

## **Public funding and the performing arts A national profile-Romania**

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The purpose of the following document is to draw a synthetic picture regarding the evolution of the relationship between the performing arts field and the late developments of public funding in favour of these arts, in Romania.

### **A national picture in numbers**

It is not easy to deliver a simplified national overview of Romanian performing arts, as the legal and managerial system regarding this domain is still in the process of reform. An important number of changes in legislation, engaged in previous years, are under way to be implemented.

To start with, one can have a look at some relevant numbers.

In Romania function today a total of 103 performing arts institutions that depend and are entitled to public subsidy. Some are financially supported by the Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs, some by regional and local authorities, as illustrated by the following table( according to Romanian law, a public institution must function within the subordination of only one central, county or local government body):

<i>Institutions</i>	<i>Supported by the Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs</i>	<i>Supported locally by municipalities and county councils</i>
49 dramatic theatres	7	42
19 puppet theatres	0	19
8 opera houses	5	3
16 philharmonics	1	15

9 musical theatres	1 operetta theatre	8 light musical theaters for entertainment
2 national performing arts centers	National Center for Dance The Center for young arts Tinerimea Romana	0

The instruments for allocating public subsidy to performing arts institutions are:

a. **Subsidy:**

1. according to their status, as ‘public state institutions for theatre and musical performance’, through specific legislation in place( for performing arts: bill 504/2004) and general regulations regarding public funding for institutions.
2. through regional funds and/or other funding programs existing at regional and local level

b. **Project base support(grants)**

Through the National Cultural Fund (an arm’s length subsidized agency), created in 2005 and allowing extra-financing, on a project base, for both state subsidized organizations and artistic ONG’s.

On the repertory side , as a telling example, in 2006, the total number of theatre openings was in 2006 of 300 of all genres: classical theatre (Shakespeare, Moliere Chekov), modern and postmodern theatre(Ionesco, Beckett), new drama(Carunariu, Sarah Kane). Opera is keeping the classical repertoire alive(Verdi, Rossini, Puccini, but also Enescu) At the same time, but based more on ad-hoc choice than on a clear repertoire strategy, some Romanian and European contemporary composers are presented in Philharmonics and opera houses. Classical ballet is presented in Operas and contemporary dance starts to be presented not only in the National Center for contemporary dance in Bucharest but more and more on the stages of dramatic theatres all over the country.

More than 85 % of the total amounts invested in productions and performance events comes each year from public source(national, local, regional).

In 2007, important amounts of private money were attracted more easily for performing arts 'events', because of the Sibiu Cultural capital 2007, as well as because of the growing relevance of performing arts festivals, like the International Theatre Festival (annual event held in Bucharest and Sibiu) or the Jazz international festival and the George Enesco festival/Bucharest (the most costly event entirely supported by the Romanian Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs).

One can conclude that even if performing arts remain, mainly state supported in Romania, the growing visibility and international pertinence of some events attract today more of the private sponsoring and interact positively with a dynamics of new forms of financial and logistic support for new production and distribution of shows.<sup>1</sup>

### **The institutional system of performing arts in today's Romania**

The infrastructure for allocating public funding to performing arts in Romania has to be analysed in parallel with its correspondent institutional situation , as outlined in the following.

One observes three complementary institutional realities. These realities challenge one another in a sometimes contradictory, still often progress oriented way.

#### **The 'repertory theatre'**

On the one hand, there is the inherited institutional reality of the over-centralized and conservative performing arts institutional system built by communism . This institutional pattern survives together with its scale of attached values: e.g. conservative, traditional issues, grandiose staging modalities.

This reality allows the continuation of the logic of repertory theatres at national and local level (each season is split in periods presenting several successive shows each week-some

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<sup>1</sup>all sources are reproducing data from texts produced by Ministry of culture and religious affairs between 2004-2007 and/or recent interviews with Romanian Ministry of culture and religious affairs administrators and theatre directors

produced in previous seasons, some freshly produced in theatre institutions, opera houses and classical ballet companies with productions running for several years). Also, it has direct consequences on the functioning of institutions at administrative, managerial and artistic levels.

From an administrative point of view, the repertory theatre system preserves the existing, outdated, contractual regime of Romanian performing artists: e.g. actors, opera singers, music interpreters, directors and set designers. Instead of encouraging the change of the present legal status :e.g. going for individual contracts per performance that allow a differentiation between important artists and debutants, important and less important roles, the possibility of financial gain according to the quality and quantity of the performance, in short- introducing a competitive and negotiated base for agreements, the present contractual system consecrates entitlement for low salaries in exchange of artists being life employees in theatre or opera house institution where they get a job. Hence, many young artists involved with performing arts find themselves in the situation of being forced to look for other, better paid jobs ( in advertising, soap opera and other TV shows, ‘light’ performances) and also maintaining, at the same time, their job in a theatre. This situation provides ground for preserving an unchallenging status quo for career development of new generations .

The existing system also blocks the performing arts institution functioning in itself:work is given mainly to its own-employed actors and there is always a difficulty to invite other artists and to ensure after a performance’s opening the continuity of a show when there are too many external collaborators (e.g. theatre Radu Stanca in Sibiu, one of the most active Romanian theatre venues, has each year an impressive number of openings using an important number of actors. However, because of its functioning as a repertory theatre, there is very limited possibility to follow up on the performances. It sometimes happens that some of the Sibiu State theatre shows perform more during external tours than for audiences in Romania)The repertory theatre system also limits the ‘open market’ for directors among theatres. The ones that are heads of important institutions or life employed by those and artistically well established share exclusively among themselves the annual number of contractual deals offered by the state owned arts institutions. A

newcomer has difficulties in entering this circle and benefitting of good contractual deals.

Last, but not least, repertory theatres are very costly artistic wise (e.g. each opening produces specific scenery and after one performance, it has to be replaced with another scenery, according to the show's weekly planning system ; work involved by these regular and often replacements of the settings is immense and belongs to another era). However, repertory theatre could also have positive outputs in the sense of the preservation of a constant tradition dedicated to performing arts as a 'public service' in the sense defined by Jean Vilar and the further encouragement of a certain traditional , costly but profoundly necessary cultural tool, especially in Romanian provinces. In this sense, recent policies attempt to affirm that, if the repertory theatre pattern has to be conserved, it is desirable to better channel and distribute the existing public financial resources and invest in these performing arts institutions development, not only in their survival and, thus, to allocate public funding according to real necessities engendered by the system. Getting repertory theatres enough money to survive but continuing their low level expenditure is a solution that cannot bring any positive outcomes, nor any quality expectations and decision - makers seem to acknowledge this truth better and better.

Many of the public repertory performing arts institutions struggle each year to get enough budget in order to be able to produce and perform, but also to tour their production (eg. funds do not allow either touring or inviting foreign collaborators or even staging as many performances as the institutional infrastructure would normally allow).

### **The so called 'independent' scene**

In comparison, recent years brought about a second reality in Romanian performing arts: the one represented by an extremely dynamic and consistent so called 'independent' scene, organised around initiatives of either young playwrights and theatre critics and directors ( e.g. Dramacum, the group of directors-playwrights sharing a need to write and stage differently and meeting each other while students at the Romanian University of film and theatre in Bucharest, Desant theatre (Bucharest), administrated by the Persona association- initiated as a venue for critical debate in the reading and performing of

dramatic text, Dramafest-an initiative in Tg Mures developed by a young playwright on behalf of emerging Romanian writers for theatre.. ) or around the courageous and generous input of private producers ( e.g. bar owner Voicu Radescu opened his place to a program called ‘Monday theatre at Green Hours ‘ and became the talent breeder for a whole generation of new writing, staging and acting that repertory theatres did not naturally embrace at first)

In the same line, small theatre companies like: TFF (Teatrul Fara Frontiere-Theatre without frontiers), Teatrul Imposibil(Cluj) and Teatrul inexistent(Bucharest) are all independent performing arts initiatives generally launched and led by artists that want to create a different , more flexible, internationally oriented and vivid counterpart to repertory theatres. These are completed by contemporary dance independent organisations like Project DCM and Solitude project or music organisations like TmBase(Timisoara), organiser of electronic music festivals and workshops..

To complete this picture, a follower of the type of initiative represented in early ‘90’s by LEVANT theatre, there is today Teatrul Act, whose artistic director and main investor is actor Marcel Iures and which profiled itself as an ‘independent’ venue dedicated mostly to experimental drama, young international playwrighting and lecturing about performing arts issues.

Generally speaking, many of the independent performing arts initiatives are interdisciplinary, mixing different performance modalities, precisely because they are the result of newly created art forms and freshly determined artistic dynamics. Also, organisations from the independent performing arts scene are often those that engage international collaborations more easily .

All these ‘independent’ initiatives access public funding on a purely ad-hoc basis, their financial support comes mainly from donors and private investors, or via direct income from performances.

Independents can , however , apply in order to receive public funding (eg. through the grant system initiated and implemented by the National Center for Contemporary dance or through the ‘Cantemir program for cultural cooperation’ initiated by the Romanian

cultural Institute, as well as through the funding from the 'National cultural fund', as well as local and county authorities).

Still, the infrastructure(venues, human resource) these independent performing art organisations have at their disposal is reduced and precarious since no funders provides support for it. As opposed to repertory theatres, who have too much personnel, but badly payed and according to noncompetiutive standards, independent companies have to employ one person for a multitude of tasks and sometimes find themselves overwhelmed by the dimension of a project, being in lack of venue, infrastructue and humnan ressource to finalise it correctly.

Hence, there is to be praised, when observed, as a positive kind of collaboration the one offered by the National Theatre in Bucharest (host for a while for the performances of Monday theatre), National Theatre in Cluj host of the impossible Theatre or of Arcub (the Cultural center of the Bucharest Municipality)-hosting independent groups of performing arts for regular performances. These collaborations are unfortunately still isolated in time and they do not ensure yet a consistent and sustainable connexion between public subsidy and private initiatives in Romanian performing arts.

### **The lust for entertainment**

A third reality that can be taken into account when analysing the relationship between public funding and performing arts is the one of the new entertainmanent industry in Romania, one that conquered important ground in recent years.

Big performing arts events (musical, dance and performance shows) organised at local level and financially supported by local authorities-from public money, are today extremely frequent.

Theatre, music and dance festivals, other kinds of ceremonies including performance and popular actors and singers are attracting extremely important audiences and represent one of the main Romanian week- end leisures. This situation has a visible impact on the way that general tastes of new audiences are shaped and on the artistic choices that traditional

performing arts institutions (repertory theatres, opera houses) are brought to make , consequently.

Performing arts entertainment shows , using public money, challenges both the independent and the repertory theatre system by the broad attraction they represent and the number of people they bring. This might mean these performances might seem to make better use of public money .

The question is, how should repertory theatres offer a convincing argument against this conclusion and how can they counteract and position themselves to address broader and younger audiences in order to rebalance the mass effect of the entertainment performance scene.

### **The drive forward for public funding in Romanian performing arts**

Some of the recent legislative modifications intended by the Romanian Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs tempt an answer to this question and also to the some of the issues raised previously in this article. Thus, the bill passed in 2004 regarding public institutions in the performing arts is undergoing modifications (still in process).<sup>2</sup>

The most important changes , as explained by the director of the performing and contemporary arts department in the Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs<sup>3</sup> touch to the following aspects:

The increase of salaries according to the quantity and quality of artistic work and the reconsideration of the artistic contractual system for all artists employed by repertory theatres; the clarification of ambiguities related to the management contract (obligations for managers, criteria for performance assessment...)for general managers of public performing arts institutions; the encouragement of collaboration between public funded performing arts institutions (from central, regional and local level) and independent initiatives and private initiatives in all sectors of the performing arts.

These modifications are at present in the process of negotiation with the Romanian Ministry of Labour and are already debated with the professional performing arts

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<sup>2</sup> Bill 504/2004 on <http://www.dreptonline.ro/legislatie/legea-institutii-spectacole-concerte.php>

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Demeter Andras, in Gandul dayly newspapaer, 02.02.2007



communities ( artists in repertory theatres, Union of Theatre Artistists, Union of Musicians and Composers).

The sense and ambition of the proposed modifications to the existing law are to precisely take into account and correct the capitalised frustration about the issues analysed before(e.g. incompatibility between the existing repertory theatre funding system and the emergent independent scene, encouragement of a competitive salary system, clarification of notios related to artistic efficiency in qualitative terms).

These modifications also strive to clarify the status and role of the different stakeholders interacting with public funded performing arts organisations:central authority, arm's length agencies and programs, local and regional authorities, performing arts unions . In absence of a functional and efficient law for sponsoring artistic activities, these policy measures try to provide a basis for redistributing public money in favour of both public and independent organisations in performing arts, encourage more artistic competitiveness and try to initiate reliable mechanisms for public/private collaboration.

Out of the observations and data gathered, the points that stick out as main policy directions defined by decision-makers (currently in different stages of implementation) in the field of performing arts are:

1. A clearer and more balanced distribution of public funding towards all the institutional actors active within the Romanian performing arts ( public, independent, private).
2. A diversification of sources for public funding and the continuation of the dynamics of decentralised funding (by transfer of financial responsibility to local and regional authority and by the further strenghtening of arm's length funding mechanisms: e.g. national cultural fund, Cantemir program, priority programs of the Romanian ministry of culture and religious affairs(eg National Theatre festival, Enescu festival)
3. A growing tendency to supply public funding for interdisciplinary performing arts events organised locally, to grow public support on behalf of national tours of outstanding Romanian performances, to augment public support for international events organised locally around performing arts(e.g. in 2008 the

Hungarian Theatre in Cluj is organiser for the Festival of The Union of European theatres-UTE, the jazz international festival in Sibiu and the one in Bucharest are constantly growing, the ENESCU festival is already a European reference)

4. An important acknowledgement of the fact that the independent performing arts sector has to be substantially encouraged and supported with public funding and an explicit policy of the Ministry and local and regional authorities in favour of the collaboration between independent, private companies and repertory theatres or other public funded performing arts institutions.
5. An overall liberalisation and externalisation of the process of decision making by the systematic organisation of independent expert commissions responsible for public funds allocation in favour of performing arts institutions and projects.

Even though much of the projected legislative and operative measures are still in search of adapted implementation instruments, the direction of the reform dynamics from this point of view is today clearer than it was five years ago. It is also true that there is a need for generational change in order that the modernised version of public funding for performing arts can be efficiently brought to life in post totalitarian Romania.