

Research for the benefit of the community

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Abstract: In a world where things are evolving at an astonishing pace, where the jobs of the future have increasingly looser connections to human beings and focus on automation and digitisation, we must ask ourselves whether our research in the field of art is still relevant. The professions we are preparing for, whether we are talking about acting, directing, set design or choreography, are increasingly fragile, and our country's leaders are not making much effort to ensure that artists remain relevant in this particular context in which we find ourselves. Given these factors, we must consider whether our research has a place in this chaotic landscape, or whether it is simply a bureaucratic exercise that allows artists to teach university courses after completing their bachelor's and master's degrees. My article aims to bring into debate the role of our research, first and foremost for cultural and educational institutions, and then for the society as a whole. The second point I want to raise is related to the research budgets available in our country, but also in other European Union countries, and to try to explain as transparently as possible the differences between countries in terms of the budget allocated to doctoral research. Thirdly, I propose to discuss and identify the exact beneficiary of our research, whether it is the student or the actor, and whether the language should be academic or adapted to the needs of those working in the arts.

Keywords: research, artists, theatre, budget, community, education.

Introduction

Our research in the field of art should have direct applicability, which should materialise in a benefit that artists can enjoy in their work. Theatre productions staged by directors on professional stages should maintain continuous communication with researchers in the art world, and their work should be a valuable study material for them, helping them to build an improved theatrical language adapted to the times we live in, with an emphasis on innovation. An artist needs a lot of practice to fulfil themselves, but they must not reject theoretical study from their artistic life, because only in this way can they reinvent themselves and constantly seek new forms of expression. The great theatre theorists have written books of major importance for the field of theatre. Their research stemmed primarily from a desire to find

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what was relevant to their profession, as they were constantly searching for the theatrical language they wanted to highlight. Declan Donnellan, Jerzy Grotowski, Peter Brook and Eugenio Barba have all left behind extremely valuable research works for researchers and artists from all corners of the world. The relevance of the works of the above-mentioned authors is measured by the exposure they have received. Their works did not remain locked away in drawers, but on the contrary, they found their way into educational and cultural institutions around the world.

Artists must bear this in mind, namely that their research work should have direct applicability and be relevant both to the academic environment and to artists who continue to develop theatre performances. “Thus, skills are as fundamental to theatre and performance research as methods and methodologies. And even if another trilogy of terms (skills/ methods/ methodologies) can form another level in the game of defining disciplines and thus lead us further into quasi-disciplinarity, there is nothing at the base of any step in the order of the trilogies that cannot be rearranged in its horizontal and vertical alignments”¹. An actor's qualities should not stop at simply contextualising their artistic means of expression, but should also include the ability to monitor their progress and be constantly attentive to what could be improved. For this to happen, they need access to research papers in order to clarify their thoughts and learn how to and structure their work in such a way that it becomes relevant from a theoretical point of view, not just a practical one.

With regard to the academic progress of research papers, we can say with disappointment that very few of the doctoral theses of researchers in the arts are made available to students and professors at relevant universities. Even though, in terms of the motivation for writing the thesis and its applicability in educational institutions, it is stated with great aplomb that all theses are addressed to the latter, they do not actually reach them. There are multiple reasons for this, which must be highlighted. The first is related to the quality of the research, which in many cases does not meet the necessary conditions for publication, and the second reason is related to the overly academic language, which repels the reader and shifts their attention elsewhere after only a few pages. The heads of doctoral schools should establish more clearly, from the outset, who the research in question is aimed at, and the language should be adapted so that it can be understood by everyone. More accessible language does not mean a compromise on quality. The word 'academic' should not lead us towards rigidity and impenetrability, but should open the way to knowledge.

¹ Baz Kershaw, Helen Nicholson (2011). *Research methods in theatre and performance*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, p. 12.

Research budget

Given that the budget allotted for „special pensions” in Romania slightly exceeds that allocated to culture, which is only 1,274,537,000 lei, we can say that we choose our priorities in a rather strange way. Unfortunately, people in the cultural sector do not rebel, choosing instead to complacently accept the situation and give up hope for change for the better. The education budget does not rank among the shameful figures allocated to culture, amounting to 58,062,930 lei. The RDI (Research, Development, Innovation) component does not receive significant support from the state, with the budget allocated to research amounting to only 2,148,957 lei, according to the 2025 budget execution. The comparison with France is irrelevant, as the budget allocated to research exceeds even that which we allocate to the entire education system, reaching 16 billion euros in 2022, five figures above ours.

Ultimately, no matter how hard we try to find relevant research topics, we will inevitably be blocked by shortcomings in terms of the prospects for developing doctoral theses, as the gap between our system and the Western one is far too wide for us to keep up with. The great challenge for a doctoral student is to find the time to devote to research, trying to squeeze in between the various projects they have to accept in order to earn a living. The amount of a scholarship for a doctoral student at UNATC (National University of Theatre and Film Arts in Bucharest) is 3,700 lei per month in the final year of study, with the grant being lower in the first and second years. Students must also attend faculty courses as teaching assistants, which complicates matters in terms of time management. Practical experience is very important in the work of a researcher, but since this work is not remunerated, students will have to find other activities to earn the money they need to cover their daily expenses and purchase the books necessary for their research.

In these circumstances, students are forced to look for alternative sources of funding for their research, and such programmes are made available to them by both the Romanian state and the European Union through various funding programmes. Universities are the ones that can obtain funding for doctoral students. Within the Ministry of Education, they can access grants through the fund management body, which provides funding for higher education. Uefiscdi is such a structure through which universities can obtain funds for the actual activity of the institution, but also for research². A second national programme that supports doctoral students is managed by the Ministry of Investment and European Projects and can offer scholarships for researchers in their final year of study, as well as for those in the post-doctoral stage, amounting to 400 and 600 euros per month for 12 months, respectively³.

² <https://uefiscdi.gov.ro/finantare-invatamant-superior>, accessed on 28.02.2025.

³ <https://mfe.gov.ro/apel-deschis-burse-si-sprijin-profesional-pentru-minim-1-800-de-doctoranzi-si-cercetatori-post-doctorat/>, accessed on 28.02.2025.

Even if the amounts are small, and excessive bureaucracy does not encourage students to apply for such support, it is important that it exists, and ways can be found to get this information to students through university representatives. A very important step to mention and implement is related to counselling them by professionals in the field who have the necessary qualification to provide support to students and guide them through grant programmes, so that they are not intimidated and understand that this information is hidden somewhere, but with a little openness and time allocated to discovering such programmes, their journey through doctoral school will be a smoother one.

Romanian students can also apply for scholarships abroad, where grants are more generous than in Romania, much more diverse and can add value to their research, provided that the student is willing to sacrifice certain aspects of their personal life. In order to benefit from a scholarship in France, moving to Western Europe is inevitable, and the student will have to break contact with their family and the artistic world for a period of time, dedicating more time to research.

Motivation is very important during the study phase, as the arguments that each student finds relevant to their research will lead them towards research that is more focused on theoretical study, with practical work in the theatre faculty's workshops not being essential for them. However, given that the research has a more direct application, experimenting with theoretical studies in the courses will add value to the research, and under the given circumstances, the internship abroad should be short.

Tuition fees in France are much lower than in Romania, if we refer to UNATC requirements. The average fee at a state-funded institution is €1,564 for the entire cycle, and for a PhD started at a private university, it varies between €3,000 and €10,000. The University of Theatre and Film in Bucharest charges a fee of 10,000 lei per year, which amounts to 2,000 euros for one year of study. This amount exceeds the entire budget that a student must allocate to an entire study programme at a university funded by the French state budget. It is very important to note that in France, students can also apply for various research grants to offset their expenses. They can apply for support from the "Eiffel" programme, through which they can obtain a scholarship of €1,800 per month for 18 months, as well as medical insurance, subsidised housing and return air tickets. CROUS scholarships, funded by the Ministry of Education, are also a source of income for doctoral students, with grants of up to €571 per month to cover accommodation and living costs. Another programme is CIFRE (*Conventions Industrielles de Formation par la Recherche*), through which students can obtain a full-time job for a period of three years with a French company or research laboratory⁴.

⁴ <https://www.findaphd.com/guides/phd-study-in-france/funding>, accessed on 28.02.2025.

The budget for research is not easy to obtain; it requires sacrifice, adaptability and understanding, and things may turn out in favour of the doctoral student, but it is very important that they know what they want, what sacrifices they are willing to make, and what is most beneficial for their studies.

The direct beneficiary

Academic research must first and foremost comply with rules and standards of writing that meet the requirements of a scientific paper. In the arts, compromise is fully understood and accepted by decision-makers, as it is a field in which it is impossible to gather accurate data on how viewers receive the actors' message through both rational and emotional filters. The mechanisms of assuming a character, from the perspective of an actor working on their role, are subject to rules relating to their body, and especially to the actor's psyche, which must be engaged in the most personal manner possible. No technological devices have yet been invented to measure the exact parameters that an artist uses to create a work. EEG headphones that measure neural activity, made available by doctors to monitor patients with various mental disorders, including epilepsy, have generated noteworthy results in research projects and theatre performances, but an actor or director cannot work under close monitoring because our profession, whether we like it or not, does not work with exact data.

The language of the research paper must be thought out and adapted to the needs and resources available to the doctoral student, but this should not be determined before focusing precisely on the target audience of the research. If the direct beneficiary is the student from the acting department of the theatre faculty, then the academic language must be constructed in such a way as not to be off-putting. The most important books on theatre theory written by the world's great directors speak the language of artists, and this has ensured that their works have stood the test of time. Unfortunately, many research papers remain locked away in library drawers, and no one reads them because the topics covered are not adapted to the current needs of the theatre and social system, and the language used is far too academic. As long as academic research is aimed only at the scientific community, it loses much of its value and fails to become relevant.

Artistic research should not be confined to overly academic language, but neither should researchers shy away from the responsibility of incorporating scientific elements into their work. The fields must be combined, even if the art of theatre is primarily a practical one, artists need to experience first-hand the messages and subjects that playwrights raise through their plays. If “art” is nothing more than a mode of perception, then “artistic research” must be a mode of carrying out a process. Therefore, there can be no categorical

distinction between 'scientific' and 'artistic' research – because the attributes independently modulate a common carrier, namely, the goal of knowledge in research"⁵ .

Collaboration, understanding, and trying to find a middle ground should be the main strategy that researchers in the artistic world should consider when writing a doctoral thesis. Things cannot remain superficial; it is important that the expression respects academic language and contributes scientifically to the work, but at the same time, they cannot forget for whom they are writing these works. The professional experience of researchers should not be left aside, but should be integrated into the scientific course of the work, as the practical part of the doctoral thesis structure is very important for the quality of the research.

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⁵ Julian Klein (2017). *What is artistic research*, in “Journal for Artistic Research”, April, <https://jar-online.net/en/what-artistic-research>”, April, <https://jar-online.net/en/what-artistic-research>, author’s own translation from English.