review

In many sectors of institutional theater in recent years, the negative effects of restrictions on engaging new employees are clearly visible, which is, on the one hand, the consequence of the Law on the method of determining the maximum number of employees in the public sector, and on the other - the inability of certain institutional frameworks to retain highly profiled personnel, due to better working conditions offered by various private producers or other areas of creative and cultural industries.

With this negative effect, the artistic and technical sectors of institutions are permanently affected: the ban on the employment of newer generations of actors (actors, musicians, players) and the lack of insufficiently profiled personnel in technical services, who are not able to keep up with the new technical possibilities that theatrical and performing arts have at their disposal.

In addition to the infrastructure problems that are reflected in the obsolescence of the facilities in which they are located, their lack of functionality or lack of equipment for quality implementation of the program, institutional theaters also face a production crisis that is due to the lack of clear program guidelines for the houses themselves, as well as the intention of the founders. Program strategies are mostly conducted in the short-term designed financial possibilities of the house, because the founders do not agree to commit themselves to long-term, systematically projected financing of the production itself, guided by the overriding principles of the competition whose calendar does not follow the real needs of the art production of the theater for which it is intended. The intention of the founder and thinking about what is the role of performing arts in Serbia is very often not the subject of the administration's interest. Institutions are financed without analysis of artistic achievements, social significance and / or success in the audience, but also without the understanding of realistic needs, of possibilities of sustainability and the necessity of long-term projections of the funds to be allocated.

As a consequence, the houses often do not have clear program orientations, they plan repertoire policies in the short and *ad hoc* way, do not have the possibility of engaging or changing artistic leadership, which results in a paradoxical situation that the performing arts institutions are deprived of artistic concepts and strategies.

It is important to note that the Ministry of Culture and Information of the Government of the Republic of Serbia has, in the Action Plan that followed the development of the Strategy for Culture Development Strategy 2017-2027 for the first three years of its implementation, envisaged a search for a new, European and precise system of the institutional theater framework, with a special emphasis on the National Theater in Belgrade and the Serbian National Theater in Novi Sad. This action plan further envisions measures that should regulate the field of performing arts - theaters and dance - in a given period, through a series of laws and by-laws.

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HEARTEFACT

SERBIA CREATES DRAMA

Key problems of institutional theatres

- Insufficient resources, sources of financing and support for theatrical production, as well as in other parts of the sector. Regardless of the certain advantage, mission, tradition and intentions of the founders, most of the institutional theaters face challenges in finding funds for the realization of the program and the use of full capacities of their houses, as well as for engaging the necessary additional associates.

- Inadequate legal and other juridical regulations, which do not recognize all the specifics of contemporary theater and performing arts. This includes laws enacted in the field of culture, as well as a series of other regulations and acts, which put artistic creation and procurement of goods and services in the same plane. In addition, the system of coordination, responsibility and clear strategic determination of institutional houses by these laws is not most precisely regulated, and business largely depends on the capacity of individuals who manage the institution at a given point in time.

- The prohibiting measures of employment greatly jeopardized the flow of reconstruction of ensembles, technical services, but also what would otherwise be a natural and spontaneous process of transformation of institutional theaters into contemporary cultural institutions. In this situation, theaters are forced to, besides the permanently employed members, also engage a large number of external associates in their own means, resulting in a lack of funds for new productions and endangering regular work on improving the programs of the houses themselves.

- Key institutions do not have the resources, capacities, or adequate support for the development of the international aspect of their work. Apart from individual, mainly bilateral relations or participation in the work of certain international networks, there are almost no mechanisms that will enable international cooperation and exchange in a sustainable manner. Very few creators from abroad participate in the implementation of domestic programs and there are almost no examples of international co-productions and exchanges that go beyond the framework of the regional linguistic frame. This disables the significant distribution, exchange and visibility of our productions and authors at a wider international level.

- Investments in different forms of marketing as a strategy for the development and construction of a new audience, in addition to the existing one, are at the bare minimum. Institutions, even on social networks, use predominantly traditional marketing forms, while new approaches to the development of the audience are not recognized as potential for further development of the theater, which largely testifies to the lack of a full understanding of the changed nature of communication with the audience, but also of the broader role of the theater has in modern society.

- Most theaters still do not recognize the importance of intersectoral and interdisciplinary exchange and cooperation. This is best reflected in the fact that, for example, most surveyed institutions have their own web presentations, but don't use the full potential of new and digital technologies in everyday work. In general, the influence of knowledge from other fields in the functioning of institutional theaters is reduced to sporadic and very limited cases, often related to the content of particular performances, while in the field of organization, coordination and production practices, institutional theaters remain trapped in rigid and inert production models.

- The impression is that the Law on the method of determining the maximum number of employees in the public sector is the leading barrier in the development and transformation of institutional theaters, as it stops the natural renewal of the sector, which leads to an aging ensemble, which further dictates repertoire policy, and prevents the use of modern technological resources due to the lack of a new, educated staff to work on them. Furthermore, it accounts for the greater part of the funds for engaging external collaborators, which drastically reduces funds for artistic production or the renovation of the technique, but at the same time prevents the house management from changing the directors of the arts sectors, leading to a paradoxical situation that art directors in institutional houses are never relieved of their function in the entire period of their working life, and thus the institution remains within the framework of the artistic vision and strategy of only one person, who works in that one place until the pension. With this Law, institutions of performing arts are treated as any other sector of work, thus supporting unfair distribution of funds, mediocre values and mediocre achievements.

- Due to the lack of a long-term projection of the funds allocated by the founders, the same houses are forced to make exclusively short-term programs and artistic strategies, thus becoming completely uncompetitive within the international framework, excluded from the international cooperation through the co-production process and therefore making it impossible to create an audience through a project, as well as to work on a coherent artistic concept that a particular house represents and defends.