

OPINION

Prof. Anna Topaldzhikova, DSc
Lecturer in History of Bulgarian Theatre at NATFA "Krastyo Sarafov"
on the dissertation:

Project Theater in Bulgaria after 1989

By Ilko Evgeniev Ganev

For acquiring the educational and academic degree Doctor

The topic of Ilko Ganev's dissertation has not been brought into focus as an object of scientific analysis and this is one of the contributions of his work. Ilko Ganev examines unstudied archival data, selects the results and makes his own analysis. The analysis compares the requirements specified in the pre-conditions from the funding sources for the application, the practices carried out and the results of the projects' implementation. The conclusions - the result of the process of fact-finding, analysis and evaluation - are clearly formulated as effective or unsuccessful practices.

Ilko Ganev's comment on the terms repertory and independent theatre is valid, as theatre cannot be considered independent. On the contrary, it is dependent both on the financial resources necessary for its creation and, we might add, on the audience, whose presence it secures thanks to the creative potential and skills of the team.

I find the term 'project theatre' in the title, and throughout the doctorate, questionable - we know there are many different types of theatre, but what is being considered here is not types of theatre, but types of financial policies in relation to different types of theatre. This imprecision places the concept in a liminal zone that is vague and imprecise. Perhaps a more accurate title would be, for example, Financing Theatre Projects in Bulgaria - Practices since 1989.

In the first chapter "The Beginnings of Project-Based Financing in Bulgaria. Borrowing, Models and Practices. Policies up to 2020" compares the three main periods in the development of these processes in Bulgaria from 1989 to 2020. It identifies the main trends of transition from the initial steps of theatre funding projects towards the creation of new structures and the involvement of funding donors to the gradual decrease of private donors and the increase of state funding of theatre projects. Examined are the different funding models depending on the specific socio-political context of our country in different periods. The conclusion of the analysis is important in its critical assessment of a phenomenon that has not yet been overcome, namely "the persistent imposition of commercial repertoire solutions at the expense of artistic excellence, dictated by the ambition of the managements of the respective institutes" and the conclusion that this ambition for financial prosperity contradicts the tasks and specificity of publicly subsidized culture. As a way out of the problem, the doctorate student points to the encouragement of "artistic quality", "the desire to upgrade,

develop, enrich theatrical repertoire, to catch up with the best examples in the European context".

In the second chapter, "Donor Funders. Principles, Conditions, Impact on Culture", the different funding institutions that sponsor Bulgarian theatre after 1989 are examined (foreign ones - Soros Center for the Arts, Swiss Cultural Foundation Pro Helvetia, America for Bulgaria Foundation, British Council, Goethe Institute, French Institute - for Bulgaria, as well as Bulgarian ones - the National Centre for Theatre, the National Culture Fund, the Culture Program of Sofia Municipality, the culture programs of the municipalities of Varna, Plovdiv, etc.). Attached are accounting charts showing the financial effect of the measures taken to finance theatre projects over the years. Ilko Ganev draws attention to the emerging problem - the sharp increase in funding budgets does not always lead to an increase in the artistic results of the funding policies.

This is followed by chapter three, "Resilient Examples. Theatre Performances, Directors, Artists and Companies". Here again I have a small quibble with the title - directors and artists are inaccurately listed as different theatrical figures. This chapter historically traces the innovative explorations of theatre formations and theatre personalities that emerged in the 1990s in the context of the chosen dissertation topic. Foundations still active today in the financial support of theatre and their activities are mentioned. The activities of theatre organizations and associations (which emerged in the period under consideration and are still active today), which have been permanently funded by approved projects, are traced. Their theatrical ideas, the stylistic character of their creative searches are outlined in a synthesized form.

The conclusion draws summaries, critical remarks and recommendations. Returning to the overall picture of this study, I am convinced that Ilko Ganev deals with a large volume of previously unexplored documents. Essential to the contribution of the dissertation are largely the summaries and his critical evaluations. They are a provocation to overcome difficulties, wrong approaches, underestimated negative effects, which the research notices, analyzes and formulates. In this sense, the work can be useful for practitioners in implementing effective theatre project financing strategies.

On the basis of the merits of the dissertation presented by Ilko Ganev, I vote in favor of his candidature for acquiring the educational and scientific degree Doctor.

23.05.2022

Signature:

Prof. DSc Anna Topaldzhikova