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Theater for young audiences in Romania  
**ABSTRACT**

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Theater for young audiences is the only genre of theater that is defined by its audience, the prepositional use that indicates the attribution of the artistic object - *for young audiences* (or for children and youth, for teenagers) - being absent in defining other theatrical forms. In this regard, two aspects can be noted:

On one hand, already from its name, theatre for young audiences reveals its very careful preoccupation for the spectator, for the way in which the artistic message is transmitted, but also the pedagogical stake. The name indicates that the target audience is clearly defined, important and properly perceived, and the mission of this kind of theater is a special one.

On the other hand, this name has contributed to the depreciation of the meaning and value of the artistic act - *for young audiences* being often translated as "poorer quality" or even "a minor genre of theater." This depreciation can have its origins in the fact that for a long time theatre addressed to young people had a simple pedagogical utility, sometimes proving propagandistic valences, and the really valuable performances from an artistic point of view appeared much later.

The main premise of the research is that teenagers need a different theater than that offered to adults. The term "theatre for young audiences" suggests on the one hand a separation from adult theater, as well as some distinct qualities. Theater for young audiences is different from adult theater primarily because it caters to a special audience. Therefore, the artistic act should be different.

The present research mainly refers to theater for the age group 14-18 years, using both the term *theater for young audiences* and the term *theater for teenagers* or *theater for young people*. Although the present study is restricted to this age group, there are often made references to children's theater. The theater for teenagers has separated from the children's theater as a result of a fragmentation of the repertoires of children's theaters by age categories, so up to a certain point we are talking about a common history and characteristics. Even today, in Romania plays for teenagers are also performed in theaters for children and youth.

The research focuses primarily on aesthetically centered theater, concerned with the production of a play as an artistic act, and with an important pedagogical stake, but which is always secondary to the aesthetic stake. The study focuses mainly on the period 2000-2020, primarily on theater performed by adults, professional actors, on professional stages (independent or state theatres), as well as on the extra-repertorial strategies of theaters.

An important reason for starting this research was my strong conviction in the need for this study, in the context in which there is currently no large-scale theoretical contribution in the field of theater for young audiences in Romania. The only publication on this topic, the collective volume *Theatre and its young audience. Romanian Realities*, coordinated by Oltița Cântec and published in 2018 by *Timpul* publishing house, confirmed my conviction that theater for young audiences is more and more visible, has entered the sights of theoreticians and has become a phenomenon that can no longer be ignored. I started this research with the conviction that this paper will be useful to theater managers who want to get out of the comfort zone of organizing school groups that watch the performances and think of strong strategies for audience development, aligned with Western trends, being aware that in order to gain and maintain a young audience, considerable efforts must be made both in terms of repertoire and off-stage.

Last but not least, I initiated this research believing strongly in a necessary reform of the theaters for children and youth in Romania, which mostly operate according to an outdated system, lacking artistic directions to individualize them and are almost immune to foreign influences. Added to this is the lack of adequate budgets to confirm the real interest of public culture funders in training young audiences. Although their full name is "Theater for children and youth", most of them pay much more attention to children than to teenagers, building their repertoires for age groups up to 10-12 years and thus neglecting entire audience segments. The paper aims at x-raying a relatively new phenomenon, which is still in the pioneering phase in Romania, and which would deserve special attention.

### **Structure of the paper, methodology and main conclusions**

Regarding the structure, the paper is divided into four chapters, each of them being built with different research and analysis methods, depending on the stakes. In the present research I used the methods of theater history, the methods of theatrical criticism, methods of sociology, marketing, public studies, psychology or theatrical aesthetics. The case studies - *Theater for young audiences in Germany*, *Youth Theater in Piatra Neamț*, *Replica Educational Center*, *Teen Spirit* platform from the *Reactor of Creation and Experiment*, the *Ideo Ideis* Young Theater Festival – aimed to highlight a few exemplary initiatives, which could serve as inspiration and example of good practice for other theatrical institutions in Romania.

The first chapter, *Theater for Young Audiences. About the difficulty and limits of defining a term* aims to define the concept of theater for young audiences - an area whose

identity becomes increasingly questionable with the progressive blurring of the boundaries between adolescents and adults - and to identify the main features of a performance for young audiences. Trying to formulate a definition for theater for young audiences is very difficult, because we are not talking about a genre with a clear identity and boundaries, since teenagers can go to performances for adults and *vice versa*. However, I tried to provide a definition for what, ideally, means a performance for young audiences:

Shows performed by professional actors, in state or independent institutions, both theatres for young audiences and theatres for adults, which by the theme they approach, by the characters and by the performative language are addressed primarily - but not exclusively - to the public between 14 and 18 years old, having an important pedagogical stake, but which is never subordinated to the aesthetic stake. The ideal performance for young audiences has a high degree of participation and is accompanied by strategies and approaches that involve the audience beyond the show.

Starting from the general socio-historical plan, passing through the literary one, and then through the theatrical one, I researched the context in which the focus on the adolescent, a relatively recent preoccupation, led to the emergence of a culture for young people. In order to answer the question of why a special theater is needed for teenagers, different from the one for adults, I proposed a foray into the history of theater for young audiences, insisting on the educational stake, the importance of the participatory dimension, but also the need for theatrical pedagogy programs. I also gave an important space to research on the adolescent spectator. From the sociological studies conducted in recent years in Romania on the cultural consumption of young people, we can extract very little relevant information about the preferences and needs of those who were identified as being part of *Generation Z*. Thus, we started from the premise that the results of marketing studies made for big brands involving young people from *Generation Z* can be partially applied to theater. For each need and specific characteristic of the *Generation Z*, identified by the consulted studies, I proposed possible approaches that can be used by theaters in developing a communication strategy aimed at young audiences.

Also, using the results of the research, I identified the main characteristics that should ideally meet in a performance for young audiences:

- is performed by professional actors in a state or independent theater (or toured in schools)
- is based on a play

1. from Romanian dramaturgy

a) commissioned:

- written by a playwright on a certain theme (this also includes the dramatizations of some novels or adaptations from classical plays)

-written with the *devised* method together with the whole artistic team

-written based on the interviews with teenagers made by the playwright or the entire artistic team

b) pre-existing

- a play performed for the first time, discovered at a playwriting competition

- a play already performed

2. a translation of a foreign play

a. original text

b. dramatization of a novel for teenagers or adaptation of a film script for teenagers

c. a rewriting of a classical play with the language of teenagers

- the play focuses on teenage characters

- the subject is from the immediate reality of young people

- the play focuses on very actual, often taboo topics

- the play is not necessarily written for young people, but is addressed mainly to them

- in the performance, it matters equally what you say and how you say it, the performative language must be close to that of the young people

- the performance has, in addition to artistic value, an important educational component, which, however, should never be subordinated to the artistic value

- the performance for young audiences never comes alone, but accompanied by various off-stage approaches, which have the role of deepening the subject of the show, guiding the teenager and preparing him for the role of the spectator

- the theater for young audience has an important participatory component, is oriented towards a permanent dialogue with its audience, always tests the boundaries between the stage and the spectators and turns the young spectators into participants

- participation can be achieved:

a. by the performance itself

- using new media, provided that they form an organic body with the content, their use being generated by the theme

- involving the audience directly

b. outside the performance

- involving the adolescent audience in the creative process (in some cases the play is written by the teenagers)

- through a guidance made by professionals (theater pedagogues): training before the performance, discussions with the audience after the performance, workshops after the performance

- the performance is promoted in such a way as to attract the target audience, the whole communication strategy being planned so that the message reaches as many teenagers as possible, so the events are promoted mainly online, on their favorite social networks, and using a lot of video content.

In addition, the cultural offer of the institutions that produce performances for young audiences must be characterized by continuity, complementarity and quality.

**Continuity.** The concern of theaters for their target audience must be constant. Only in this way an audience development can be made, creating the habit of returning to shows and workshops.

**Complementarity.** The theater should be the place where young people can openly discuss on topics considered to be taboo at home or at school. Theater for young audiences should speak when school and family are silent, and it should be an important dialogue partner of the adolescent.

Thus, the theater should not double the school curriculum, offering dramatizations based on novels from the baccalaureate curriculum. It should be complementary to school and offer something new.

**Quality.** All theatres that produce performances for young audiences should act according to Natalia Saz, the founder of the first children's theater (Moscow Children's Theater, 1931), who said that children should be offered "high art"<sup>1</sup>.

**The second chapter** of this paper, *Case Study: Theater for Young Audiences in the German - speaking Space*, aims at a foray into current trends in theater for young audiences in the German-speaking space. I chose to restrict the research on this space not only due to the professional experience gained here, but first of all because in the German language space the evolution of theater

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<sup>1</sup> Andrea Gronemayer, Julia Dina Heße, Gerd Taube, *Kindertheater.Jugendtheater.Perspektiven einer Theatersparte*, Berlin, Alexander Verlag, 2009, p. 33.

for young audiences is one of the most significant, being an example of good practice and a valuable source of inspiration for theaters in Romania.

Thus, I researched how theater for young audiences has evolved since its inception, closely linked to the emancipation of youth in the late 1960s, to formats that involve the active participation of young audiences in the theatrical experience. I have analyzed the repertoire strategies of some theaters for children and youth, such as *Grips Theater* or *Theater an der Parkaue* in the last three seasons, identifying current trends and themes and I have systematized several types of theater pedagogy programs that are regularly part of theaters offer. I analyzed both the programs offered by children's and youth theaters, as well as by the children's and youth sections of state theaters such as *Deutsches Theater*, *Schauspielhaus Hamburg*, *Schauspielhaus Düsseldorf*, *Schauspielhaus Zürich*. Also, in the research I used the information published in the yearbook *Kinder-und Jugendtheater in Deutschland*, which lists each year the premieres of the current season.

I paid special attention to the relationship of theaters with schools and the textbook as an adjunct tool in the work of the teacher, creating, based on teaching materials made by *Deutsches Schauspielhaus Hamburg*, *Gorky Theater Berlin* and *Schauspielhaus Zürich*, a structure for two potential workbooks that could be the basis of two performances from the 2019-2020 season in Romanian theatres. Special attention was also paid to plays intended to be performed in classrooms, *Klassenzimmerstücke*, a form of *Theater in Education* which is very common in Germany.

I have identified as another important feature of theater for young audiences in the German space: the existence of an extremely consistent and varied dramatic literature, due primarily to the massive investment in the playwright. Thus, I discussed a series of systems for validation and recognition of playwrights, presenting the most important awards, scholarships and residencies. In addition to the image of the German theatrical landscape, I identified the most important editorial programs and festivals for young audiences.

Using the results of my research on theater for young audiences in Germany, in which I see an exemplary, coherent and functional system, I proposed a series of initiatives necessary to develop, in Romania, a truly relevant theater for young audiences, according to European theater trends:

- „importing” plays for young audiences from the German language space through translation-programs (translation of at least 20 new texts per year, organization of project competitions for young directors based on these plays)
- At least four premieres for teenagers per season, at children's and youth theaters; at least two at the other theaters
- Introduction in the organizational charts of theaters of the profession “theater pedagogue”

- Extra-repertorial activities (depending on the topic) to accompany each theatrical production for teenagers
  - Deepening relations with schools through permanent communication with teachers and training of teachers (workshops, regular meetings)
  - Introduction of work manuals for each performance
  - Introducing performances for classrooms in the repertoires (for the beginning translations from German dramaturgy, later the theaters can commission playwrights to write the texts or to develop them through the work-in-progress method)
    - Encouraging dramaturgy for young audiences by investing in playwrights
    - Early investment in future playwrights (drama workshops in schools, the opportunity to work on text with professionals, drama competitions for students)
    - Annual awards for texts addressed to young audiences
    - Offering grants and residencies
    - More commissioned texts
  - Encouraging young directors to produce performances for young audiences (project competitions, residencies)
  - Publishing anthologies of plays for young audiences
  - More festivals with performances for teenagers, more guest shows from abroad
  - Permanent concern for identifying new potential spectators (teenagers from disadvantaged backgrounds).

**The third chapter**, *Contemporary Romanian for Young Audiences*, is the most consistent part of the paper and aims at a comprehensive analysis of the main trends that have defined Romanian dramaturgy for young audiences in the last 20 years. Many of the Romanian plays about teenagers already existed long before theaters in Romania began to show interest in this area.

In the **first section** of the chapter, I set out to analyze the context in which contemporary Romanian drama about teenagers appeared. It was created in the late 1990s-early 2000s by *Dramafest* and *dramAcum*. Going through the history of the two initiatives that marked a revolution in Romanian theater after 1990, first of all by moving the focus on the playwright, I identified the zero moment of contemporary Romanian drama for teenagers as the discovery, in 1998, of the play *When I want to whistle, I whistle* by Andreea Vălean at the playwriting contest initiated by *Dramafest*. Next, I have inventoried the playwriting competitions and residencies for young authors or for plays for young audiences currently existing in Romania.

In general, the specialized criticism signals the low number of Romanian plays for young

audiences, compared to other countries<sup>2</sup>. The scarcity of stage texts that deal with the reality of today's teenagers could be caused by several aspects:

- In general, little drama is written in Romania
- In Romania there is no tradition of a culture for teenagers
- Theater for young audiences is still insufficiently explored
- Although their number is growing, there are currently relatively few initiatives to encourage the writing of plays for young people.
- The reluctance of playwrights to address issues related to the universe of adolescents could be due on the one hand to the fact that plays for young audiences are the most difficult to write. They are texts written mostly by mature authors, and due to the generational difference from the target audience, the risk of not being authentic is higher. Another possible cause could be the perception that theater for young audiences is a minor genre from an artistic point of view. Thus, we can deduce that playwrights prefer to write texts for more visible performances.

In the **second section** of the chapter I set out to briefly analyze 15 Romanian plays about teenagers that were written between 1998 and 2018. The selection aims to illustrate how the topics chosen by playwrights, the documentation process, the structure, the language, but also working methods have evolved over 20 years.

The selected plays can be divided into two categories: texts written independently of a performance (and later discovered at playwriting competitions) and texts written for a specific performance (by the playwright, by a tandem director-playwright or through collaborative methods-together with the entire creative team or based on interviews with teenagers). The selection aims to identify the main trends that have prevailed over time in dramaturgy for young audiences and to show the variety of topics addressed. The selection contains plays that in their time were an innovation, both in style and through the topics addressed. The 15 texts are:

*When I want to whistle, I whistle* by Andreea Vălean(1998)

*The electric angel* by Radu Macrinici (2002)

*Stop the Tempo* by Gianina Cărbunariu (2003)

*Elevator* by Gabriel Pintilei (2004)

*With a little help from my friends* de Maria Manolescu (2006)

*New York. Fuckin' city* by Peca Ștefan (2006)

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<sup>2</sup> Oana Cristea Grigorescu, "Dramaturgia marilor speranțe", în: Oltița Cântec (coord.), *Teatrul și publicul său tânăr. Realități românești*, Iași, Editura Timpul, 2018, p. 65.

*Zippers, buttons and staples* by Mihai Ignat (2007)  
*graffiti drimz* by Alina Nelega (2010)  
*Family Offline* by Mihaela Michailov (2013)  
*The religion teacher* by Mihaela Michailov (2014)  
*Antisocial* by Bogdan Georgescu (2015)  
*The missing* by Alexa Băcanu (2016)  
*School feat. Cool* by George Cocoș (2017)  
*Boys and Girlz* by Sanziana Koenig (2018)  
*Foreplay* by Ozana Nicolau (2018)

Over the years, a shift of interest can be seen in Romanian plays for young audiences, from texts that offer egocentric perspectives, in which the playwright fictionally explores his own experiences to plays in which the author (or team of authors) fictionalizes experiences of others and speaks on behalf of those who do not have the opportunity to do so. And the topics addressed have become, over time, more and more courageous - from the intergenerational conflict and the revolt against a society that imposes rules and regulations, a favorite theme of texts about adolescents in the 2000s, to uncomfortable topics, considered to be taboo in school and at home: sex education, the problem of children left alone by parents working abroad, the problem of teenage mothers, cyber-bullying, sexual identity, violence in schools.

We can also observe, over the time, the restructuring of the notion of authorship in favor of other configurations. Currently, the cases in which a new play for young audiences is written by an isolated playwright, without a dynamic collaboration with the stage, are becoming increasingly rare. In recent years there has been an emerging trend to integrate the methods of documentary theater in the process of writing plays, as well as a shift of interest to collaborative processes, in which authorship is assumed by the entire team, often in collaboration with subjects who have inspired the text, this being adjusted from the response of the teenagers invited to attend and validate the stage language in the various stages of the rehearsals. Today, the new drama for young audiences is, in many cases, the result of composing collaborative methods and the response of the target audience.

At present, performances for young audiences are built with the following working methods:

1. Plays written independently of a performance

- 1.1. Staging a pre-existing play

The option of staging a pre-existing text is mainly used in state theaters. In most cases it is a

play that is not staged for the first time, which has already passed the stage test - it is the least risky variant. Very rare are the cases in which a director proposes a contemporary Romanian text to the theatre (published or not), not yet staged. In most cases, performances based on pre-existing texts do not involve the playwright in the working process.

1.2. Staging a play that was discovered at a playwriting competition or that was written during a residency

Most new plays are discovered at competitions or written in workshops or residencies offered to playwrights. Playwriting contests often end with the staging of the winning text and are organized, in most cases, by state theaters. In some cases, readings with the best texts are organized, after which the winner is decided.

2. Plays written especially for a certain performance

2.1. Plays commissioned to playwrights by theaters or by directors

Borrowed from Western Europe, the practice of commissioned plays begins to be used in Romania. Thus, the playwright is asked to write a text on a certain topic. Usually, the play has a form close to the final draft at the beginning of the rehearsals, and the playwright attends the first readings, after which he makes (or not) changes to the text. There is also the extremely risky option of *work-in-progress*. For some time now, plays have also been commissioned for performances staged in state theaters. Most of the time, the theater invites a director to put on a performance on a certain theme, the director being the one who in turn invites the playwright to work with him. The cases in which state theaters first commission a text from the playwright, and then invite a director to stage it, are still very rare.

2.2. The performance-author

Originally used mainly in independent theater, this model was also taken over by state theaters. Thus, the director is both the author of the text and of the performance. It is true that the texts resulted from workshops with the actors and are very much based on their personal experiences, but the authorship is assumed by the director.

### **2.3. The director-playwright partnership**

The director-playwright tandem does not work together only in writing the text, but also in the documentation phase. The model is successfully applied in institutions (usually independent) that produce performances for young audiences, such as the *Replica* Educational Theater Center (Mihaela Michailov and Radu Apostol) or *Reactor of Creation and Experiment* (Petro Ionescu and Raul Coldea).

### **2.4. Collaborative methods**

#### **a. Collaboration between members of the artistic team**

Lately, especially in the independent theater, new plays appear through the method of collective-collaborative or *devised* work. Thus, the text is developed by the whole team, and the actors, the set designer and the director assume the authorship together. The playwright who is part of this team performs the tasks of the dramaturg, by processing, selecting, ordering and reconstructing the text of the performance.

#### **b. Collaboration between the artistic team and the target audience**

Lately, in the theater for young audiences there is an emerging trend to involve teenagers in the various phases of writing the text and preparing the performance. Artists who work in this way consider that the interventions with teenagers are essential, because the text / performance represents them in the first place. The first Romanian performance made with the involvement of the target audience was *Family Offline* by Mihaela Michailov directed by Radu Apostol (2013), when the students from the School no. 55 from Bucharest participated, for a year, in all the stages of the performance, starting with writing the text.

The identified working methods are not specific for the theater for young audiences, they refer to the contemporary Romanian drama in general. A peculiarity of the theater for young audiences are the plays developed on stage, with teenagers in the hall, which constantly provide feedback to the creators.

Among the authors of stage texts, a new category has recently appeared, that of the journalist-playwright. His great merit is that he has the courage to bring on the stage - and thus in the eyes of the public opinion - rigorously documented topics, relevant to today's society, often considered to be

taboo. The problem is that the value of the play often suffers, the general tendency being to write supporting texts for a certain performance. Especially the texts for the young audience fall into this trap: they deal with strong, impactful subjects, but they present template-characters and cliché-situations, the social and political stakes having priority over the artistic value of the text.

We can ask ourselves what is the future of authorship and whether the collaborative processes come to complete the classical method, of the playwright who is the author of the text, or will gradually replace it. The collaborative methods rarely result in texts with a life independent of that of the performance, but rather supporting texts for the concept of the performance, which do not always work outside it. On the one hand, more and more dramaturgy is written, on the other hand, fewer and fewer texts independent of a certain performance are written. And although there is a need for more texts that work independently of a particular show and withstand different directorial interpretations, when they exist, in very few cases they are staged a second or a third time. Several Romanian texts are staged in independent theaters.

Thus, it is extremely rare for a new text to be staged a second time, this being more the case in state theaters. On the other hand, with each new performance, a new play appears. Thus, the number of new texts is constantly increasing.

In general, in terms of staging new plays for young audiences, independent theaters take more risks and are more open to the playwright. For a while, the working methods of independent theaters and their successful models began to be taken over, although quite timid, by state theaters as well. Here, the new plays for young audiences enter almost exclusively through the options of guest directors, the cases in which a playwright is commissioned directly by a state theater to write a text being very rare. Also, after successfully tested by independent theatres, the programs to stimulate young playwrights such as commissioning new texts, residencies, workshops or drama contests which aim at staging of the texts discovered, this type of project began to be implemented by state theatres. Thus, the number of playwriting contests that aim at discovering plays for young audiences has increased and several initiatives have emerged that aim an early investment in the young theater creator. However, compared to other countries, there are very few residencies for playwrights and only a few playwriting awards to motivate young writers.

I also considered important to mention the initiatives that aimed at translating plays for young audiences and introducing them to Romanian theaters, preparing the ground for the change in the way of writing of local playwrights.

In general, foreign texts for young audiences enter Romanian theatres in three ways:

1. discovered and translated by a director, who then stages (less often, texts are discovered by translators and recommended to directors)
2. as part of a translation funding program dedicated to plays for young audiences

3. as part of a translation program that is not exclusively focused on texts for young audiences.

The **third section** of this chapter is dedicated to my personal concerns in the field of theater for young audiences. The section includes a short presentation of six plays for young audiences that I wrote between 2012 and 2018 – *The green Cat*, *Paper Planes*, *Crocodile*, *Explosive*, *iHamlet* and *Feminine* - and provides details about the context in which they appeared, about the writing process and about some performances based on these texts.

**The fourth chapter**, *Programs dedicated to young audiences in Romanian theaters*, aims to map an area that is constantly expanding. During the research I identified the main factors that determined the increase, over time, of the interest for performances addressed to young audiences in Romania, as well as the context in which these performances are produced and the working methods on which they are based.

In the **first part** of the chapter, I analyzed the repertoires of independent and state theaters in Romania (both *Children and Youth* theaters and theaters that address mainly adult spectators) in terms of performances and extra-repertory projects dedicated to spectators between 14 and 18 years, from 2015-2020, researching at the same time the context in which they appeared. I also analyzed a series of management projects and annual reports of state theater directors, in order to identify the strategies proposed by them regarding the young spectators and audience development.

We could say that an amalgam of factors determined the increase, over time, of the interest for performances and projects addressed to the young audience:

- the appearance of dramaturgy about teenagers, in the context of the competitions organized by *Dramafest* and *dramAcum* in the early 2000s (the authors being young, the plays addressed topics close to teenagers);

- the emergence of projects that financed translations of foreign drama (Goethe Institut supported the translation of several plays for young audiences from German dramaturgy, *Heart of a Boxer* by Lutz Hübner, *Fireface* by Marius von Mayenburg or *Norway.Today* by Igor Bauersima, all translated by Victor Scoradeț, being just a few examples);

- performances on the independent stage that targeted the young audience, after the establishment, in 2005, of the Administration of the National Cultural Fund (AFCN). Among the financing priorities of the “theater” area were the projects for the young audience, there is also a distinct financing area dedicated to cultural education;

- the increased interest in young adult literature, triggered by the appearance on the Romanian publishing market of cult-series such as *Harry Potter* or *Twilight*;

- special sections dedicated to teenagers at film festivals, which contain both films and discussions with the public and workshops, the most eloquent example being the film education program EducaTIFF organized by the Transylvania International Film Festival;

- diversification of repertoires in state theaters and production of shows for young spectators as a form of audience development, in the context of the steady decline of the number of spectators;

- segmentation of spectators by age groups;

- the projects of some artists with a coherent and constant program in the field of educational theater: the playwright Mihaela Michailov and the director Radu Apostol, the founders of the *Replika* Educational Theater Center, are called to carry out their projects in other theaters as well; thus, the two performed the show *Wanda* (dramatization after the novel *100 dresses* by Eleanor Estes) at the Gong Theater in Sibiu. Also, shows produced by them such as *Offline Family* or *Facing Rights*, which involve meetings between professional actors and child performers, were a source of inspiration for theaters that later carried out projects in which adolescents were directly involved;

- identifying a need of the audience;

- importing trends from the international theater.

In the **second part** of the chapter, I exemplified, through three case studies (*Replika* Educational Center, *Youth Theater* Piatra Neamț and *Teenspirit* Platform at *Reactor for Creation and Experiment*), three successful models through which both independent and state institutions managed to bring teenage spectators closer to the theater. I analyzed their repertoire offer from the last 3-5 years, the issues addressed by the performances, the working methods, but also the extra-repertoire initiatives.

The **last part** of the chapter is dedicated to theater festivals for young audiences, which appeared as a consequence of the development of this sector, offering an analysis of their selections from the last 5 years, but also of their extra-repertoire offer. Last but not least, I wanted to point out the important role that theater performed by teenagers has in building a new generation of spectators, the evolution of theater for young audiences in Romania being very well reflected by festivals addressed to high school theatre groups, meanwhile of a large number, which are distinguished by a high quality of the productions. Presenting the *Ideo Ideis* Young Theater Festival as a case study, I again chose an exemplary initiative, which played an important role in raising a new generation of spectators and in stimulating the interest of Romanian theaters for the adolescent audience.

Given the growing number of performances and extra-repertoire initiatives addressed to teenagers, we could say that theater for young audiences is increasingly visible in Romania, being on an upward trend. On the other hand, there are still a considerable number of theaters that do not have a clear strategy in terms of audience development, and many managers do not seem to realize that

attracting young audiences and working with schools is not just about forming school groups. who come to see the performances, but it is a complex process that requires time, know-how and appropriate strategies.

Theatre shows for young audiences are performed to a greater extent in state theaters for adults or in independent theaters, there are numerous state theaters for children and youth in which projects for teenagers are either missing or not constantly carried out and thus lose their efficiency. The causes are the lack of adequate budgets to confirm the real interest of public culture funders for the developing of young audiences, the lack of training of school teachers and specialized staff (drama teachers).

In general, the independent environment, much more open to risk and experiment, is a test laboratory for new theatrical trends. If the "recipes" prove to be functional, then they are taken over by the state theaters. The diversification of the repertoire approaches towards contemporary languages and themes regarding the young public and the approach of the concrete, specific and immediate problems that the teenagers in Romania face, had as a starting point the independent area<sup>3</sup>. The premises for the existence of the theater for the young audience were created, at the beginning of the 2000s, by the *dramAcum* group. The performances based on texts written by very young playwrights, made by young directors, approaching extremely current, often taboo, topics began to bring a young audience in theaters. Among the institutions that today are programmatically oriented towards adolescents and prove a constant preoccupation for the young public are the *Replika* Educational Center and the Youth Theater from Piatra Neamț. Not coincidentally, their managers are both former members of *dramAcum*: Radu Apostol, respectively Gianina Cărbunariu.

After the appearance of *dramAcum*, theaters became more and more interested in the teenage spectator. Their interest has grown steadily, but quite slowly, to record, after 2012, an accelerated development that reached a peak in 2015. It was the year in which most new initiatives were launched: the *Replika* Educational Center opened in Bucharest, two new festivals appeared - *Excelsior Teen Fest* and the *Young Festival* in Sibiu, *Reactor of Creation and Experiment* in Cluj-Napoca launched the *Teenspirit*-platform and the *International Festival for Young Audiences* Iași opened with the first production for teenagers of *Luceafărul*, the host theater, *The Green Cat* directed by Bobi Pricop. In the following years, more and more repertory and extra-repertory initiatives for adolescents appear. Festivals dedicated to high school drama groups are also multiplying, being an important alternative education platform and creating a new generation of spectators, with different expectations than previous generations and for which it becomes increasingly necessary to produce quality performances. There are still few initiatives that take theater out of the building and take it to

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<sup>3</sup> Iulia Popovici, "Cum s-a făcut mare teatrul educațional," în *Teatrul și publicul său tânăr. Realități românești*, coord. Oltița Cântec, editura Timpul Iași, 2018, p. 105.

classrooms, there are still few theaters that have their own teenage drama group or that offer the young spectator guiding programs to deepen the theatrical experience.

Theaters that have truly understood how to form and maintain a young audience rely on dissolving the boundaries between artists and spectators, creating communities in a close relationship with the institution. They are open institutions, attentive to the needs of the public, which involve adolescents in the working process, offering them a creative space, an educational platform and a place where they feel important and listened to. These theaters, still very few in number, are exemplary in the way they managed, in just a few years, to take important steps to win over the teenage audience. It is to be hoped that their example of good practice will be taken up by other institutions in the near future.

Theater for young audiences is a "different kind of theater", whose educational stake brings a greater responsibility with it. It is more difficult to create, firstly because it involves efforts outside the production of performances and secondly because it is addressed to a special audience, being a continuous challenge to arouse their interest. At the same time, theater for young audiences is struggling with value prejudices and facing an identity crisis in the context in which the boundaries between adolescents and adults have become increasingly blurred. However, there is a need for a theater especially made for teenagers, different from that for adults. Perhaps a more appropriate name than *theater for young audiences* is *theater of the youth*. It is a name that integrates teenagers, making them feel important.

*A theater of the youth* is ideally:

**A theater that relates concretely to the lives of young people:** Theater creators should avoid handling teenagers with kind gloves, presenting them a better world, just because they address an audience that has not yet reached maturity. A theater of the youth communicates with its audience on equal terms. Usually, a performance for teenagers is characterized by the realism of the topic: conflicts with parents, violence in schools, sex education, the impact of economic migration on children. Often, taboo topics are addressed, which are not discussed in school or in the family. Theater has an impact on teenagers when it talks about them.

**A theater aware of the need for its involvement in education, in a close relationship with schools:** The responsibility for the education of young spectators is one of the characteristics by which theater for young audiences differs from that for adults. The school should be the main partner of theaters that produce performances for young audiences, and the relationship with educational

institutions can be deepened by introducing in the organization charts of the theater the position of theater pedagogue, who is the liaison between the theater institution and educational institutions. Extremely important is not only permanent communication with students, but also communication with teachers and the training of teachers. A show for young audiences should never come alone, but accompanied by various off-stage approaches, which have the role of deepening the topic of the performance, guiding the teenager and preparing him for the role of the spectator. Thus, in addition to post-show discussions, it is necessary to introduce workbooks and to show performances especially made for classrooms. At the same time, a *theater of the youth* is complementary to the school curricula, it offers something new, having the responsibility to speak when the school and the family remain silent.

**A theater that invests in playwrights:** Early investment in future playwrights (playwriting workshops in schools, the opportunity to work on a play with the help of professionals, playwriting contests for teenagers) is a strategy that proves its long-term success. At the same time, emerging or established playwrights who write for young audiences should be encouraged by offering them grants and residencies, commissioning plays, publishing anthologies of plays for teenagers, and offering awards to reward their work. A *theater of the youth* must be an institution aware of the role of the playwright, considering him part of the working team, investing him with confidence and offering him visibility.

**A dialogue-oriented theater that creates a community:** Forming and maintaining a young audience means dissolving the boundaries between artists and spectators and creating a community. The young audience must be challenged to think and becomes an equal partner with the artists, acquiring the necessary education and the critical exercise to filter what is proposed in the performance. A theater addressing teenagers must be an open institution, always attentive to the needs of its audience, in which young people feel like home. The theater must offer them what the virtual worlds cannot give them: a real, unique and unrepeatable experience. Also, a *theater of the youth* should be the place where teenagers are listened to and can openly discuss topics that they do not have the courage to address with parents or teachers. A *theater of the youth* must prove a permanent concern for identifying new potential spectators (adolescents from disadvantaged backgrounds and from rural areas), trying to reach their environment.

**A theater as young people want it, where the teenager is a co-creator:** At present, in Romania there is still no serious research on the cultural preferences of the teenage audience. The barometer of cultural consumption, as well as the few surveys conducted periodically by some theaters among

the public are made only with respondents over 18 years old, and existing studies for the age group 14-18 do not provide relevant information about what young people want to see at the theater, respectively about the reasons why they do not come to the theater.

In addition to the need for theaters to conduct their own surveys on the preferences of adolescent audiences, there is a need for greater involvement of young people in decision-making. In a theater that focuses on teenagers, there is always the risk of offering young people what we, as adults, think they want, and not what they really want. A *theater of the youth* is a theater as teenagers imagine it. A number of festivals already involve young people in making decisions, having high school juries that offer special prizes. Why not also be consulted on the repertoire options? In addition to the artistic director and the literary secretary, in a *theater of the youth* there should be a group of teenage consultants who have a say in decision-making.

A *theater of the youth* involves teenagers in the working process, giving them a creative space, an educational platform and a place where they feel important and listened to. A performance for teenagers should constantly have, in the various stages of its creation, the young people present in the hall, who must be asked what interests them, where they get bored, if the subject makes sense, if the way it looks visually or soundly is attractive, what is more relevant for them, what means a cultural experience for them. The standards may be completely different from those of the artists, and a successful performance for teenagers fits their expectations and accepts their communication channels.

**A theater connected to international trends and open to foreign influences:** Usually, the Romanian public has access to the latest international trends in theater through the few festivals that invite productions from abroad. But it's not enough. It is becoming an increasing need to invite foreign artists to perform for young audiences. The infusion of ideas, artistic formats and working practices can be extremely beneficial, in the context in which the theater for young audiences in Romania is still in its first years. It is also necessary to “import” plays for young audiences from foreign dramaturgy, especially from countries where there is a strong tradition in this regard, through translation funding programs.

**A theater that matters:** In Romania, productions addressed to young audiences are still struggling to overcome prejudices related to value. These performances generally benefit from less professional criticism and are largely excluded from the professional recognition system. A reform of the UNITER Awards, that are frozen for years in the same patterns, should also take into account the theater for

young audiences, an increasingly visible presence in the Romanian theatrical landscape. An annual award to reward the best production for young audiences (with a section for children and one for teenagers) would stimulate the production of such performances. Theater for young audiences in Romania must be valued and encouraged at the level it deserves. We need to look at it more insistently.

**A theater in which artistic value prevails:** The role of theater in the education of young people is extremely important, but the educational component of a performance for young audiences should never be subordinated to its artistic value. A youth theater should be a space for experimentation with new trends, a place of trial and risk in which performances with high aesthetic standards and exciting content take place, which ask questions rather than provide answers.

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