

Doctoral School of the University of Theatre and Film Arts

THEATRE AS COMMUNITY SPACE
Art mediation and connections to the city

The main theses of the doctoral dissertation

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Theatre as community space – Art mediation and connections to the city

In my view there is a tendency for the operation of state-funded repertory theatres in Hungary to be supplemented by theatre mediation departments employing art mediation experts, whose activities strengthen the social responsibility of the theatre, adding new functions to the institution.

In Germany theatre education work, which is an integral part of theatrical institutions, is defined as a mediation activity that creates a chance for free, constructive connection between theatre art and individuals. Various activities are organized around pedagogical goals and artistic motivations within this border territory, and there is great variety in which aspects become dominant in work processes. The practice and the related interdisciplinary specialisations are associated with university courses.

In my doctoral thesis I examine what causes, goals, responsibilities and institutional characteristics underlie the organization of these very diverse activities, which can be seen as functional expansion of the central tasks of Hungarian and German theatres.

The objectives of theatre mediation

The theatre is responsible for making the young generation familiar with the theatre and the arts, for teaching them to understand more in performances, and for playing a part in aesthetic education.

The theatre is responsible for participating in cultural education in a thought-through manner and for collaborating with schools in public education, where arts education is now increasingly relegated to the background. Its mission is to act as a partner of education institutions, complementing and widening the range of activities that support a constructive passing of leisure time and that offer opportunities for developing artistic awareness and competence of self-expression.

It is the responsibility and interest of a theatre to reflect on its own impact and to sensitise itself to the needs of its audience and society at large; and also to build a communication channel

system that keeps pace with its rapidly changing environment; but also to connect with contemporary reality and to be able to change and to inspire change in others.

Theatre has responsibility in promoting equity in cultural and social participation, and responsibility for cultural democracy.

In my opinion it is the responsibility of a theatre, especially a state theatre, to return to its ancient origins and act as a forum and to participate responsibly in the life of the city.

In summary, the theatre needs to develop a cultural and social vision for the future.

The main focus of my research are the last two responsibilities. Do participatory theatrical aspirations that are in stark contrast with the aesthetics and working methods of traditional civic theatres fit within the framework a state theatre? As a result of my research, I argue that traditional frameworks can be changed.

Objectives in theatre mediation

Theatre mediation objectives in state theatres can be formulated and arranged in several ways. I examine these from five points of view. I collect the relevant aspects of the system of responsibilities of public education; I examine them according to the different styles of art mediation, from the point of view of the theatre institution, from a pedagogical point of view, and from the professional point of view of the wider field of Hungarian theatre education.

Forms of theatre mediation

I present and systematise the forms of theatre mediation that occur in state theatres in the framework of different tasks. I follow the German principles of systematisation, mainly based on Ute Pinkert's paper *The Structure of Mediation I*, but supplementing it in accordance with the Hungarian situation and the wide range of formal varieties that are characteristic here. In the framework of the systematisation, three basic categories take form:

The dimension of *internal* mediation includes the forms of theatre mediation that rely on personal performance, active acting, or theatre-making. (E.g. theatrical youth clubs, acting groups).

The *immanent* dimension includes mediation acts that take place in the field between an art product and the audience/participants. (E.g. workshops that investigate a performance and tune the audience in to it, meetings between the audience and the makers of a performance, introductory theatre, TIE performances).

The dimension of *external* mediation includes audience development and reaching out to new audiences, as well as opening up the theatre and providing opportunities for participation, which increase equal opportunities in access to culture (e.g. mobile and community theatre projects, changes in the repertory).

The history of theatre mediation

In the second chapter I examine the development of theatre pedagogy in the two countries from a historical perspective. I explain, building on Ute Pinkert's paper *The structures of theatre mediation II*, the social expectations, cultural policy developments and theatrical art aspirations that had an impact on the development of the field of theatre pedagogy connected to theatrical institutions in Germany. Reflecting on the historicity of German theatre pedagogy, I take stock of the historical similarities and differences appearing in the practice of Hungarian state theatres.

In the 1970s Hungarian theatres turned their attention to the responsibilities of public education due to the low number of young people in the audience. The dramapedagogy movement that started in the 1980s, the foundation of independent theatre in education companies with international connections, and the strong influence of the Anglo-Saxon practice had almost no impact on the state theatre system for a long time. Complex theatre mediation programmes similar to those in Germany began to emerge in state theatres in the 2010s, whereas some pioneering initiatives in children's and youth theatres already began in the 1990s. The division between the institutional theatrical structures and the independent theatre in education companies is disappearing. Initiatives to cooperation and jointly defined strategic goals are now helping the development of the field.

Presentation of the establishment of the ÖrkényKÖZ workshop

Through the history of the establishment of the workshop, I present the steps and difficulties of expanding the function of a state-run repertory theatre and how such a complex program can become an integral part of the theatre. I highlight the facts that there is no dominant methodology within the field of educational theatre in Hungary, and that there are no specific pedagogical or artistic goals in state theatres compared to other arenas of theatrical education; however, the institutional operation and the existence of a repertory and its artistic quality give rise to special responsibilities and forms, making the theatre's tasks both easier and more difficult at the same time.

A complex art mediation and community program has been running in the Örkény Theatre since 2012. In the past eight years the department has been offering workshops for the performances of the theatre repertory and transforming the institution into a community space. The ÖrkényKÖZ workshop, an integral part of the theatre, is planned, led and coordinated by a team of ten; so far we have interacted with more than 10,000 people, and in the 2018/2019 season we organized more than 180 community events that were on the border between pedagogy and art.

We conduct art mediation and promote responsiveness to theatre and art. We operate the theatre as an open forum where audiences, artists, teachers, students, children, school and theatre collaborate. We foster creativity and communication skills, encourage empathy and build theatre-related communities. We create theatrical performances and community-based creative processes. We conduct methodological research and training in the field of theatre pedagogy.

We offer various types of open rehearsals, meetings between the audience and theatre staff, theatre tours; workshops that are based on theatre practices, offer workshops that help tune-in and investigate, analyse a performance. We also offer community games built on improvisational exercises and drama games, cultural and public dialogues and discussions about the themes brought up in the repertory, free theatre schools for the youth, methodology trainings and teaching aids for teachers, as well as an online interactive programme with quiz games. In addition to our programmes related to the repertory, we work on new projects that strengthen the connection between the theatre and the city by engaging civilians in community-based creative processes and activities that build on participants' stories and problems.

The richness in the forms used in the activities of the ÖrkényKÖZ workshop related to the dimensions of internal and immanent mediation is outstanding in the Hungarian state theatre scene, and these programmes make full use of the theatre's infrastructural capacity. The main question of my research is related to the external mediation dimension, where we are looking for new ways of social responsibility of state theatres.

Theatre as a forum – *Bürgerbühne*

I examine the questions of the relationship between theatre, city and civic identity through the practice of the *Bürgerbühne* model in Germany.

The *Bürgerbühne* model is a form of community theatre, based on calling “civilian” actors to the stage, appeared in Germany in 2009. Its mission is to connect with the city and to offer groups whose representation is scarce and whose problems we would not encounter in the theatre a chance to speak up. The theatre's role as a forum is reinforced by these performances, which by setting the inhabitants of the city on the stage focus on the problems and stories of the residents. The *Bürgerbühne* provides meeting points for different social groups along common issues, providing an opportunity to get to know each other's experiences and perspectives and to re-evaluate their own in the light of these. The name *Bürgerbühne* and the creation of the theatre model are linked to the Dresden State Theatre, where it operates as a department.

Work related to my doctoral dissertation

I present two creative community processes that were implemented in the ÖrkényKÖZ workshop to develop the connection between theatre and city in the context of the relationship between memories and the present.

Madách Square 6 – Creative community work with high school students and people living in the building next to the theatre

Live Travel Guide for District VII – Forum and creative community work with inhabitants of the seventh district

For the full programme and documentation of the ÖrkényKÖZ workshop, see koz.orkenyszinhaz.hu