

Concept Paper

Funding and Production Systems and Their Impact on Establishing a Genuine Theatrical Life:

Trajectories Across the World and Their Realities in Arab and African Countries

Discourse on and within theater is indispensable to the art form itself, its practitioners, and all those invested in it; for such discourse serves as a reminder of the theater's existence and an effort to secure its recognition. It is essential for theater-makers and practitioners, as behind it lies a constant aspiration to validate the theater's legitimacy within society and a continuous endeavor to demonstrate the need for it.

Naturally, the topics of this discourse are as manifold as the theater's own manifestations, trajectories, issues, and complexities. Equally natural is the diversity of its forms and modes of expression, shaped by the varied backgrounds of those who engage with and contribute to it. It is also natural for opinions to converge and clash, reflecting the multiplicity of starting points and perspectives, as well as the diverse intellectual and political concerns that shape it and carve its identity.

Theatre itself, and the body of work it has produced, invites all of this. It is an art of paradoxes: an art of essence and appearance. It celebrates the ephemeral and actively pursues it, yet at the same time the accumulated works and experiences of its practitioners have been built up across the centuries, giving it an enduring presence that aspires to permanence. It is the art of the individual, delving into the depths of solitude, seeking it out and striving to uncover its secrets and the foundations upon which it rests. Yet it is equally the art of the collective, brought into being through the combined efforts, talents, and solidarity of many. It is an art complete in itself, with an unbroken presence, yet one whose reach extends to embrace all the arts. It is their meeting place: from it they spring, to it they return, and against it they rebel and revolt.

While these may be the facets and manifestations of theater at the level of discourse, one must acknowledge that theater cannot exist without an actual "theatrical life"—a framework in which the "theatrical act" is brought to fruition. Without this act, theater—in all its manifestations and extensions—loses its meaning and purpose. The "fulfillment of the theatrical act" is, quite simply, the realization of a live encounter—one that is intentional, desired, and eagerly anticipated—taking place in a specific setting between artists and an audience, centered upon an imaginative proposition: the theatrical performance.”¹

Researchers have closely examined issues concerning theater audiences, revealing that the matter is not merely a question of how much attention theatrical creators devote to the audience;

¹"Theatre audiences today", concept paper for the International Intellectual Conference held as part of the 24th edition of Carthage Theatre Days.

rather, it is inextricably linked to the status the audience holds within the institutions that host and promote this art form. While there is a consensus—at the level of discourse—regarding the importance that should be accorded to the audience in the work of theatrical creators and the institutions that host and market their productions, this agreement has not obscured the vast differences in how theatrical institutions practically handle this issue from one country to another.

While those concerned with theatre in a number of countries did little more, or almost little more, than call for greater attention to audiences and emphasize their central place in the development of a national theatre, other countries, Germany for example, established specialized research bodies that closely monitor audience attendance, classify spectators according to their distinguishing characteristics and the types of productions they attend, taking into account the conditions under which those productions are presented, and publish their findings on a regular basis². It has shown that such qualitative statistics can yield insights that go beyond general observations, providing theatrical institutions and those who work within them with the knowledge needed to guide their decisions and contribute to sustaining a genuine theatrical life.

A close examination of such statistics confirms, on the one hand, the importance of the public theatre institution and its central role in shaping the course of theatre and theatrical life. On the other hand, it reveals the fundamental role played by direct and indirect public funding in sustaining theatre and enabling the emergence of a genuine “theatrical life”. This has led us to call for closer examination of public funding systems for theatre and of the role they play in fostering a theatrical life within which theatre finds its meaning.

The emphasis on public funding stems from the fact that, throughout history and across all countries in whose cultures theatre has taken root, no other source of funding has matched its significance, regardless of differences in political and economic systems or of the contrasting, and at times conflicting, philosophies of governance. Moreover, private funding is, in reality, a form of indirect public funding, since it is, in one way or another, derived from resources that would otherwise have entered the public treasury through taxation.

Yet this direct and indirect public funding, despite its acknowledged predominance, is neither administered in the same way nor founded upon a single conception of theatre, its practice, or those who work within it. Nor is it governed by the same principles of management and governance. This is why we have spoken of distinct “funding systems”, each of which reflects a particular conception of the existing and the desired theatrical institution, defines the framework within which those engaged in theatre operate, and reveals the underlying stakes that shape the field.

These funding systems are, for the most part, the product of trajectories in theatrical practice that have evolved in close relation to cultural, social, and political structures, interacting with both their enduring features and their transformations. Yet, however much these systems may differ, they all

²For example, the German Theatre and Orchestra Association (Deutscher Bühnenverein) publishes its comprehensive annual Theatre Statistics (Theaterstatistik) and Production Statistics (Werkstatistik) in collaboration with the magazine Die Deutsche Bühne. These publications provide detailed information on the exact number of theatre-goers, the types of productions staged, and the revenues of both public and private theatres. (In the 2025 season, theatre attendance reached approximately 3.25 million spectators).

converge on the pursuit of the “fulfilment of the theatrical act” and the creation of a genuine “theatrical life”, one in which theatre comes to occupy the place of something the citizen actively seeks because it has become a necessity.

On this basis, **it is therefore useful to** examine public funding system models in Western and Asian countries, to consider the approaches taken there to build "theatrical life," and to look at the key points of debate surrounding them. An examination of these systems would benefit from an analysis of the logic behind the funding and its mechanisms, particularly by determining the following elements:

- The available sources of funding: the central state treasury? Government ministries? Regional authorities? Municipalities? If funding is drawn from all, or from several of these sources, what proportion does each contribute?
- What are the grounds for awarding funding, and who decides both its allocation and its amount?
- Who receives financial support, and through what mechanisms? Theatre companies, production companies, or individual artists with project proposals?
- The impact of funding structures on the theatrical professions and on the livelihoods of those who work in them.
- The relationship between funding, distribution, and audience attendance: Should support be directed towards ticket subsidies, production funding, or a combination of both?
- The structures and mechanisms of governance, and the principles on which they are founded.

It is equally legitimate to ask about the nature of the systems of direct and indirect public funding for theatre in the Arab world and across African countries, with particular attention to the extent to which they seek to foster a genuine “theatrical life” and to the approaches they adopt in pursuing that objective.

Main and Sub-Themes of the Conference:

- 1. Systems of direct and indirect public funding for theatre in Western and Asian countries: pathways to the “fulfilment of the theatrical act” and the building of a “theatrical life”, realities and challenges**

1-1The principles underpinning public funding systems in Western countries

Papers introducing public funding systems of the countries listed below—either individually or through a comparative study of two or more systems. (The following list of countries is provided to highlight models with distinctive characteristics; however, this is by way of example, not an exhaustive list):

The funding Financing systems: In Germany; France; the Scandinavian countries; Russia; United Kingdom; Hong Kong; India; United States of America ...

1-2 Realities and Challenges: Public funding and artistic and intellectual independence in Western countries

- Does public funding lead to subtle forms of censorship or to the implicit shaping of artists' creative choices?
- Mechanisms of engagement and the tools through which they operate

2. Systems of direct and indirect public funding for theatre in Arab and African countries: pathways to the “fulfilment of the theatrical act” and the building of a “theatrical life”:

2-1Papers introducing public funding systems in Arab countries, following the methodological framework adopted for the Western funding systems, while indicating the proportion of the national budget allocated to the cultural sector in general and to theatre in particular, together with the mechanisms governing its administration.

2-2Papers introducing public funding systems in African countries, following the methodological framework adopted for the Western funding systems, while indicating the proportion of the national budget allocated to the cultural sector in general and to theatre in particular, together with the mechanisms governing its administration.

3- Present and absent priorities, and the challenges involved in fostering a “theatrical life” in the Arab and African contexts:

3-1Arab and African regional organizations and their role in supporting systems for funding theatrical production and facilitating the circulation of theatrical productions beyond national borders.

3-2Non-governmental Organizations and their role in funding theatrical production and facilitating the circulation of theatrical productions beyond national borders, in the light of existing models in the European context.

It scarcely needs repeating that our aim for this symposium is to foster a productive dialogue among researchers and professionals, including artists, producers, distributors, and cultural practitioners in general. Such a dialogue cannot succeed unless it is grounded in research based on precise data and rigorous analytical methodologies.

Symposium Director
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