

# Modes of Production

— Performing Arts in Transition

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## TITLE

German theater system at the crossroads

## ABSTRACT

The German Theater is going through the first serious and fundamental change and transformation process in the last 120 years. Some employees in the public theaters have woken up and have decided to no longer accept the poor working conditions in the theaters and the power exclusively exercised by artistic directors.

The first reform steps have already been taken and *toxic leaders* have been replaced in some theaters (*Berlin Volksbühne, State Theater Karlsruhe, a.o.*). Many theater artists, including the artists and groups from the independent theater sector are beginning to empower themselves and address their demands either to the management or to the cultural politicians. Diversity, empowerment, divided leadership, team building, participation, stakeholder management, transparency and communication are the new *leitmotifs*.

One starting point was the study “Power and Structure in Theater” (Macht und Struktur im Theater) in 2018/19 with around 2000 participants from all German theaters, which showed that more than 50% of the artists in German theaters have to live under **very precarious conditions**, even though they have a middle-term contract or work regularly as guests. Most of the artists have to work more than 10 hours per day, including many weekends without compensation or overtime being paid, while the average working time per day is 8 hours and 40 hours a week. In addition, the results of the study showed, that there are toxic conditions in many theaters, especially an abuse of power, from which women in particular are affected to a high degree. (Schmidt 2019)

The **independent theaters**, in turn, are the second largest part of the German theater landscape, besides the huge public sector with more than 130 state and community theaters. The independent theater sector is divided into independent companies, production theaters and many freelance artists. In terms of their production modes and their artistic forms and aesthetics, they have already significantly advanced compared to public theaters. They are part

of the modern critical discourses and they reflect them with their experimental, documentary or game theater projects, lecture performances, digital or interdisciplinary approaches. At the same time, they provide artistic impetus for many public theaters, which try to incorporate many of the new “independent” styles and formats.

The **production modes** are depending on the status of the groups and artists. There are artists and groups that are working in the local areas of Germany, many of them under precarious conditions. The other status group and their production modes are characterized by national and international collaborations and co-productions. They have continued to develop over the years, while the public theaters are still producing as they did in 1970, except for a few new impulses, I want to describe.

With my contribution I would like to report on the special artistic and innovative power that arises from the pure existence of the dichotomy of the German theater landscape, the two forms of theaters side by side, and what potentials arise and can be released if suitable interfaces and production modes are created here. These interfaces are shaped by three aspects, first, the structural difference and, second, the different modes of production, and third, the different ways of approaching their stakeholders and their audience. With my research, I will develop a model of a productive and sustainable artistic coexistence from the juxtaposition of the two parts and to find then new forms of a future institutional theater.

## **BIOGRAPHY**

Dr. Thomas Schmidt is Professor of Theater Management and the Director of the Master program for Theater and Music Management at the University of Music and Performing Arts Frankfurt/Germany since 2010. He is the former Managing Director and later CEO of the German National Theater Weimar (2003 – 2013). He was a Guest professor at Harvard University (2014), a. o. His studies: “Theater, Krise und Reform”, 2016 (*Theater, Crisis and Reform*) and “Macht und Struktur im Theater”, 2019 (*Power and Structure in Theater. Asymmetries of Power*) are among the most influential critical studies on German theater. His publication “Die Regeln des Spiels” (*Programming in Theatres*) is the first of its kind, which is describing the complex artistic and organizational process of creating artistic concepts and designing a Theatre Program while reflecting the Modes of Production. In 2021 Schmidt and his research group are studying the complex relationships between cultural politics and the mechanisms of promoting the organizations and artists in the field of Performing Arts.