



Youth Theatre



**Suggestions and recommendations for
publicly funded theatres, policy makers
and funders at the local, national and
European level**



This paper distils ideas and recommendations for Youth Theatre.

Since 2017, the European Theatre Convention has developed “ENGAGE – empowering today’s audiences through challenging theatre”, thanks to a co-funding by the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union. It is an international programme for European theatres to diversify their artistic work and professional context, to offer theatre as an open, social and democratic space for exchange and reflexion. The programme focused on three aesthetic practices and a core principle, jointly identified by ETC and its member theatres, who researched, developed, tested and co-created internationally in the following fields: youth theatre, participatory theatre, digital theatre and diversity in theatre.

ETC strives to reach and empower youth through the art of theatre, and direct the spotlight on the critical and diverse voices of the future generation. Now in its third iteration, the ETC’s Young Europe programme started in 2008. The suggestions arising from the project are presented as an advocacy plan aimed at theatres, funders and policy makers, sharing the most important project learning.

Since the **ENGAGE programme**, the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic have necessitated new modes of artistic research and development, so that engagement through research, development, testing and co-creation can

continue across international projects. The learning and recommendations for youth theatre have created a valuable knowledge resource for theatre practitioners and policymakers, which can be further built on in the new context.

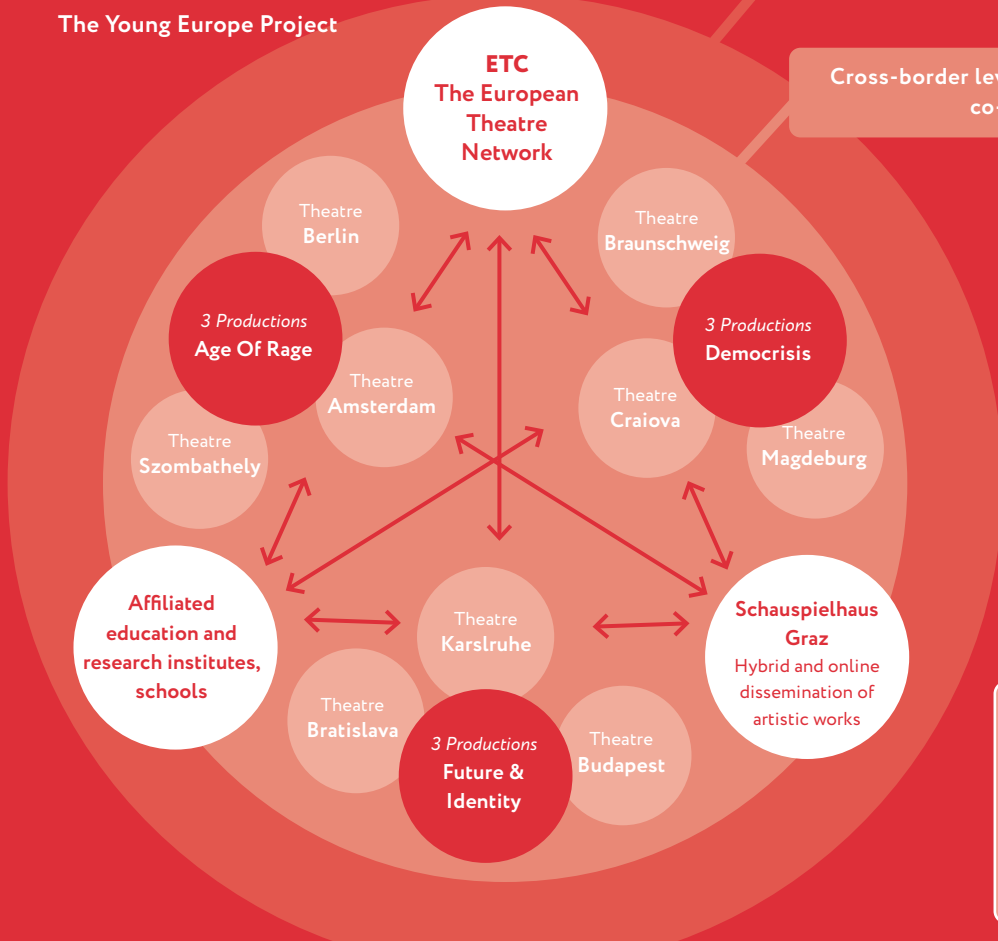


ETC Ecosystem

International Collaboration in Theatre
The Young Europe Project

Cross-sectoral level of research, artistic co-operation and dissemination

Cross-border level of creative research & co-production



- New Plays / Scenarios (7)
- Productions / Premieres (9)
- Conferences (4)
- Co-Creation Workshops (8)
- Reports (2)
- Festival (1)

Timeline



2017

2018

2019

2020

2021



Suggestions for theatres, policy makers, funders and EU level

Identify key questions for maximum impact

- » What occupies the minds of the young generation today? Nine productions were created and premiered across Europe in the 2019-2020 season, seeking to answer this core question in different ways. Growing the European repertoire of contemporary plays for young people through such projects is essential in order to value, nourish and promote youth theatre, and develop new content and formats relevant to today's young people.
- » Major themes have been identified in the new productions through in-depth research with teenagers from Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands, Romania and Slovakia. Working directly with young people is vital to find out what is important to them now and experiment with new ways of creating work together. This research approach with young people requires careful planning and attention to achieve a strong impact.
- » An important starting point is to identify and agree on a common theme which is open to different interpretations and can be adapted according to the context. One theme chosen for artistic collaborations under Young Europe III was 'Age of Rage', which shed light on different sources of anger from young people's perspectives. Topics which came up in the project included rising right-wing populism, climate change, family, school, technological

evolutions, communication, and the generation gap. Two artistic groups focused on themes of democracy and autonomous decision-making and identity.

- » Other questions important to young people will arise – often specific to a country or context, to external or internal events. What is essential is to work closely with young people to ensure the creative content and creation process responds to their needs and concerns.



Suggestions for publicly funded theatres

Be open to diverse content, formats and approaches

- » It is important to listen to provocative ideas and not to silence people with different points of view. Theatres should be prepared to get out of their comfort zone in developing new youth theatre. E.g. in the Netherlands, the project team wanted to look at reasons for the growth in membership of a Dutch right-wing populist political party, now the country's second largest youth party. This raised uncomfortable questions, in having to delve into a perspective the theatre makers did not share, a position also taken by most Dutch theatre audiences. The post-performance discussions showed that adolescents have a strong moral compass and believe in equal opportunities.
- » When working with young people, be aware of any potential legal restrictions in researching their concerns. E.g. in Hungary, the artistic director had to respect national privacy laws. Young people were interviewed, with their parents' permission, but the discussion of certain serious and sensitive topics is constrained by law. One strategy was to get students to interview each other, which enabled the exploration of current societal challenges, while maintaining confidentiality and anonymity.
- » Be attentive to the language of young people, in order to devise a production which speaks to the audience on their own terms. E.g. in Slovakia, in-depth research was co-developed with an

anthropologist, looking at the dreams, troubles, insecurities and provocations experienced by young people, and this gave the playwright a fresh take on language. The research results were reconstructed into a new kind of language that mixed existing words and computer slang taken from the survey responses, searching to find the right tone and melody for the language of the play.

- » Classroom theatre brings theatre to young people directly. In a post-pandemic context, it becomes very relevant as a strategy to assist re-opening of society, and expanding access to theatre. A well-developed format in the German-speaking world, this approach can open up new experiences and bring theatre to marginalised audiences, such as in rural areas. With classroom theatre, the constellation of relationships in the classroom shifts and the group dynamics change, both for students and teacher.
- » Look at games in devising relevant, innovative youth theatre formats. Writers and directors can develop scenarios and escape room game-play in setting a problem for the player/audience and working out the consequences. Capitalise on the interest of young people in free will and decision-making, as developed by the collaborating artistic teams from Germany and Romania who set up a game-play involving the power of AI influences. Extensive research, planning and testing with different audiences is recommended.

Involve young people in institutional decision-making

- » Theatres and policy makers should consider strategies and funding streams that specifically support the involvement of young people in institutional decision-making. They can learn from the example of the Deutsches Theater/ Junges DT partner in Berlin which

has formed a Youth Council, inviting six young performers from their youth theatre productions. This forum proposes changes and recommendations for what they would like to see on stage. The Youth Council also advises on how best to reach younger audiences and advocates for young performers. This strategy builds young citizens participation in the institutional decision-making process and is a valuable participatory approach, benefiting all involved.

Find ways to amplify Young European Voices

- » Raising young people's voices across Europe is an excellent strategy to integrate into any youth theatre project. If it's about them, don't do it without them. A series of interviews with young teenage participants in Young Europe, published in the ETC Casebook, explores their hopes and dreams, their fears and insecurities, with reflections on prejudice, racism, globalisation and the climate emergency, and gives insights into the future they anticipate.



Suggestions for policymakers and funders at local and national levels, and at EU level

Recognise

- » Cultural policy and funding programmes should reflect the value of European youth theatre projects as a dynamic, transformational tool, which can make theatre relevant for young people, and develop new formats to voice their concerns and aspirations. Youth theatre needs to be fully recognised as an important area of state theatres. Its status should be legitimised through improved funding and presentational opportunities.

Facilitate and enable

- » Youth theatre can create safe spaces, which are inclusive and accessible, for intercultural dialogue and diversity of cultural expressions, focused on societal and generational challenges and realities.

Support

- » Encouraging diverse projects and programmes for youth theatre at local, national and European levels, is strongly recommended.
- » Encouraging formats for collaboration and co-production between Creative Europe countries in youth theatre (while taking into consideration different contexts between countries) is recommended to further advance this work and achieve wider objectives. This will connect young people and youth topics

internationally, as well as broadening the horizons of participants and facilitators.

- » Creating support mechanisms to bring young people into the governance and decision-making structures for cultural institutions is an important democratic strategy to develop greater relevance and representation, and can benefit all involved.
- » The Covid-19 pandemic has isolated performing arts institutions and youth theatre groups from each other. Young people have had specific issues to deal with during the lockdowns and pandemic, including disrupted education pathways, loss of future perspectives and mental health challenges. Support for youth theatre initiatives can help in the recovery process. Theatres and cultural institutions can be valuable community hubs to foster participation and ensure that the pandemic perspectives of young Europeans are heard and seen.



Conclusion

In general, funding and support schemes at European, national and regional levels should take into consideration that the production of interdisciplinary, international projects need a long-term approach.

ETC's goal is to show that European initiatives – both on the political and artistic levels – fuel changes among the individuals and professionals involved, as well as at national level. Such European initiatives reinforce a European dimension, and reach wider groups of citizens in the process. It is therefore essential to enable and support international collaboration and the exchange of work practices. Continued and expanded international cooperation is necessary to create theatre for the future.

ETC has committed itself to working in this direction while continuing to address the question of youth theatre in its programmes and advocacy actions.

More ETC Publications

ETC Journals

- ENGAGE – Designing the New Decade (2020/21)
- ENGAGE – Europe on Stage (2019/20)
- ENGAGE – International Programme for European Theatres (2018/19)
- ENGAGE – Empowering Today’s Audiences Through Challenging Theatre (2017/18)

Casebooks

- Youth Theatre – A Casebook (2020)
- Participatory Theatre – A Casebook (2020)
- Digital Theatre – A Casebook (2018)

Policy Papers

- Gender Equality & Diversity in Theatre (2021)
- Youth Theatre (2021)
- Participatory Theatre (2021)
- Drama goes digital vs. Theatre invades digital (2018)

Research

- Gender Equality & Diversity in European Theatres – A Study (2021)
- The Art of Ageing – Bringing the Burning Issue of Global Demographic Change on Europe’s Stages. Creative Research – a Documentary by the European Theatre Convention (2015)
- Audiences for European Theatres. Study on Audience Development and Research in the ETC (2015)

European Drama

- Theatre is Dialogue – Awakening. New Horizons in the Independent Theatre Scene in Ukraine (2017)
- Young Europe – European Drama Repertoire for Young Audiences. A Selection of Five Plays From Cyprus, France, Germany and the Netherlands. Theater der Zeit (2013)

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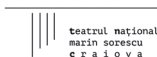
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