

## How to make theatre attractive for teenagers

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**Abstract:** In Romanian performing arts institutions in general, and national ones in particular, there are cultural marketing strategies that can maintain young people's interest in theatre. Theatre managers could include productions for young people aged 9 to 16 in their repertoire. After the age of 9, we no longer talk about children's shows because, at a certain point, they no longer consider themselves children and no longer want this type of show. At 13-14 years old, there is a need for a different language, a different dramatic structure; we want to educate them and become friends with them. To achieve this, we bring education and culture together. Starting from this premise, that of improving the theatrical experience in the sense of increasing and diversifying the audience, one of the possibilities is to develop a strategy based on the perspective of the spectator-consumer, that of educating young people and including education as a marketing tool, especially in promotion.

**Keywords:** theatre, teenagers, education.

### Introduction

In the contemporary educational landscape, the fusion of theatre and education appears to be a compelling strategy for cultivating a dynamic and well-structured learning environment. Theatre, with its layers of creativity, collaboration and critical thinking, offers unique opportunities to improve traditional educational methodologies. Integrating theatre practices into the curriculum not only enriches the learning experience, but also addresses the holistic development of students, preparing them for the complexities of modern life. “Youth theatre is a form of theatre that is defined by and for its audience, as the use of the preposition – ‘theatre *for* youth’ – indicating the young audiences (children and teenagers) is absent from the definition of other forms of theatre.”<sup>1</sup>

We can say that there is theatre for young audiences, which we would define as having a very careful consideration for the spectator, for the way in which the artistic message is conveyed, but also for its pedagogical stakes. As the name suggests, we note that the target audience is clearly defined and that

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<sup>1</sup> Elise Wilk (2022). *Teatrul pentru publicul tânăr* [Theatre for Young Audiences], UartPress, Cluj University Press, p. 11.

its mission is very clear. On the other hand, as Elise Wilk said in her doctoral thesis, its name has contributed to a devaluation of the meaning and value of the artistic act – for *young audiences* is often translated as “inferior quality” or even “a minor genre of theatre”. This may be due to the fact that, for a long time, youth theatre was only an educational tool, while truly artistically valuable performances appeared much later. <sup>2</sup>

### **Cultural marketing, a starting point**

The premise of the article is that young people need a theatrical education in general, and in particular their own theatre, one for teenagers, which is different from that offered to adults, where the artistic act should be different. This can be achieved through various cultural activities, communication or promotion strategies. The role of cultural activities in society has been much discussed in terms of their economic impact, without considering their impact on social life. Many studies have attempted to identify the influences that different leisure practices have on educational capital.

For this article, we started from cultural marketing, which is the process and, at the same time, the art of offering the artistic product to the target audience, combining it with tools such as price, placement, promotion and staffing of organisations to achieve management objectives. Contrary to how marketing works in the logic of the modern market economy, the artistic product does not respond to an expressed consumer demand, but identifies the right audience for an existing offer and creates a horizon of expectations. At the same time, cultural marketing aims at a mutually beneficial relationship between the organisation and consumers.

We say that theatre is what facilitates the act of creation and has the necessary resources to create a unique experience for the audience. The artistic product can only exist in the presence of its audience; theatre is a social and participatory event in which the reality of the artists and that of the audience merge. We can identify strategies through which theatre institutions in general, and national theatres in particular, could educate the younger generation through appropriate programmes. This is an activity practised with reluctance in cultural organisations, which proposes a meeting between organisational thinking and consumer behaviour, in this case that of adolescents, in an attempt to offer performing arts institutions practical guidelines specific to cultural marketing. Theatre managers could include in their repertoire productions for young people aged between 9 and 16, because after the age of 9, we no longer talk about children's shows. At a certain point, this type of audience no longer recognises itself in this category and no longer wants this type of show. For the age interval 13-14, there is a need for a different language and a different

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<sup>2</sup> Elise Wilk, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

dramatic structure. To achieve this, we bring education and culture together. Starting from this premise, that of improving the theatrical experience in terms of increasing and diversifying the audience, one of the possibilities is to develop a strategy based on the perspective of the spectator-consumer, that of educating young people and including education as a marketing tool, especially in promotion.

An analysis of the literature has highlighted a number of theoretical perspectives that aim to identify the social impact attributed to participation in cultural activities, analysing aspects related to active citizenship, civic engagement, social integration and democratic participation.<sup>3</sup> For example, *the European Parliament Resolution* of 11<sup>th</sup> December 2018 on the “New European Agenda for Culture” refers to “the active role of culture and cultural and creative industries in achieving the objectives of cohesion and social inclusion policies”<sup>4</sup>, thus establishing the unique contribution of cultural life to the consolidation of a democratic society.

If in 2022, as the Cultural Consumption Barometer tells us, in Romania: “The situation is slightly better than in 2021, but slightly worse than in 2019”<sup>5</sup> and consumption trends in 2022 - the first report after the Covid pandemic - show that Romanians are gradually returning to cinemas and movie theatres, in 2023, as noted by the Minister of Culture at the time, Raluca Turcan: “It highlights significant developments in cultural consumption, in the context of a society in constant change. The figures confirm the correct direction of our actions at the Ministry of Culture, investments in heritage and cinema. We have purchased books, supported poetry and literature festivals, and placed an emphasis on cultural education. The percentages must increase in the 2024 Barometer!”<sup>6</sup>

For the first time, the Barometer links cultural consumption to democratic citizenship, showing that Romanians who are frequently exposed to cultural practices tend to be more involved in community life. In terms of public cultural consumption, 34% of respondents went to the cinema at least once in 2023, a percentage close to the pre-pandemic figures. At the same time, however, participation in performing arts events outside of festivals remains low: only 25% of respondents went to at least one theatre performance and

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<sup>3</sup> M. Sharon Jeannotte (2017). *The Social Effects of Culture. A Literature Review*, Centre on Governance, University of Ottawa.

<sup>4</sup> European Commission (2018). *European Parliament resolution of 11<sup>th</sup> December 2018 on the new European agenda for culture*, accessed on 20 January 2025.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.radoromaniacultural.ro/emisiuni/timpul-prezent/timpul-prezent-barometrul-de-consum-cultural-2022-carmen-croitoru-situatia-e-ceva-better-than-in-2021-but-slightly-worse-than-in-2019-id40493.html>, accessed on 20 January 2025.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.radoromaniacultural.ro/sectiuni-articole/muzica-dans-arte/s-au-publicat-rezultatele-barometrului-de-consum-cultural-pe-anul-2023-catalogul-se-poate-consulta-online-id46225.html>, accessed on 20 December 2024.

24% to at least one classical music performance in 2023. It is also true that respondents represent the generation that grew up with television, a massive generation that received everything and made no effort to decipher the messages it received, so that their relationship with the internet was built at the same time: an image accompanied by an induced message. The lack of cultural infrastructure (performing arts or any cultural centre) discourages the consumption of culture and can lead to escapism on the internet. In their private life, at home, 53% of respondents access streaming platforms to watch films. Less than 50% of households nationwide have subscribed to streaming services or platforms.<sup>7</sup>

This problem is also found among cultural content producers, because they will have to rethink their means of expression and gradual education. But we are not talking about arts education: dance, painting, music that we do in school classes, and those with talent are selected for vocational schools. We are talking about a cultural education that allows easier access to cultural products and understanding them as they are created. This is a concern that is on the public agenda not only in Romania, but in all European countries, where the level of understanding of cultural products is declining quite dramatically.

There are several perspectives that could be taken into account: one would be related to the impact of the pandemic on the emotional state of the population and the use of leisure activities as a form of stress relief or relaxation in crisis situations, as shown by studies conducted in the year immediately following the pandemic. Another could be the paradigm shift in cultural management, which, in its desire to attract new audiences, has moved towards a more leisure- and entertainment-oriented offering, focusing more on fun and pleasure and less on functional and symbolic benefits.

A brief analysis of cultural consumption before and after the pandemic could lay the foundations for a public cultural policy. Thus, starting from the definition of specific objectives, the means of achieving them and the impact they would have on young theatre audiences and beyond, we have outlined two perspectives: the external one, in which national theatres could have programmes dedicated to young people, and the internal one – a series of activities that could support the education of young people.

As for the external perspective, national theatres could expand and diversify their repertoire and adapt it for teenagers. Among the tactics they could apply, we could mention a series of performances based on major international dramatic works adapted to our times, in chronological order, starting with ancient theatre. This would be a win-win situation: teenagers would learn more easily, and the theatre would build a new audience. Another tactic would be to facilitate young people's access to an environment that

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.forbes.ro/barometrul-de-consum-cultural-2023-53-dintre-romani-acceseaza-platforme-de-streaming-pentru-a-viziona-filme-416658>, accessed on 13 February 2025.

stimulates their creativity by creating age-specific programmes and gradually implementing the concept of theatre education, in order to build their loyalty.

From another perspective, the internal one, we could talk about educating young people through theatre: Raising the educational level of the younger generation through theatre involves integrating theatrical practices and principles into educational programmes to improve learning outcomes and personal development. One of the main benefits of incorporating theatre into education is its ability to transform passive learning into an active, engaging process. Traditional education often relies heavily on rote memorisation and lecture-based teaching, which can disengage students. Theatre, on the other hand, requires active participation, whether through acting, directing, or set design. This hands-on approach makes learning more interactive and enjoyable and fosters a deeper connection with the material. By engaging both the mind and the body, it would help students retain information more effectively and develop a passion for learning.

Another aspect that could be considered is the development of transferable skills. A theatre education programme would successfully cultivate these skills, which are often overlooked in traditional curricula. Students would learn to articulate their thoughts clearly, listen actively and interpret non-verbal cues. These skills are invaluable in any professional setting. In addition, theatre requires teamwork and collaboration. Students could learn to work together to produce a successful performance, learning to negotiate, compromise and support each other. These collaborative experiences develop interpersonal skills and make them aware of the value of collective effort. Creativity and critical thinking are also cornerstones of theatre education. Whether it's developing a character, interpreting a script, or solving technical challenges, theatre stimulates innovative thinking and problem solving. Students would learn to approach problems from multiple perspectives and think outside the box, skills that are crucial in today's rapidly changing world.

Theatre also offers cultural awareness and empathy, as well as a unique perspective through which teenagers can explore different cultures, historical periods, and social issues. By stepping into the shoes of characters from diverse backgrounds and time periods, they gain a broader understanding of the world and its complexities. This exposure fosters cultural awareness and sensitivity, qualities that are essential in our increasingly globalised society. We have said that theatre cultivates empathy. To portray a character convincingly, one must delve into their motivations, emotions, and experiences. This process of understanding and embodying different perspectives helps them develop a deeper sense of empathy and compassion for others, enhancing their social and emotional intelligence. Thus, for the future, academic performance would be improved, confidence in their own abilities would increase, and they would be well prepared for their future careers. The skills developed through theatre

education have broad applications in the real world. Communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking are highly valued in the workplace. Employers in various industries are looking for people who can think creatively, work well in teams, and communicate effectively. By incorporating theatre into education, we prepare students not only for academic success but also for the demands of the modern workforce.

## Conclusions

Integrating theatre into education can significantly improve the learning experience for younger generations. It promotes balanced development by combining cognitive, emotional, and social growth, preparing students for both academic success and personal fulfilment.

Improving the education of young audiences through theatre becomes a tool for achieving social and economic goals and has a dynamic and cross-sectoral value. It responds to the needs of the younger generation without preventing other generations from meeting their needs.<sup>8</sup>

Creating hubs for development, research, education and innovation, including for entrepreneurs in the cultural and creative sectors, is one of the biggest challenges and a necessary part of the process of educating the younger generation through theatre. Thus, the cost of development centres will attract new theatre productions and improve investment activity. The return on investment will generate cash flow.

The process of human development is sometimes mistakenly evaluated only in terms of increased material well-being or a high standard of living. In reality, it has a number of other equally important dimensions: by improving the skills of the young people involved, they will acquire new skills after the training period, which, depending on the number of hours allocated to each participant, will ultimately lead to better results and greater audience satisfaction.

Human development therefore means diversifying individuals' options for a long and healthy life, for education, i.e. for acquiring a level of knowledge that meets their changing needs, and for access to resources that guarantee a decent standard of living. In addition to these options, other options relate to political freedoms and the exercise of other fundamental rights and freedoms.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Delia Mucică (2017). PhD – *Cultural Policies and Strategies (course)*.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*.

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