

**INSTITUTE OF ART STUDIES, BAS**



**ILKO EVGENIEV GANEV**

**PROJECT THEATRE IN BULGARIA AFTER  
1989**

**DISERTATION ABSTRACT**

**FOR AWARDING DOCTORAL DEGREE**

**SOFIA  
2022**

**INSTITUTE OF ART STUDIES, BAS**

**ILKO EVGENIEV GANEV**

**PROJECT THEATRE IN BULGARIA AFTER  
1989**

**DISERTATION ABSTRACT FOR AWARDDING  
DOCTORAL DEGREE IN**

**THEATRE STUDIES AND DRAMA, 8.4.**

Research Supervisor:

Prof. Nikolay Iordanov, DSc

SOFIA, 2022

The dissertation was reviewed and referred to public defence at a session of sector *Theatre*, held on 24.02.2022.

The dissertation contains 120 pages, foreword, three chapters and 42 titles of bibliography in Cyrillic and 3 titles in Latin letters.

The public defence will be held on 28.06.2022 at 11:00 at a session of scholarly panel:

Prof. Anna Topaldzhikova, DSc , National Academy of Theatre and Film Arts, opinion  
Assoc. Prof. Asen Terziev, PhD, National Academy of Theatre and Film Arts, opinion  
Prof. Kamelia Nikolova, DSc, Institute of Art Studies, BAS, review  
Assoc. Prof. Romyana Nikolova, PhD, Institute of Art Studies, BAS, scientific council,  
opinion  
Prof. Veneta Doycheva, PhD, National Academy of Theatre and Film Arts, review

The materials on the defence are available to the interested parties at department Administrative Servicing with the Institute of Art Studies at *21 Krakra Street*.

## **GENERAL CHARACTERISTIC OF THE DISERTATION**

The purpose of this research is to outline the issues and the results of the long-term managing, financial and creative pursuits as well as all specific conditions of the development and functioning of Bulgarian theatre as an output foundation for the establishment and the subsequent development of the project theatre in Bulgaria.

Why project theatre? The use of the word phrase “project theatre” as a term has several functions. On the one hand, this is the formal way of referring to the theatre funded on the project principle. Outside of this concept explanation, however, this text has the task to refer to the meaning of the project theatre all of its remaining characteristics – content, objectives, achieved results, successful and not so successful examples, profiles of the creators practicing in the research field. The notion of “project theatre” should include all creative expressions which are happening in the building of the state and municipal repertory theatres in the form of individual projects outside the regular activity of these organizations as well as all other manifestations existing freely in the non-traditional, non-theatrical spaces.

According to the financial resource provided by the funding sources to the projects the text makes analyses of the time scope and develops non-researched and not sufficiently reviewed issues, topics, events and creators related to the project principle of functioning of the theatre in Bulgaria. The text monitors the way of the so called “decentralization” during the entire period of the transition.

The third chapter of the research reviews the content and the results of the project theatre performances and forms. The archives of the Ministry of Culture and of the National Theatre Centre, the Metropolitan Municipality, the Union of the Artists in Bulgaria, the Swiss Cultural Programme “Pro Helvetia”, Foundation America for Bulgaria were studied, as well as some of the foreign cultural institutes in the territory of Bulgaria, the municipalities in Plovdiv, Varna, etc.

## **RELEVANCE OF THE TOPIC**

The relevance of the topic has increased significantly in the last two years marked by the world health and economic crisis (2020-2021). The dissertation is based on the necessity to outline in particular the specifics and the differences between the repertory theatres and the free programming spaces by focusing critically on the benefits and disadvantages of the completed projects and the utilized funds. Additionally, this topic indicates the negative practice in which we become witnesses to principles of project funding which are applied as administrative approach, without taking into consideration the specificity of the separate activities and the regional peculiarities. This results in stable trends of narrowing any attempts and opportunities for more flexible funding and broadening of the audiences.

## **MAIN TASKS AND OBJECTIVES**

1. Clarification of the term project theatre. Etymology, functions and usage according to the specific environment, time frame and circumstances.
2. Periodicity. Defining the main periods of forming and development of the project theatre in Bulgaria. Following the political and social context in which project theatre was developing.
3. Tracking the chronological order of the emerging of the main funding organizations and financial donors. Presenting their goals, policies and support. Presenting funding budgets according to public reports.
4. Presentation of key organizations, realizing stage projects in the meaning of the term *project theatre*, key creators, companies, creative groups and formations.
5. Analysis of the change in the situation at the beginning of 2020 according to the world pandemic and all consequences which affect the sector of performing arts and cultural policies.

## METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

The research of the set issue combines an empirical survey with the sociological and cultural analysis of the stage practices and of the cultural policies in the area of the theatre. Meanwhile, the dissertation offers a parallel panoramic overview of specific examples and trends in the contemporary Bulgarian theatre and their connection to proven generations of artists. The conclusions accompanying the research outline possible future practices, which to some extent lays the foundation for subsequent scholarly and applied research papers on project theatre.

The dissertation outlines the artistic achievements in the project theatre as well as discussing and offering practical solutions to manage the currently existing in Bulgaria specific project niche of stage products which speculate with the artistic value through the inertia of stable and publicly acclaimed performances. The purpose is to reflect on the reasons for the specific examples, which do not succeed in proving the achievement of significant cultural horizon and do not offer developing and upgrading content.

There are different views on whether project theatre should measure its effectiveness in improving the quality of life in general, whether community development and individual spiritual needs of social groups, creating conditions and space for human communication (interactivity, interdisciplinarity), develop people and their way of life.

The archives of the main listed funding donors and organizations as well as their financial and content annual reports were studied in detail. The legislative acts and documents of the Ministry of Culture, the Metropolitan Municipality, the internal rules and ordinances were also studied.

The official sites, blogs and social media profiles of all organizations stipulated in the text which work primarily in the area of *project theatre* were reviewed and studied in detail.

This research uses as foundation the scholarly texts and research such as the books of Nikolay Yordanov “Theatre in Bulgaria 1989–2015”. Sofia: Institute of Art Studies - BAS, 2016 and „History of the Bulgarian theater “, volume 4 edited by Nikolay Yordanov, Romeo Popiliev, Kamelia Nikolova, Violeta Decheva, Yoana Spasova, Institute of Art Studies.

## **CONTENT SCOPE**

CHAPTER I. The beginning of the project funding of theatre in Bulgaria. Borrowing models and practices. Policies until 2020.

CHAPTER II. The funding donor organizations. Principles, conditions, environment impact

CHAPTER III. Sustainable examples. Theatre performances, directors, artists and companies.

**CHAPTER I. THE BEGINNING OF THE FUNDING ON THE PROJECT BASIS IN BULGARIA. BORROWING MODELS AND PRACTICES** offers a general overview of the research field, set within the period of three decades. During this period the theatre practices funded on project basis undergo exceptionally dynamic development, leaving behind permanent and stable models but also rather contradictory results. This was a time when the Bulgarian stage strived to catch up with the already renewed Western theatrical language, the established new stage forms, experiments, creative pursuits and events, which construct the large and diverse model of contemporary theatre.

It is important to note that when we speak about project theatre it is necessary to combine in the common cultural landscape all performances or stage occurrences which are performed at the state and municipal cultural institutes and become part of their repertoire, as well as all other performances, created in the private companies and spaces independent from the state subsidy, experimental and non-traditional stages, galleries, community halls, etc. The project theatre is not necessarily related to the artists defining themselves as “independent” or “free” since we often become witnesses to hybrid forms between the state cultural institutes and the private organizations and in addition, the “independence” of most private organizations which utilize funds on project basis is relative as their market existence is possible only in the event of complete commercialization of their activity, which is usually not in compliance with the terms and conditions of project funding.

Historically, before 1989, during the period of the socialist regime, the authority assumed theatre and performing arts as an opportunity for propaganda. Some significant changes happened to Bulgarian theatre during the period of socialism. Undoubtedly, the general reform happened between 1944 (the beginning of the socialist regime in Bulgaria) and 1956 (The April Plenum of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party). During this period the management of the theatre system and of the entire culture was centralized. In the subsequent three decades the development of the theatre life in Bulgaria flows monotonously, following the logic of the full state monopoly and ideological control.

At the end of the 80s in Bulgaria it was already permissible to talk about “defrosting” of the regime. The generation of those creating in the theatres stated its desire and gradually began to implement their intentions to create theatre which is not strictly subjected to the socialist regime. That was the time when the idea of theatres and formations

independent from the state system emerged. Following the fall of the regime this became possible and meanwhile such initiatives faced the challenges of the imposing market relations and the economic crisis in the country.

During the period after 1989 reviewed in this text and within the spirit of the reflections on the project theatre we need to stipulate three basic subperiods to be considered in greater detail. Conditionally, these subperiods can be distinguished as independent phases of development and can be divided as follows:

***Table 1. Periodization of project theatre in Bulgaria after 1989***

<b><i>First Subperiod</i></b>	<i>1989 – 1996</i>	<i>Time of political change. Beginning of project theatre.</i>
<b><i>Second Subperiod</i></b>	<i>1997 – 2009</i>	<i>Development of project theatre. New structures and new funding donors.</i>
<b><i>Third period</i></b>	<i>2010 – 2020</i>	<i>Suspension of the activity of the private funding donors. Increase of the state financial support for the project theatre.</i>

The analysis of the development of project theatre in Bulgaria should be done mostly through the expectations and attitudes available during the time (mostly during the First period), to research their dynamics and change as a function of the society and political processes, as well as of the social and economic factors, defining the period, in combination with the discrepancies and sometimes definite clashes between intentions and achievements. It would not be correct to state that theatre in general (in particular project theatre) existed in vacuum and the policies and their implementation could exist in ideal conditions. The attempts of the first period (1989 – 1996) during which the conceptual foundation was laid for what was the project theatre expected to be, rely on processes and influences, on theories and experimental application of models which are external for the country and the public context, which underwent change over time, were redefined and some of them were rejected as unsubstantiated or impossible to adapt to the Bulgarian environment.

The national centre for theatre with the Ministry of Culture was established as the necessary initial institutional step during this first period in 1993. It was the first claim of the state for transition from the socialist model of management and public life to the market principle and it mostly serviced the desire and recommendations for decentralization.

Naturally, during those first years after the “defrosting” of the socialist regime, the public life in Bulgaria was dominated by political change (a sequence of unstable governments, mass and cash privatization bank and economic crisis in 1996, the implementation of currency board in 1997, applying and then becoming member of NATO, applying for EU membership, harmonization of the legislation with Europe, the implementation of the *acquis communautaires*, etc.) and culture in general was forced to be removed from the priorities of the moment. Nevertheless, Bulgaria made the first attempts for cultural reform during economic instability. The cultural sector by its own efforts and independent field claimed its place in this complex environment with the expectation that the above models of making cultural policy in Europe will start functioning in our country as well.

Those first years set the beginning of the conceptual framework where the criteria for review, assessment and subsequent funding of theatre products would be placed. This is the time when the main types of theatre projects in Bulgaria acquired clear shape and category, the implementation of terminology related to project theatre started, a specific *theatre slang* emerged. Thus, we are already speaking about projects for creating a performance, projects for distribution of a ready production, projects for organizing a theatre forum, festival, conference, projects for implementation of educational module, projects for research/publication related to theatre, projects with social focus, etc.

As a result, the Bulgarian cultural background started accumulating various project occurrences in terms of scope and quality – there emerged the first programming and producing centres, where the state represented by the Ministry of Culture began to support some administration and a technical team to service the premises but was deprived of acting company employed full time.

Following a huge public debate (and in compliance with European recommendations) which engaged various professional and guild representatives in a discussion regarding future objectives, structure and specifics of the activities, in 1997 a specially planned *Programme for development of the theatre activity of the Ministry of Culture* was launched, which was the final transition between the First and the Second period (see Table 1). This programme was fully shaped following the development of a final format by experts of the National centre for theatre and the Ministry of Culture based on the ideas of public discussion and the advice of the European specialists. The course of time the

legislation in the country was developing in parallel in order to comply with the set objectives and with the specific practical situation upon its implementation. In this regard the Programme for the development of the theatre activity aided the process for adopting in two years' time of the Act on the Protection and Development of Culture as well as the Rules for structure and activity of the National centre for theatre in 2001 and a number of other laws and bylaws, which shaped the legal environment for the functioning of the theatres in Bulgaria.

All theatres (except the Ivan Vazov National Theatre) are given the same status and took part in the competition programmes of the Ministry of Culture, where metropolitan theatres lost the opportunity to receive mixed funding. Paradoxically, the achieved result of restructuring and the subsequent redistribution of the funds as a result of competitions for subsidies led to increase in the salaries of those employed in the area of performing arts by 30%, where the funds for activity for three years achieved growth by 10% in comparison to the Employment Salary Fund and Income Tax, These values were increased in the two subsequent years up to 15% for drama theatres respectively and up to 21% for the drama and puppet theatres. The conclusion is that upon such competitive model the theatres are motivated to work in financial discipline and a stimulated creative product.

In this environment the recently emerged project theatre in Bulgaria actually plateaued in its development when the National centre for theatre focused its efforts on supporting projects for theatre activity and targeted funding, mostly related to international cooperation or stimulation of strategically important regions for the national culture and internal political priorities.

However, regardless of this initial logic in the construction of the foundations for both *conventional* and *project* theatre in post socialist Bulgaria and regardless of the external advice, as a consequence of the internal political commotion on the border between the first two periods, as a result of attempts brining dubious financial results and not specifically detailed rules for funding, the theatre profession started recognizing extremely conservative attitude towards the claimed changes in the reform. The actions of the state regarding cultural policies were definitely not following a clear strategy for the long-term development of culture. To this day there is no such strategy. Gradually, at the end of the first and at the beginning of the second decade of the period there commenced a definite counter reaction of

closing down theatres and companies and the redirecting of funds to projects and the so called reform suffered its first temporary failure.

The period of the establishment of project theatre in Bulgaria was generally chaotic, full of random collection of cultural operators in the area of performing arts as a result of imbalanced and insufficient support when distributing public funds. This support was also a combination of various mechanisms for funding which were still not taking into account the specifics of the stage product, of the characteristics of the organization, the set goals and their subsequent survey and control, of the artistic requirements, of defining, development and broadening of audiences, of the formation and acknowledgement of new and different cultural spaces, of formulating strategic and long-term goals in the sector. The targeted funding which is the foundation of the project logic was actually in discrepancy with the traditional notions of the repertoire theatre which is aimed at producing stable formats, which themselves rely on higher funding but also generate higher income for a longer period. On the contrary, project activities may rely mostly on decreased and irregular funding in comparison to the institutes directly subjected to the state or to the local authority and cannot allow for commercial success (often such success is not encouraged by the regulation of the donor organizations either).

During the first reviewed period the Theatrical Workshop Sfumato appeared, founded by Margarita Mladenova and Ivan Dobchev, the First Private Theatre “La Strada” initiated by a group of like-minded people gravitating around the director Teddy Moskov, Boyko Bogdanov with his experimental theatre studio “Elizaveta Bam” and Vazkresiya Viharova and the participants in the performance „Customs“, which resulted in the creation of a programme becoming the basis for the emerging of the “Theatre” department of the New Bulgarian University and many other organizations which left their trace in history.

And right after the beginning of the new millennium, which marked the Second period of the project theatre, we may highlight one of the most stable examples realized on the stages of the National Theatre Ivan Vazov, the Youth Theatre Nikolay Binev, the Theatre of the Bulgarian Army, the Theatre Workshop SFUMATO, Theatre 199 Valentin Stoychev, the Plovdiv Drama Theatre, etc.

As it was already discussed in the dissertation, all of these dynamic processes were developing in a specific context and it is imperative to consider them in their

interconnection. After a number of diverse efforts to create a single strategy for the functioning of the state theatres, *Decree No. 152 of the Council of the Ministers* was adopted in 2010 whereby the state cultural institutes went into reform of the performing arts mode and they are still under this influence – the state cultural institutes performing their activity in the area of performing arts began to implement a system of delegated budgets under which the managements despoised independently with the funds of the institute, it made compensated changes (correcting them with the consent of the Ministry of Culture) to the available budget regarding the profit and loss, it determined independently the number of the staff and the monthly remuneration of the employees in compliance with other laws as well. These “freedoms” were subject to *Methodology of funding of the state cultural institutes* approved by the Minister of Culture, where it was trying to take into account the specificity in the activities of the cultural institutes but the subsidy (which was no longer applied for in a competition but was a function of the revenue from the activity of the specific institute) according to the standard of the delegated budget for a purchased ticket could be received only from a production directly related to the main activity of the respective cultural institute. The methodology obliged the institutes to provide their own contribution, i.e. the state participation was determined as a ratio between the final subsidy and the revenue from the sale of tickets up to an amount stipulated under the *Methodology*.

Following a number of misappropriation and individual interpretation of the *Methodology* by the theatre managers and the impossibility of the Ministry of Culture to perform monitoring of the activity of 51 stage organizations, in 2016 the base component of the *Methodology* was changed from “sold ticket” to “one lev of revenue”.

At the end of the third decade of the reviewed period, in 2019 and as a result of misconduct of the heads of leading state theatres, this *Methodology* for funding of the performing arts in the state sector was amended, whereby it excluded the realization of co-productions between state cultural institutes and private organizations. As a result of this decision the state theatres were no longer interested to provide their stage to the private cultural organizations to present a joint or guest stage project. This resulted in the big challenge to the project theatre due to the lack of infrastructure to cover the growing number of realized project performances outside the system of the state cultural institutes.

The conclusions we can make from the changes in the cultural policies held by the Ministry of Culture regarding the theatres and the theatre projects are that there were no

attempts to encourage the artistic quality, there was no desire to upgrade, develop, enrich the theatre repertoire, the catching up with the good examples from Europe was delayed.

**IN CHAPTER II. FUNDING DONOR ORGANIZATIONS, PRINCIPLES, CONDITIONS, IMPACT ON THE ENVIRONMENT** the text follows and analyses the role of the project funding in Bulgaria.

The dynamic of the various stages of the researched period was represented, in its various manifestations, scope, strategic goals related to the social and cultural context.

The natural renewal of the terminology resulted in thinking about culture in the context of the market and of all other areas, which it is directly or indirectly related to.

Despite the failure at the institutional and purely social level in the first years of the project principle, it is important to note that in sync with global processes, the environment still managed to change in a positive direction and as a result - initially sporadically and timidly, but over time more and more emphatically - the various funding (donor) organizations for culture appeared.

In 2001, the Soros Centre for the Arts published a directory of funding organizations for culture and art in Bulgaria, which presents 12 Bulgarian structures that actively support projects in the field of arts. Among them are the National Centres for Theatre, Book, Film, Music and Dance, Museums, Galleries and Fine Arts, established as independent legal entities with the budget support of the Ministry of Culture.

The **National Centre for Theatre** is among the first to start its activities during the first researched period in 1993. Its goal was to support the development of theatre in Bulgaria in accordance with the priorities of national cultural policy. Its main activity revolves around the distribution of the budget subsidy between theatres and the financing of theatre projects on a competitive basis. The centre also carries out information and research activities in the field of theatre, and also seeks to stimulate the exchange of theatrical ideas, teams and artists, supporting theatre forums, festivals and educational programs.

The tables of approved projects of the National centre for theatre point out that in the 90s the predominant funding was for the state drama and puppet theatres. The funding in the private sector was not separated, nor it was differentiated by certain rules, different conditions, etc. Organizations such as First Private Theatre “La Strada”, theatre “Dialogue”, theatre “Alternative”, Free Theatre, Theatre “Avril”, “Elizaveta Bam”, Theatre “Solo”,

Experimental Studio “Yorik”, Foundation “Theatre World” and many others were competing on equal terms with all state theatres.

The other two donors which appeared during the First Period in the 90s and were active in the funding of theatre projects were the Soros Centre for Arts and the Swiss Cultural Foundation “Pro Helvetia”.

The **Soros Centre for the Arts** is a functional structure of the Open Society Institute, which is essentially a non-governmental organization for public benefit, upholding the values of the open society in Bulgaria and supporting the country's integration into the European Union. In Bulgaria, through the Open Society Foundation, it finances a number of non-governmental organizations such as the Centre for Economic Development, the European Institute, the Institute for Market Economics, the Soros Centre for the Arts, the Red House Centre for Culture and Debate, the Centre for Social Practices. Centre for Liberal Strategies, etc.

In 1999 the **Swiss Foundation for Culture "Pro Helvetia"** established its address in Sofia and also began to support projects of cultural organizations and creative associations in the field of contemporary art - music, theatre, dance, literature, fine arts. Founded in 1939 by the Federal Council on the eve of World War II, its original idea was to be a "working group" to protect Switzerland's independent cultural identity. Pro Helvetia was reformatted into a public and legally sound foundation in 1949. Its mandate is to preserve Swiss culture, promote it within the country and disseminate and promote it abroad. Its mandate and structure were first defined by law in 1965. Over time, the international activities of the foundation became increasingly important. In 1985 Pro Helvetia opened its first overseas office, the Centre Culturel Suisse in Paris

Over time, however, the geopolitical interests of the respective countries shifted to other latitudes and Bulgaria immediately after its accession to the European Union began to weaken as a focus of these foreign funding donors. For example, the Soros Centre for the Arts redirected its funding for cultural programmes to other countries that it considered "less developed" and "poorer." Today in Sofia the Open Society Institute continues to function as a non-governmental organization that aims to support the country's integration into the European Union, but the programmes it works on are related to governance and public

policies, European policies and civil society. integration of minority groups, etc., and the arts do not fall within the scope of their priorities.

Immediately after Bulgaria's accession to the European Union and in parallel with the onset of the World Financial Crisis in 2007-2008, two other funds emerged that dynamized the cultural environment: in 2007 the Culture Program of the Sofia Municipality was launched and its project funds exceed those of the Ministry of Culture) and in 2008 the America for Bulgaria Foundation began its work, which also supports initiatives in the field of performing arts.

One of the important titles in the palette of project theatre, created with the support of the America for Bulgaria Foundation, is "The Goat or Who's Sylvia?" by Edward Albee, directed by Yavor Gardev, "One flew over the Cuckoo's Nest" by Ken Kesey with director Alexander Morfov, "Angels in America" by Tony Kushner with director Desislava Shpatova, "August in Oklahoma" by Tracy Letts with director Yassen Peyankov, "Death of a Salesman" by Arthur Miller with director Borislav Chakrinov. All of them were part of the American season at the Ivan Vazov National Theatre (2010-2011). In addition, the Foundation supported leading theatre festivals and forums in the country until almost the end of the decade. Support for the Vox Populi Documentary Theatre Studio, whose founder and director is Neda Sokolovska, also stands out.

Prior to Bulgaria's accession to the European Union in 2007, institutes with the rank of cultural services at a number of embassies in Bulgaria began to operate in the country. The British Council (Great Britain), the Goethe-Institut (Germany), the French Cultural Institute (L'Institut Français, France), the Instituto Cervantes (Spain), the Fulbright Program USA and a number of smaller foreign cultural institutes, demonstrating significant policies in support of cultural projects.

One significant variable trend is related to educational programmes. All qualifications, courses, exchanges in arts from interstate agreements, for which Bulgaria worked hard in the first years with foreign cultural institutes and created traditions in connection with various training programmes, were redirected to the individual programmes of the European Union (Tempus, Erasmus ", " Erasmus + "), thus rearranging the links built so far. The question remains whether our country still enjoys the same intensity of these

international relations as before our accession to the European Union, which is especially true in terms of cultural practices.

*In the mature period of the development of project theatre in Bulgaria, we come to 2007 - the year of Bulgaria's accession to the European Union, which coincides with the establishment of the **Sofia Municipality Programme "Culture"**. The programme was launched with a budget of BGN 600,000 for all areas, and each applicant organization could receive funding for no more than one project. The amount requested by the Culture Programme must not exceed 80% of the total value of the whole project. In particular, the budget for theatre projects is BGN 22,000, with which the Sofia Municipality funded the first performance on a project basis - "In the Ice" by Dimitar Dimov and Teodora Dimova, directed by Stilian Petrov, produced by the Youth Theatre "Nikolay Binev".*

After Sofia, other municipal funds appeared spontaneously, trying to finance cultural projects and less often theatrical performances on a project basis - in Varna, Plovdiv, Sliven, Ruse, Shumen, Burgas and others.

In 2017 Varna was the European Youth Capital. In 2018 the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union was concentrated in Sofia. In 2019 Plovdiv was the European Capital of Culture. All these titles also contributed to the prioritization of funding programmes. Topics, highlights, policies were beginning to appear, which the evaluation commissions invariably encouraged when they were present in the individual applicant projects.

In the period 2010 - 2014 in the Municipality of Varna operated a **municipal programme "Varna - the territory of creativity"**. The programme allocated an annual budget between BGN 150,000 - 200,000. In 2014 in connection with the candidacy of the Municipality of Varna for European Capital of Culture, the Programme was transformed into the current **Culture Fund - Varna** and began to distribute significantly more serious budget in the range of BGN 800,000 and 1,000,000 per year. These funds support between 80 and 140 projects, divided into four areas: *Festivals and competitions, Creative projects, National and international cooperation, Audiences.*

Unlike Varna, the **Municipality of Plovdiv** chose another model for competitive support of projects in the field of art and culture. The municipality does not develop a separate funding program, but uses the opportunities of its Cultural Calendar. Since 2014 a module for

applications from external organizations has been open in the Calendar. The Calendar regularly distributes between BGN 1,230,000 and BGN 1,350,000 per year. Every year between 35 and 54 projects are supported, divided into four components: Festivals and significant events, Mobility, Civic Activity, Books by Plovdiv authors and important publications for the city.

At the end of 2000 under the Law on Protection and Development of Culture, the **National Culture Fund** began to function. Its main task is to support the development of culture by raising, managing and spending funds intended for the implementation of national policy in the field of culture.

The **National Culture Fund (NFC)** is an independent legal entity that works with funds from the state budget and other sources of funding described under the law. The National Culture Fund has existed for over 20 years and is constantly searching its image and the way it works, in order to fulfil in the most effective way the goals for which it was created. During this period, at the beginning of each calendar year, surveys are conducted on what was done in the past. The Fund performs the role of spending unit only through competitions and targeted subsidies through the application modules. Individual artists, private, municipal and state cultural organizations have the right to participate with equal rights in the programmes of the NFC.

In March 2020 as a consequence of the health crisis resulting from the pandemic of the distribution of the covid-19 virus the Ministry of Culture faced the serious challenge of unfamiliar conditions and unclear financial future for raising and keeping the performing arts and for providing compensations for the entire cultural sector in combination with the limitations, which the state imposed on all public events. The creative process was suspended or severely obstructed. The few artistic criteria was disregarded in the name of the actual survival of the theatre art. A policy of recalculating or updating of the state budget commenced, leading to updating the budget of the cultural sector on state and municipal level. The National Culture Fund received unprecedented subsidy in the amount of BGN 17.2 million for financial support to programmes and projects in the area of culture as part of the anti-crisis measures. From the planned BGN 1 900 000 the budget of the Fund reached a little over BGN 21 000 000 which stimulated mostly the quantity of the applicant projects.

The temporarily abandoned criteria for artistic value and methods of subsequent control led to overproduction of individual "works" whose impact was shrinking and their

perception was becoming more superficial. Here again we come to the problem of seriously finding the differences between the effect and benefits of the results achieved at the national level, compared to the desirable convergence of patterns and trends on the world theatre map. The situation with the steep increase of the budgets for cultural projects and the capacity of the organizations that should implement them was beginning to provoke many questions regarding the problems in the sector and whether they are mainly related to the lack of sufficient funding.

In the midst of the pandemic, the Solidarity in Culture programme appeared, by which the Sofia Municipality supported the organizations and artists working in Sofia. Solidarity in Culture started on April 24 with a budget of BGN 150,000, formed from the available budget of the Department of Culture, Education, Sports and Youth Activities, and at one point it had a budget of BGN 400,000, including funds from remuneration of members of the Management Board of the Municipal Guarantee Fund for Small and Medium Enterprises, of the Supervisory Board of the Sofia Privatization and Investment Agency and of the Management Board of the Specialized Municipal Privatization Fund during the state of emergency. More than 200 projects were supported.

In parallel with the problems of the private sector, state and municipal cultural institutes relied entirely on public funding, without the need to prove revenue. There was a transfer first to direct financing, and a few months later to a mixed model (directly and according to the Methodology, but with reduced or missing criteria). The state, represented by the Ministry of Culture and its National Culture Fund, was trying to save the private sector (the independent artists). However, some cultural operators started using the situation and raising more and more quality issues. Tension between the private and public sectors was growing. In the public space, the need to support the huge number of state cultural institutes was openly questioned. The expanded theatrical state network since the time of socialism continued to generate problems and controversies between artists employed under employment contracts and all the others working in freelance. The consequences of thirty years of lack of investment in cultural infrastructure provoked a debate over the ownership of buildings. State theatre buildings were beginning to be the subject of conflicts, desires and intentions of the independent sector.

The Covid-19 pandemic has shown that we are in fact in danger of theatrical language (and theatrical language in project theatre in particular) subordinating its development to arguments more relevant to the social and political spheres, as well as

healthcare, than the primary creative energy, the impulse for play and creativity. The imposition of measures and restrictions, the stimulation of certain activities that meet specific conditions of funding schemes, displace the true power and authenticity of the theatre, replacing them with easy and quick solutions in art, but using a medical problem as excuse. Thus, after the past three decades, we still could not objectively and comprehensively determine the effect and results of project theatre, its impact in the cultural sphere, but also on the audiences. The authenticity of the theatre seems to prevail over attempts to reform it. Let's hope that the next decade will offer new directions in which we will have to go, boldly, but also with the knowledge of the past. And whether the attempts to beat and assimilate the "dusty" theatrical stages will continue and lead to a new reform, we will see in the future.

### **CHAPTER III reviews THE SUSTAINABLE EXAMPLES. THEATRE PERFORMANCES, DIRECTORS, ARTISTS AND COMPANIES**

Naturally, this last chapter presents the pioneers of project theatre in Bulgaria, including performances of the young directors Ivan Stanev, Stefan Moskov, Vazkresia Viharova, Boyko Bogdanov, who debuted in the 1980s. The theatrical critic Kamelia Nikolova describes the work of the above as attempts ... to introduce through their performances the missed discoveries of the European theatrical avant-garde - ideas and signs from the theatre of expressionism, dada, surrealism, Grotovski's laboratory theatre, Barba, Schechner. Their efforts then take place both as authentic avant-garde gestures and gestures that handle stored knowledge, with already experienced (in Europe, but not in our country) experience.“<sup>1</sup>

Among the other directors are Alexander Morfov, Galin Stoev, Valeria Valcheva, Ivan Pantelev, Lilia Abadjieva, Dimitar Nedkov, Elena Panayotova, Desislava Shpatova, Yavor Gardev, and of course the already established Elena Tsikova, Margarita Mladenova and Ivan Dobchev. All these names can also be recognized as leaders in the registers of approved projects for funding of the National Theatre Centre between 1994 and 2000.

The new forms in the theatre, melted through the litmus test of political and economic change, set new themes that the theatre will deal with in the coming decades. The mentioned artists will try (and most of them will succeed) to climb even on their own shoulders to bounce up, and thus outline trends that the next young generation of directors and

---

<sup>1</sup> Nikolova, K. "Chosing a Text For The Stage In the Late 90s. The Theatre Practice At The End Of The 90s", "Kontseptsii Balgaria", Antrakt Association, Sofia 1999, pp. 68-69

a whole army of actors will use as a benchmark, but will also try to surpass. This is also the time of accumulation of extensive experience in world cinema, which provides additional charge for new means of expression for both directors and actors, as well as scenographers and costume designers. Next is the endless sea of information on the Internet. Unfortunately, this first period turned out to be very conservative in terms of continuity - the next stages of the theatre development were not marked by the pioneering zeal with which the performing arts of the 1990s burned. Almost without exception, the above-mentioned names remain zealous guardians of their creative niche. And the development of *project* theatre, given its lagging and subordinate position to *conventional* theatre, continues to this day to stand between its birth in the 1990s and the present moment in anticipation of its "Golden Age", as seen in its counterparts in Western Europe. and the world.

One of the largest and most revolutionary events in the Bulgarian theatre is the creation of the first theatre-laboratory - the **SFUMATO Theatre Workshop**. Although it has acquired the status of a state-supported theatre, its founders Margarita Mladenova and Ivan Dobchev think of it as an independent laboratory. The goal is to get out of the classic box stage, turn to the history of human culture, return to the truth. It is no coincidence that the founders of SFUMATO seriously emphasize the term "anthropological theatre". Margarita Mladenova and Ivan Dobchev were initiated into psychological theatre, building on the idea of it, using Jung's concept and the concepts: archetypal behaviour and collective unconscious, following a well-established scheme: director-programme-theatre. They are trying to embody a historical experience already gained in Europe through their work.

So far, the Sfumato Theatre Workshop has implemented the Chekhov, Yovkov, Radichkov, Archetypes, Myths, Dostoevsky, Exodus, To Damascus, Gogol, and Shakespeare programmes ", as well as workshops with Bulgarian, international and mixed participation - "One Hundred Years of Solitude - Marquez "(1996), "Seagull-Chekhov" (Sozopol, Apollonia International Art Festival, 1997), "The Dream as Theatrical Poetics "(with artists from the Balkans, Balkan Festival of Young Theatre, Sofia, 1998), "Ancient Myths: The Blind Tiresias and Antigone the Dead" (1998), "The Black Fleece"(1999), "Slow Boat to China - E. Vassilev" (with students from the Theatre Faculty of the New York University, Varna, 1999), "Khazar Dictionary" (with students from the Theatre Faculty of the New York University, Varna, 2000), "Nomina Trivialia" (2001), "Poetics of Chekhov" (with students from the Theatre Faculty of New York University, Varna, 2002), "Freedom as a Disease" (2002), "Outside In" (with artists from 8 countries, Sofia, 2006), "Human, too human" (Balchik,

2008), "Hamlet: to look or be" (Sofia, 2010), "To travel or to go down" (Balchik, 2010), "I am an actress" (2011), Atelier 200 "The Universal Soul of the Dump" (2012), "The Disappearing Man" (2013-2014), "Terminal 2" (2014-2015), "Exorcism" (2017), "Noah's Ark" (2018) and others.

Another no less significant phenomenon in the Bulgarian theatre is the founding of the **Theatre Department at the New Bulgarian University** in 1992 by the director Vazkresia Viharova, which became her place for conducting experiments. Even before the establishment of the department, the idea of Vazkresia Viharova for a new type of theatre education was to direct to "perception" and to eliminate the common expression "message".

In 1991 the NBU began offering the training programme "Theatre", developed by Vazkresia Viharova, Zarko Uzunov and Veselin Mezekliev, who teach at the University to this day. In December 1999, the Theatre Department and the Naked Snail Theatre were separated into separate structural units within the NBU. Since February 2010, the programme of the Department has been presented in the new premises of the University Theatre whose director is the long-time head of the Department "Theatre" Assoc. Prof. Vazkresia Viharova. Since September 2012, the head of the Department Theatre has been Assoc. Prof. Snezhina Petrova.

Both structures (SFUMATO and the Theatre Department and the Theatre with the NBU) are resilient to this day, but along with them in the late 1980s and 1990s many theatre formations and private theatres formed, significantly supported in their experiments, both by the Ministry of Culture (National Theatre Centre) and by private donors and foreign cultural institutes. All of them have built their own cultural policy for a certain period of time, some rely on experiment, on modern, new, undiscovered, unposted texts, on mixing genres and collage of authors, etc., and others stick to classical texts or popular mainstream titles, which also did not have free access to state stages of the previous period.

The first private theatrical formation, created in our country even before the democratic changes in 1989, is the **Dialogue Theatre** (1989), founded by the director and actor Boyko Iliev. The theatre does not have its own stage and during the years of its existence has been forced to give its performances in various places in Sofia. Its productions are performed in the Central House of the People's Army, in the hall of the Community Club

"Slavyanska Beseda", in the Theatre Hall of Sofia University, the French Cultural Institute on Slaveykov Square, the hall on Garibaldi Square and others. The productions that Dialogue Theatre realizes are attempts to attract a wide audience, without disturbing the balance between commercial and new dramatic texts. Similar attempts were made by later organizations such as **Provocation Theatre**, founded by the actor Petar Raizhekov, **Alternative Theatre**, **Movement Theatre**, created by the actor and mime Velyo Goranov, **Inversion Theatre**, **Druzha**, **Free Theatre**, **Pantdance**, **Manufactory** and others.

The **First Private Theatre "La Strada"** appeared in 1991 with director Stefan Yankov, directors Stefan Moskov, Andrey Avramov and Leonard Capon, Dimitar Nedkov, composer Lyubomir Dinev, set designer Vyacheslav Parapanov, and among the cast were actors, friends and supporters from the student years - Krastyo Lafazanov, Maya Novoselska, Valeri Malchev, Nikola Dodov, Toncho Tokmakchiev, Borislav Stoilov, Nelly Topalova, Valentin Tanev, Elina Kalinova, Elena Nacheva, Vyara Kolarova and others. The premiere performance, which launched the activities of the theatre is "**The Street**". This is the beginning of the huge trace that "The Street" as a trademark of director Stefan Moskov will leave on television.

Another successful private theatre group, actively present in the history of project financing, is the **Credo Theatre**. Founded in 1992 by actors Nina Dimitrova and Vasil Vassilev - Zueka, whose first premiere was "Overcoat" by NV Gogol. From its premiere on November 6, 1992 until 2020, the show has performed over 600 performances in 9 languages at over 200 international festivals around the world and has won 14 international awards.

The director Galin Stoev also performs some of his productions on a project basis. Such an example is "Agamemnon 2" by Aeschylus, realized after winning a project at a session of the National Theatre Centre in 1995. The play was performed on the stage of Hall 2 in the National Palace of Culture, starring Marius Kurkinski, Kamen Donev, Monyo Monev, Lilia Lazarova, Stefka Yanorova, Krassimira Kuzmanova, Koyna Ruseva, Stefan Valdobrev, Nikolay Nikolov, Georgi Karkelanov, Marian Bozukov.

The actor Kamen Donev also began to consistently develop his one-man shows on a project basis. In 2006 he founded a legal entity under his name, and in 2007 he won financial support from the 25th session for subsidizing theatre projects at the Ministry of Culture for the play "About Folk Art". The performance is realized in the format of a one-man

show, and in terms of content the actor gives a detailed lecture, the topic of which is us - the Bulgarian people. Bulgarian folk songs and dances are also part of the elements of the performance.

Surely, we must note that the companies and organizations and artists presented above are a very small part of the existing private theatre sector in this period. From this point forward began the serious division, not only of the types of theatrical forms, a clear distinction of genres, but also the audience would begin to disintegrate from a single mass into many different profiles and categories. The project conditions would start talking more and more about audiences, communities, social groups with limited access to culture, marginalized people who should be integrated through project activities. Increasingly, project language will use theatre as a pure category,

In this sense, the efforts of state and municipal authorities, supported by various other donor organizations, continue during all these over 30 years since the beginning of political changes in our country to work with highly individual participations and initiatives of various representatives of project theatre in our country. This is evidenced by the impossibility in the extreme conditions created by the pandemic in 2020, to consolidate the sector and speak in one voice.

And today it is a colourful amalgam of various structured and meaningful organizations that paint a complex picture which modern Bulgaria must cultivate.

Here are some of the organizations that today are still active in the creation of project theatre - **DEN GRI Foundation, Legal Art Centre, Derida Dance Centre / DERIDA STAGE, ART Link Foundation, Organization for Contemporary Alternative Arts and Culture "36 Monkeys", Panic Button Theatre, Association for Contemporary Alternative Arts and Culture "Based on True Story", Brain Store Project, METEOR, VOX POPULI Documentary Theatre Studio, Theatre Replica.**

The last decade in the researched period actually provoked the emergence of a large number of organizations working in the field of project theatre. As a kind of tendency, the graduating classes at NATFA, most often led by a young director, have to register their associations as legal entities under which they can develop activities and apply mostly for project grants. This is how ZONG Theatre (2017) with creators Dina Markova and the actor Boyan Arsov appeared, SPAM Studio (2018), developing theatre projects with main director

Ana Bateva, the Deer King Theatre Association (2018), with the participation of artists, united around the directorial figure of Anastasia Sabeva, Association ATOM Theatre (2018), led by actress and choreographer Stefania Georgieva, Association "Class 5x5" (2019), students from the class of Prof. Atanas Atanasov at NATFA and many others.

What we can summarize in terms of funding sources is related to the movement - the further we move away from the time of change after 1989, the more foreign financial donors withdraw, at the expense of state, institutional financial support, which is increasing .

Of course, the pandemic situation of 2020 also had a huge impact on the development of project theatre, not only in terms of funding, but even in terms of aesthetic trends and results. Observance of safety measures and distance between people provoked many creators and producers to ingenuity. On the one hand, the division of large companies into smaller groups due to the reduced likelihood of infection, on the other hand, communication with the audience, transformed from live in cyberspace or hybrid. As a natural course of time and circumstances, more one-man shows, small forms, easier to travel, adaptive and multifunctional appear.

The final part of the dissertation summarizes the researched problems, topics, results of project theatre.

The development of project theatre in the last three decades has gone through political changes, reforms, crises, state and municipal policies, compliance with the requirements of funding donors, flexibility in terms of forms and spaces in which it is presented. Project theatre in every sense is leaving traces in the history of performing arts in our country. It often differs from the repertoire, carrying in itself the added value of social themes, newly discovered stage forms and theatrical spaces, as well as targeted focus groups, to which it is directed even on a conceptual level. Last but not least, the project theatre is a good opportunity for the first professional realizations of the youngest artists, as well as for the launch of non-standard theatrical ideas. Apart from the realization of theatrical performances, project practices are essential for infrastructural theatrical activities such as organizing festivals, conducting educational modules for additional professional training of theatre professionals, publishing theatrical literature, etc.

Good practices are still cited as unattainable examples of cultural policies pursued abroad. In these three decades, not enough lasting international partnerships have been

established in the creation and distribution of theatrical performances in which Bulgarian cultural operators are the leading country. And in the presence of such, they remain in most cases temporary, related only to specific projects and initiatives or events.

At the same time, in the local context, specific needs, endowments and needs of the organizations and cultural institutes that operate outside the capital are not taken into account. The same conditions and requirements are applied to them, both with regard to applying for programs and projects, and within the current methodology of the Ministry of Culture, which allocates funds for subsidies in state cultural institutes. At the same time, there is a feeling that the efforts of the state and the state cultural policy are aimed at regulating the economic indicators in the cultural sphere, increasing the budgets and financial parameters of projects and activities, increasing the administrative capacity of organizations and additional knowledge and the skills and competencies of artists and cultural managers, but there is no effort to pay attention to artistic quality. Unfortunately, there are no adequate incentives to encourage cultural organizations, but also state and municipal cultural institutes, which strive for the quality of their artistic result.

At the same time, the greater freedom that project theatre gives us compared to institutional theatre presents us with new challenges that require more complex thinking. This, in turn, requires new priorities and instruments of cultural policy, development of evaluation and monitoring procedures, stimulation of collaborations between the public and private sectors in the field of performing arts, as well as awareness of the fact that applying for public support under a project implies responsibilities which are undertaken before society.

## **CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE DISERTATION**

1. Forming general idea of the emerging, development and the future horizons of the project theatre in Bulgaria as function and opportunity for additional activity of the repertoire theatres, as well as main and supplementary activity for the artists and the organizations working in the private sector.
2. Presentation and analysis of unresearched archives to this moment, data, reporting documentation of funding sources, results of stage projects, interconnections between conditions, context and time period for implementation.

3. Presentation of the dynamic and analysis of the development of the cultural policies and the funding for theatre in Bulgaria as a national cultural policy on the one hand and as internal sector development on the other hand.
4. The research indicates specific issues which remain unresolved currently and which cause difficulties to the artists working on project basis.

## **PUBLICATIONS ON THE SUBJECT MATTER**

1. More than three decades of project-funded theatre, Homo Ludens, 25 /2022

2. Time's Dynamics at the Intersection of Cultural Policies and Artistic Processes within Varna Summer International Theatre Festival's Programme, How Does Theatre Change Today in the frame of the 26th edition of Varna Summer ITF

Edited by Prof. Kamelia Nikolova, DSc, Prof. Nikolay Iordanov, DSc,  
Published by Via Fest Foundation, Homo Ludens Foundation. Sofia,  
2018.

3. Dramaturgy within the Phenomenon of Theatre Productions Satellite Broadcasts, Dramaturgical Tendencies through the Focus of Varna Summer International Theatre Festival, Edited by Prof. Kamelia Nikolova, DSc, Prof. Nikolay Iordanov, DSc, Published by Via Fest Foundation, Homo Ludens Foundation. Sofia,  
2017.

Interviews on the subject taken by Ilko Ganev:

4. "Kids are the real teachers" – Mihail Bilalov, HomoLudens, 17/2014

5. "I like working with intelligent people" – Lilia Maravilla, HomoLudens, 18/2015