

## THE ARTIST-MANAGER- BETWEEN MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP IN ROMANIAN CULTURAL SECTOR\*

Ivona Maria Tătar-Vîstraș\*\*

**Abstract:** *This presentation tries to underline the essential trademarks of the Romanian theatre managers in the post-communist era. The junction and interrelationship between the artistic prestige of and his position as manager define the daily management practices of the state or private funded theaters, and draw serious limitations with regard to the use of available resources. The need to question these aspects of the cultural sector is of great importance today, mostly because cultural entrepreneurship is becoming a loud agency of urban re-italization and sustainable development. Through the interviews we conducted we hope to call attention to the specification of the Romanian theatrical environment, their implications in the overall cultural sector, but also to better understand the executive climate in which the theatre productions take place.*

**Keywords:** cultural management, post-communist theatre, Romanian theatre, cultural entrepreneurship

### Manager in subsidized theatres

Specialised books in the cultural management support the idea of a mediating manager. Probably more than in any other area the term “mediating manager” determinates the essential quality of such a role. Mediation is not necessarily related to the ambassador quality or representative, but to mediating in the broad sense of the word between two parties that should be complementary - the economic dimension concerning any commercial enterprise and the artistic dimension specific to this area of

---

\* This work was supported by the project "Quality, innovative and relevant doctoral and postdoctoral research for the labour market": POCU/380/6/13/124146, project co-financed by the European Social Fund through The Romanian Operational Programme "Human Capital" 2014-2020".

\*\* Cercetător post-doctoral, Universitatea Babeș-Boyai Cluj-Napoca; e-mail: ivona.vistras@gmail.com.

„Anuarul Institutului de Istorie «George Barițiu» din Cluj-Napoca. Series Historica”, LIX, 2020, Supliment, 2, *Lucrările conferinței internaționale online „ROMANIA-ITALIA-EUROPA. Evoluții istorice - Dinamici culturale - Relații internaționale”, 16-18 septembrie 2020*, p. 671-678.

activity<sup>1</sup>. Even if the quality of mediator is necessary in any area, in most cases it is not a determining factor in the project's success. However, things are not that simple regarding the cultural activity.

In Romania, several researchers studied the matter. For example, Oltița Cîntec, in her book *Cultura ca piață (Culture as a Market)* tries to establish the profile of an ideal cultural manager. In her perspective, three main qualities are required – professional, temperamental and moral. In our opinion, those qualities are necessary for any manager, regardless of the activity domain. The author remarks though: „Being a manager is not a privilege, as some would think in our country, those who see a sinecure in a function. The cultural management supposes a huge responsibility toward the institutional resources and community”<sup>2</sup>. The need to make such an observation betrays a severe issue at the local level of naming people in functions to manage the cultural area. The aforementioned statement gains nuances of rebuke that touches the big difference between theory and practice. In his doctoral thesis, the director Theodor-Cristian Popescu mentions the excessive politicization of the cultural domain in the '90s: „The party or the alliance of parties that form the government impose their loyal people in minor functions of the Ministry of Culture or in the cultural directions of the counties and cities. Moreover, this practice is developed until the level of theatre director, generating lack of continuity (as a rule)”<sup>3</sup>.

Unfortunately, in 2020, three decades after the instauration of democracy, Alina Nelega, artistic director of the National Theatre of Târgu Mureș, mentions and condemns the politicized system in naming the theatre directors. At the end of the interview, she exposes the current practice in Romania and states that the director positions are “political bargaining chips”.

The highest position in all organisational charts of the Romanian national theatres is the one of general director or general manager. With only several exceptions (the Northern Theatre of Satu Mare), people who run these institutions have artistic professions, as it can be seen in the table below. That is why the concept of manager-artist gains a major importance in understanding the Romanian administrative system.

Table 1. Directors of National Theatres

<sup>1</sup> Dragičević Šešić, *Arts Management in turbulent times. Adaptable Quality Management*, Amsterdam, European Cultural Foundation Boekmanstudies, 2005, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Oltița Cîntec, *Cultura ca piață: elemente teoretice și practice de management și marketing cultural*, Iași, Edit. Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, 2012, p. 27.

<sup>3</sup> Theodor Cristian Popescu, *Surplus de oameni sau surplus de idei*, Cluj-Napoca, Edit. Eikon, 2012, p. 36.

Institution	Name	Profession	Period of the role of director
National Theatre „I. L. Caragiale”, Bucharest	Ion Caramitru	Actor	2005- present
National Theatre „Lucian Blaga”, Cluj Napoca	Mihai Măniuțiu	Director	2010-present
State Hungarian Theatre, Cluj Napoca	Gabor Tompa	Director	1990- present
National Theatre, Craiova	Alexandru Boureanu	Actor	2016-present
National Theatre „Vasile Alecsandri”, Iași	Cristian Hadji-Culea	Director	2006-present
National Theatre, Târgu-Mureș	Gasparik Attila	Actor	2011-present
National Theatre „Mihai Eminescu”, Timișoara	Ada Lupu Hausvater	Director	2005-present
National Theatre „Radu Stanca”, Sibiu	Constantin Chiriac	Actor	2000-present

The procedure to occupy top positions in state theatres is regulated by the Decree 21/2007, which sets the necessary legal procedures and offers explanations concerning the basic terms of the managerial act. Manager's duties are established by the employment contract signed with the authorizing officer and are stipulated in the Interior Order Regulation of the institution (pubic document), approved by the authorizing officer. For example, in the case of the National Theatre “Lucian Blaga”, the article 15/ROF 2014 offers a detailed image of director's duties. Among the most important ones, we mention: the director runs, coordinates and is responsible for the proper conduct of the activity, as well as managing the patrimony of the theatre under the law; he is third authorizing officer, endorses the projects of the income and expenditure budgets and transmits them to the Ministry of Culture. Moreover, the director approves the artistic projects per season, as well as the collaboration projects, distribution of the shows and repertoire of the theatre; he also names, organizes and conducts the Administrative Council, names the members of the Artistic Council and approves the job descriptions of the personnel. The theatre director also approves the project of position charts and presents the minimal program of the theatre for approval, while elaborating and applying specific strategies to ensure the proper conduct of the current activity. Lastly, the director presents the economic-financial situation of the institution to the competent members of the Ministry of Culture on a quarterly basis.

As it may be noticed, the tasks are numerous and suppose a number of professional competences and abilities. The position combines both the artistic dimension and the financial-economic one. In fact, not the general director should elaborate and predict the economic instruments, as they are part of the economic department duties and of the economic director, but a profound understanding of the financial mechanisms and an evaluating capacity of the outcomes from the aforementioned department is necessary. Therefore, why the director is required to have artistic background?

We believe that the manager must be an influential person in the artistic background, known both nationally and internationally, capable to impose respect and appreciation of the colleagues. Thus the manager should be a leader. Gavril Cadariu, director of the Theatre for Children and Youth “Ariel”, Târgu Mureș, points out the necessary charisma of a theatre director, given that artistic qualities weigh more in the process of naming a theatre manager. It is also the case of mediating between the artistic components and the economic ones of any institutional activity. Dorina Lazăr states that her personal experience offered the occasion to understand the management mechanisms of the Odeon theater: „I am an actress at the Odeon Theatre and I signed up for the contest of theatre manager; We were about to see who was more suitable for the position – me or Mr. Ivănescu. I started writing the thematical work. Among the questions there were: What is your opinion of the structure of the theatre? What would be the repertoire? What is the relationship with the actors, with the collectivity and something like that... (I need to search for that paper, as, compared to those of nowadays, it was a piece of cake.) And I got stuck, I was struggling with budget issues and accountancy. I got the job, as I kept asking other people about this and that. (Dorina Lazăr)”<sup>4</sup>.

On the other hand, a counter-example may be Constantin Chiriac who earned his fame within the community not necessarily by the special artistic results, but by his consecration as director of the International Festival of Theatre of Sibiu and by proving organizational skills. The development of the festival contributed to the recognition of the event and its growing importance on the cultural market as one of the biggest theatre festivals in Europe. The existence and reputation of FITS led to the declaration of Sibiu as European Cultural Capital in 2007. This urban regeneration, as it was labeled by the local authorities, is mainly due to the development of cultural tourism. The professional path of Sibiu’s theatre director deserves a monograph in order to highlight the operational techniques of this manager within the institutions he ran. Firstly, the great attention to team work and work division is to be noticed. The National Theatre “Radu Stanca” was among the first institutions in the country to

---

<sup>4</sup> Interview conducted in April 2015.

understand that the literary office is insufficient in the 21st century to promote and develop the theatre programs, creating thus the marketing department and P. R. The model was taken over by the majority of state theatres in Romania.

Then, another operation concept applied by Chiriac is his relationship with the business background of the city. In order to attract sponsorship, the director cultivated a permanent relationship with the businessmen, developing partnerships with local companies, such as Ambient Ltd, partner of the festival since 1993. In addition to that, the official sponsors of the festival are mostly companies from Sibiu that actively participate at the event financing. Another strategy employed by Chiriac is launching the section of Cultural Theatre Studies-Management within the Faculty of Arts at the University “Lucian Blaga” of Sibiu. This section is also called the theatre’s “breeding ground”.

### Leadership and management

Theoretical studies and research, as well as case studies in the area of leadership are focused on the current practices in companies and do not refer to the cultural sector and its peculiarities. Surprisingly, as we could say that the theoreticians of cultural management cover all the defining aspects of leadership in their works (we refer especially to Klaić Dragan, Kein Armin, Heilbrun James, Dragičević Šešić Milena, and Zecheru Vasile etc.), but they avoid the case studies or going deeper in this research field. The “artist-manager” combines two worlds, and many theoreticians cover the topic with their case studies.

The theory of charismatic leadership or the theory of heroes/great personalities, as it is also known, seems at the first glance perfectly applied in the case of the Romanian cultural management. Expressed in the beginning stages of the psychology and based on the psychic processes, like feelings and perceptions, the theory supports mainly the idea according to which great personalities possess “charisma”<sup>5</sup>. From this perspective, leadership is an innate gift, not a science of management. Sorin Adam Matei signals in *Boierii Minții (Boyers of the Mind)* the importance of charisma especially in prestigious groups that try to monopolise the Romanian cultural market: „Charisma is an elementary form of social relationship, while essentially being a non-relational quality. It structures the group into the “chosen” ones and “supporters”. The first ones are endowed with superhuman qualities and talents (wisdom, sanctity, charm, courage) that are supposedly innate; these people are capable to mobilise and inspire the others. The prestigious groups gather around charisma to maintain the idea of art as an extraordinary act. Subsequently, the natural tendency of the prestigious groups is to

<sup>5</sup> Max Weber, *Etica protestantă și spiritul capitalismului*, București, Edit. Antet, 2003 p. 167.

monopolise the intellectual and educational act, to consecrate new chosen intellectuals<sup>76</sup>.

### **Independent theatres**

The parametres that define the cultural management in the case of independent theatres are undoubtedly part of the leadership and management capacities. As in the case of state theatres, leaders of independent companies have professions related to the artistic fields of cultural management. Ioana Tamaș enumerates the independent companies in Romania, in the annexes of her doctoral thesis. The author identifies 23 private theatres in 2013. After a thorough analysis, it may be said that leaders of these theatres have rather artistic education than managerial.

A peculiarity of the Romanian cultural management is that in most of the cases the initiators of the project or association remain directors or presidents of the institution; they are the leader who keep things running within the organization. There are exceptions, as in the case of Theatre ACT, where, despite the fact that Marcel Iureș is one of the founding members and the outstanding figure of the organization, the executive functions of administration and management are entrusted to a team with precise functions and duties. In this case, it may be clearly noticed the area of leadership and the management activity.

As a matter of fact, several aspects must be mentioned before discussing the cultural management in the independent sphere. Firstly, there are two types of cultural managers: the manager-artist, involved in the artistic activity of the company and the cultural entrepreneur, the one that relates to the cultural demarche as being a true business that brings profit.

In the first case, the most profitable establishment of a theatre company is based on a personal artistic discontent or in order to fulfill a market sector with a specific type of theatre, using aesthetic, ideological, artistic tools. As in the case of the manager from the state theatre, the personality of the independent manager relies greatly on leadership and his/her capacities to concentrate the creative energy compatible with his/her vision, leading an artistic group by instilling enthusiasm, perseverance etc. Unquestionably, the financial component cannot be neglected, but at the beginning of launching the association/organization on the market, it would not be its main aim. Most of the independent theatre groups are non-profit associations and work mostly on the basis of projects or attracted funds; they do not engage in commercial activities.

---

<sup>6</sup> Sorin Adam Matei, *Boierii minții. Intelectuali români între grupurile de prestigiu și piața liberă a ideilor*, București. Edit. Compania, 2004, p. 18.

In the second case, the cultural entrepreneur is much more oriented toward a balance between the artistic proposal and financial reward. In nowadays Romania, the most widespread model is the theatre-café/restaurant. And the business models are different from case to case depending on the initial motivations or aesthetic/ideological reasons. Basically, even if the principle stays the same, the proposal of those from Theatre Fix, Iași, is very different from Godot-Cafe in Bucharest or Theatre Arca. Differences appear because of the public segment and, of course, the major discrepancies given by the size of the cultural market (see the capital vs. any other city).

The total number of independent cultural entrepreneurs is almost impossible to detect under present circumstances, especially given the fact that such initiatives are numerous and varied. We consider that the multitude of private initiatives in the cultural sphere is auspicious and that the challenge of the traditional cultural market cannot produce but benefits in the midterm or in the long run in terms of cultural diversity and alternative.

Although the majority of the initiators of cultural projects are not necessarily graduates of specialised studies, in the independent area many of the involved people have studies of cultural management or cultural marketing. Paradoxically, the absorption of the latter in the state apparatus is lower than in the private sector. Among the most famous people of this area are Corina Șuteu and Miki Braniște, coordinators of projects and recognised programs for their entrepreneurial activities and appreciated efforts to contribute to professionalisation and popularisation of cultural management.

A different cultural manager is Voicu Rădescu, the founder of **Theatre Luni at Green Hours**, the famous café, located on his property. In 1997, his initiative was novelty in Romania so that the recently inaugurated space became at the forefront in the Romanian theatrical movement, bringing also financial success or at least covering the production costs and salaries.

The case of Theatre Arca, Bucharest is similar to the previous one – Dan Hornoiu saw a business opportunity in the independent theatre. In other words, identifying an emergent market and precise needs of the public conducted to launching new players on the Romanian theatre market. The manager's practical spirit shows a less known facet of the people involved in artistic acts, but draws attention to a commercial niche on the Romanian market, with investing opportunities.

The independent cultural manager on the Romanian market is difficult to grasp roughly speaking. Due to his/her defining quality as a leader, he/she will be always different from his/her colleagues from other activity areas. Nevertheless, from the psycho-behavioral point of view, he/she might probably possess similar characteristics and features.

